



REST, RECHARGE, AND RESTORE:

Understanding Chronic Stress

Everyday stress is a biological response to demanding situations. When life throws you under the bus whether it's an unexpected end to a relationship, a medical diagnosis or demands at work, feeling stressed is universal. However, stress is dangerous when it becomes chronic, meaning prolonged and without a foreseeable ending.

Stress causes the body to release hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. These hormones alert the body of the need to take immediate action. Over time, chronic stress can suppress immune function which may lead to developing a range of physical and mental disorders including heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, obesity, chronic fatigue, gastrointestinal illness, respiratory infections, autoimmune diseases, depression and anxiety disorders.

Research reviews indicate that ongoing stress can change immune responses and may weaken the body's ability to fight illness. Recent findings also reveal chronic stress can raise cortisol and suppress parts of immune function over time.

Sleep Supports Health

While asleep, the body repairs tissues, regulates hormones, and cleanses the brain of toxins. Short sleep and sleep problems are linked with higher blood pressure risk in

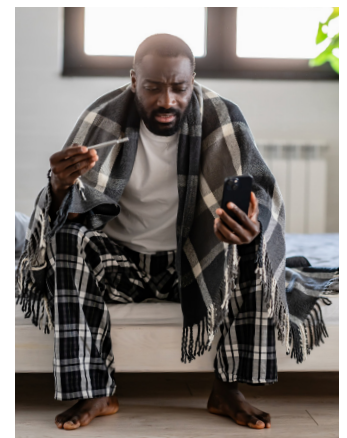
research, and irregular sleep schedules are also tied to hypertension.

One large review of sleep and weight revealed short sleep can affect appetite hormones, contributing to stronger hunger impulses and overeating.

Mood and sleep are interconnected. Poor sleep can amplify stress levels, decrease patience, and weaken coping mechanisms.

Sleep Hygiene for Real Life

Better sleep often results from a few practical and repeatable



Continued on next page



We've highlighted some resources you may want to look into further. Simply click or tap the icon or its hyperlink to access these select materials!



Don't let your coffee habit creep into your sleep. Caffeine can quietly stretch into bedtime, so consuming it earlier in the day helps many people.

habits. A consistent sleep and wake schedule (time) helps regulate your internal clock. Keeping your bedroom cool, dark, quiet, and comfortable helps calm the central nervous system which primes the body for restorative sleep. Eliminate looking at screens at least 30 minutes prior to bedtime. Screens can keep your mind active and bright light can delay sleepiness, so powering down devices is critical.

Caffeine can interfere with sleep patterns, so consuming it earlier in the day is advisable. Large meals and alcohol close to bedtime can also disrupt sleep quality, even if you fall asleep fast. A relaxing wind-down routine is more important than you might think. A warm shower, gentle stretching, calming music, or reading something light helps signal “sleep time” to your body.

Unplug to Recharge Evening Challenge (Powered by AI)

This short challenge was powered by AI and designed to feel doable on a weekday evening. Pick one option and try it for five days. Notice how you feel, then keep what works. Remember, AI is a supportive resource, but not a substitute for advice from a health care professional.

Option 1: quick swaps

Trade scrolling for five minutes of stretching. Trade after-hours emails for logging off 30 minutes earlier. Trade multitasking for one screen-

free moment, like drinking water slowly or taking five deep breaths.

Option 2: one-a-day swaps

On Mondays, consider trading screen time for a short walk. Tuesdays, you might trade responding to e-mail notifications for quiet time while enjoying a great book. Wednesdays you can trade eating lunch at your desk to enjoy a meal with a colleague. Thursdays you can designate for self-care and indulgence versus watching consider trading late-night TV. And how about designating Fridays for gratitude and appreciation for successfully completing a week of incorporating healthier habits!

Option 3: 10-minute reset

Replace ten minutes of screen time for something restorative, like deep stretching, outdoor meditation, journaling, or penning a thank you note or “thinking of you” card to someone special.

Support Through Your Benefits

[ComPsych EAP](#) offers total life resources and tools, including support related to stress, sleep, and building healthier routines. [CLICK OR TAP!](#)

BCBSIL resources can help you explore wellness support and digital tools through the [BAM portal](#). [CLICK OR TAP!](#)



SOURCES: [American Heart Association](#), [Jennifer N Morey et al](#), [Amna Alotiby](#), [Sleep Foundation](#), [Centers for Disease Control](#), [American Academy of Sleep Medicine](#)

SLEEP TRACKERS VS. MEDICAL SLEEP MONITORS



SLEEP TRACKERS are usually consumer devices like watches, rings, or phone apps. They can be helpful for identifying patterns, like bedtime consistency and total time spent in bed. Accuracy varies by device, and most trackers cannot diagnose sleep disorders. The American Academy of Sleep Medicine notes that consumer sleep technology is not a substitute for medical evaluation.

MEDICAL SLEEP MONITORS are different. A medical-grade sleep study or monitor is used when a clinician needs to evaluate a condition such as sleep apnea. Coverage depends on your insurance plan and medical needs. A helpful next step is consulting with your doctor if you experience symptoms such as loud snoring, gasping for air while sleeping, daytime sleepiness, or morning headaches. Your doctor will determine if a sleep monitor is necessary.

