

# Stress management: What can you do about it?

- Stress is a fact of life. A 2017 American Psychological Association survey found that a whopping 80% of Americans reported experiencing at least one symptom of stress over the past month. And stressors from work and home made matters worse.
- Sometimes we stress over good things, like a long line at a brunch spot, a new job, an upcoming vacation. And other times, it's over not-so-good things like being sick, working too much or family drama.

## Chronic stress can affect your mental and physical health

Long-term activation of your body's stress response system, along with prolonged exposure to cortisol and other stress hormones, may put you at risk for health troubles such as:

- digestive problems
- anxiety
- headaches
- depression
- sleep problems
- weight gain
- memory and concentration issues
- high blood pressure
- heart disease and stroke

## So what can we do about stress?

Small stress-fighting changes are easy to try. Check out this list for stress management tips.

- **Find a friend.** Take a 60-second social break to message someone with a "Hello!" And hey, if you're busy, that's fine too. Friendship is important.
- **Move more.** Movement is good for your heart and your mind. Dance like crazy to get the fun out of it, or walk around the block and listen to the birds, or take that hip-hop class you've always wanted to take. Laugh while you're moving!
- **Hit the hay.** Getting enough sleep can help you feel less cranky and overwhelmed, and more productive. To want those benefits, you need to get to bed earlier! Turn off the screen(s) – you can binge-watch your favorite TV show tomorrow. Sleep experts suggest aiming for about seven to nine hours of sleep a night. So get some sunshine!
- **Be with your breath.** You've been breathing your whole life, but learning to focus on your breath can activate your body's relaxation response. According to Dr. Herbert Benson, a cardiologist and Harvard Medical School Professor of Medicine, diaphragmatic (deep) breathing is one of several ways to ease stress. Try it! You'll be getting your Zen on in no time.
  - Get comfy and take a normal breath.
  - Next take a deep breath slowly through your nose, filling up your chest and stomach.