

# Stressed out?

Tips for recognizing and managing stress



**CONCORDIA PLANS**

We hear and use the word “stress” a lot to talk about our busy lives, the effects of the demands put upon us and much more. But what do we really know about stress? The more we learn about it, the better equipped we will be to manage stress and potentially minimize the impact it has on our daily lives, our families and our ability to deliver ministry.

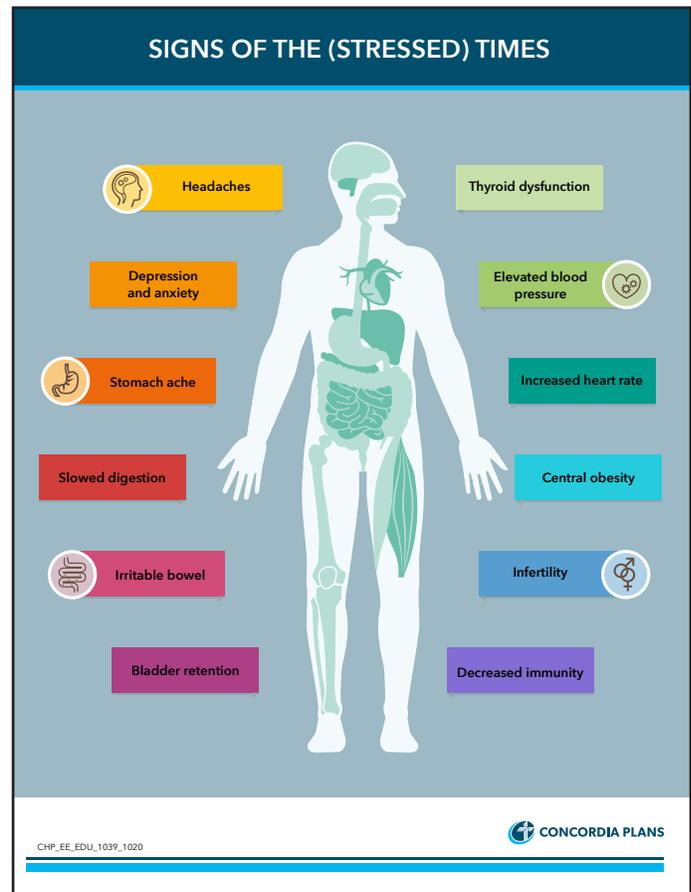
## What does stress look like?

According to **MedlinePlus**, stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension in reaction to a challenge or demand. It can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry or nervous.

Stress isn't always negative. Our bodies encounter stress during pleasant times as well, for example in childbirth, on your wedding day, during a first date or when giving a big presentation. Stress can also be positive in short bursts, such as when it helps you avoid danger or meet a deadline. But when stress lasts a long time, it may harm your health. Too much stress can cause physical and emotional symptoms.

## Coping with stress

Learning what causes or triggers your stress and what coping techniques work for you can help reduce your anxiety and improve your daily life. It may take trial and error to discover what works best for you, and one technique might not work in every situation. So, it is good to have several tools in your toolbox. The next few pages include some activities you can try when you start to feel overwhelmed. Some of these come from a **Fact Sheet** from the National Institute of Mental Health, others are my own. Many of them can be used at any time during a stressful season, while others may work better in-the-moment, or as long-term maintenance practices.



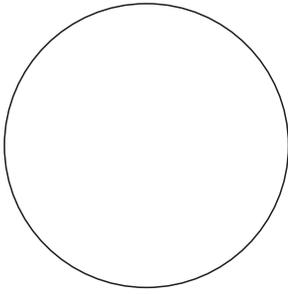
To use this image as a handout, see [page 6](#).

