

A man in a light blue shirt and dark trousers is walking away from the viewer on a sandy beach. He is carrying a dark jacket in his left hand. The beach is bordered by lush tropical vegetation, including several palm trees on the left. In the background, a steep, rocky cliff rises from the water's edge, covered in dense green foliage. The water is a vibrant turquoise color, and the sky is blue with scattered white clouds. The overall scene conveys a sense of escape and relaxation.

## FIND RELIEF FROM STRESS

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# Are You Stressed?

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“Everyone has stress to some degree, yet I am overwhelmed with stress. It is not from just one big problem but from many situations, from struggles, and from seemingly unending years of caring for my physically and mentally ill husband.”—Jill.\*

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“My wife left me, and I had to raise two children on my own. It was hard being a single parent. On top of that, I lost my job and I couldn’t afford to get my vehicle inspected for registration. I had no idea how to handle things. The stress was overwhelming. I knew deep down that it was wrong to kill myself, so I begged God to end my misery.”—Barry.

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Like Jill and Barry, do you sometimes feel overwhelmed with stress? If so, may the following articles comfort and help you. They examine common causes of stress, how stress can affect us, and how we can get at least a measure of stress relief.

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\* Names have been changed.



# What Causes Stress?

“Most adults report being under increasing levels of stress,” says the well-known Mayo Clinic. “Modern life is filled with change and uncertainty.” Consider just some of the changes and uncertainties that contribute to stress:

- **divorce**
- **the death of a loved one**
- **severe illness**
- **serious accidents**
- **crime**
- **a hectic pace of life**
- **disasters—natural or man-made**
- **pressures at school or work**
- **worries about employment and financial security**

## STRESS IN EARLY CHILDHOOD

It is not uncommon for children to suffer from stress. Some are bullied at school or neglected at home. Others are abused physically, emotionally, or sexually. Many are anxious about exams and school grades. Still others see their family torn apart by divorce. Stressed children may have nightmares, learning difficulties, depression, or a tendency to be withdrawn. Some seem unable to control their emotions. A child suffering from stress needs urgent help.

## “THE LOSS OF A JOB,”

says the American Psychological Association, “can be devastating, putting unemployed workers at risk for physical illness, marital strain, anxiety, depression and even suicide. Loss of a job affects every part of life.”



# What Is Stress?

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Stress is your body's response to a demanding situation. Your brain causes hormones to flood your system. These increase your heart rate, regulate your blood pressure, expand or constrict the capacity of your lungs, and tense your muscles. Before you are fully aware of what is happening, your body is primed for action. When a stressful episode is over, your body comes off "high alert" and returns to normal.

## GOOD AND BAD STRESS

Stress is a natural response that enables you to deal with challenging or dangerous situations. The stress response begins in your brain. Beneficial stress enables you to act or react quickly. A certain amount of stress can also help you to reach your goals or to perform better, perhaps during an exam, a job interview, or a sporting event.

However, prolonged, extreme, or chronic stress can harm you. When your body is repeatedly or constantly on "high alert," you may begin to suffer physically, emotionally, and mentally. Your behavior, including the way you treat others, may change. Chronic stress can also lead to substance abuse and other unhealthy means of coping. It may even spiral into depression, burnout, or thoughts of suicide.

While stress may not affect everyone in the same way, it can contribute to a wide range of diseases. And it can affect nearly every part of the body.



