



information for your life

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STRESS AND YOUR BODY



What is the most common cause of most headaches and muscle aches? The answer is tension and stress.

Today, it's common knowledge that what happens mentally and emotionally has a significant effect on the physical, and vice versa—so what about *stress*? Physically, stress isn't always a bad thing. Stress hormones are what help people out in emergency situations, allowing their bodies to move into lifesaving action. Also, it's actually good for people to deal with some stress in order to build up a tolerance for stressful situations. The problem comes when people are on overload or have to handle too much stress too often. It's then that stress affects people in ways they might not always be aware of.

Physical Impact of Stress

Everyone is familiar with signs of stress such as nervousness, anxiety, and depression, as well as the other ways stressors can upset a person's state of mind. Here's a look at what stress can do to people's bodies:

- **Heart Disease**—Added up, daily stress can lead to heart attacks. Type A personalities have an extremely high risk of developing abnormal heart rhythms, and the normal stress of everyday life negatively affects people already prone to heart disease.
- **Strokes**—People who are highly stressed, and even moderately stressed on a regular basis, have a significantly increased risk of a fatal stroke.
- **High Blood Pressure**—Stress hormones cause an immediate rise in blood pressure. While this may not create problems for everyone, chronic stress and hypertension is a deadly combination.
- **Lowered Immunity**—Stress hormones compromise a body's immune system so that it is more susceptible to the flu, colds, and other infectious diseases.
- **Digestive Problems**—Stress has been proven to reduce the amount of beneficial bacteria in the digestive system, which can lead to indigestion, diarrhea, constipation, and other problems.
- **Headaches and Muscle Aches**—What is the most common cause of most headaches and muscle aches? The answer is tension and stress.
- **Changes in Sleep Patterns**—Overstressed people often suffer from insomnia, or feel the need or desire to sleep too much, which can be a sign of depression.

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STRESS AND YOUR BODY

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- **Sexual Dysfunction**—Any type of psychological or emotional stress can be the cause of temporary sexual dysfunction in both men and women.
- **Hormonal Imbalances**—During stressful times, the mind sends emergency messages that upset the body's natural hormonal balance.

In addition, there are many stress-induced behaviors that can cause physical harm, such as overeating or eating the wrong foods, alcohol and substance abuse, and smoking.

Help your body beat stress: Exercise.

- Whether you like it or not, the best weapon against stress is exercise. Regular exercise—it doesn't matter what it is as long as it's consistent—helps your body deal with stress for a number of reasons:
- Exercise releases hormones that are natural antidepressants and increase your tolerance to pain.
- Exercise stimulates nerves that help the brain's ability to accurately sense emotions. A clear mind can steer clear of misinterpretation and miscommunication, which are high-level stressors.
- Exercise connects to hormones that control the stress response and improves a body's ability to tolerate stress and changes.
- Exercise gets your mind in shape by giving you a positive place to release frustrations and take a break from your worries; it also leaves you with more energy.
- Exercise can reduce negative thinking and improve your self-image—it changes the way you look and feel.
- Exercise improves cardiovascular health—your heart is a muscle and can be strengthened like any other.
- Exercising is a direct hit on stress-induced muscle aches and headaches and helps to normalize sleep patterns and hormonal imbalances.

Eat right to fight stress.

- Under stress, people physically need more vitamins and minerals, but the foods that have them aren't the ones they grab. Foods rich in fat and calories are what people crave when they're stressed or depressed, and these comfort foods actually work—they do make people feel and function better in the short term. However, they're killers in the long run. These are the kind of foods that, especially when eaten under stress, turn into fat around the middle.
- In stressful situations, try to eat foods high in vitamins and fiber: poultry, fish, beans and legumes, low-fat dairy products, whole grains and cereals, and fruits and vegetables. Foods in complex carbohydrates—pasta and potatoes—can help reduce stress because they're more slowly absorbed by the body. Don't skip meals. Getting too hungry will only make you reach for the wrong foods when your blood sugar's low. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and stimulants in medicines and beverages.

Calm your body and mind.

Other ways to physically take control of stress include these:

- **Breathing Techniques**—Breathing slowly and deeply automatically relaxes the body.
- **Yoga**—Slow exercising such as yoga connects breath, movement, and body control.
- **Meditation**—Find a quiet place to be alone, wherever you are, and try to clear your mind.
- **Relaxation Techniques**—Learn how to really relax, physically and mentally.
- **Stretching**—Take time to stretch whenever you find yourself in a tense position.
- **Walking**—Walk around the building instead of taking a coffee break, or get up 15 minutes early and walk around the block before you leave for work.
- **Sleeping**—Make sure you get just a little more sleep than you think you need during times of high stress.

Workplace Options. (Revised 2018). *Stress and your body*. Raleigh, NC: Author.



For a Fit Family

Being a parent often means dealing with a whole lot of *shoulds*: You wake up every day knowing that you *should* eat smart, exercise, and set a good example for your children. You know it's important for the family to make decisions and participate in activities together, and you're continually reminded that it's best to get the kids started on healthy habits as early as possible. However, sometimes your life gets the best of you, and all of your good intentions go out the window. Try the following suggestions on for size, and see how they can help your family fit overall wellness into your everyday lives.

Get active with choices.

- Involve everyone by sitting down to a brainstorming session. Try to come up with all of the possible activities available to your family.
- Find out whether anyone has a particular interest, and help everyone discover something active that's particularly suited to them.
- Take stock of what equipment you have lying around the house. An indoor basketball hoop or old croquet set that was abandoned by one child may be just right for another who's gotten older.
- Discuss what might work in the way of healthy snacks or adapting favorite meals.
- Make sure each family member feels included in the process as you make changes together.

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For a Fit Family

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- Sign up for local softball games, a bowling league, or classes at a nearby gym, recreation center, or YMCA. The entire family can join a walking club.
- With neighbors, form your own flag football or basketball teams and set a weekly game time. Or organize an "Olympics" and get really creative about what kind of races and events you include.
- Have birthday parties—or any parties—at a roller skating or ice skating rink. As gifts, buy equipment or toys that promote activity: hula hoops, juggling supplies, or in-line skates (plus a helmet, knee pads, and elbow pads).

Activities at Home

- Set aside areas for active play, both inside and outside.
- Even if you don't have a big back yard, there's probably room for jumping rope, playing hopscotch, jumping on a pogo stick, or stilt-walking.
- Inside, build an obstacle course in the garage on a rainy day, or do indoor gymnastics. Get physical with a family game of charades. Have a dance contest. And set aside time to stretch, relax, and unwind.
- Limit TV to less than two hours a day, and take the TV set out of your child's room. Also place time limits on the computer and video games.
- Take the time to touch base with your child's teachers to see that your child is physically active at school, stays involved with games and intramural sports when appropriate, and is eating a healthy lunch.

Kitchen Basics

- Keep cut veggies, fruit, low-fat cheeses, nuts, and raisins around for easy snacking.
- Water should always be in the fridge. Small bottles are more likely to be snatched up—find refillable containers.
- Try to pack snacks and lunches for outings and for school. There's no reason the kids can't help, or even be in charge.