In-the-moment/Short-term	Long-term/Maintenance
<p><b>Pause, Breathe, Observe, Respond (PBOR)</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Pause and take a moment to stop.</li> <li>• Breathe slowly and deeply, in through your nose, out through your mouth.</li> <li>• Observe emotions and thoughts, both positive and negative. If there is another person with you, take a moment to also observe his or her body language and other verbal or non-verbal communication.</li> <li>• Respond by choosing how to appropriately respond, rather than just reacting.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Exercise and eat healthy meals:</b> It is recommended that adults move for at least 30 minutes per day, with as much of that time outside as possible. This can be a great time to “double down” with a nice mindfulness practice. Take a walk outside and allow yourself to really use all your senses: feel the breeze or the warmth from the sun, smell the fresh air, enjoy all the colors and sounds all around you. Marvel at God’s creation.</p> <p>A healthy, balanced diet is key to obtaining the proper nutrients for overall health and wellbeing. The USDA website, <a href="https://www.myplate.gov">myplate.gov</a>, is a valuable resource for understanding how to build a healthy plate.</p>
<p><b>Identify and challenge your negative and unhelpful thoughts:</b> This is a type of mindfulness practice using “positive affirmations” to challenge those thoughts. There are many positive affirmation examples in the Bible, especially in Ephesians 1 &amp; 2.</p>	<p><b>Stick to a sleep routine:</b> Make sure you are getting enough sleep. According to the Centers for Disease Control, most adults need seven or more hours of sleep per night. You can check out these tips and resources about getting better sleep from <a href="#">Mayo Clinic</a> and <a href="#">Sleep Foundation</a>.</p>
<p><b>(In-the-moment/Short-term, leading to a long-term healthy practice) Keep a journal:</b> Journaling does not have to be fancy. Freewriting, where there is no punctuation or real form to the words, can be very stress-relieving. I often suggest while coaching clients, “Just write. Don’t proofread, don’t add punctuation, don’t try to make sense, or form complete sentences, and don’t judge what you have written. Just get your thoughts on paper. Draw a picture if that helps.” I also recommend not going back to read what you’ve written right away. Enjoy the pause and time after releasing that burden of so many thoughts.</p> <p>Praying over your written words and giving them over to God is the next step to fully releasing what is not for you to control or fix. Writing the words does not automatically mean you need to do anything with them. Throw the paper away, if that helps release the emotions attached to the words.</p>	<p><b>Limit caffeine intake:</b> Caffeine can still be stimulating your system up to 12 hours after you last had any. Caffeine is not only found in coffee, soda, and tea, but also in chocolate and other drinks and candy.</p> <p>Check labels for Guarana, green tea extract, and any other ingredients that are associated with claims of “increased energy and focus.” Speak with your doctor or dietitian if you are unsure. Everyone’s tolerance to caffeine is different. It’s important to know what your optimal caffeine level is and be aware that it could be adding to or even causing your anxiety, jitters, etc.</p>

## In-the-moment/Short-term

**(In-the-moment/Short-term, leading to a more long-term healthy practice) Understand what is in your control:** If you find yourself in a worrisome situation, or worrying about multiple things, taking inventory of what's in your control and your responsibility versus what's out of your control can be a profound exercise. Use the handout on [page 7](#) to get started. There are many online resources for taking a Christ-centered approach to this practice. This includes realizing that things out of our control and personal responsibility are strictly God's to handle and need to be entrusted to Him.

What is inside & outside of  
**your control?**



Instructions: Inside the circle draw or write what you can control. Outside of the circle draw or write what you cannot control. For example, inside the circle you might include "my words" or "my reactions" and outside the circle you might include "other people's words" or "the weather."

**(In-the-moment/Short-term, leading to a long-term healthy practice) Download an app:** There are great apps that provide relaxation exercises such as deep breathing or visualization, or tips for practicing mindfulness, a psychological process of actively paying attention to the present moment. Examples include:

- **Pray Now** from Concordia Publishing House
- **Abide**, another helpful, Bible-based app

## Long-term/Maintenance

**Manage your time: Time management practices and tips include:**

- Make a list of to-dos and prioritize them, with realistic time expectations to complete.
- Practice saying "no" or simply being honest when someone asks, "What would you prefer?" Some personalities tend to internalize and not fully share their thoughts, needs, or wants. While we are called to put others above ourselves, it is also important for our voice to be heard, especially when asked.
- Ask for support with large projects or tasks, or when you are feeling overwhelmed by other responsibilities.

**Learn to "Rest in a Busy World":** A [blog article](#) on the YouVersion website reminds us scripture encourages us to pause and turn to God when the world screams at us to buckle down, grind and work even harder. The article provides great insights including:

- Find your why: Find a clear vision for why rest matters to you.
- Schedule it on your calendar: If we don't schedule rest in advance, chances are something else will consume your time.
- Give yourself something to look forward to: True rest doesn't always look like doing nothing. When you schedule time to rest, plan to do something that brings you joy or peace.
- Don't do it alone: God created us for community. We're wired for relationships. Those relationships can be one of the most tangible ways we experience God's presence.
- Be relentless: Practicing rest is a spiritual discipline. Like any discipline, resting requires determination and self-control.

