



## A GUIDE FOR FAMILY AND LOVED ONES

# Managing Stress

Military families are under a lot of stress. During deployment, family members must take on new roles and responsibilities. Adjusting to these changes can be difficult. When the soldier returns, relationships and routines must be reestablished. Learning to manage your stress is important.

### What is stress?

Stress is the body's response to a change or a demand. We all experience stress. Some stress is helpful. It allows us to focus on a goal. This is true for short term stress, like giving a speech. Long-term or chronic stress results from situations like divorce or illness. Chronic stress can negatively affect your health. It can raise your risk of stroke and heart attack. It can lead to anxiety and depression.

### What You Need To Know

Stress affects everyone differently. You may not realize that you are feeling stressed. Pay attention to your body's signals:

- Tight muscles, especially in the neck and shoulders
- Headaches and upset stomach
- Problems sleeping
- Feeling worried, hopeless, or depressed
- Difficulty concentrating
- Weight gain or loss

### How can you start to manage your stress?

Military families face special challenges. Deployments and relocations can strain finances. At times, the stresses you face may seem overwhelming. It is important to take one day at a time. To help keep your stress level under control:

- **Seek out social support.** Search out other military families. They will be able to relate to your feelings and experiences.

- **Share your worries.** Talking with family and friends can relieve stress. Be open with how you are feeling. Writing in a journal can help relieve stress.
- **Slow down.** The day to day stresses can take a lot out of you. Give yourself permission to take a break. Ask for help when you need it.
- **Take time for yourself.** Do something that you enjoy, like reading a book. Take a nap or listening to music. This will help to reduce stress.

## Tips for fighting stress

- **Get active.** Regular physical activity can relieve tension. Go for a walk or bike ride. Go for a swim at the local pool. Try to do something active every day.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Eat meals at regular times. Make sure to eat foods that are rich in vitamins, minerals and fiber. Limit fats, salt cholesterol and sugar. Drink plenty of water.
- **Learn to relax.** Practice deep breathing to relieve stress. Join a yoga class. Calm yourself through prayer or meditation.
- **Be sure to laugh.** Joke with your family and friends. Laugh out loud. Read a funny book or watch a comedy on TV.

## When should you seek help?

Too much stress can make you feel trapped. It can affect your ability to work through daily problems. Seek help when the stress becomes too much to handle. Talk to your healthcare provider. Talk about how the stress is affecting you. Together you can work towards managing the stress in your life.

### Where can you get help?

The VA and most military groups have a family service and support center. These services can help you access information. You can get a referral for counseling and receive help for crisis intervention.

Getting help is not a sign of weakness.



## REMEMBER...

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