



# WELLNESS OUTLOOK

Helping SouthEast Michigan Residents Maximize their Mental Health Since 1983

Ann Arbor Consultation Services

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## 10 Facts About Stress & Your Health

**50% to 90% of doctor visits are related to stress in one way or another.**

- (1) Stress is related to the development of various medical conditions, including heart attacks, diabetes, certain cancers, worsened osteoporosis and arthritis, and possibly even Alzheimer's.
- (2) 50% of Americans don't sleep well at night due to chronic stress.
- (3) 80% of Americans currently have physical symptoms related to stress, such as headaches, fatigue, upset stomach, change in sex drive, even teeth grinding.
- (4) Most Americans realize stress affects their health, but only a third modify their unhealthy stress coping strategies (smoking, eating a lot of unhealthy food, etc) when they develop health problems.
- (5) Exercising is an effective way to reduce stress and improve health. Just 10 minutes of exercise has anti-anxiety effects, and 2.5 hours a week of moderate exercise (such as walking) improves health significantly and reduces risk of various diseases. Yet over 80% of Americans do not exercise regularly.
- (6) Chronic stress places the body on a system of high alert and reduces the ability of the body to heal wounds or respond to infection. For chronically stressed people, even a single argument with a family member further worsens the ability of the immune system to repair wounds.
- (7) A single stressful event can worsen seasonal allergies.



- (8) People with anxiety disorders are more likely to have asthma; stress intensifies asthma attacks.
- (9) Older adults under stress perform more poorly on measures of cognitive functioning such as memory. The effect is worse for those who have an increased genetic risk for the development of cognitive decline and dementia.
- (10) Anxiety does not appear to be related to pregnancy complications (such as having a low birth weight baby).

### Five Stress Management Tips

Visit our website's Resources section to learn

more about each stress management suggestion below. Our website also has a number of other ideas to help manage stress.

- (1) Exercise
  - (2) Learn progressive muscle relaxation or mindfulness meditation
  - (3) Set aside time each day to problem-solve
  - (4) Set manageable goals
  - (5) Get help from others, including professional help if needed
- Need additional help** managing stress? Call us today at (734) 996-9111.

## Changing Health Habits

Health behaviors like smoking, drinking, eating patterns and risky drinking are hard -- but possible -- to change

Approximately 2% of the population is naturally good at "cold turkey" change and using willpower, but 98% of us are not. That means that 98% of us will try, try, try again until we successfully change a behavior or bad habit. However, there are several things that can help speed this process along. Here, we discuss one of them: Tailoring your strategy to your Stage of Change.

**Stage One – Pre-contemplation.** If you are in this stage, you are not yet aware that your unhealthy habit (such as drinking) is a problem. If someone you care about is in this stage, the most effective strategy is to provide information about the habit and resist nagging.

**Stage Two – Contemplation.** In this stage a person feels ambivalent, or torn: They are not really sure if they want to (or can) change. Try tipping the balance by writing down a list of the pros and cons of continuing the habit, and

the pros and cons of stopping it.

**Stage Three – Preparation.** The primary pitfall in this stage is finding balance between planning for too short a time versus too long. When examining ways to change your habit, think about what has been helpful in the past, and what hasn't worked. Also think about realistic short- and long-term goals. For example, if you are trying to lose weight (and are overweight), a realistic long-term goal that has significant health benefits might be to lose 10% of your body weight. Weekly short-term goals would include small steps toward meeting your long-term goal, such as eliminating eating after dinner, eating 5 servings of vegetables each day, or walking 30 minutes 4 times a week. Create a written behavior change plan that has realistic, achievable weekly

goals.

**Stage Four – Action.** When implementing your plan, remember it can take 21 days to weeks to create a new habit. Lapsing back into the old habit ("falling off the wagon") is common in this stage: Do not view it as a failure, but rather as something to be expected. Try to learn from it and then "get back on the horse."

**Stage Five – Maintenance.** Behavior or habit change enters this phase when it has been relatively successful for 6 months or more. Remember, lapses are common, normal, and expected. An important factor that predicts continued success is not viewing those lapses as failures, but rather as something to learn from.