## Both In-the-moment/Short-term and Long-term Maintenance

**Reach out to friends or family members:** We are not made to do this life on our own and the right people can help you cope in a positive way. There is spiritual strength in numbers. Pastors and Christian counselors are also great resources for social support while working through stress. Concordia Plans offers information on a variety of resources for improved social support. Visit our website [here](#).

*For where two or three are gathered in my name, there I am among them.*  
*Matthew 18:20 ESV*

**Dig into a great resource from an expert:** There are many great books that can help you deal with stress. Here are just a few:

- *Grace Under Pressure: Responding Faithfully to Stress* by Rev. Christopher Kennedy (LCMS) offers tremendous insight into the state of stress and how to use Jesus' example to respond to stress with grace.
- *Equipped: Putting on the Full Armor of God*, also by Rev. Kennedy, offers practical use of scripture regarding God's gift of protection physically, mentally and emotionally.
- *Vantage Point*, by Brenda Jank, the founder of Run Hard. Rest Well., offers biblical insight into the God-ordained rhythm of work and rest.

### Kelly Menke, MSPH, CHES

Kelly joined Concordia Plans in May 2022 as a Health and Wellness Educator. She holds a Master of Science in Public Health degree from Southern New Hampshire University, and a Bachelor of Arts degree in Health Education, with a Minor in Healthcare Administration, from Ashford University. She has nearly 15 years of experience in a variety of health and wellness-oriented roles. As a military spouse (retired) and mother of three, she has seen first-hand the health challenges and successes people from all over the country, in different stages of life can experience. Her focus is on encouraging overall healthy lifestyle choices for prevention and improved management of health concerns.



