

## Tips for Those Living with Stress

Everyone experiences feelings of worry, unhappiness or grief now and then. But when changes in mood interrupt one's ability to perform daily responsibilities and enjoy life, chronic stress may be the reason.

According to The American Institute of Stress, there are numerous emotional and physical disorders that have been linked to stress including depression, anxiety, heart attacks, stroke, hypertension, increased susceptibility to infections as well as autoimmune diseases.

Although everyone experiences symptoms of stress differently, there are common signs. If symptoms like these, or others, persist, it may be time to seek help:

- Excess anxiety, worry, guilt, nervousness
- Depression, frequent or wild mood swings
- Increased anger, frustration, hostility
- Forgetfulness, disorganization, confusion
- Heartburn, stomach pain, nausea
- Feelings of loneliness or worthlessness
- Excessive gambling or impulse buying
- Increased smoking, alcohol or drug use

The National Institutes of Health offers the following tips for managing stress:

- **Physical activity.** Start a physical activity program. Most experts recommend 20 minutes of aerobic activity three times per week.
- **Nutrition.** Eat foods that improve your health and well-being. For example, increase the amount of fruits and vegetables you eat. Avoid the use of alcohol as a coping strategy.
- **Social support.** Make an effort to socialize. Even though you may feel tempted to avoid people when you feel stressed, meeting friends usually helps people feel less stressed. Be good to yourself and others. Avoid the use of alcohol as a coping strategy.
- **Relaxation.** Learn about and try using relaxation techniques, such as guided imagery, listening to music, or practicing yoga or meditation. With some practice, these techniques should work for you.

If you're not sure where else to go for help, your Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is a confidential resource that provides counseling, information and referral services to help address personal, family or work-related concerns.

You can also make an appointment with your Primary Care Physician (PCP) who may refer you to a specialist, if needed. If you don't have a PCP, just visit your insurance carrier's website, look for the "find a doctor" area and follow the instructions.

When you're living with any disease or condition, it may not always be easy to decide where to go for care. However, if you (or a loved one) are in crisis, it's best to go to the emergency room.

For less severe matters that still require immediate attention, if you can't get in to see your PCP, going to an urgent care facility can save you time and money.

Even if you require emergency or urgent care for your health situation, it's always best to have a relationship with a PCP who knows your history and understands what is happening with your health over time.