# HOW STRESS CAN AFFECT YOUR BODY

## Musculoskeletal system.

Your muscles tense up to protect you from injury. Too much stress can lead to

- body aches and pains, tension headaches, muscle spasms

## Respiratory system.

You breathe faster to take in more oxygen. Too much stress can lead to

- hyperventilation and shortness of breath, as well as panic attacks in those who are prone to them

## Nervous system.

Your nervous system causes hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol to be released. These increase your heart rate, your blood pressure, and the glucose levels in your blood—all of which enable you to respond quickly to danger. Too much stress can lead to

- irritability, anxiety, depression, headaches, insomnia

## Cardiovascular system.

Your heart beats faster and harder to distribute blood throughout your body. Blood vessels dilate or constrict to direct blood where your body needs it the most, such as in your muscles. Too much stress can lead to

- high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke



## Endocrine system.

Your glands produce the hormones adrenaline and cortisol, which help the body react to stress. Your liver increases your blood-sugar level to give you more energy. Too much stress can lead to

- diabetes, lower immunity and increased illness, mood swings, weight gain

## Reproductive system.

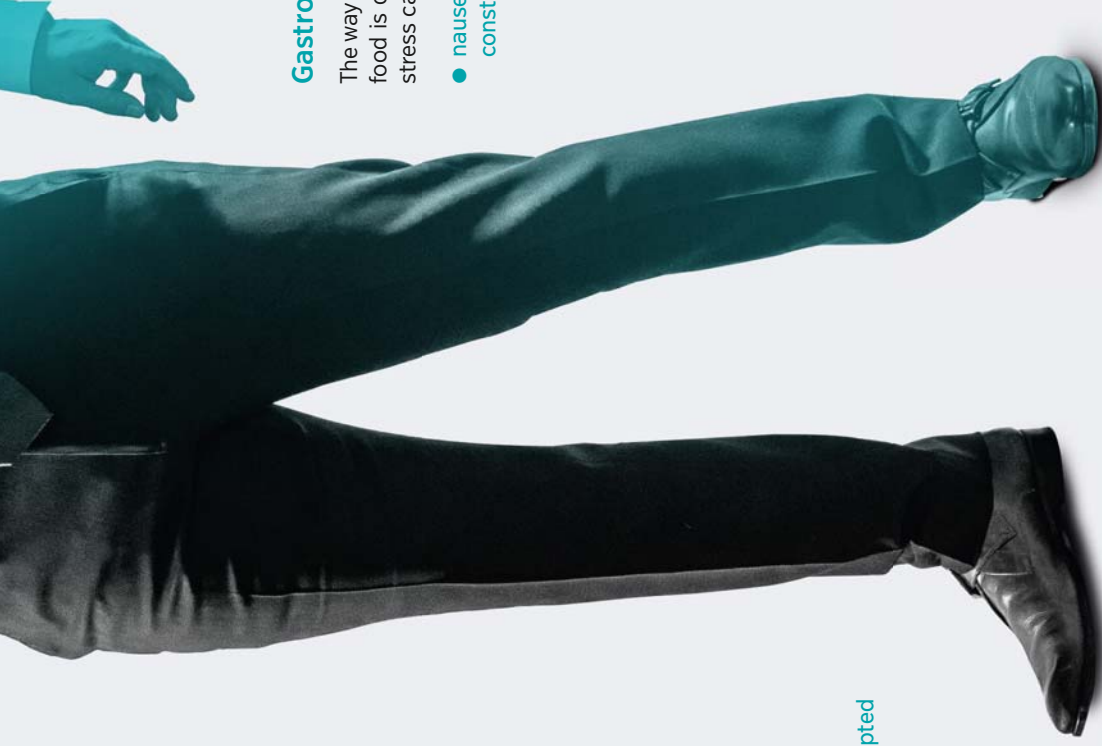
Stress can affect sexual desire and function. Too much stress can lead to

- impotence, disrupted menstrual cycle

## Gastrointestinal system.

The way your body processes food is disrupted. Too much stress can lead to

- nausea, vomiting, diarrhea, constipation



# How to Deal With Stress

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To deal effectively with stress, you need to think about your physical health, the way you interact with others, and your goals and priorities in life—that is, what you consider to be truly important. This article will review some practical principles that can help you to deal better with stress and perhaps even reduce it.

## Try to Live One Day at a Time

“Never be anxious about the next day, for the next day will have its own anxieties.”—MATTHEW 6:34.