## WE CAN HELP

AACS has over 40 clinicians with a wide range of specialty areas. If you have a mental health concern, we have a clinician who can help.

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[www.a2consultation.com](http://www.a2consultation.com)

## DID YOU KNOW

Evidence suggests that omega-3 fatty acids may improve physical health (such as blood pressure, heart health, rheumatoid arthritis) and mental health (primarily depression). While research is still underway, omega-3 fatty acids appear to improve depression directly; they also appear to boost the effects of antidepressants.

Omega-3 fatty acids are found in food sources and/or supplements. The omega-3s found in fish and fish oil (DHA and EPA) appear to be the type most beneficial for depression. To boost your intake, try eating fish two to three times a week. The fish highest in omega-3s are anchovies, bluefish, herring, mackerel, salmon (wild has more omega-3s than farmed), sardines, sturgeon, lake trout, and tuna. Remember that some fish are more likely to have high toxin levels and should be eaten sparingly (or not at all by children and pregnant women); these include wild swordfish, tilefish, and shark. In terms of supplements, experts usually recommend 1 gram (1,000 milligrams) of DHA and EPA combined from fish oil daily. Finally, remember to talk to your doctor before modifying your diet or supplementing, especially if you have a bleeding condition or take medicines that can increase bleeding, have diabetes, congestive heart failure, recurrent angina, or other health problems.

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# JUST STOP IT?

## Is trying not to think about health problems helpful?

Many of us adopt a “Try not to think about it” strategy to deal with problems, both physical and emotional. But when trying not to think about it involves actively trying to suppress it, the problem tends to get worse.

In one study, people with chronic back pain who tried to mentally suppress their pain (i.e., forcing themselves to not think about it) became more aware of pain-related thoughts and sensations, and their pain worsened over time, partially because trying to suppress thoughts about pain led to increased muscle tension at the site of their pain.

Many studies have demonstrated that trying to suppress thoughts (thought-stopping, for example), tends to actually increase thoughts

instead of getting rid of them. As an example, try right now to not think about a stop sign. Again, do not think about a stop sign. Chances are, you just thought about a stop sign and would have trouble pushing the thought out of your mind if you kept trying to not think about stop signs.

For most people, a better strategy is to acknowledge thoughts and physical sensations like pain, and then try to focus attention elsewhere or think about the situation as accurately as possible. These strategies are called Mindful Thinking and Rational Thinking, respectively (visit our website’s Resources section for Tip Sheets on each topic). Distraction can be a helpful strategy for some people as well.

**Need additional help** adjusting to a chronic illness? AACs has specialists who can help. Call us to find out more.

**AACs has mental health professionals with specialty areas in the physical-mental health relationship, including managing chronic pain, smoking cessation, weight loss, postpartum depression, death & dying, head trauma, chronic illness, and many others. We coordinate with your physician to help you achieve the best health possible.**

## Positive Emotions Improve Health

Over the past several decades, a large body of research has focused on how negative emotions (anger, stress, depression, et cetera) impact health. Clearly, these negative emotions directly and indirectly make health worse.

Positive emotions also impact health, and they are more than the absence of negative emotions. Positive emotions such as happiness and satisfaction lower stress hormones, reduce high blood pressure, reduce the risk of developing diabetes, and help people recover from stress more quickly. A recent study also suggests that positive emotions also increase life expectancy.

What can you do to increase positive emotions? Below are some ideas. Visit our website (Resources: Happiness) for more suggestions.

**Express Gratitude** - Think about 3 to 5 things you are grateful for, and then either write them down or tell the person you are grateful to. Practice this on a daily basis.

**Cultivate Optimism** - Optimists are misunderstood—they do not just see the good in everything. Instead, they are skilled at thinking accurately about situations (i.e., seeing the good as well as the bad).

**Practice Acts of Kindness** - Do good things for others. Or for yourself!

**Exercise** - Even 10 to 15 minutes of activity helps improve mood—so try this to start with, especially if you do not currently exercise and find it hard to get motivated to exercise. Of course, remember to check with your physician before beginning an exercise program.

Visit our website for additional ideas to maximize positive emotions.