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Schedule fun.

- It's important that there's a regular time set aside for workouts, and that they're fun!
- Schedule at least a half hour most days a week and keep a variety of things happening: trips to the pool on Mondays; different physical activities in the backyard on Tuesdays; going for walks, skating, or riding bikes on Thursdays and Fridays. Then head to the park on the weekends.
- Keep in mind that regular activities need to be convenient. The easier it is to exercise, the greater the chance you'll go to the effort.
- Pick options that are free or within your budget. Physical fitness is an investment in wellness. It shouldn't put you under a financial strain.
- Take turns in selecting what you'll do, and start a fitness log for each family member.

Find other families.

- To keep yourself motivated, join with other families for swimming and water sports, nature hikes, skateboarding, miniature golf, kite flying, Frisbee tournaments, volleyball at the beach, or camping trips.



For a Fit Family

continued

- Involve the whole family in meal preparation. Toddlers are able to wash fruits and vegetables, mix ingredients, and set the table. School-age children can measure, use tools like an egg beater, cut with child-safe kitchen scissors, and follow recipes.
- Let everyone read food labels. Learn what to look for—fiber, added sugar, artificial ingredients, and fat content—and see if your taste buds change as you make healthier choices.
- Whenever possible, take the whole family grocery shopping and try new things. But don't give into demands for the latest candy, cookies, chips, and soft drinks.
- When it comes to bread and baked goods, whole grain is better!

Make mealtime important.

- Never skip breakfast. As hectic as a morning can get, make time for yogurt with fruit, whole-wheat toast and peanut butter, cereal with low-fat milk and fruit, or whole-grain frozen waffles.
- Get into the habit of serving fruit, salad, and vegetables with each meal. For adults as well as children, the goal is five to nine servings of fruits and veggies per day.

- Low-fat milk or dairy products should also be part of every meal.
- Eat meals together. In busy households it's sometimes difficult, but for children, a mealtime routine is just as important as a bedtime routine. Use family meals as an opportunity for catching up on everyone's individual activities.

You're in charge of change.

- Sure you watch your kids as a parent, but they're also watching you. Model good behavior when it comes to smoking, drinking, exercising, eating right, and finding a healthy way to relax—read a book, walk the dog, or listen to music instead of watching TV.
- Learn to say *no*. Putting restraints on outside activities and commitments which put too much pressure on the family is just as important as drawing boundaries for the kids.
- Pick your rewards. Instead of rewarding children with food or electronic game privileges, try rewarding them with your time and attention.
- Stay involved as you see and feel the changes in your family happening, and try not to leave anyone out. When you're together, remember to ask questions, tell stories, and turn to each of the kids for suggestions. If a family member visits, keep them in the loop and let them become part of your new and improved daily routine. It's more than likely you'll be doing them a favor.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2019). *For a fit family*. Raleigh, NC: Author.



Talking with Teenagers About Violence

Try to make them feel comfortable about talking to you, but don't force them to talk if they don't want to.

Teenagers are ages 12–18.

You may not be the first person a teenager will turn to when he or she is upset. Teens are most likely to talk with their peers. Don't take it personally. Be mindful of your own reactions to the event and of the fact that adolescents need the support of calm caregivers. They may also fear that, as an adult, you will discount or underestimate the significance of their feelings. The best you can do is listen, remain open and available, and let them know you're there for them.

If teenagers see or are hurt by violence, they may do the following:

- Talk or think about the event all the time
- Say the event didn't happen
- Use violence to get what they want
- Rebel at home or in school
- Stop being concerned about how they look
- Complain about being tired all the time
- Refuse to follow rules
- Spend more time away from home
- Not want to leave the house
- Get scared when thinking about the event
- Have nightmares
- Have difficulty paying attention in class or concentrating on work
- Do risky things (such as driving fast or jumping from high places)
- Want to seek revenge
- Change friends or dating relationships abruptly
- Become perpetrators or victims of violent dating relationships*
- Drink and use drugs*
- Start skipping school*
- Think about wanting to die or committing suicide*
- Break the law or destroy things*

*Take these actions seriously and seek professional help.

Teenagers may feel embarrassed to talk about what happened, but they won't want you to know that. Try to make them feel comfortable about talking to you, but don't force them to talk if they don't want to. Don't downplay their feelings by saying things like "Don't worry" or "Cheer up." Try not to make judgments or give advice. Instead, let them know you're there to help them find solutions.

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Talking with Teenagers About Violence

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Here are some things teenagers might do if you try to talk to them about violence:

- Ignore you
- Change the subject ("I'm hungry")
- Blame others for the violence (for instance, by saying, "If you were nicer to him, he wouldn't hit you" or "You should have done what he said" or "Those kids were just asking for trouble")
- Run to his or her room and slam the door
- Say, "Don't worry," and try to cheer you up
- Try to hit you
- Listen quietly without saying anything
- Say, "Whatever"

Don't take any of these responses personally. Try some of the strategies listed below. Remember that healing takes time, and teens need you to be patient.

Here are some ways you can help teenagers express what they're thinking and feeling:

- Reach out to teens by asking, in private, "What's wrong?" Use conversation openings such as "You haven't seemed yourself lately," "You seem kind of down," or "Is something bothering you?"
- Encourage teens to talk about their feelings and tell their side of the story.
- Expect some difficult behavior, but don't let teens break the rules out of sympathy.
- Respond calmly to what teens have to say.
- Don't judge.
- Keep anniversary reactions in mind. For example, a teen may feel upset on the date the violence occurred, even years after the event.
- Show you understand by repeating in your own words what they said or felt. Let them know that the feelings are normal. For example, "It sounds like you really hated Dad when he was hitting you."
- Help them identify and label their feelings. For example, "I can understand why this made you angry."
- Praise their efforts to communicate their thoughts and feelings. For example, tell them, "I'm glad you are talking with me about this."

- Respond supportively when they tell you about the event. Don't disagree or try to lessen the intensity of their feelings.
- Encourage them to write about their thoughts and feelings in a journal.
- Encourage them to talk to people with whom they feel comfortable. They might choose to confide in close friends or a trusted teacher, coach, or counselor.

Here are some things you can do to help teenagers feel safe and in control:

- Be extra patient. They may be distracted and forget to do chores or turn in school assignments.
- Give straightforward explanations, whenever possible, for things that may worry them.
- Find out what's making them feel unsafe and help them make a safety plan. For example, you might suggest that they don't try to stop the violence themselves, and that they leave the place where the violence is happening and go somewhere safe.
- Support them to engage in comforting routines—listening to favorite music, playing sports, keeping a journal, looking at photographs. These can bring a sense of hope.
- Provide them with safe and fun physical activities to release the tension. Good choices of activities include those that they do well or enjoy.
- Enroll them in programs that teach conflict-resolution skills.
- Don't make commitments you can't honor. Don't say, "You'll be safe from now on." Instead you might say, "Let's make a plan to keep you as safe as possible."
- Suggest concrete things they can do. You might start by saying, "I'm sorry that this is happening to you. You're not alone. Let's take a look at your options."
- Help them think of positive ways to keep busy, such as playing sports, going out with friends, or making art or music.