**Meaning:** Daily anxieties are a part of life. But do not increase today’s anxieties by adding tomorrow’s to them. Try to live one day at a time.

- Stress can cause anxiety. So try this: First, recognize that some stress is inevitable. Fretting over things you cannot prevent increases your stress. Second, understand that quite often things do not turn out the way we may fear they will.

## Set Reasonable Standards

“The wisdom from above is . . . reasonable.”—JAMES 3:17.

**Meaning:** Do not be a perfectionist. Avoid setting unrealistically high standards for yourself or others.

- Be modest, set reasonable standards, and know both your limitations and those of others. When you do this, you will reduce stress all around and even encourage greater success. Also, keep a sense of humor. When you laugh—even when something goes wrong—you relieve tension and brighten your mood.





## Know What Stresses You

“A discerning man will remain calm.”—**PROVERBS 17:27.**

**Meaning:** Negative emotions can cloud clear thinking, so try to stay calm.

- Identify what stresses you, and note your response. For example, when you feel stressed, note your thoughts, feelings, and behavior, perhaps even making a record of them. By becoming more aware of your response to stress, you may be able to deal with it more effectively. Also, think of ways to eliminate stressful things from your life. If that is unrealistic, look for ways to reduce their impact, perhaps by managing your tasks or time more efficiently.
- Try to see things in a different light. What stresses you may not stress someone else. The difference may be in viewpoint. Consider these three suggestions:
  1. Do not be quick to assume bad motives. A person may cut ahead of you in a line. If you attribute his act to rudeness, you may become upset. Instead, why not assume that his motive was good? You may be right!
  2. See the positive side of a situation. A long wait at a doctor’s office or an airport is easier to bear if you use the time to do some reading or to catch up on work or e-mail.
  3. Keep the big picture in mind. Ask yourself, ‘Will this problem be a big issue tomorrow or next week?’ Distinguish between minor or short-term issues and more serious ones.

## Try to Be Orderly

“Let all things take place decently and by arrangement.”

—1 CORINTHIANS 14:40.

**Meaning:** Try to maintain order in your life.

- We like a reasonable amount of order in life. One thing that can contribute to disorder—and stress—is procrastination, and this may lead to a growing list of unfinished tasks. Why not try these two suggestions?
- 1. Make a practical schedule, and stick to it.
- 2. Identify and correct any attitudes that cause you to procrastinate.



## Pursue a Balanced Lifestyle

“Better is a handful of rest than two handfuls of hard work and chasing after the wind.”

—ECCLESIASTES 4:6.

**Meaning:** Workaholics can deprive themselves of the benefits of their “two handfuls of hard work.” They may have no time or energy left to enjoy what they worked for.

- Have a realistic view of work and money. More money does not mean more happiness or less stress. In fact, the opposite can be true. “The plenty belonging to the rich one does not permit him to sleep,” says Ecclesiastes 5:12. So try to live within your means.
- Make time to relax. You relieve stress when you do things you enjoy. However, passive recreation, such as watching TV, may not help.
- Keep technology in its place. Avoid constantly checking e-mail, texts, or social media sites. Unless circumstances require it, do not check work-related e-mail outside of working hours.

## Take Care of Your Health

“Physical training is beneficial.” —1 TIMOTHY 4:8.

**Meaning:** Regular exercise promotes better health.

- Develop healthful habits. Physical activity can lift your mood and improve your body’s response to stress. Eat nutritious food, and try to avoid skipping meals. Be sure to get enough rest.
- Avoid harmful “solutions” to stress, such as smoking or drug and alcohol abuse. In the long run, these heighten stress, perhaps by robbing you of your health and hard-earned money.
- See your doctor if your stress becomes overwhelming. Getting professional help is not an admission of failure.



## “KILL YOUR STRESS WITH KINDNESS”

“A kind man benefits himself, but the cruel person brings trouble on himself.”  
—PROVERBS 11:17.

