

# Reduce your Stress

Over the last week – or maybe longer, you’ve found that you’ve been tense or anxious. Maybe you’ve got a permanent lump in your throat or had a chronic headache. You’re snapping at colleagues or family members. You’re not sleeping. The symptoms vary, but the source is always the same: stress. It is, however, more than an annoyance. If it lasts longer than a week and becomes unmanageable, it could pump up your blood pressure. High blood pressure is the number one cause of stroke and a major risk factor for heart attack. The good news is that you can do something about your stress – and the sooner the better. Read on.

## How stress affects blood pressure

“When you are feeling stressed, your blood pressure goes up and your heart rate quickens. If your stress is persistent, those effects could be damaging,” Heart and Stroke Foundation researcher Dr. Brian Baker says. Being overworked can cause a long-term impact on blood pressure. A 2006 study funded by the Heart and Stroke Foundation, co-authored by Drs. Sheldon Tobe and Baker, showed that when subjects experienced job strain, their systolic blood pressure (the top number) went up over the course of a year in both men and women. “If you have chronic demands and limited control at your job, over time your blood pressure can be raised by a few points,” says Dr Baker.

## The good news

Reducing stress now could lead to a healthy future with a lower risk of heart disease. A study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* found that, in patients with stable ischemic heart disease, physical activity and stress management training reduced emotional stress and depression and improved some indicators of heart disease.

