



HEALTHY LIVING SECTION

Weekly tips and advice from your neighborhood Carolinas HealthCare System Blue Ridge providers.



Five Easy Ways to Reduce Stress

It's hard not to be stressed in today's fast-paced world. But chronic stress can lead to high blood pressure and weight gain, putting your heart at risk and causing even more stress. Here are five easy steps that can help you break this vicious cycle.

Get Your ZZZs

Getting a good night's sleep sets you up for a low-stress day. Most people need between seven and eight hours of rest every night to feel refreshed, but some people need up to nine. If you have trouble falling asleep, try setting up a routine to follow every night. Try a series of stretches before bed, simple breathing exercises or a hot shower. You'll feel more relaxed and ready to ease into sleep.

Eat Up

Low blood sugar makes you tired and grumpy, which makes you less likely to work out and can lead to poor food choices later in the day. Eat well-balanced meals with healthy snacks (like Greek yogurt and fresh fruit) at regular intervals throughout the day to keep your blood sugar, and your mood, even!

Turn Off the Tube

Lots of people use television as a way to unwind and escape from the worries of the day. But too much screen time can lead to behaviors that actually increase stress. People who eat in front of the television tend to consume more calories and make less healthy food choices than those who eat at a table. And any time spent watching TV on your couch is time you aren't spending de-stressing in a more effective way.

Work It Out

Exercise is a proven stress reliever. Cardio releases endorphins into the blood stream that help regulate your mood and stress levels. Exercise also helps limit the amount of cortisol, a hormone caused by stress, your body produces. Get the good stuff pumping through your veins by getting moving at least 30 minutes a day.

Be a Social Butterfly

When things pile up, it can seem like you don't have time for fun. But don't let a stressful situation cut you off from friends. Having someone to confide in can be a huge help, and friends and family often offer the best advice. Just make sure you don't dwell on the bad stuff. Talk it through and move on to something positive, like enjoying your friends' company!



Side Effects of Stress

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If you live an entirely stress-free life, you should write a book and make your fortune letting everyone in on your secret. For most of us, stress is an inevitability, and practically every day something increases our stress levels, at least a little. Unfortunately, stress isn't going away and neither are the illnesses it can help cause or worsen.

Heart disease is a huge problem in the United States. Our high rate of obesity seems to be a leading cause, and stress isn't making our hearts any healthier. High blood pressure can be related to high stress levels, but it isn't completely known whether stress directly causes heart disease or if it indirectly does through unhealthy management behavior, such as smoking and poor dietary habits. Unexpected emotional stress can trigger heart attacks and other heart problems, so anyone with known heart issues should avoid acute stress as best they can and learn effective ways to manage it when they can't.

Chronic stress has been linked to higher rates of depression and anxiety. This is particularly true for people with jobs that cause them a lot of stress, especially if that stress isn't considered worth it due to the end result. Finding a new job may not be an option for you, but discussing work-appropriate ways to manage and reduce it with your supervisor is. Perhaps more frequent breaks or a change in the environment could solve your work stress problems.

It is often said that worrying and stress will give you an ulcer, but that isn't exactly true. However, those two things definitely aren't helping you avoid ulcers or making them any better. Ulcers require a bacterial infection to form and high stress levels can help that infection take hold. Stress is also related to several gastrointestinal problems, such as chronic heartburn or indigestion and irritable bowel syndrome. When your brain becomes overly stressed it releases a waterfall of different hormones. These hormones often clash, which can cause your stomach problems.

Stress and its related side effects aren't a laughing matter, although laughing may be a good way to reduce your stress levels. If you suffer from a lot of stress or have any related illnesses, you should consult with your doctor to create a plan to manage your stress and the side effects. Call us at 828-580-6600 if you have any questions or if you are one of those amazing stress-free people.



Tortellini Tomato Spinach Soup

Incorporating more spinach into your diet could help you manage the stress in your life. It is an excellent source of magnesium, which helps provide a sense of calm.

- 1 tablespoon olive oil
- 1/2 cup minced onion
- 1 garlic clove, minced
- 4 to 6 cups chicken or vegetable broth
- 1 (14 ounce) can whole tomatoes, coarsely chopped
- 1 (9 ounce) package fresh or dried tortellini
- kosher salt
- cracked black pepper
- 10 ounces fresh or frozen spinach, chopped
- 1/4 cup freshly grated Parmesan cheese (optional)

In a soup pot, heat olive oil over medium high heat. Saute the onion and garlic, stirring frequently until the onions are clear, about 5 to 7 minutes. Add broth and tomatoes, turn heat up to high and bring to a boil.

Add the tortellini and cook per package instructions. When tortellini is almost done, add the spinach and season with salt and pepper to taste. Garnish with Parmesan if desired. **Serves: 4 to 6**

Stress Tips From the Far East

Asian cultures have long been known for effective and healthy exercises to reduce stress. If stress is too big a part of your life, try tai chi or a tai chi-inspired exercise, such as NIA (neuromuscular integrative action).

