

The UConn Buzz



UNDERSTANDING STRESS

Do you feel stressed out over supposed fun things, if so it might be time to reassess. Take a few moments to learn how stress affects your health and what you can do about it.

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. The hormones and other chemicals released when under stress prepare you for action. You breathe faster, your heartbeat quickens, blood sugar rises to give you energy, and your brain uses more oxygen as it shifts into high alert. Stress can give you a rush of energy when it's needed most for instance, competing in sports, working on an important project, or facing a dangerous situation.

But if stress lasts a long time those "high-alert" changes become harmful rather than helpful, and potential develop into a condition known as [chronic stress](#). "Stress clearly promotes higher levels of inflammation, which is thought to contribute to many diseases of aging. Inflammation has been linked to cardiovascular disease, diabetes, arthritis, frailty, and functional decline," says [Dr. Janice Kiecolt-Glaser](#), a leading stress researcher at Ohio State University. She and other researchers have found that stress affects the body's immune system, which then weakens your response to vaccines and impairs wound healing.

Research has linked chronic stress to [digestive disorders](#), [headaches](#), [sleep difficulties](#), [depression](#), and [anxiety](#).

"Some studies have found the physical, emotional, and social effects of a disease like cancer to be stressful for patients, caregivers, and long-term cancer survivors," says [NIH's Dr. Paige Green McDonald](#), an expert on stress and cancer biology. "However, there's no definitive evidence that stress causes cancer or is associated with how long one survives after a cancer diagnosis."

The top causes of stress in the U.S. are the future of the country, money and work-related pressures, according to a [2017 survey](#) from the American Psychological Association. Stress can also arise from major life changes, such as the death of a loved one, divorce, illness, or losing a job. Traumatic stress is brought on by an extreme event such as a major accident, exposure to violence, or a natural disaster such as a hurricane or flood.

It's not clear why some people can sidestep or recover more quickly from stress than others. These resilient people seem to "bounce back" more easily after stressful situations. [Recent studies](#) of animals suggest that resiliency may depend at least in part on our genes. But learning healthy ways to cope with stress can also boost your resilience.

"There are many different ways to cope with stress. We know from a lot of different studies that having close personal relationships—people with whom you can talk, with whom you can share your feelings—can be helpful," says Kiecolt-Glaser. "So spending time with family and friends in order to maintain those relationships is perhaps one of the most crucial things you can do as a stress reducer."

Unfortunately, Kiecolt-Glaser adds, "when we're stressed, we tend to do the worst things that are not at all helpful to our health." For instance, stressed out people may tend to isolate themselves and not seek social support. "Exercise is a great stress reducer. But when people are stressed, exercise becomes less common and less appealing," Kiecolt-Glaser says. "Instead of maintaining a healthy diet, some people who are stressed tend to eat more donuts than vegetables."

You may think that the agitation brought on by stress might help to burn calories. But evidence hints that the opposite is more likely. Kiecolt-Glaser and colleagues found that, compared to non-stressed people, those who were stressed burned fewer calories after high-fat meals and they produced more of the hormone

insulin, which enhances fat storage. "So stress may contribute to weight gain & obesity through these biological routes," Kiecolt-Glaser adds. Getting enough sleep is also key to resilience and stress relief. To improve your sleep habits, go to bed the same time each night and get up the same time each morning, and limit the use of light-emitting electronics like computers and smartphones before bed. The light can reduce production of a natural sleep hormone called melatonin, which then makes it hard to fall asleep.

Beyond recommendations for exercise, healthy diet, social contacts, & getting enough sleep, Green McDonald says, "studies have also shown that [mindfulness](#) & other meditative practices can effectively relieve stress."

"Mindfulness means staying aware and conscious of your experiences. No matter what we're doing, we can always make time to bring our attention to our breath and body and stay there for a short period of time," says NIH psychologist [Dr. Rezvan Ameli](#), who specializes in mindfulness practice. "Recent studies show that even short periods of mindful attention can have a positive impact on health and well-being."

"Mindfulness is a simple and effective tool that anybody can use to reduce stress," Ameli says. Although the concept is simple, becoming more mindful requires commitment and practice.

If you feel overwhelmed by stress, talk with a health care provider or mental health professional. Medications or other therapies might help you cope. In the long run, reducing stress may help you to slow down and enjoy your time with the people and activities you really care about.

Source: NIH News in Health

HAPPENINGS AROUND TOWN

[UConn SAPTA 5K](#) – Sat. Oct 6th, Young Building, UConn. Hosted by the doctorate of physical therapy students to fundraise their way to the national conference. Check-in is at 9am and the race/walk starts at 10am. There is a fee for this race.

