

Stress and Tobacco Use

The number one reason people return to smoking is stress. Distress is extreme anxiety, pain, or suffering caused by the lack of money or other basic necessities of life. Stress is the milder form of distress, but equally powerful in affecting our daily lives. When stress becomes greater than our ability to cope, we can experience burnout, anxiety, or depression.

What are some causes of stress?

- Work demands
- Leadership role demands
- Physical illness
- Part-time work
- Time urgency
- Relationship demands
- Career planning and expectations
- Financial strain
- Conflict with family and friends

Because people experience stress differently, it can take different forms – both physically and behaviorally such as:

- Headaches
- Upset stomach
- Constipation or diarrhea
- Backaches
- Trouble sleeping
- Sadness or depression
- Feelings of helplessness
- High blood pressure
- Lack of appetite or binge eating
- Increased use of alcohol or cigarettes
- Frequent illness
- Dangerous behavior

Negative management of stress and subsequent burnout can lead to bigger problems such as:

- Drinking
- Drug use
- Social isolation
- Risky sexual practices
- Driving carelessly
- Sleeping too much
- Eating junk food

If you can identify with any of these behaviors as ways to cope with stress, the plan of action becomes on how to turn away from these choices to a long-term approach to wellness and choices that will improve your overall physical and mental health.

Suggestions for Handling Stress

- Increase physical activity
- Share your stress by talking with others
- Surround yourself with good people
- Know your limits
- Take care of yourself (especially during times of increased stress)
- Make time for fun
- Prioritize your time and resources
- Learn to relax
- Focus on what is really important
- Get help when you need it