



**FAMILY AND
CONSUMER SCIENCES**
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Tips for Managing Family Stress

Stress is normal and unavoidable. It comes in a variety of forms and means different things to different people--for some people it represents an exciting challenge, but for others stress can be very hard to cope with. Generally, however, too much stress causes a negative feeling.

We encounter stress in a variety of situations and in various amounts. Stress can come from ordinary events such as heavy traffic or long lines at the grocery store, or from crisis events such as the loss of a job or a death in the family. How you and your family handle the stressors in your lives predicts your future success both as individuals and as a family.

The demands of daily responsibilities and routine are often those things that can build up over time to create a lot of stress in your life. To reduce your everyday stress, try some of the following:

- Remember that it takes time and commitment to make changes.
- Determine the maximum amount of stress you can handle, and do not exceed it.
- Learn to say “no” to activities that are not a priority.
- Do the best you can; no one is perfect.
- Get one thing done each day. Make a to-do list of the things that you want to get done and cross things off your list so you can see that you are making progress.
- Get moving! Try to fit in 30 minutes of physical activity everyday.

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Family and Consumer Sciences (FCS) program staff at MSU Extension can answer questions or help you learn more about money management, parent, food, nutrition and health issues. MSU Extension educators integrate university and community resources to provide tools that help families succeed. For more information on FCS programs in Michigan, call your county MSU Extension office. Check the government pages of your phone book for contact information.

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- Eat nutritious, well-balanced meals. Include at least five fruits and vegetables each day, and limit the amount of sugar and fat that you eat.
- Limit caffeine, alcohol and tobacco use.
- Get at least seven to eight hours of sleep each night.
- Talk to a friend or family member when you are feeling stressed.
- Laugh! Humor can help ease almost any situation.
- Make time for hobbies or activities that you enjoy.
- Be flexible and know that sometimes things may not go your way.
- Learn ways to change or limit stressful situations when possible.
- Visit your doctor or other healthcare professional if your everyday stresses overwhelm you.

Life events that take place less frequently can also cause us to feel out of control. Stress can occur from a positive life event such as marriage or a new job or from a negative event such as loss of income or a family member's illness. Whether negative or positive, these major life events will affect you and your family. In the beginning of a stress crisis, it may seem as if you will never get through it, but know that you will. In a crisis, you may react to stress in a number of ways:

- You may feel tired, have trouble sleeping and eating, have headaches, or feel dizzy.
- You may have trouble focusing on things or working through problems. Your memory may be affected; you may have trouble remembering familiar people and places.
- You may experience feelings of guilt or helplessness and become overly sensitive. You may begin to doubt yourself and your choices, and you may become moody or angry.

These feelings and reactions are normal. To work through a crisis stress situation, try some of the following:

- Structure your time by keeping busy with everyday activities. Try to live your life as normally as possible.
- Talk to close friends and family members. In addition to those who have been affected by the event, it is important to talk to others who may be able to offer you a new or different perspective.
- Avoid using drugs, alcohol or nicotine.
- Try strenuous exercise as a healthy way to work through your feelings.
- Write down your feelings.

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- Take life one day at a time; you will get through this.
- Visit your doctor or other healthcare professional if your stress levels are worrying you or members of your family.

For more information on these and other family and money management, health, food, nutrition or parenting issues, contact the MSU Extension office. MSU Extension Family and Consumer Science educators are located in all 83 Michigan counties to integrate university and community resources to help families succeed.

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