

## Stress Management for Grandparents

### Introduction

Stress is with us all the time. It comes from mental, emotional and/or physical activity. It is unique and personal to each one of us. So personal, in fact, that what may be relaxing to one person may be stressful to another. Appropriate stress is healthy and useful; it's only when stress becomes overwhelming that it becomes distress. Learning what causes stress and different ways we can cope with it will help us be better grandparents.

### A Balanced Life

Make a list of all the stress you have in your life. When you are finished, study the list. Then crumple the paper into a ball and throw it over your shoulder. Did that relieve any of your stress? Maybe, but probably not. Your stress is still there; you've done nothing to eliminate it.

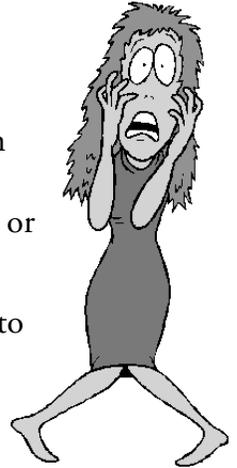
It is very difficult to balance all the stress in your life. The effects of stress can affect your physical, mental, emotional and social functions. Knowing what causes the stress in your life will help you to better manage it.

All the stress we face in our lives can be overwhelming. You must find a way to balance all of the activities that may contribute to your own stress.

When feeling overwhelmed, we must 1) get help from others and 2) not take on any more. Where does most of the stress come from – work, personal life, additional child care responsibilities? Are all tasks equally important to keep control of?

### Some Things to Remember

- Stress is defined as our body's physical and emotional reaction to circumstances or events that scare, aggravate, confuse, excite or endanger us.
- Your body creates extra energy to protect you when you are stressed. This additional energy can build up and create an overload. When the additional energy is not used, it creates an imbalance within your system.
- Research has divided the body's reactions to stress into three stages.
  - Stage 1: Alarm Stage – Certain hormones are pumped into the bloodstream, which speeds up the heart rate, increases respiration and slows down digestive activity. The body is ready for either fight or flight. Such a situation can lead to stress-related illnesses such as ulcers, headaches, backaches, palpitations of the heart, rashes and various other ailments.
  - Stage 2: Resistance and Adaptation – The body tries to repair the damage caused in stage one and bring the body back to a "normal condition." It is only when stress is not positively dealt with that the third stage occurs.
  - Stage 3: Exhaustion – A person's body cannot be stressed all the time. Release must occur or illness may result.



- It is important to learn how our body reacts to stress and how it responds to the demands. Recognizing the early signs of stress and then taking action can make an important difference in our quality of life.
- Look at the **Personal Stress Symptoms** handout and take a few minutes to check your own personal stress symptoms. This will help you become aware of what your body is trying to tell you. Once you know what these symptoms are, you can begin to listen to your body and take better care of yourself.
- Studies show that people who seldom become ill, rarely miss appointments and seem to be in control of their lives do the following things:
  - Take personal control and responsibility over events in their lives.
  - Are committed to a goal.
  - Use few substances and/or chemicals.
  - Are active.
  - Had strong bonds to other people.
 These people are known as stress resistant or the “unbreakables.”
- Now that we’ve defined stress and it’s three stages and what our own personal stress systems are, let’s examine some ways to cope with stress.
- Look at the **Coping With Stress** handout. It will provide you with some examples of ways to cope with stress. This is not a comprehensive list. There are many different things that may help reduce your stress that are not on this list. What do you do that helps you deal with your own personal stress?
- Time management is another way to help you cope with stress. Learning how to manage time means determining what is most important and learning to balance all the different roles you have each and every day. The **Time Management** handout will provide you with useful tips.
- Try the **Easy Relaxation Techniques** suggested on the handout when you’re stressed. These relaxation techniques do not require a lot of time, but a nice quiet place where you can get comfortable is best. Just finding a few minutes to relax can help you reduce your stress.

## Closing

There is no one remedy or method to reduce stress that will work for everyone. You must decide what works best for you. Remember to find coping techniques that meet your own personal needs. Robert Frost said, “In three words I can sum up everything about life. It goes on.”

## Coping With Stress

- Learning to cope with stress is the key. No one can do anything else about your personal stress but YOU!

