



1 How Stress Affects Your Blood Pressure

Stress itself doesn't cause high blood pressure, but it can have an impact on your blood pressure levels.

When you're under stress, your body's stress response kicks in:²

- Chemicals called hormones surge through your body.
- Hormones make your heart beat faster and your blood vessels narrow.

- Your blood pressure rises.
- Once the stress has passed, your blood vessels widen again and your blood pressure goes back down.

Being stressed out once in a while is normal. But if you're under constant stress, you may start to cope with this stress in an unhealthy way.

How you react to stress can affect your blood pressure

Some people deal with stress in ways that can raise their blood pressure, including:¹

- Drinking too much alcohol
- Overeating or eating a lot of salty snacks
- Not getting enough sleep
- Smoking
- Forgetting to take their blood pressure medicine

2 Learn What Stresses You Out

Before you can manage your stress, you need to learn what stresses you out. Stress can be due to major life changes, like a divorce or death in the family. Or, it can be caused by everyday hassles like a traffic jam or paying bills. Even positive events such as a wedding or the birth of a baby can cause stress. **Check off your biggest sources of stress in the last year.**

Major Stressors

- Illness in the family
- Death of a spouse, family member, or close friend
- Divorce or separation
- Racial discrimination
- Loss of job
- Move to new home
- Retirement
- Pregnancy, birth of a child
- Other _____

Stressors That May Be Part of Your Daily Life

- Arguments with spouse, kids
- Traffic jams
- Work deadlines
- Household chores
- Money problems
- Overloaded schedule
- Change in sleeping habits
- Change in diet
- Social commitments
- Other _____



3 Easy Ways to Combat Stress

You can't always avoid stress, but you can control how it affects your body. Here are a few positive ways to deal with stress before it can impact your health:

- **Exercise**—it causes your brain to release chemicals called endorphins that make you feel good.³ Talk to your doctor before beginning any exercise program.
- **Take a deep breath**—it sends more oxygen to your body and tells your brain to calm down.
- **Laugh**—creates healthy physical changes in your body. It lowers levels of stress and makes you feel more relaxed.⁴
- **Listen to music**—it can ease your troubled mind, and it may also help lower your blood pressure.⁵

4 Getting a Little Help From Your Friends

When you're going through hard times, your friends and family members can be a huge support. Surround yourself with people who care about you and they'll be there to help you in difficult times.

To make sure you have support when you need it:

- Meet new friends by volunteering or joining a gym, social club, or church.
- Keep in touch with your closest friends.
- Go out to a movie or for a meal with your friends every few weeks.
- When your friends help you, say "thank you" to show that you appreciate them.