The clinicians at Ann Arbor Consultation Services are trained to help improve both negative and positive emotions. Contact us today to learn more.



## Postpartum Depression

Primary Care Physicians and those who work in obstetrics are very familiar with the symptoms of postpartum depression (PPD), but many new mothers are not. Between 10% to 15% of new mothers develop postpartum depression, and it is more than just the “baby blues.” Researchers believe that postpartum depression may be related to a variety of factors, including rapid changes in estrogen and progesterone after childbirth, potential drops in thyroid hormone levels, the stress of having a newborn, loss of one’s pre-baby role in life, lack of sleep, and/or a family history of depression. Those who have had a previous episode of depression are also at risk, and PPD can get worse with each subsequent birth. Symptoms can include loss of appetite, fatigue, insomnia, anger/irritability and thoughts of harming the baby. In rare cases, a new mother can become confused, disoriented, suffer from paranoia, delusions or hallucinations and can attempt to harm their baby. Some experts believe this may be more likely to occur in women who have a previous diagnosis of Bipolar Disorder.

While postpartum depression has been covered frequently in the media over the past few years, many women are still afraid or embarrassed about their symptoms. Many feel like they aren’t strong, that they should be able to handle it and make themselves feel better. Others feel like

## Men & Medical Care

Men seek medical care far less often than women; some experts have suggested this may be a primary reason why women have a longer life expectancy than men. This is an unfortunate fact given that many health conditions are preventable and treatable when caught early. What gets in the way for men? **Beliefs** such as “I don’t have time to sit around and wait” or “It’s a sign of weakness to go to the doctor” **Comfort** Women also become more comfortable with seeing physicians due to routine OB/GYN care as well as tending to be the ones who take their children to the doctor. Also, women have less difficulty (in general) talking about their bodies and health than men do. **Socialization** Women learn that it is ok to ask for help & assistance. **What to do** If you are someone who doesn’t visit a doctor as much as you should, think about how these factors get in the way, and then try to act on them.

## You & Your PCP

Your relationship with your physician is a partnership. Unfortunately, many of us do not make the most of it. We think that our doctor is too pressed for time, we’re intimidated by them, we feel uncomfortable bringing up problems we are having, and so on.

Having a good relationship with your PCP is critical to your health. An increasing amount of research indicates that the quality of your relationship with your doctor predicts your health. For example, diabetics who have better relationships with their physicians have better-controlled blood sugar than those who have worse relationships. So what can you do to make the most of your relationship with your own doctor?

**Bring in a list** to your appointment with specific questions, concerns, symptoms, and so on. Visits can go quickly, and even those of us with the best memories can forget important things that we wanted to discuss. Write down what you learn!

**Don’t wait** until your next scheduled visit if you have an important question or concern. If you run out of medication, for example, call your doctor’s office to see if you can get a refill called into your pharmacy before your next appointment.



they are bad parents. None of these are true.

### What can help:

- \*Rest as much as you can. Sleep when the baby is sleeping.
- \*Don’t try to do too much or try to be perfect.
- \*Ask your partner, family, and friends for help.
- \*Make time to go out, visit friends, or spend time alone with your partner.
- \*Discuss your feelings with your family and friends.
- \*Talk with other mothers so you can learn from their experiences.
- \*Join a support group. Ask your doctor about groups in your area.
- \*Don’t make any major life changes during pregnancy or right after giving birth.
- \*Seek professional help for depression: Contact us to learn more.



**Advocate for yourself** and be involved in developing your treatment plan. Look out for your own best interests. Tell your doctor if you have any concerns about your care; if they are not adequately addressed, seek a second opinion.

**Be honest** about your symptoms, whether (or not) you are following your doctor’s recommendations, and whether you even understand what your doctor is talking about. Your doctor can only help if you are honest; like the rest of us, they cannot read minds. And it is virtually guaranteed that they have already had another patient bring up whatever it may be that you are reluctant to talk about.

**Work as a team** Don’t take advocacy too far and challenge your PCP on everything. Use questions to enhance your understanding, not to outthink your doctor.



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Visit us on the web for additional resources

www.a2consultation.com