

Healthy Steps to Mental Health

From your friends at Blue Care Network

Are you stressed out?

Someone cuts you off on the road. Your boss pressures you. You have a fight with your spouse.

That's stress.

You break a leg. You move to a new neighborhood. Your best friend dies.

That's also stress.

Stress can hurt you or help you. This is a natural process called the classic "fight-or-flight" response. Do you stay and fight the danger or do you run from it? Your stress response can help you get through a pressing deadline at work or help you adjust to a major change, such as the arrival of a new child. However, chronic stress affects your quality of life and your physical and mental health.

Chronic stress can lower your immune system and lead to multiple physical symptoms, including chest pain and even heart attack. Stress can lead to depression or it can be a major tip-off that you have a mental illness such as generalized anxiety disorder.

The good news is that stress is manageable. If you learn simple relaxation techniques, identify the causes of your stress — your "stressors" — and change your thinking about stressful situations, you can reduce stress and lessen its effects on your body.

What if these remedies don't work? Physical stress or emotional stress can trigger chemical changes in the brain. It's a good idea to seek professional help when your feelings go beyond stress, and you experience these disruptive symptoms:

- Persistent sad mood
- Loss of interest or pleasure in most activities
- Changes in sleep patterns
- Restlessness or decreased activity that is noticeable to others
- Loss of energy or feeling tired all the time
- Difficulty in concentrating or making decisions
- Feelings of worthlessness or inappropriate guilt
- Repeated thoughts of death or suicide

If your stress is related to an anxiety disorder or depression, you can be successfully treated with psychotherapy, medication or both. Talk to your doctor about managing your stress.

Is alcohol a problem in your life?

Stress in daily life can sometimes create unhealthy behaviors. Using, or abusing, alcohol can be a way to "chill" from the demands of work and family.

Do you think you have a problem with alcohol? Ask yourself the CAGE questions:

- Have you ever felt you should **C**ut down on your drinking?
- Have people **A**nnoyed you by criticizing your drinking?
- Have you ever felt bad or **G**uilty about your drinking?
- Have you ever had a drink first thing in a morning (an **E**ye opener) to steady your nerves or get rid of a hangover?

Answering yes to one or more of these questions may indicate you could use some professional help.

Go to alcoholscreening.org for another alcohol screening test. Answer the online questions to determine if your drinking patterns are safe, risky or harmful.

Recipe

Comfort food

After a stressful day, there's nothing like a warm plate of homemade, comfort food. Lighten up a favorite by using low-fat cheese and evaporated skim milk.

Macaroni and Cheese

Ingredients

- 2 cups macaroni
- ½ cup chopped onion
- ½ cup evaporated skim milk
- 1 medium egg, beaten
- ¼ tsp black pepper
- 1-¼ cups low-fat sharp cheddar cheese, shredded
- Nonstick cooking spray

Instructions

1. Preheat oven to 350 degrees.
2. Cook macaroni according to package directions. Drain and set aside.
3. Spray a casserole dish with nonstick spray.
4. Sauté onions until soft in saucepan, about 3 minutes.
5. In a bowl, combine macaroni, onions and remaining ingredients. Mix thoroughly.
6. Pour mixture into the casserole dish.
7. Bake for 25 minutes or until bubbly. Let stand 10 minutes before serving.

Makes 8 servings

Nutritional information

Serving Size	½ cup
Calories	200
Saturated fat	2 g
Cholesterol	34 mg
Sodium	120 mg

It's a fact...

- Nearly 17.6 million Americans — one in every 12 adults — abuse alcohol or are alcohol dependent, according to the National Institute on Alcohol Abuse and Alcoholism.
- About one-half of all fatal traffic crashes among those aged 18 to 24 involve alcohol; many of those killed in this age group are college students.
- In the workplace, at least 12 percent of all employees have alcohol problems. More than \$40 billion is lost annually from related absenteeism and reduced productivity.
- Heavy drinking can increase the risk of heart failure, stroke, high blood pressure and cirrhosis of the liver.

Did you know...

More teens abuse alcohol

Alcohol use is the No. 1 drug problem among young people. Teenagers are drinking younger and more frequently than before.

- More than three of every four students have had alcohol by the end of high school with almost half by the eighth grade.
- More than half of twelfth graders and a fifth of the eighth graders have been drunk at least once.

How can you convince your teenager to stay away from drugs and alcohol? Be a good role model.

Source: National Institute on Drug Abuse

Diagnostic information

How much is too much?

For men, it's two drinks per day or less.

For women and people 65 and older, it's one drink per day or less.

One drink is:

- A 12-ounce glass, bottle or can of beer or ale
- A 4-ounce glass of wine
- A 1.5-ounce shot of distilled liquor or brandy (straight or in a mixed drink)

Resources

Behavioral health services are available to members 24 hours a day, seven days a week by calling the number on the back of your ID card. No referral is necessary. A behavioral health specialist can answer your questions or refer you for individual help.

For more information on alcohol abuse, go to MiBCN.com.