U.S. Department of Justice (DOJ), Office of Justice Programs (OJP), Office of Juvenile Justice and Delinquency Prevention (OJJDP). (n.d.). Teenagers, ages 12–18. In *Healing the invisible wounds: Children's exposure to violence* (pp. 19–22). Retrieved April 16, 2019, from <https://www.ojjdp.gov/>

Getting a Good Night's Sleep



Getting a Good Night's Sleep

Being older doesn't mean you have to feel tired all the time. There are many things you can do to help you get a good night's sleep. Here are some ideas:

- Follow a regular sleep schedule. Go to sleep and get up at the same time each day, even on weekends. Try to avoid napping in the late afternoon or evening, as it may keep you awake at night.
- Develop a bedtime routine. Take time to relax before bedtime each night. Some people watch television, read a book, listen to soothing music, or soak in a warm bath.
- Keep your bedroom dark, not too hot or too cold, and as quiet as possible.
- Have a comfortable mattress, a pillow you like, and enough blankets for the season.
- Exercise at regular times each day, but not within 3 hours of your bedtime.
- Make an effort to get outside in the sunlight each day.
- Be careful about when and how much you eat. Large meals close to bedtime may keep you awake, but a light snack in the evening can help you get a good night's sleep.
- Stay away from caffeine late in the day. Caffeine found in coffee, tea, soda, and hot chocolate can keep you awake.
- Drink fewer beverages in the evening. Waking up to go to the bathroom and turning on a bright light break up your sleep.
- Remember that alcohol won't help you sleep. Even small amounts make it harder to stay asleep.
- Use your bedroom only for sleeping. After turning off the light, give yourself about 20 minutes to fall asleep. If you're still awake and not drowsy, get out of bed. When you feel sleepy, go back to bed.
- Keep a telephone with emergency phone numbers by your bed.
- Have a good lamp within reach that turns on easily.
- Put a glass of water next to the bed in case you wake up thirsty.
- Use nightlights in the bathroom and hall.
- Don't smoke, especially in bed.
- Remove area rugs so you won't trip if you get out of bed in the middle of the night.
- Don't fall asleep with a heating pad on, as it may burn you.

Sweet Dreams

There are some tricks to help you fall asleep. You don't really have to count sheep, but you could try counting slowly to 100. Some people find that playing mental games makes them sleepy. For example, tell yourself its 5 minutes before you have to get up, and you're just trying to get a few extra winks. Other people find that relaxing their body puts them to sleep. You might start by telling yourself that your toes feel light as feathers and then work your way up the rest of the body saying the same words. You may drift off to sleep before getting to the top of your head.

If you feel tired and unable to do your activities for more than 2 or 3 weeks, you may have a sleep problem. Talk to your doctor about changes you can make to get a better night's sleep.

Safe Sleeping

Try to set up a safe and restful place to sleep. Make sure you have smoke alarms on each floor of your house or apartment and lock the outside doors before going to bed. Other ideas for a safe night's sleep are

U.S. National Institutes of Health National Institute on Aging. (Updated 2015, December 22). *A good night's sleep*. Retrieved February 22, 2016, from <http://www.nia.nih.gov>

Some people find that playing mental games makes them sleepy.

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CHOOSING A CHILD CARE CENTER

Centers for children 3-5 years old are the most prevalent, however, many centers offer programs for infants, toddlers, and school-age children.

Child care centers provide group care in a nonresidential setting. They are licensed by a state agency to care for a specific number of children at each level, with limits on the ratio of children to caregivers. They may offer part-day, full-day, after-school, or kindergarten options. Centers for children 3-5 years old are the most prevalent, however, many centers offer programs for infants, toddlers, and school-age children.

Centers are located in schools, hospitals, religious or spiritual organizations, recreation centers, or self-contained buildings. They usually have outdoor play

space or a park nearby. Variations of centers include preschools or nursery schools. Nursery schools are part-day programs aimed at providing enrichment activities for children who do not need full day care.

Full-day programs may provide breakfast, lunch, and two snacks. Centers usually follow a daily curriculum or schedule. Hours of operation typically begin between 6:00 a.m.—7:00 a.m. and end between 6:00 p.m.—6:30 p.m. Times may vary depending on the center. The following is a list of considerations:

PROS	CONS
Centers are usually regulated to set minimum standards for health, safety, and adult-to-child ratios.	Centers are usually not flexible about hours of operation and may charge late fees.
Center directors and staff usually have education in child development.	Center care may be expensive—especially for infants and toddlers.
Centers may offer a wide variety of activities and experiences as part of their programming.	Your child may not get as much individual attention at a center as in a family day care environment or from a nanny.
Your child will have playmates his age and may also meet children of different backgrounds or cultures.	A center may not accommodate all of your children.
Centers are able to provide care even if a teacher is ill.	Centers are unable to care for a mildly ill child.



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CHOOSING A CHILD CARE CENTER

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Accreditation

In addition to a license, which allows the facility to operate, there is a growing trend to apply for accreditation. The National Association for the Education of Young Children (NAEYC) offers an accreditation program for child care centers. Accreditation is a seal of approval. NAEYC has developed criteria, which includes parent input and inspector validation. Centers must apply to NAEYC in order to be accredited and are subjected to an extensive external review process. While accreditation indicates that the center has met NAEYC's standards, it does not mean that accredited programs are necessarily better than those that have not applied for accreditation.

Evaluating Child Care Centers

In order to evaluate child care centers, it is important to visit several programs and spend time observing in each one.

Carefully review these materials prior to visiting the centers. Call in advance to make an appointment. Your referral service will provide you with basic information regarding vacancies, fees, hours, and policies. It is usually best not to bring your child along to every program you visit. It may be confusing for the child. Once you have narrowed your choices, consider making another visit with your child.

The activities of the day and the interaction between the provider and the children are strong indicators of the quality of care provided. Observe your child's prospective classroom. Pay attention to first impressions. Is the room bright and cheerful? Is children's art work displayed? Are children engaged in a variety of activities? Do the children seem involved and happy? Are staff members pleasant and responsive to the children and each other?

You will want to spend some time talking with the director about the program and tour the entire center.



Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2017). *Choosing a child care center*. Raleigh, NC: Author.

Make the Holidays Your Own



Are the holidays about extended family, or about solitude? Is this the time to explore cultural roots and reconnect with religion, or a chance to reach out to strangers? Forget about what everyone else says or what your mother has always done, what do you want your holiday traditions to be?

So it's that time of year again. You take one look at the calendar and you're hit with pictures of perfect holidays. There are kids frolicking in the snow, big families laughing around a huge meal, and smitten couples exchanging gifts in front of the fireplace. The pressure is on to make the traditional holiday images come to life—or else!