The book *Overcoming Stress* has a chapter entitled “Kill Your Stress with Kindness.” Treating others kindly, according to the author, Dr. Tim Cantopher, can promote health and happiness. On the other hand, an unkind or cruel person makes himself unhappy because he alienates himself from others.

We may also get stress relief by treating ourselves kindly. For example, we should not make harsh or unrealistic demands on ourselves. Nor should we belittle or malign ourselves. “You must love your neighbor *as yourself*,” Jesus Christ said.  
—Mark 12:31.

## Set Priorities

“Make sure of the more important things.”—**PHILIPPIANS 1:10.**

**Meaning:** Carefully consider your priorities.

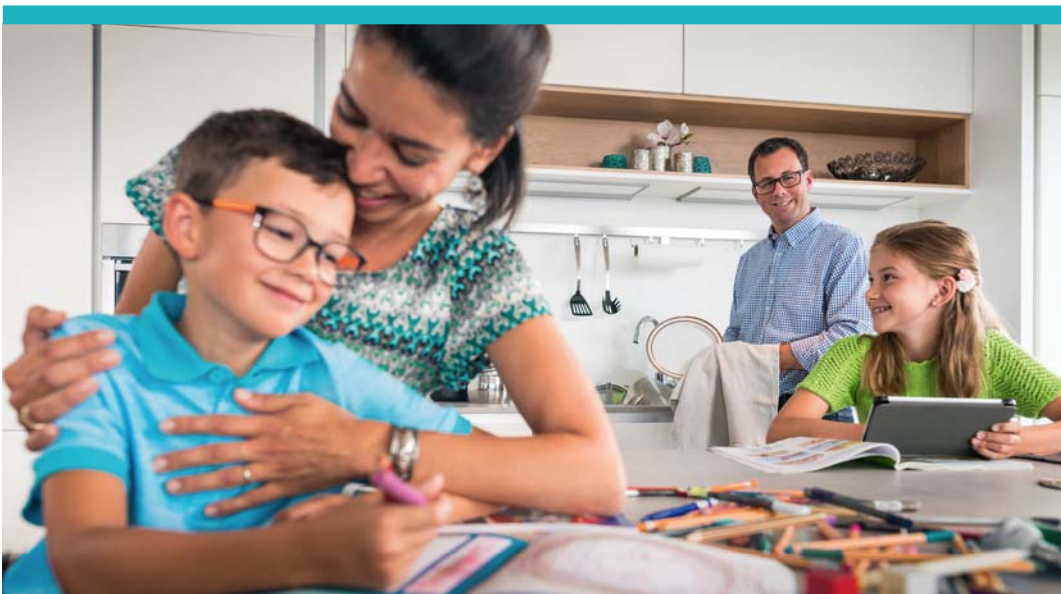
- List your tasks in order of importance. This will help you focus on the more important jobs, and it will reveal which ones you can put off, delegate, or even eliminate.
- For a week, keep track of how you use your time. Then look for ways to make better use of it. The more you are in control, the less pressured you will feel.
- Schedule some downtime. Even short breaks can reinvigorate you and reduce your stress.

## Get Support

“Anxiety in a man’s heart weighs it down, but a good word cheers it up.”—**PROVERBS 12:25.**

**Meaning:** Kind, compassionate words from others can lift your spirits.

- Talk things over with an understanding person. A confidant may help you to see things differently or even to see a solution you overlooked. And just unburdening yourself can make you feel better.
- Ask for help. Can you delegate a task or share the workload?
- If a work associate stresses you, look for ways to improve the situation. For example, could you kindly and tactfully tell the person how he or she makes you feel? (Proverbs 17:27) If such measures fail, can you reduce the time you spend with the person?



## Care for Your Spiritual Need

“Happy are those conscious of their spiritual need.”—**MATTHEW 5:3.**

**Meaning:** As humans, we need more than food, clothing, and shelter. We have a spiritual need. To be happy, we must be conscious of that need and attend to it.

