



### *Fast facts*

- ◆ Stress can weaken the immune system.
- ◆ A balanced diet helps regulate your blood sugar, which has a calming effect.
- ◆ Aerobic exercise may be the single best stress fighter.

## Stressed out? Here's how to cope

Your daughter is getting married and the wedding plans have fallen on your shoulders. The drive to work every day through that construction zone is a nightmare. The cutbacks at your office are starting to worry you.

We all have some stress in our lives. But when things become too overwhelming, our reaction to it can have negative effects -- even longterm consequences.

What is stress? It's actually a chemical reaction within your body, impacting your blood sugar, heart rate, blood pressure and breathing. It occurs when you are confronted with change, and you struggle to adapt and cope. Stress can make you angry or afraid, excited or helpless. It can make it difficult to sleep at night or create body, neck and head aches.

Many people treat stress by indulging in bad habits -- smoking, drinking or overeating. But these behaviors can just make matters worse. Here are a few tips from behavioral experts on how to deal with stressful situations in your life:

- Relaxed breathing: Take deep breaths at a slow rate to help your body wind down.
- Take a bubble bath: Warm water is soothing. Light a candle and play music.
- Exercise: A brisk walk will help release tension.
- Have a warm drink: Hot chocolate is calming, especially on a cool day.
- Avoid caffeine: It can make you jittery.

## Help your parent -- help yourself

As Americans live longer and longer, more adult children find themselves having to take care of an aging parent. For some, it's a real squeeze play: They're raising children on one hand, and scrambling to find care for their elderly mother or father on the other. It's enough to make you throw your hands up in the air.

Fortunately, you can minimize the stress and strain by approaching the matter armed with good information and a thoughtful game plan.

One of the most important things to remember is that a lot more can be accomplished if you approach problems with a positive attitude. That means making sure you have time for yourself and the things you like to do. Spending all of your free time assisting mom or dad will only lead to fatigue -- or even bitterness.

Secondly, get a handle on what exactly needs to be done. If necessary, have a professional do an assessment to determine whether independent living is an option. If not, what level of assistance is required?

If your parent is in good health, he or she may be able to continue living on their own, but with some help from you. Be sure they're getting good nutrition and eating a balance diet. Maybe you'll have to bring them groceries once a week, or even prepare some meals that could be microwaved.

There are safety issues, too. Are the smoke detectors in working order?

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### *Fast facts*

- ◆ By 2030, there will be 70 million elderly, twice the number in 1998.
- ◆ Almost 20 percent of those over 85 live in nursing homes.
- ◆ The two most common conditions among the elderly are arthritis and hypertension.

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Does the shower have a grab-bar to prevent falling? Are there emergency phone numbers posted near the telephone? A touchy subject: Your parent may still be driving a car, but are they still able to do it safely? Remember that even a short trip to the store can present many hazards.

Take a realistic look at your mother or father's finances. Long-term care can cost up to \$80,000, according to some estimates. If your father can no longer live on his own, what kind of arrangement would be affordable? Get a first-hand look at some of the facilities that are available so you can help him decide.

Your parent should also have an up-to-date will, including a Living Will that instructs you or others what to do in the event he or she is unable to make key medical decisions. Also, it might be wise to get a durable power of attorney so that other decisions -- about housing, for example -- could be made in his or her best interests.

Finally, as we said at the outset, don't overload yourself. Take a break once in a while. Most communities have respite services that allow you to drop off an elderly parent for the day. Depending on income, there are also housekeeping and other services offered by your city or county government. Get out of your routine, spend time with your family and socialize with friends. You won't be doing your parent any favors if you're always stressed out over their care.

Here are some other services you might consider:

- Home-delivered meals. Many communities have "Meals on Wheels" programs that bring lunch or dinner to the elderly.
- Telephone reassurance program. Even if you can't check up on mom and dad all the time, these people (often volunteers) call at a pre-set time to make sure everything's OK.
- Transportation or escort service. These folks, who are also often volunteers, will take your mom or dad shopping or to medical appointments.
- Friendly visitors. Quite often church groups will offer to visit the home-bound.

### It's a dicey problem

For most people, going to a casino, dog track or a horse track is harmless entertainment. But for a small minority -- about 2 percent -- gambling can become an addiction.

Experts say that some people actually experience a "high" after a big win, similar to the euphoria people feel after taking a drug.

How do you know when you're losing control? Here are a few of the warning signs:

- Being preoccupied with gambling.
- Gambling with increasing amounts of money.
- Lying to family or friends to conceal your habit.
- Jeopardizing a job or relationship due to gambling.
- You are repeatedly unable to cut back or stop.
- You gamble to escape from personal problems, such as depression, anxiety or guilt.

### Video games can increase aggression

It's hard to tear your son away when he's engrossed in a video game. And sometimes you wonder: Could this affect his behavior? Some new research suggests that the answer is yes.

Playing violent games like Doom, Wolfenstein 3D or Mortal Kombat may fuel a person's aggressive thoughts -- and even his behavior, researchers from Iowa State University and Lenoir-Rhyne College concluded.

One reason is that the games are interactive, and require the player to identify with the aggressor.

What's more, time spent playing video games was associated with lower academic performances.

"Violent video games provide a forum for learning and practicing aggressive solutions to conflict situations," says Dr. Craig Anderson, one of the researchers involved in the study.

## Edward Jones

*"Happiness is a matter of choice—your choice for yourself."*

- Harold Azine

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