But what about those people who aren't included those snapshots? What if you are single, without little ones to decorate the Christmas tree or light menorah candles? More and more people are divorced and part of blended families who are dealing with multiple traditions in the same house. The truth is that lots of families today don't have a mom, a dad, and 2.5 Norman Rockwell children. And for many people, the pressure becomes too much. If you don't belong in a traditional holiday portrait you can still make the holidays your own by creating your own traditions.

Figure out what you want.

Basically, holiday stress is caused by unrealistic expectations. In one word, stress is *should*. During the holidays, everyone, particularly those people who don't live anywhere near "It's a Wonderful Life," can use a reminder to think about their own needs and desires for this time of year and not focus on what they've come to believe they should do.

Before the holidays, spend some time with yourself. Set aside a couple of days to examine what you're really looking for during the holidays. If you had it your way, how would you paint the picture? Are the holidays about extended family, or about solitude? Is this the time to explore cultural roots and reconnect with religion, or a chance to reach out to strangers? Forget about what everyone else says or what your mother has always done, what do you want your holiday traditions to be?

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Make the Holidays Your Own

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Going It Alone, or Not

If you're single, you might look into doing volunteer work at a local soup kitchen, food bank, or homeless shelter. Or maybe you want to do something totally self-indulgent. What's stopping you from spending a day relaxing at a spa, hiking or biking, or hopping on a plane and enjoying the holidays at the beach? Rely upon your family or friends who may have all sorts of interesting things planned. Also, friends with kids are not off limits during the holidays. If you want to be around children, find the families in your circle who'll welcome a guest to a holiday meal, and then ask what you can contribute. Maybe you're helping them fulfill their tradition.

The holidays also tend to put extra pressure on new relationships, whether it's a new romance or a new family unit. Keep in mind that now is not the time to force things. Concentrate on what's truly at the core of the holidays for you and find ways to embrace that together. Have fun. Chances are the new people in your life will feel relief as well without having to rush into a situation loaded with expectations.

Blending a family means staying flexible.

Blended families are faced with a particular challenge during the holidays. For kids and adults, thinking about celebrations past inevitably brings back memories, good and bad. It's important to talk about what each side of the family used to do, and what the new family can do now to make things special. Be flexible. It may be combining traditions or it may be starting fresh. Planning can get complicated if the holidays are divided between families, but kids often don't mind celebrating more than once—in a different way in each home—no matter what date the celebration happens to fall upon.

Make a list of no's.

Just as important as your holiday wish list is pinning down what you don't want. Come up with a list of all the things that are not part of your ideal holiday, even if you may not be able to realistically eliminate them. Do you really want to deal with expensive gifts this year? Must you make an appearance at your neighbor's annual party? Do you have to invite your husband's ex-wife over for dinner? Include everything that makes you nervous just thinking about it. Call it a *stress list*.

Then practice saying *no*. It may sound silly, but practice it in front of the mirror. You'll probably find out that it works remarkably well when the time comes. And if not, at least you spoke up.

Timing is everything.

If you decide to shake your holidays up a bit you'll probably want to start planning early. Don't ambush your loved ones at the last minute by opting out of the family meal and announcing a solo trip to Mexico, or throw a new tradition at the kids on Christmas Eve. You may have shifted your outlook, but it could take some time for the rest of the world to join you.

Change isn't always easy, especially when people are bombarded with old-fashioned images of holidays past that probably were not ever quite real. But once you can let go of the unrealistic expectations, visualize what you need, and take the holidays into your own hands, you are one step closer to having a stress-free season truly worth remembering.

Workplace Options. (Reviewed 2017). *Make the holidays your own*. Raleigh, NC: Author.



Understanding Gratitude

"Gratitude implies humility—a recognition that we could not be who we are in life without the contributions of others. Gratitude also implies the recognition that it is possible for other forces to act towards us with beneficial, selfless motives. In a world that was nothing but injustice and cruelty, there would indeed be no possibility of gratitude. Being grateful is an acknowledgement that there are good and enjoyable things in the world."

—**Dr. Robert A. Emmons**, published in *Thanks! How the New Science of Gratitude Can Make You Happier*

Gratitude is a positive emotion that occurs when you understand and acknowledge that the positive experiences you have in life, small or large, are not owed to you but are gifts. It is the opposite of taking things for granted. The experience of this emotion on a regular basis has been shown to have very positive effects on enthusiasm, energy, and well-being. Because of the positive benefits of gratitude on health and happiness, it is important to increasing your resilience to bring the regular practice of gratitude into your life.

Research has shown that the positive effects of gratitude are multiplied as you increase

- The strength of your feeling of gratitude
- How often you experience gratitude in any given minute, hour, or day
- How many life circumstances you feel grateful for
- The number of people in your life to whom you feel grateful

Developing Gratitude

There are a number of exercises that can increase your sense of gratitude in each of these areas. They take just a few minutes a day and can have a life-changing effect:

Begin each day with a two-minute gratitude session. Find a quiet space of two minutes, close your eyes if possible, and bring to

mind the things and people in your life you are grateful for. Remind yourself that they are gifts, because none of this is owed to you.

- **Create a short prayer or affirmation concerning the gifts you have received.** Use this on a daily basis to remind yourself that even though you have worked and planned for what you have, life could have turned out differently.
- **Use a daily gratitude journal.** Make it special by purchasing an inexpensive journal you can use just for this purpose. Every day write at least five things that you are grateful for. Your entries can be short or long; it doesn't matter. To begin, make a commitment to do this for at least two weeks, and then work to develop it into a lifelong habit. The key to doing this is to never repeat an entry. Each new entry has to be different. You will find that this helps you to begin to pay attention to many of the small gifts that come into your life.
- **If you have children in your life, make it a practice to discuss gratitude on a daily basis.** Help them to create and use their own gratitude journal. Doing this is a wonderful teaching tool as you help your children to develop resilience.
- **Focus on the fact that gratitude can turn difficulties into gifts,** and use this truth each time you are faced with a challenge in life.

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Understanding Gratitude

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Write a gratitude letter.

This exercise takes the form of identifying a person to whom you are grateful for his or her presence in your life or for something that was done for you recently or in the past. The person does not need to be present in your life now. This person should be someone to whom you believe you have not sufficiently, or ever, previously expressed your gratitude.

After you have identified this person, take a few minutes to write a letter expressing your gratitude, how your life was affected by the person's actions, and specifically what the person did for which you are grateful. Be as specific as possible in describing the contribution this person made to your well-being.

If you decide to actually express your gratitude to someone and you don't get the response you hoped for, remind yourself that this isn't a contract with the other person. You are not owed anything in return. This is about who you are.

Look for opportunities to be grateful for the experiences and people who come into your life on a minute-to-minute basis. Get used to noticing when the traffic lights are timed just right for you, when someone holds the door or lets you into traffic. Pay attention to the beauty that you are surrounded by all the time—a flower, a tree, a vista. Try not to repeat things you notice. There is plenty to be grateful for without repeating.

