



# Managing Stress and Chronic Pain

Stress is a normal part of everyone's life. Stress is the result of a natural process, classically referred to as a "fight or flight" response, where your body decides to stay and fight impending "danger" or run from it. When you are put in a stressful situation, your heart rate and blood flow increase, getting your body ready to deal with a current crisis. Your body is suddenly energized and better equipped to complete the task that is being asked of it. In this way, occasional stress can be good.

When your body is constantly confronted with stressful demands—mental, physical or emotional—chronic stress begins to take hold. Chronic stress can weaken your immune system and lead to heart problems. It also worsens conditions like type 2 diabetes, asthma or gastrointestinal problems. Chronic stress can also lead to depression and anxiety, alcohol and tobacco use, poor eating habits and trouble sleeping.

Chronic pain caused by health conditions can also put strain on your well-being. It can make everyday life more difficult, adding to your stress level.

## Take steps to manage stress and pain



**Prioritize.** At the beginning of your day, review what you need to get done and prioritize what has to be done, what could be done and what can wait. Learn to say no if you can't reasonably accomplish more tasks.



**Talk.** When you're stressed or in pain, your first instinct may be to be alone. Instead, open up and talk to your closest friends or family members. Also, consider talking with a therapist, doctor or church member, depending on the nature of the issue.

**Meritain Health**<sup>®</sup>  
an  **aetna** company



**Pilates, meditation and yoga.** All of these methods help promote deep breathing and becoming more in tune with your body. Take classes at your local gym or get a video or DVD. All are relaxing, and yoga and Pilates can help with strength and flexibility, as well.



**Count to 10.** This simple task can help you to clear your head. Close your eyes, breathe deeply and count.



**Exercise.** Exercise is a natural stress reliever which releases endorphins into your bloodstream. Endorphins are chemicals that help your body to reduce stress. Even if you're in pain, staying active within your limits can help you remain flexible and strong.



**Get enough sleep.** Go to bed on time to feel refreshed and alert the next day. Lack of sleep can increase your stress or pain because it affects your mood, energy level and concentration. If your stressors are preventing you from falling asleep, go into another room and do a relaxing activity to help you feel sleepy, such as deep breathing, stretching or reading.



## Chronic stress can lead to:

- Lowered immune function.
- Irregular heart rate.
- Chest pain.
- Heart attack.
- Stroke.
- Worsening of type 2 diabetes.
- Worsening of asthma.
- Gastrointestinal problems.
- Depression and anxiety.
- Alcohol and tobacco use.
- Poor eating habits.

This flyer is for information and is not meant as medical advice. Health benefits plans contain exclusions and limitations. Not all health services are covered. See plan documents for a complete description of benefits, exclusions, limitations and conditions of coverage. Information is believed to be accurate as of the production date; however, it is subject to change.

## Simple. Transparent. Versatile.

At Meritain Health®, we're creating unrivaled connections.

Follow us:  @meritainhealth |  Meritain Health

[www.meritain.com](http://www.meritain.com) | © 2025-2026 Meritain Health, Inc.

**Meritain Health®**  
an  **aetna** company