# SIGNS OF THE (STRESSED) TIMES



Headaches

Thyroid dysfunction

Depression and anxiety

Elevated blood pressure



Increased heart rate



Stomach ache

Central obesity

Slowed digestion



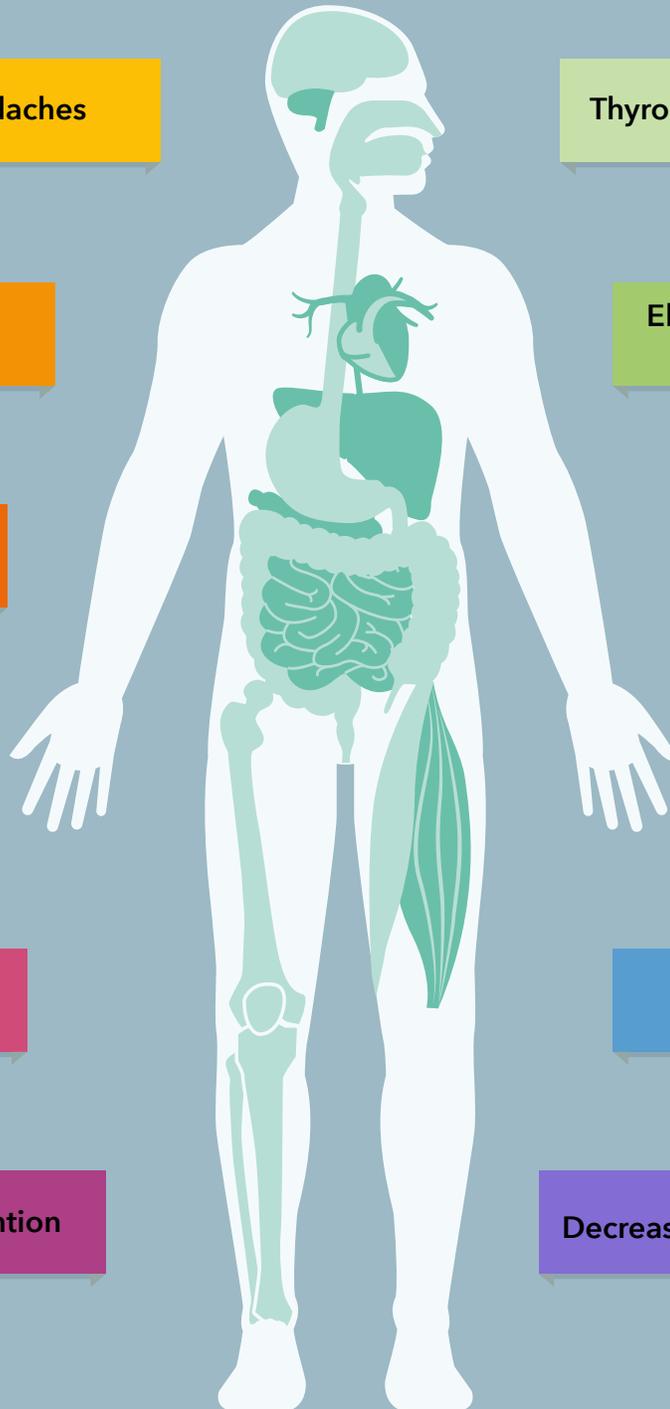
Irritable bowel

Infertility

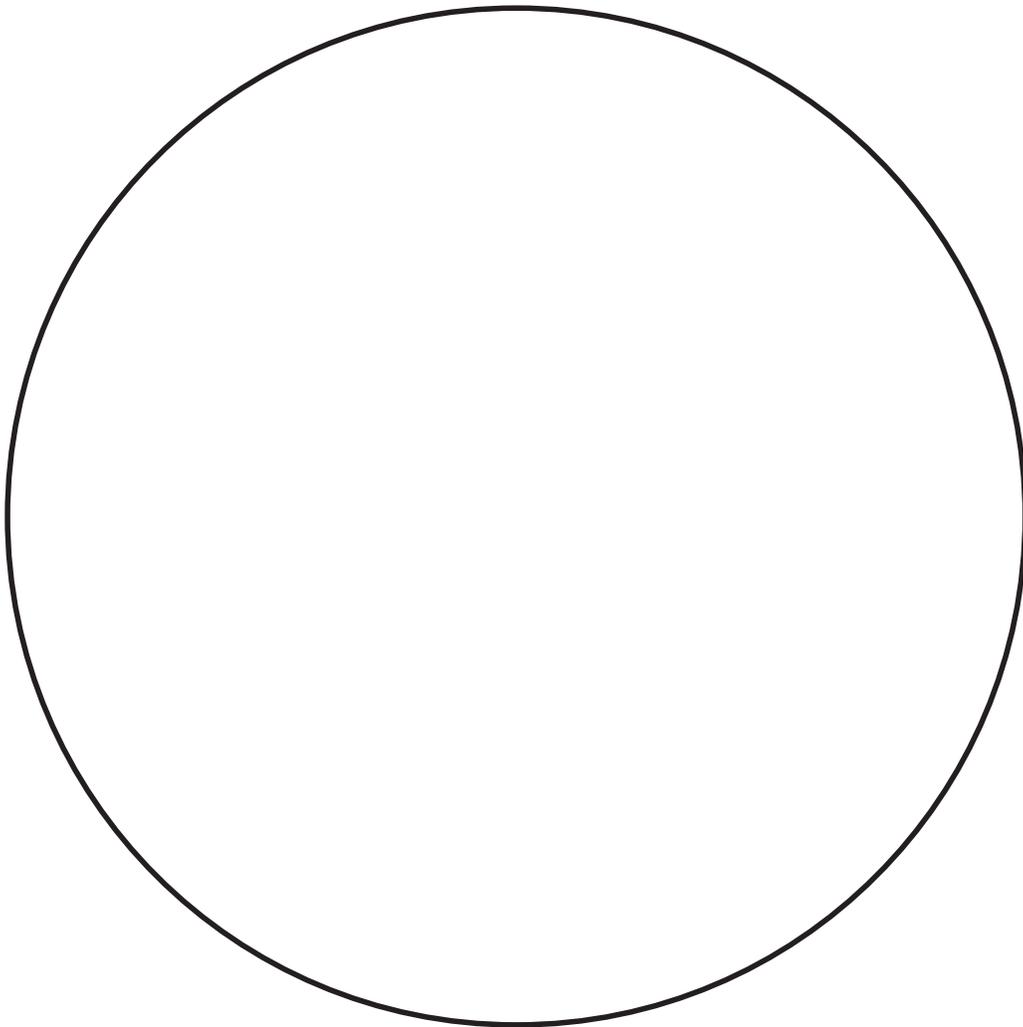


Bladder retention

Decreased immunity



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**QUESTIONS?**

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