Defense Centers of Excellence, National Center for Telehealth & Technology, Afterdeployment. (2010). *Understanding gratitude*. Retrieved January 12, 2018, from <http://afterdeployment.dcoe.mil/>



Families Learn and Grow Together

Responding to infants' crying and holding them often is important and develops a sense of trust.

Parents are a child's first and most important teachers, and it is in the everyday routines that great learning opportunities happen. This information is meant to be a source of simple and fun ideas and to be a reminder to make the most of every minute!

Each child and family is different. Children learn and grow at their own pace and in their own unique and wonderful way. Families also have their own special and unique traditions. There are many ways that families can learn and grow together—more than what is included here. You can also talk with your friends and other parents to share more good ideas and activities that create meaningful moments for your family.

Infants (Birth to 15 Months): Growing Every Day

Infant development is amazing! At the end of 12 months, your baby can be three times his birth weight and twice his birth length. Babies follow a similar path of development, yet each is unique. Here is what you can expect to see during the first 15 months of life:

- **Babies first gain control** over their heads and then their bodies in the early months of life. Rolling over, sitting, crawling, walking and moving with a purpose can happen over the course of the first 12-15 months.
- **Babies are like sponges**, soaking up all of the talk around them. Thus, talking, singing, reading and interacting with your baby becomes critical to the development of language. Television and videos are not a substitute for face-to-face interaction with a loving caregiver.
- **Babies coo and babble**, but the main way they communicate is by crying. As all parents quickly learn, their babies' cries can change when they are hungry, tired, wet, frightened or overwhelmed. Responding to infants' crying and holding them often is important and develops a sense of trust.
- **Babies have their own temperaments and rates of growth**, as well as their own routine of feeding and sleeping. Each relationship between family and baby is special and unique!

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Families Learn and Grow Together

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Activities to Help You Learn and Grow Together

- **Play with simple toys:** Your baby can drop; roll; and chew soft and colorful toys, such as stacking cubes, rattles and soft blocks.
- **Use toys at bath time:** Use toys that float or sink. Splash and play with these water toys, and always keep one hand on your baby during bath time.
- **Sing through routines:** Repeat lullabies, finger plays, and games like pat-a-cake and peek-a-boo to help build language skills. Your baby loves the sound of your voice!
- **Babies love to look at themselves in the mirror:** Provide child-safe mirrors for the car, stroller or play space. Point and say, "Here is your nose, there is your mouth, I see your eyes. ..."
- **Read to your baby:** Look at chunky board books with colorful pictures or photographs. Let baby hold the book and turn the pages. This builds a solid foundation for literacy and school readiness.

Parenting Tips

- **Have a daily routine:** Provide a predictable daily routine for your baby. This gives your baby a sense of security and safety.
- **Respond to your baby's cries:** Immediately tuning in to your baby's needs develops attachment and trust. You cannot spoil your baby by responding right away.
- **Make sleep time safe:** Avoid toys, blankets and pillows in your baby's sleeping area, and always put your baby to sleep on her back.

Toddlers (15 to 36 Months): On the Move

Toddlers are busy and eager explorers with small bodies and big feelings! Toddlers are trying to do things for themselves but still need to be reassured by the adults in their lives. They are experiencing the world and trying to make sense of it all at the same time. Here is what you can expect to see in the toddler years:

- **Vocabulary takes off.** Toddlers are learning many new words and putting them together.

- **Toddlers start using words** to interact with parents and other people in their lives. This stage is marked by the frequent use of favorite toddler words: "No," "Mine" and "I do it!"
- **They are on the move!** Crawling, dancing, rolling and running all contribute to a toddler's growth.
- **Although they often get frustrated, this is just a temporary stage.** As toddlers develop more language, an understanding of how things work and what to expect, their frustrations melt away rather than melt down.
- **Toddlers are straightforward, concrete thinkers** who truly believe a kiss and hug can make things all better!

Activities to Help You Learn and Grow Together

- **Turn a walk into learning time:** Talk about what you see, like the colors of cars, or count the number of dogs. Let your child share her ideas with you and expand on what she says!
- **Sing your way through routines:** Take a familiar or favorite tune, such as "Row, row, row your boat," and use words to match your activities, such as "Brush, brush, brush your teeth."
- **Visit your local public library:** Check out new books to bring home and look at together. Children's librarians can help you find books to read with your child and may host special story times for toddlers.

Parenting Tips

- **Be patient with your little explorer:** Toddlers need to repeat activities many times until they can predict what will happen in a given situation.
- **Acknowledge feelings:** Give your child words for what he is feeling. "I know you are sad." He has to know you understand him before he can listen to you.
- **Redirect:** Head off a tantrum by offering another activity when you see your child is becoming frustrated. As you play with your child, you will learn to tune in to the signs that she needs a change of scene.

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Families Learn and Grow Together

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Preschoolers (3 and 4 Years): Imagination on the Go

Preschoolers are active and more confident of how their bodies move. Here is what you can expect at this stage:

- **They like to use their fingers** to build with blocks, use crayons and do puzzles.
- **You will see great growth** in your child's language, imagination and ability to play with other children.
- **They are curious about the world** and want to understand how everything works. They often ask questions and share their own stories and experiences.
- **This stage often marks the development of imaginary play** and role-playing, when children create rich and involved fantasies.
- **Busy preschoolers have a growing interest in playing** cooperatively with other children. All the time you spent encouraging your toddler to take turns now pays off!
- **Preschoolers learn concepts** of reading, math, writing and science as part of their play and everyday routines!

Activities to Help You Learn and Grow Together

- **Cook safely:** Make a shopping list, and plan to cook together. Ask your child to look at the supermarket flyer with you and tell you what needs to go on the shopping list. Always closely supervise cooking activities; turn pot handles away from your child and keep sharp or breakable objects out of reach.
- **Sort, count and label:** Build numbers into everyday routines. Count your way upstairs, or say out loud the number of bananas you are picking at the supermarket. Using math builds problem-solving skills and confidence.
- **Look at your child's baby pictures together:** Marvel at how your child has grown and changed! Let your child tell you about all the things she can do now that she could not do as a baby. Remember that even "big kids" need a cuddle.
- **Have an indoor "family picnic":** Plan an easy-to-prepare menu and select a theme. For a seasonal "Winter Wonderland," you can use sheets for snow, pillows for a snowman and bubbles for falling snow.

Parenting Tips

- **Let your child see you writing and reading:** You are the best role model your child has for supporting literacy.

- **Do chores together:** Develop cooperation and responsibility early on by letting your child help out.
- **Be amazed:** Let your child know how impressed you are with his accomplishments and abilities.

