

Your Health Matters

STOP STRESSING OUT!

My shoulders are tightening up. My head's starting to hurt. I can feel my neck tensing. Stress is rearing its ugly head. When work is difficult, finances are tight, relationships seem strained, children are ill, or a situation is difficult or challenging – stress moves in.

Some people claim that a small amount of stress motivates them to push through difficult situations, but for others it can have a negative impact. It can cause emotional, mental and even physical issues like a headache, stomach ache, difficulty sleeping, illness, irritability, and depression.

You may not be able to completely prevent stress, but you can insulate yourself against its impact by taking a few simple steps.

- **Eat healthy.** A well-balanced diet with a variety of fruits and vegetables helps keep your immune system strong. Eat regular meals and snacks, and limit caffeine, salt and sugary foods.
- **Exercise.** Physical activity has many benefits, including promoting a feeling of well-being. Participate in at least 30 minutes of moderate physical activity daily. You don't have to run on the treadmill or visit the gym – take a walk around the block, rake leaves, or play with your kids.
- **Relax and sleep.** Find a hobby, meditate, listen to music – find a way to help your body relax. Getting the recommended 8 hours of sleep each night can help you manage stress. Listen to your body, and learn to take a break when you need it.
- **Avoid drugs and alcohol.** It may seem like they are relieving your stress initially, but they will create additional problems in the long run.
- **Plug in.** Develop a support system by talking to family, friends, and people you trust. Find someone you can rely on for a listening ear and encouragement when you get stressed.

Recognize when you need help. If you are unable to reduce your stress level, if it increases, or if you are thinking about suicide, talk to your health care provider or a mental health professional.

By making small changes in your life, you can help protect yourself against the negative impact of stress.

The Montgomery County Health Department loves taking care of your family, and works every day to protect, promote and improve health in our community. To learn more, call 573-564-2495 or visit us online at www.montgomerycountyhealth.org or on Facebook or Twitter @healthymoco. ■



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