## References

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## Stress Management for Grandparents: Personal Stress Symptoms

When I feel under a lot of stress and pressure, which of the following responses do I notice? Place a check "✓" before those items which apply and occur frequently or regularly.

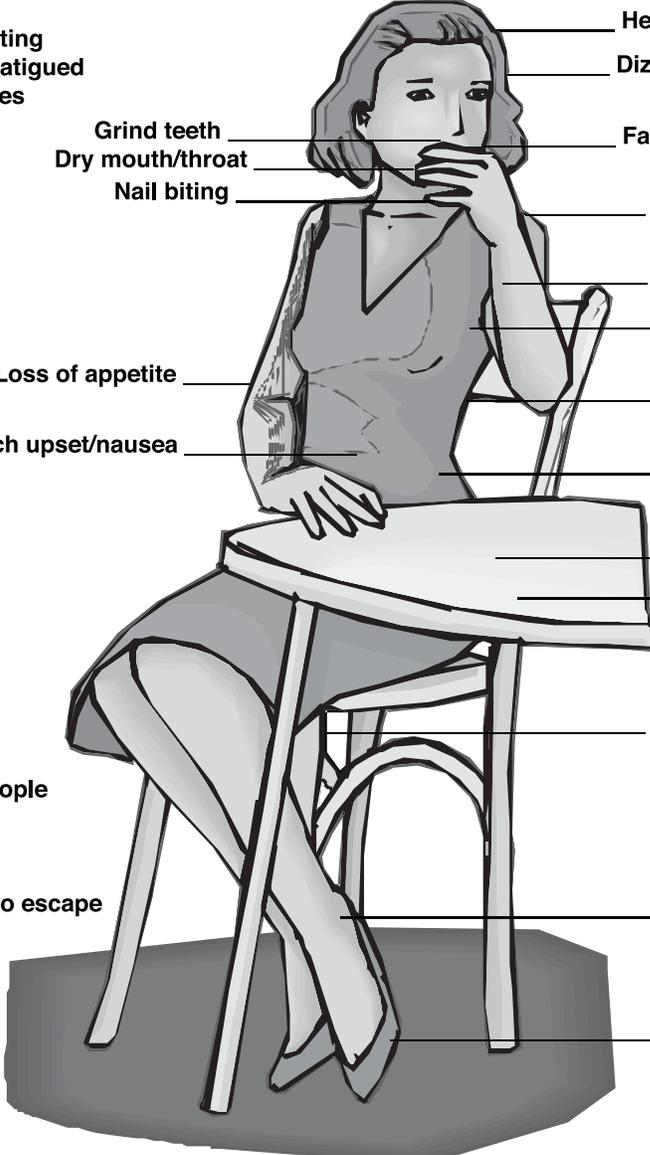


- Crying
- Depression
- Increased smoking
- Restlessness, fidgeting
- Feeling exhausted/fatigued
- Drug/alcohol misuses
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Face feels hot, flushed
- Nail biting
- Neck/shoulders tighten up/ache
- Heart beats faster
- Heartburn
- Back tightens up/aches
- Stomach cramps
- Increased urination/defecation
- Diarrhea
- Legs get shaky or tighten up
- Grind teeth
- Dry mouth/throat
- Loss of appetite
- Stomach upset/nausea
- Tapping fingers/feet
- Hands and/or feet feel cold or sweaty
- Withdrawal from people
- Aggression
- Boredom
- Can't concentrate
- Sleep or go to bed to escape
- Inability to sleep

# Stress Management for Grandparents: Personal Stress Symptoms

When I feel under a lot of stress and pressure, which of the following responses do I notice? Place a check "✓" before those items which apply and occur frequently or regularly.

<input type="checkbox"/> Crying		<input type="checkbox"/> Headaches
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<input type="checkbox"/> Increased smoking		<input type="checkbox"/> Face feels hot, flushed
<input type="checkbox"/> Restlessness, fidgeting	<input type="checkbox"/> Grind teeth	<input type="checkbox"/> Neck/shoulders tighten up/ache
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## References

*Managing Stress*, FSHE127, by Dr. Betty Youngman, Extension Specialist-Family Life, and Charlotte Mills Fant, Extension Health Education Specialist. 1999. University of Arkansas Cooperative Extension Service.