Young School-Age (5 to 9 Years): Curiosity Rules

When children start the formal school years, they become more independent and their world begins to expand. Here is what you can expect at this stage:

- **Children are experiencing physical growth and changes** at this stage. They are becoming stronger, and have better coordination and more energy.
- **Your child's natural curiosity** is also flourishing! You may be asked to respond to their questions with greater detail. In return, your child is able to relate experiences and solve problems with more depth and logic.
- **An understanding** of the difference between fantasy and reality emerges.
- **As they become confident readers**, school-age children may enjoy reading a book on their own.
- **During this stage, your child is forming more relationships** outside of the home with peers, teachers, coaches and others.
- **In order to embrace your child's expanding world**, participate in her school or after school (organized or informal) activities. Allowing your young school-age child to be more independent and active in her environment will enhance family moments.

Activities to Help You Learn and Grow Together

- **Engage with story starters:** Begin to tell a story, and stop at a suspenseful moment. Let your child continue the story using his own thoughts and imagination.
- **Plan a scavenger hunt:** Encourage your child to partner with a sibling or friend. Let each team select a few items to hide in the home or designated area. Teams may give hints for hard to find objects.
- **Talk about current events:** While reading the newspaper, waiting at the bus stop or eating dinner, talk about an article or current event. Encourage your child to give her reaction and share her perspective or thoughts.

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Families Learn and Grow Together

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Parenting Tips

- **Reinforce mastered skills:** Give children opportunities to be successful in new activities that build on skills that they have already learned.
- **Encourage humor:** Humor in your daily communications with your child can enhance positive family experiences.
- **Set reasonable limits:** Provide consistent and loving support to your independent learner as he becomes skilled at making his own choices.

School-Age (10 to 14 Years): Young Minds at Work

There is noticeable growth and change in the child of 10-14 years. Here is what you can expect at this stage:

- **During these years,** physical exercise, good nutrition and an appropriate amount of sleep are important.
- **Their young minds are able to understand logical** and abstract thinking. They are learning quickly and need to be challenged in new and exciting ways.
- **You may notice that your child is now able to concentrate** for longer periods of time and can memorize and recall larger amounts of information.
- **Puberty begins** sometime in this age span and varies from child to child.
- **Children may show an interest in sports or the arts,** while others may be more social and concerned about their relationship with friends.
- **Your 10-14-year-old is working to develop his own identity** and may worry about "fitting in."
- **Encourage independence** by giving them some control over their lives, but remember they still need direction, understanding, support and positive reinforcement from the adults in their lives. As a result, you should see that they are capable of using good judgment and accepting responsibility for their actions.

Activities to Help You Learn and Grow Together

- **Create a dictionary:** Have your child write a word and its definition and then decorate the page. Hang on the fridge and talk about ways to use the word in a sentence. After a few days, pick out another word! Collect the pages and create a "child's" dictionary!
- **Have a "game night":** Games promote the everyday skills of cooperation, honesty and making choices. Games strengthen skills used in school such as memorization, spelling, problem-solving and taking turns.
- **Talk about when you were growing up as a child:** Telling family stories and history can be the beginning of tracing the family tree. Children can interview other family members, write out the stories and use photographs to create a family scrapbook.

Parenting Tips

- **Positive reinforcements:** Give support to your child through open communication. Give the message: "We can talk about anything." You can promote a trusting and positive self-image in your child.
- **Set up a homework area:** A stationary work space, a specific time set aside for the task and perhaps a "no TV" rule can help your child concentrate. Try to be available to answer any questions or help with homework.
- **Safe Internet use:** Make Internet use a family activity, and support your child's responsible and safe exploration of the Web.

Massachusetts Department of Early Education and Care (EEC). (n.d.). *Families learn and grow together*. Retrieved January 3, 2017, from <http://www.mass.gov/>



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UNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE



Resilience helps you through the challenges in life; it allows you to bounce back from stressful situations and also reduces the initial impact of stress. However, resilience is not something that you either "have" or "don't have." Resilience is about the way you approach situations from moment to moment and can be strengthened in the same way as you strengthen your muscles—through repetition and practice. As you do this, it is like developing personal protective equipment (PPE) that is with you at all times protecting you from the negative effects of stress.

If you can develop and maintain relationships with others so you always have some support, if you are able to see the world clearly and respond appropriately, and if you can manage to live in a balanced way, you will have developed resilience. This in turn leads to a healthier, happier, and more successful life.

Developing Relationships

Maintaining good relationships with others is a basic resilience skill. When you are challenged or stressed, it is much easier to respond successfully if you have the support of your family or community of friends and coworkers. Poor communication skills can leave you feeling isolated, making it much more difficult to respond to life's challenges. You'll be more effective in your professional mission if you can gain the cooperation of others by learning to resolve conflicts when they arise. Assertiveness and conflict-resolution are skills that allow you to successfully navigate the normal interpersonal problems that are a part of life, whether in personal or professional

relationships. Maintaining relationships so that you always have someone "watching your back" is one of the keys to overcoming the rough spots and bouncing back from difficulties.

Personal Qualities

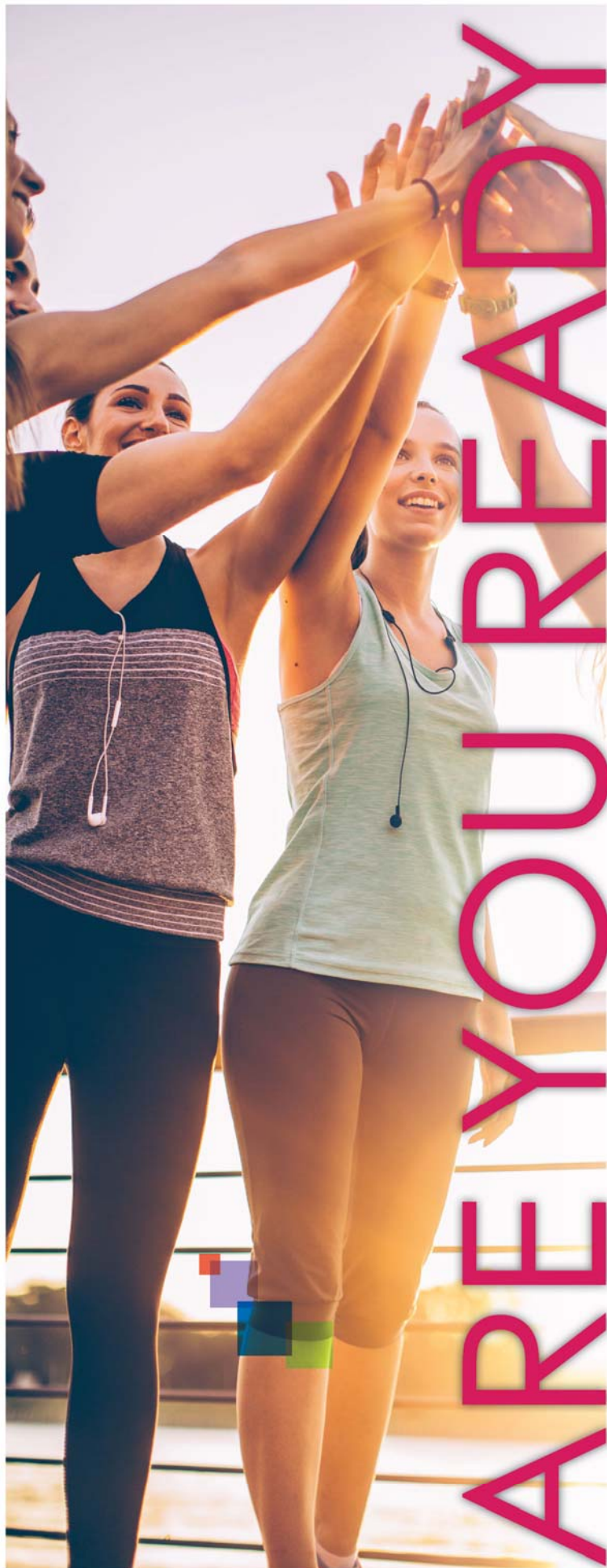
Increased resilience occurs when skills are developed that allow you to feel more in control of your life. These skills include realistic thinking, optimism, and living personal values. Resilience is also supported by developing strong connections with others through gratitude, forgiveness, and generosity. Practicing these personal qualities on a daily basis reduces negative emotions such as anger and resentment, which themselves are internal stressors. Research has demonstrated that integrating these personal qualities into everyday life even improves immune functioning.

