

# a healthy conversation

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## 5 tips for reducing stress in your daily life

*Stress has a variety of effects on health and costs*

*From Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield*

When it comes to Iowans and stress, there's both good news and bad news.

The good news is that Iowa ranked sixth among the least stressed states in 2010. According to data from the Gallup-Healthways Well-Being Index released last month, 37.7 percent of Iowans reported feelings of stress (up 1.4 percent from 2009). That compares with 30.2 percent of people in Hawaii (the least stressed state), and 45.1 percent of people in Utah (the most stressed state).

While it's nice to finish near the top, that still means more than one in three Iowans reports feeling stressed on a daily basis. And that stress can take its toll on our health.

### Stress has many potential sources

Stress levels can vary according to a variety of factors:

- Personal finances
- Job and career
- Relationships
- Major life changes
- Caring for family members and others
- Emotional problems
- Personal health

### Signs of stress

Common signs and symptoms include:

- Tightness or stiffness in the neck, shoulders or back

- Fast heartbeat
- Fast breathing
- Headache
- Nausea, diarrhea or upset stomach

*Acute stress* can happen suddenly in response to a life situation and, in extreme cases, lead to an irregular heartbeat or heart attack. *Chronic stress* occurs when people are exposed to stressful situations over a longer period of time. If you already have a health condition, chronic stress can make it worse.

### Stress a hidden driver of health care use and cost

Chronic stress, left unchecked, can affect your cardiovascular system, digestive tract, muscles and reproductive organs. It can also contribute to mental illnesses like anxiety and depression. And that has an impact not only on our health, but also health care costs.

Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield spends \$40 million on antidepressants annually, for example, at an average rate of \$60 per prescription. Prices range from less than \$10 for generic forms of Zoloft and Celexa, to nearly \$200 for the brand name drugs Cymbalta and Effexor XR.

### Tips for reducing stress in your daily life

Prescribing medications shouldn't be the first option, however. Most

people can manage their daily stress by eating a healthy diet and exercising regularly.

Here are five more ways to better manage the impact of stress on your daily life:

- Get plenty of sleep. A good night's rest can help recharge your batteries for that next stressful moment
- Relax. Meditate, practice yoga, read a book or do anything else that takes your mind away from the source of your stress
- Develop a support network. Healthy relationships with family, friends and coworkers can provide a much needed boost when stress levels are high, or prevent situations from becoming stressful in the first place
- Laugh. Even when you can't change the situation at hand, a good sense of humor can keep the stress from getting to you and throwing life off track
- Don't be afraid to seek help. Your doctor can gauge if stress is becoming harmful to your health, and if medical treatment may be appropriate

*For more information on health and health insurance, call the Wellmark Blue Cross and Blue Shield Personal Health Assistant 24/7 at 1-800-724-9122, or visit [www.wellmark.com](http://www.wellmark.com).*

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