- Prayer can be a big help. God invites you to “throw all your anxiety on him, because he cares for you.” (1 Peter 5:7) Prayer and wholesome meditation can result in deep inner peace.—Philippians 4:6, 7.
- Read spiritually uplifting things. The principles discussed in this magazine come from the Bible, which was written to satisfy our spiritual need. These also foster “practical wisdom and thinking ability.” (Proverbs 3:21) Why not set a goal to read the Bible? The book of Proverbs might be a good place to start.



## THE POWER OF FORGIVENESS

“The insight of a man certainly slows down his anger, and it is beauty on his part to overlook an offense.”—**PROVERBS 19:11.**

In the *Journal of Health Psychology*, Loren Toussaint states that “stress degrades [health] and forgiveness protects health.” He adds: “Forgiveness is the release of negative—and the potential enhancement of positive—feelings, emotions, and behaviors toward an offender.” He thus concludes that a forgiving spirit “may help minimize stress-related disorders.”



# A Stress-Free Life Is Possible

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The wisdom in the Bible can help us to avoid much needless stress. We ourselves cannot eliminate all that stresses us. But our Creator can. He has even appointed someone to come to our aid. That one is Jesus Christ. On a global scale, he will soon do even more wonderful things than he did when he was a man on earth. For example:

## **JESUS WILL HEAL THE SICK, AS HE DEMONSTRATED.**

“They brought him all those who were suffering with various diseases . . . , and he cured them.”

—MATTHEW 4:24.

## **JESUS WILL PROVIDE HOUSING AND FOOD FOR ALL.**

“They [Christ’s subjects] will build houses and live in them, and they will plant vineyards and eat their fruitage. They will not build for someone else to inhabit, nor will they plant for others to eat.”

—ISAIAH 65:21, 22.

## **JESUS’ RULE WILL RESULT IN GLOBAL PEACE AND SECURITY.**

“In his days the righteous will flourish, and peace will abound until the moon is no more. He will have subjects from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. . . . His enemies will lick the dust.” —PSALM 72:7-9.

## **JESUS WILL ELIMINATE INJUSTICE.**

“He will have pity on the lowly and the poor, and the lives of the poor he will save. From oppression and from violence he will rescue them.”

—PSALM 72:13, 14.

## JESUS WILL EVEN ELIMINATE SUFFERING AND DEATH.

“Death will be no more, neither will mourning nor outcry nor pain be anymore.”—**REVELATION 21:4.**



## “PERILOUS TIMES OF GREAT STRESS”

“The world is more stressed, worried, sad and in pain today than we’ve ever seen it.”—Mohamed S. Younis, Gallup managing editor.

Why is stress so common? The Bible gives a most reasonable answer. At 2 Timothy 3:1, it states: “In the last days will come . . . perilous times of great stress and trouble.” (*The Amplified Bible*) The reason, the Bible goes on to say, relates to the bad personality traits of people. These traits include greed, arrogance, religious hypocrisy, a violent disposition, a lack of family affection, and a lack of self-control. (2 Timothy 3: 2-5) The last days will end when Jesus Christ takes full control of the earth as King of God’s Kingdom, a heavenly government.—Daniel 2:44.

# “A CALM HEART GIVES LIFE TO THE BODY”

Those words, found at Proverbs 14:30, were written about three thousand years ago! They reflect the timeless wisdom found in the Bible. If you would like to learn more, go to [jw.org](http://jw.org). There you will find videos, animations, interviews, and articles on many helpful topics, including stress relief. A sample is listed here:



## FOR MARRIED COUPLES

- Managing Conflicts in Marriage
- How to Keep Peace With Your Relatives
- How to Let Go of Resentment

## FOR TEENS

- Beat a Bully Without Using Your Fists
- How Can I Get More Sleep?
- Why Make Peace With My Siblings?

## FOR PARENTS

- How to Communicate With Your Teenager
- When Your Teenage Daughter Is Stressed Out
- How to Teach Teens Internet Safety



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