Skills

Skills that improve a sense of control over life are central elements of resilience. These are the skills that help to balance life and protect against feeling overwhelmed. Goal setting, time management, and problem-solving are areas of life that are sometimes taken for granted, but they often are the difference between success and failure. These qualities are what make a mission successful in the field. They can make the difference between a successful and unsuccessful effort at developing the kind of life you'd like to live.

Defense Centers of Excellence, National Center for Telehealth & Technology, Afterdeployment. (2010). *Understanding resilience*. Retrieved January 12, 2018, from <http://afterdeployment.dcoe.mil/>

Research has demonstrated that integrating these personal qualities into everyday life even improves immune functioning.



TO BE EVEN MORE ACTIVE?

As you become more fit, you may wish to slowly increase your pace, the length of time you are active, and how often you are active. Before starting a vigorous physical activity program, check with your health care provider if you are a man over age 40 or a woman over age 50, or if you have chronic health problems.

For a well-rounded workout plan, combine *aerobic activity*, muscle-strengthening exercises, and stretching. Do at least 30 minutes per day of moderate-intensity physical activity on most or all days of the week. Add muscle-strengthening activities to your aerobic workout two to three times a week.

If you are trying to lose weight or maintain your weight loss, you may need to do more activity. Aim for 60-90 minutes on most days.

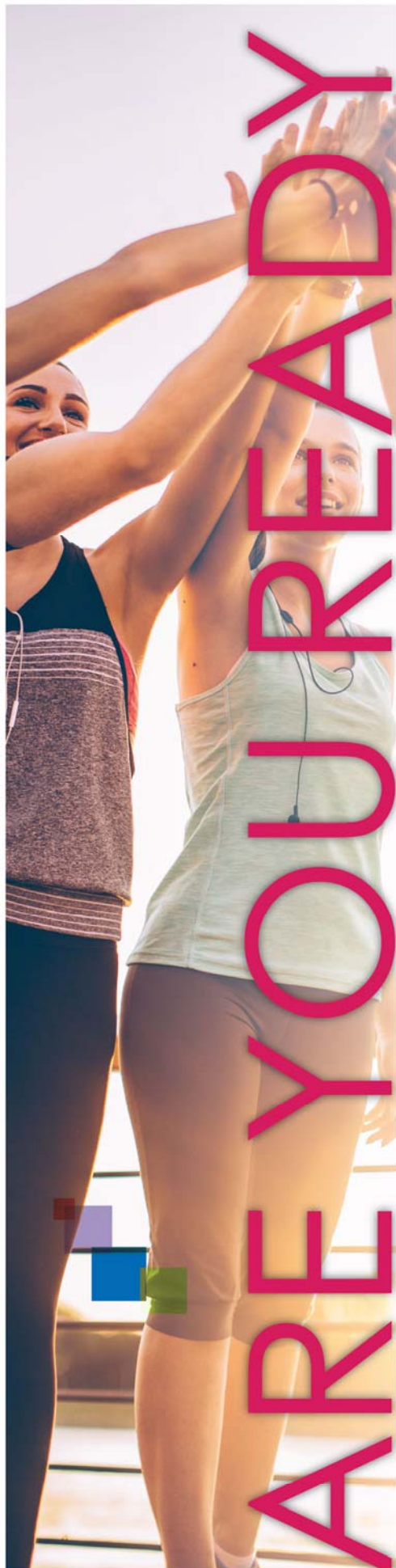
To reduce the risk of injury, do a slow aerobic warm-up, and then stretch before aerobic or strengthening activities. Follow your workout with a few more minutes of stretching.

Aerobic activity is any activity that speeds up your heart and breathing while moving your body at a moderate or vigorous pace. If you have been inactive for a while, you may want to start with easier activities, such as walking at a gentle pace. This lets you build up to more intense activity without hurting your body.

Regular aerobic activity may help to

- **Control weight.** Aerobic activity burns calories, which may help you manage your weight.
- **Prevent coronary heart disease and stroke.** Regular aerobic activity can strengthen your heart muscle and lower your blood pressure. It may also help lower *bad* cholesterol (low-density lipoprotein or LDL) and raise *good* cholesterol (high-density lipoprotein or HDL).
- **Maintain strong bones.** Weight-bearing aerobic activities that involve lifting or pushing your own body weight, such as walking, jogging, or dancing, help to maintain strong bones.
- **Improve your outlook.** Aerobic exercise relieves tension and decreases stress. It may also help build your confidence and improve your self-image.

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TO BE EVEN MORE ACTIVE?

continued

Choose aerobic activities that are fun. People are more likely to be active if they like what they are doing. It also helps to get support from a friend or a family member. Try one of these activities or others you enjoy:

- Brisk walking or jogging
- Bicycling
- Swimming
- Aerobic exercise classes
- Dancing (square dancing, salsa, African dance, swing)
- Playing basketball or soccer

Strengthening activities include lifting weights, using resistance bands, and doing push-ups or sit-ups. Besides building stronger muscles, strengthening activities may help you

- **Use more calories.** Not only do strengthening exercises burn calories, but having more muscle means you will burn slightly more calories throughout the day—even when you are sitting still.
- **Reduce injury.** Stronger muscles improve balance and support your joints, lowering the risk of injury.
- **Maintain strong bones.** Doing strengthening exercises regularly helps build bone and may prevent bone loss as you age.

Strengthening exercises should focus on working the major muscle groups of the body, such as the chest, back, abdominals, legs, and arms. Do exercises for each muscle group two or three times per week. Allow at least one day of rest for your muscles to recover and rebuild before another strengthening workout. (It is safe to do aerobic activity every day.)

