

# Stress Management: Are You Stressed?

*“Knowing what works for you and what helps you get through those tough times.”*

Christopher Wojnar deals with stress on a daily basis, both as an intensive care nurse and as someone who lives with depression and Bipolar Disorder. Stress is how the brain and body react to things you encounter in life. Things that bring on stress can be routine like a test or presentation, or more serious like money troubles, relationship issues, mental health or medical problems, or on-the-job stress.

*“For me as a nurse who has experienced a history of mental illness, what I have to do is I have to make sure that I am using coping skills.”*

Stress is linked to a number of mental and physical symptoms including: Headaches; Muscle tension; Back pain; Upset stomach; Trouble sleeping; A racing heart or chest pain; Fatigue; Eating too much or too little; Problems concentrating; Depression; Irritability, Anger; or Anxiety.

The first step to managing your stress is to identify what triggers it. Things that bring on stress are called stressors. These are different for everyone and they can change over time. It could be relationship problems, financial concerns or trouble at work.

*“Examine how we react to them. Once again looking at is this something that I can change, is this under my control, or do I need to do some positive reframing, examine whether my thinking is accurate or not and change and improve how I’m perceiving things.”*

Once you’ve identified your stressors, think about ways you can cope with them.

*“What you can change and what you can’t change. If there are certain things that you can change, that’s where I would start. So, if your work demands are piling up, they’re becoming excessive, they’re becoming a stress force on you, you might want to see if you could change your environment.”*

Sometimes you can’t change the environment, so you have to focus on how you respond to the stressor. That’s where stress relief strategies comes into play. Exercise, eating healthy, getting enough sleep and meditation are just a few. Christopher turns to music.

*“I like to play music. I like to play guitar. That is something though that helps me kind of stay balanced.”*

Christopher also relies on supportive family and friends to help him cope with stress. It’s a strategy used daily by first responders like Shannon Richter.

*“It can be hard to turn that stress off at the end of the day.”*

Richter is a paramedic and firefighter. Her department offers a peer support program to make sure everyone manages their stress in healthy ways, not ignoring it or turning to unhealthy coping methods like alcohol or drugs. Shannon is a peer support team member.

*“People bring it to my attention when they have a stressful event. So, I’ve had phone calls saying we went to this call today and this and this happened. Can you get in touch with the members that were on that call? So then I’ll reach out to those members. Make sure that they have the support and that they know that we are there for them as peer support members.”*

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Some people, like Christopher and Shannon, work in jobs where stress is unavoidable. But stress affects everyone at various times in their lives and it's important to recognize when it's getting to be too much. Pay attention to your mind and body. If you feel like you might need help getting your stress under control, talk to a mental health professional.