



Stressed out? 10 minutes to change your life

What is stress?

Stress is a word people use for the feeling they get when everything seems too much.

You might feel stressed if you have too much to do, if other people are asking a lot of you, or you're having to deal with things you can't control. To help keep your heart healthy, you need to take care of your body and your mind.

You're in control – take ten minutes to make some small changes. You could change your life.

How does stress affect your heart?

Being stressed can mean you do things which can be bad for your heart health, like:

- ✗ Eating unhealthy foods
- ✗ Smoking
- ✗ Drinking too much alcohol
- ✗ Not getting enough physical activity

This can lead to conditions such as high blood pressure, high cholesterol and unhealthy weight which can cause heart disease or stroke. Heart disease and stroke can kill you and may reduce your quality of life.

Are you stressed?

When you're stressed, your body and mind will tell you. Everyone reacts differently.

If you're stressed you might have...

- ✓ Problems sleeping
- ✓ Tight knotty feelings in your stomach
- ✓ Lost your appetite for food, fun, or sex

You might feel...

- ✓ Fearful or worried
- ✓ Hopeless
- ✓ Alone

You might find...

- ✓ It's difficult to concentrate
- ✓ It's hard to make decisions
- ✓ You avoid relationships or going out
- ✓ You're eating, drinking, or smoking more to make you feel better

What makes you stressed?

Most of us have some stress in our lives. The most common causes of stress are:

- ✓ Work
- ✓ Money problems
- ✓ Relationships – either between two people or your family
- ✓ Major life events like getting married, divorce, unemployment, or the loss or illness of someone you love
- ✓ Time pressure
- ✓ Loneliness

Thinking about which areas of your life are most stressful is the first step to finding ways to cope with them.

Which parts of your life make you stressed?

What can you do to prevent stress?

Avoid things that make you stressed. For example, if you're having family problems, try and work the problem out by talking things through with those close to you, before they become more of a problem.

Change your reaction. If you can't avoid the things that make you stressed, try changing your attitude towards them.

Make changes. Take steps to feel less stressed. Exercising, eating well and getting plenty of rest can all help you to feel less stressed.

Challenging stressful thoughts

If you feel stressed and tense, or you feel frustrated, angry or depressed, take a step back.

Remind yourself that getting stressed won't help, and take a couple of minutes to think about what you can do to change your situation.

If you have negative thoughts going through your mind like 'I can't cope', or 'I'm useless' – try more positive thoughts, like 'I know I will get through this in time' or 'there are lots of things I am good at'.

Take ten: try a quick deep breathing exercise to help you relax

1. Slowly inhale through your nose, expanding your abdomen before allowing air to fill your lungs.
2. Hold it, then let the air go slowly through your mouth. Breathe naturally for a while, and then repeat the deep breath and 'letting go' with your outward breath.

Time for more help?

It's better to ask for help rather than to struggling to cope.

Ask for help if:

- ✓ You feel stressed a lot of the time.
- ✓ You have trouble coping with your relationships at work or at home
- ✓ Stress is stopping you doing your work as well as you used to.
- ✓ You think you might have depression. (Stress and depression are sometimes linked, but stress doesn't always lead to depression, and stress is not the only cause of depression.)
- ✓ You are drinking too much or are using drugs to cope with stress.
- ✓ A friend or your partner asks you to get help.

Start by talking to your doctor. They may be able to help, or they may arrange for you to see another health professional.

Next Steps:

Try to do the *10 minute challenge* next week. If you like it, try it again the week after!

The Heart and Stroke Foundation needs generous public donations to continue to produce materials like this, and to fund the research that helps thousands of people each year. To donate, go to heartandstroke.ca/donate

For more information on other 10 Minute Challenges to reduce your risk of heart disease and stroke, visit our website at heartandstroke.ca.

Stressed out? Take 10 minutes

Take ten minutes to plan some stress-busting activities for next week

- ✓ Think about the week ahead
- ✓ Think through what you'll be doing and the likely danger spots for stressful situations
- ✓ Plan the stress-busting activities that you are going to build into your week.

You're in control – by taking the time to make small changes to your lifestyle, you can help keep your heart healthy – and lower your risk of heart disease and stroke.

Day	Danger spots	Stress busting activity
Eg.	Anna's birthday party	<i>Avoid stress:</i> Plan what I need to do. Shop early. <i>Change reaction:</i> Remember that it doesn't need to be perfect. <i>Take steps to feel less stressed:</i> Take 10 deep breaths, or walk around the block before the party.
1		
2		
3		
4		
5		
6		
7		

At the end of the week, look back over what you did and answer these questions

What worked?

What can you do in the future to help reduce stress?

What didn't work?