Lifestyle activities are the day-to-day activities that you do. These activities can really add up and increase the number of calories you burn each day. They may also boost your energy and mood by getting your blood and muscles moving. Examples of lifestyle activities include

- Taking the stairs instead of the elevator
- Walking to your coworker's office instead of using the phone or e-mail
- Gardening and doing household chores
- Walking inside the bank rather than using the drive-through window
- Parking farther from store entrances and walking the extra distance
- Taking short breaks at work to get up, stretch, and walk
- Playing with your children, nieces and nephews, and pets

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, National Institutes of Health. Weight-Control Information Network (Updated 2012, August). *Better health and you: Tips for adults* (NIH Publication No. 08-4992). Retrieved June 2, 2016, from <http://www.win.niddk.nih.gov>



Boost Your SELF-ESTEEM and SELF-CONFIDENCE

Do you want to feel better about yourself? You can learn how to build self-esteem and raise your self-confidence. Try these tips:

- **Check out new activities.** You'll feel proud for stretching your wings. Does trying something new on your own seem too intimidating? Maybe see if a friend will go along.
- **Be your own BFF.** Make a list of things you love about you. Are you friendly, funny, creative or hard-working, for example?
- **Celebrate your successes.** Try to really enjoy your achievements. Record them in a journal, tell your friends, or hang up pictures or other reminders.
- **Tell your inner critic to be quiet.** If you have a mean thought about yourself, see if you can change it to something positive instead. For example, if you think, "I'm dumb," try remembering a time you did something smart.
- **Don't compare yourself to others.** Someone else may have tons of online friends or a "great" body, but everyone has strengths and weaknesses.
- **Practice being assertive.** Try to express your thoughts, opinions and needs. It feels great to know you can speak up for yourself! (Of course, you want to do this without stomping on other people's feelings.)
- **Find ways to feel like you're contributing.** It feels great to help. You might do chores at home or volunteer in your community.
- **Set realistic goals.** Aim for a goal that you think you can reach. Then make a plan for how to get there. If you pick something very hard, you may get frustrated and quit.
- **Forgive yourself when you fail.** Nobody is perfect. The important thing is to learn from your mistakes. It's good to know you can pick yourself up and keep going!
- **Find true friends.** Hang out with people who make you feel good about yourself. Real friends like you for you.
- **Honor your background.** It can be great to feel proud of who you are and where you come from. Celebrate your heritage and culture.
- If you try working on your self-esteem for a while and still don't feel good about yourself, reach out for help. Talk to a trusted friend or family member, doctor or counselor, or another person in whom you can confide. Your confidant may be able to suggest other things you can try, and it may help just to talk about how you're feeling. Also, sometimes low self-esteem can increase your risk for depression and other emotional problems. Speaking to someone you trust is the first step to getting support, and that person may be able to help you get treatment if you need it.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, Office on Women's Health (OWH), GirlsHealth. (Updated 2015, February 19). Boost your self-esteem and self-confidence. In *Your feelings: Being happy*. Retrieved October 17, 2017, from <https://www.girlshealth.gov/>



Aim for a HEALTHY WEIGHT

Choose a lifestyle that combines sensible eating with regular physical activity. To be at their best, adults need to avoid gaining weight, and many need to lose weight. Being overweight or obese increases your risk for high blood pressure, high blood cholesterol, heart disease, stroke, diabetes, certain types of cancer, arthritis, and breathing problems. A healthy weight is key to a long, healthy life.

Evaluate your body weight.

For adults and children, different methods are used to find out if weight is about right for height. If you have concerns about your child's body size, talk with your health care provider.

If you are an adult, follow the directions below to evaluate your weight in relation to your height, or *Body Mass Index* (BMI). A BMI above the healthy range is less healthy for most people; but it may be fine if you have lots of muscle and little fat. The further your BMI is above the healthy range, the higher your weight-related risk. If your BMI is above the healthy range, you may benefit from weight loss, especially if you have other health risk factors.

BMI's slightly below the healthy range may still be healthy unless they result from illness. If your BMI is below the healthy range, you may have increased risk of

menstrual irregularity, infertility, and osteoporosis. If you lose weight suddenly or for unknown reasons, see a health care provider. Unexplained weight loss may be an early clue to a health problem.

How to Evaluate Your Weight (Adults)

1. Weigh yourself and have your height measured to find your BMI category. The higher your BMI category, the greater the risk for health problems.
2. Measure around your waist, just above your hip bones, while standing. Health risks increase as waist measurement increases, particularly if the waist is greater than 35 inches for women or 40 inches for men. Excess abdominal fat may place you at greater risk of health problems, even if your BMI is about right.

Manage your weight.

Your genes affect your tendency to gain weight. A tendency to gain weight is increased when food is plentiful and when you use equipment and vehicles to save time and energy. However, it is possible to manage your weight through balancing the calories you eat with your physical activity choices.

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Aim for a HEALTHY WEIGHT

continued

To make it easier to manage your weight, make long-term changes in your eating behavior and physical activity. To do this, build a healthy base and make sensible choices. Choose a healthful assortment of foods that includes vegetables, fruits, grains (especially whole grains), skim milk, fish, lean meat, poultry, and beans. Choose foods that are low in fat and added sugars as much as you can. Whatever the food, eat a sensible portion size.

Try to be more active throughout the day. It is recommended that all adults get at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity most or preferably all days of the week. To maintain a healthy weight after weight loss, adults will likely need to do more than 30 minutes of moderate physical activity daily. Over time, even a small decrease in calories eaten and a small increase in physical activity can keep you from gaining weight or help you lose weight.

Control portion size.

- If you're eating out, choose small portion sizes, share an entree with a friend, or take part of the food home.
- Check product labels to learn how much food is considered to be a serving, and how many calories, grams of fat, and so forth are in the food. Many items sold as single portions actually provide 2 servings or more. Examples include a 20-ounce container of soft drink, a 12-ounce steak, a 3-ounce bag of chips, and a large bagel.

- Be especially careful to limit portion size of foods high in calories, such as cookies, cakes, other sweets, French fries, fats, oils, and spreads.

The carbohydrates, fats, and proteins in food supply energy, which is measured in calories. High-fat foods contain more calories than the same amount of other foods, so they can make it difficult for you to avoid excess calories. However, low-fat doesn't always mean low calorie. Sometimes extra sugars are added to low-fat muffins or desserts, making them just as high in calories.

Your pattern of eating may be important as well. Snacks and meals eaten away from home provide a large part of daily calories for many people. Choose them wisely. Try fruits, vegetables, whole grain foods, or a cup of low-fat milk or yogurt for a snack. When eating out, choose small portions of foods. If you choose fish, poultry, or lean meat, ask that it be grilled rather than fried.

Like younger adults, overweight and obese older adults may improve their health by losing weight. The guidance of a health care provider is recommended, especially for obese children and older adults. Since older people tend to lose muscle mass, regular physical activity is a valuable part of a weight-loss plan. Building or maintaining muscle helps keep older adults active and reduces their risk of falls and fractures. Staying active throughout your adult years helps maintain muscle mass and bone strength for your later years.

U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS). (n.d.). Be physically active each day. In *Aim for fitness*. Retrieved September 29, 2016, from <http://health.gov/>