

Stress vs. Anxiety: Understanding the Difference

Stress is a natural physical and emotional response to life's challenges. When we're under stress, our body releases hormones that trigger a "fight-or-flight" response, causing increased heart rate, blood pressure and muscle tension. Some stress is normal, but high stress levels can cause many health problems. These problems include digestive problems, headaches, sleep problems and mental health problems like depression and anxiety.

The American Psychological Association states that nearly three-quarters of Americans experience stress, which can stem from various aspects of life. Key stressors include:

- Health problems (personal or related to loved ones)
- Relationship issues and significant life changes (like losing a family member or changing careers)
- Financial difficulties
- Workplace pressures and discrimination
- Traumatic events

Understanding these causes is crucial for effective stress management. By recognizing the sources of stress, individuals can take the first step toward mitigating its impact.

Sometimes, stress can feel a lot like anxiety. Anxiety is your body's reaction to stress and can occur even if there is no current threat. Identifying and understanding what you're feeling is the first step in properly managing both stress and anxiety. Refer to the table below to better understand some of the differences between stress and anxiety.

Stress	Both Stress and Anxiety	Anxiety
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generally, stress is a response to an external cause, such as taking a big test or arguing with a friend or loved one.• Goes away once the situation/issue is resolved.• Can be positive or negative. For example, it may inspire you to meet a deadline, or it may cause you to lose sleep.	<p>Both stress and anxiety can affect your mind and body. You may experience symptoms such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Excessive worry• Uneasiness• Tension• Headaches or body pain• High blood pressure• Loss of sleep	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Generally, anxiety is internal, meaning it's your body's reaction to stress.• Usually involves a persistent feeling of apprehension or dread that doesn't go away and interferes with how you live your life.• Is constant, even if there is no immediate issue or threat.

MINDFUL MOMENTS FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

Fortunately, there are several evidence-based techniques to manage stress effectively. Review the list below for some easy ways to reduce daily stress.

- **Practice deep breathing.** Focus on slow, deliberate breaths to calm your mind and body. Try inhaling for a count of four, holding for four, and exhaling for four.
- **Get moving.** Regular exercise can help reduce stress and anxiety. Find an activity you enjoy, whether it's walking, running or dancing, and aim for at least 30 minutes a day.
- **Connect with nature.** Spend time outdoors, whether it's walking in a park, hiking, or simply sitting in a garden or on a balcony with plants. Being in nature can help calm your mind.
- **Prioritize sleep.** Aim for 7-9 hours of sleep per night to help your body and mind recharge. Establish a consistent bedtime routine to improve sleep quality.
- **Try progressive muscle relaxation.** Tense and then relax different parts of your body, starting with your toes and moving up to your head.
- **Limit social media and technology.** Take regular breaks from screens and social media to reduce stress and improve focus.
- **Practice mindfulness.** Focus on the present moment, without judgment. You can try mindfulness meditation, mindful walking or simply paying attention to your senses.
- **Connect with others.** Reach out to friends, family or a therapist for support. Social connections can help you feel less isolated and more supported.

Learn more:

nimh.nih.gov/health/publications and
nccih.nih.gov/health/stress

Get outside!

Connecting with nature is a powerful way to reduce stress and improve overall wellbeing. Spending time outdoors has been shown to lower cortisol levels, blood pressure and heart rate, while also boosting mood and cognitive function. Whether it's walking in a park, hiking in the woods, or simply sitting in a garden or on a balcony with plants, being in nature can help calm the mind and promote relaxation. By incorporating nature into your daily routine, you can cultivate a sense of calm and resilience that can help you better manage stress.

Here's a chart showing activities that can help reduce stress while also benefiting the environment:

Activity	Stress Reduction Benefits	Environmental Benefits
Gardening	Reduces anxiety, promotes relaxation, and improves mood	Supports biodiversity, improves air quality, and conserves water
Outdoor Walking/Hiking	Lowers cortisol levels, improves mood, and increases energy	Reduces carbon footprint, promotes conservation, and supports local ecosystems
Mindful Outdoor Activities (e.g., meditation, yoga)	Reduces stress, improves focus, and enhances wellbeing	Encourages appreciation for nature, promotes sustainable living
Recycling and Reducing Waste	Provides a sense of control over one's actions and creates a sense of collective action	Conserves natural resources, reduces landfill waste and decreases greenhouse gas emissions
Composting	Fosters connection to nature, reduces stress through productive activity	Reduces waste sent to landfills, creates nutrient-rich soil and supports sustainable gardening
Volunteering for Environmental Causes	Enhances sense of purpose, builds social connections	Supports conservation efforts, promotes environmental awareness and drives positive change
Sustainable Living Practices (e.g., using public transport, reducing energy consumption)	Encourages mindfulness, reduces feelings of guilt or anxiety about environmental impact	Reduces carbon footprint, conserves resources and supports eco-friendly policies

These activities not only help reduce stress but also contribute to a healthier environment. By incorporating them into your daily routine, you can cultivate a sense of wellbeing while supporting the planet.

Learn more: ableto.com/resources/12-ideas-to-enjoy-nature-and-reduce-stress

CHICKEN AND SPINACH SKILLET PASTA WITH LEMON AND PARMESAN



This delicious and bright pasta is the perfect spring weeknight dinner. **Makes 4 servings.**

Ingredients:

- 8 ounces gluten-free penne pasta or whole-wheat penne pasta
- 2 tablespoons extra virgin olive oil
- 1-pound boneless, skinless chicken breast or thighs, trimmed, if necessary, and cut into bite-size pieces
- ¾ teaspoon salt
- ¼ teaspoon ground pepper
- 4 cloves garlic, minced
- 1 cup dry white wine
- 2 teaspoons lemon zest
- ¼ cup lemon juice
- ⅓ cup unsalted butter, cubed
- 4 tablespoons grated Parmesan cheese, divided
- 10 cups chopped fresh spinach

Directions:

Before you begin, wash your hands.

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil; add 8 ounces of pasta and cook according to package directions. Reserve ½ cup of cooking water; drain the pasta and set aside. Wash the bell peppers and remove the tops, seeds and membranes. Set peppers in a 9x9 baking dish or line them up in a loaf pan, so they stand upright.
2. Meanwhile, heat oil in a large high-sided skillet over medium-high heat. Add chicken pieces, salt and pepper; cook, stirring occasionally, until an instant-read thermometer inserted in the thickest portion registers 165°F, 5 to 7 minutes. Add garlic; cook, stirring, until fragrant, about 1 minute. Stir in wine, lemon zest and lemon juice; bring to a simmer over medium-high heat, stirring occasionally. Add cubed butter and 1 tablespoon Parmesan; cook, whisking constantly, until the sauce is creamy and emulsified, about 2 minutes. Add ¼ to ½ cup pasta water; cook, stirring occasionally, until the sauce thickens slightly, about 2 minutes.
3. Stir in chopped spinach and the cooked pasta. Cook over medium heat, stirring occasionally, until the spinach is wilted and bright green, about 5 minutes. Divide among 4 plates; top with the remaining 3 tablespoons Parmesan.

NUTRITION INFORMATION

Calories per serving	252
Sodium	646 mg
Fat	27 g
Saturated Fat	12 g
Carbohydrates	25 g
Cholesterol	127 mg
Protein	33 g
Total Sugars	2 g