[31st Annual Scottish Highland Festival](#) - Sun. Oct. 7th. This event will feature pipe bands, competitions, highland dancing, animals, demos, and a clan village. Free parking & a shuttle to the event. Fee to enter.

[Buell's Orchard Harvest Festival](#) – Mon, Oct. 8th, from 10am till 4pm at 108 Crystal Pond Rd, Eastford. Hay rides, apple and pumpkin picking, cider donuts, live music and more.

[UConn Forest Hike](#) – Sat. Oct. 13th, 9 to 11am. UConn Forest Steward Tom Worthley will guide a hike in the Chaffeeville Tract of the UConn Forest. Registration is required and limited to 25 hikers. Free.

[UConn Horsebarn Hill Walk](#) – Sat. Oct. 13th, 1:30-3:00pm. A walk around UConn's Horsehill to enjoy the surrounding UConn Forest, visit animal barns and view fall foliage. Registration is encouraged.

[Mansfield Pup Crawl](#) – Sat. Oct. 13th Registration (free but required) starts at 9:30am on Betsy Patterson Square. The walk will begin about 9:45am. Free.

[Tackle the Trail](#) – Sat. Oct. 20th, Air Line trail (Rt. 169) Pomfret. Flat, non-technical 20-mile trail course open to individuals and 5 person relay teams. Must register, and fee to participate.

[8th Annual Owl Prowl](#) – Sun. Oct. 21st, 5:30-8:30pm, at Horizon Wings, 9 Sand Hill Rd, Ashford. This walk happens on Nipmuck Trail at 6pm and 7:15pm. Registration is required, space is limited, and there is a fee for this event.

[Huskies Forever 5K & Lil' Huskies Kids K](#) - Sun. Oct. 28th, 2384 Alumni Drive, Storrs. Registration opens at 7am, kid's race at 8am and 5K starts at 9am. There is a fee for this event.



Cauliflower Mac & Cheese

INGREDIENTS

- 8 cups bite-size cauliflower florets (from 1-2 heads)
- 1¾ cups reduced-fat milk, divided
- 2 tablespoons cornstarch
- 2 cups shredded extra-sharp Cheddar cheese
- 8 ounces reduced-fat cream cheese, cut into pieces
- ½ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper
- Chopped fresh chives or parsley for garnish

DIRECTIONS

1. Cook cauliflower in a large pot of boiling water until just tender, 4 to 6 minutes. Drain.

2. Heat 1½ cups milk in a large heavy saucepan over medium-high heat until steaming. Whisk the remaining ¼ cup milk and cornstarch in a small bowl until smooth; add to the hot milk and cook, whisking constantly, until the sauce simmers and thickens, 2 to 3 minutes. Remove from heat and stir in Cheddar & cream cheese until melted. Stir in salt and pepper. Add the cauliflower & stir to combine. Garnish with chives or parsley, if desired.



Mindfulness Matters

Mindfulness is a practice of being completely aware of what's happening in the present, meaning all that's going on inside and all that's happening around you. It means not living your life on "autopilot." Instead, you experience life as it unfolds moment to moment, good & bad, without judgment or preconceived notions. [One study](#) found a link between mindfulness meditation and measurable changes in the brain regions involved in memory, learning and emotion. Other studies suggest that mindfulness practices may help people manage

- [Stress](#)
- [Improve sleep quality](#)
- [Reduce anxiety and depression](#)

Many people who practice mindfulness report an increased ability to relax, a greater enthusiasm for life and improved self-esteem.

Finding time for mindfulness in our cul-

ture, however, can be a challenge. We tend to place great value on how much we can do at once and how fast. Being more mindful is within anyone's reach.

You can practice mindfulness throughout the day, even while answering e-mails, sitting in traffic or waiting in line. All you have to do is become more aware of your breath, of your feet on the ground, of your fingers typing, of the people and voices around you.

Here are some simple tips:

- Keep it short. This is not a practice that takes a long time. Shoot for 20 minutes.
- Practice being aware while you wait. If you are stuck on line or in traffic, focus on your breathing and your body.
- Eat mindfully. Listen to what your body is saying to you. Enjoy the food you eat and eat it slowly.

To learn more about how to incorporate mindfulness into your daily routine, here are some helpful links.

- [Greater Good Science Center at UC Berkeley.](#)
- [Mindfulness Interventions, Worksheets and Techniques.](#)

Be Well is an employee wellness program provided through the Eastern Highlands Health District with funding from The CT Department of Health. The goal of the program is to make the healthy choice the easy choice.