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## Stress Management for Grandparents: Coping With Stress

- Change your physical ability to cope.**
  - get adequate and proper nutrition
  - exercise regularly
  - get enough sleep and rest
  - learn relaxation skills
  
- Change your environment.**
  - quit activities that bring on excessive stress
  - take vacations from stress
  - build your network of family and friends
  
- Change the way you interact with your environment.**
  - learn to say “no”
  - make a daily “to do” list
  - don’t put off activities until the deadline
  - help another person in need
  - enjoy the moment
  
- Change your attitude/perception.**
  - clarify expectations
  - know what bothers you
  - own your personal stress
  - talk with others
  - keep a journal
  - use humor



### References

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## Stress Management for Grandparents: Time Management Ideas

Time management does not mean being busy all the time. It means using your time the way you want to use it. Time management is really using self-management. Learning to manage time means learning to determine what is important to you and balancing it within the many different roles you have each day.

1. Group your activities. Do like tasks, consolidate errands and appointments.
2. Get a good start. Plan the night before.
3. Develop routines.
4. Avoid congestion. Crowds, lines and busy peak times rob you of your time. Plan ahead to avoid them.
5. Take advantage of your mood and energy level. Know when you are at your best.
6. Be a “wait” watcher. How much waiting do you do? You can squeeze in mini-tasks and a nap in a few minutes.
7. Use your phone whenever you can.



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## Stress Management for Grandparents: Easy Relaxation Techniques

Stress is a natural part of your life. Without some stress, you would lose your energy for living. You will thrive on certain amounts; but too much or too little stress can limit your effectiveness.

**Belly Breathing** – This technique needs to be learned because most of us have learned to breathe from our chests. Belly breathing is a natural way of breathing and a good stress-reducing habit. Sit or lie comfortably in a relaxed position. As you breathe in slowly, let your belly expand. Think of it as a balloon that you are filling with air. As you exhale, let the air out of your “balloon” slowly. Place your hands on your stomach and feel it rise and fall as you breathe.

**Tension Releaser** – Try to touch your ears with your shoulders. Hold for a count of 4. Then let your shoulders drop. Now rotate each shoulder separately toward the rear. Do each shoulder 5 to 10 times. Then do both shoulders together.

With your hands by your side, squeeze your fists as hard as you can. Keep them closed for at least ten seconds. At first, you may want to tense one hand at a time. Release your hand and let your fingers slowly uncurl and go limp at your sides. Repeat this exercise three times. After the three sets, keep your hands and body still, relaxed and rested for 20 to 30 minutes.

Raise your arms above your head and squeeze your fists tightly for at least ten seconds. In the beginning, you may only want to raise one arm at a time. Allow your arms to fall limply to your sides. Allow your fingers to hang loosely and motionless. Repeat this three times, then keep your arms very still and limp for at least 20 to 30 minutes.

**Neck Massage** – Sit down, close your eyes and relax. Massage the back of your neck, concentrating on the part that feels tense. Cup your thumbs at the front of your neck and massage on both sides of your spinal column, letting your head fall limply back against your rotating fingers. Use your fingers to massage around your hairline and under your jaws and cheekbones. Gently draw a line up and down the side of your nose with one finger.

**Centering** – Get into a relaxed, comfortable position and breathe through your nose, easily and naturally, with eyes closed. As you breathe out, think “one.” As you breathe in, think “one.” Continue for 10 to 20 minutes, but don’t check your watch. Just think “one.” If your mind wanders, gently pull it back to thinking “one” every time you exhale or inhale. After 10 to 20 minutes of this activity, sit quietly for a few minutes with your eyes closed. Then for a few minutes, sit with your eyes open. Don’t worry about doing it “right.” Relaxation will happen if you let it.

### References

*Iowa Family Child Care Handbook*, 6th Ed., Chapter 13: Taking Care of Yourself, pg. 295-303. Iowa State University Extension, revised June, 1999.

*60 Second Stress Management* by Dr. Andrew Goliszek. New Horizon Press, Far Hills, New Jersey. 2000.

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