

# Celebrate! *A Healthy You*

*A newsletter devoted to helping individuals of every size live in a healthy body.*

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## Stress Management Brings Relief

We have all heard the word 'stress' many times in our lives. Stress is a reaction to change or conflict. Although it is usually considered to be negative, not all kinds of stress are bad. Stress can motivate us to get a project done or to handle a situation. However, too much stress can be harmful.

Stress and its causes can be confusing. Stressful events for one person may not be identified as stressful for someone else. These would be considered stressors for many people:

- ◆ death of a spouse or loved one
- ◆ injury or illness
- ◆ marriage
- ◆ pregnancy
- ◆ change in finances
- ◆ change in work responsibilities
- ◆ loss of job
- ◆ beginning or ending school
- ◆ starting a new job
- ◆ change in living conditions
- ◆ vacation

We may not always recognize the signs of stress in ourselves. Here is a short list of some signs and symptoms of stress.

- √ Frequently feeling irritated by other people
- √ Easily becoming angry
- √ Tension or tightness in neck or back
- √ Changes in sleep patterns
- √ Change in appetite
- √ Diarrhea or constipation
- √ Increased use of alcohol, drugs (even aspirin), coffee or cigarettes
- √ Inability to concentrate
- √ Headache or other body aches
- √ Forgetfulness

Stress can have a negative impact on physical as well as mental health. Research has linked stress to headaches, allergies, coronary artery disease, high blood pressure and

rheumatoid arthritis. People experiencing a great deal of stress appear to have less resistance to illness and may be more likely to catch a cold or the flu.

For someone experiencing a great deal of stress, reducing it would seem to be ideal. However, that is not always possible. More helpful for most of us are learning ways to manage stress and enhance relaxation. Taking time to exercise, prioritizing daily activities, spending time with friends, making time for yourself, planning play time and laughing are helpful stress management techniques.

Learning and practicing relaxation techniques can provide relief from stress that lasts far beyond the time you spend doing them. Here are a few examples:

1. **Focus on Breathing.** Stand in a comfortable position. Take a deep breath in and let it out slowly. As you exhale, relax from the top your head to the bottom of your toes. Focus separately on each area of your body as you move from head to toe. Relax your head, neck, shoulders, abdomen, legs, feet.
2. **Progressive Muscle Relaxation.** Alternate between tensing the muscles and relaxing them. Squeeze your hands into tight fists, then release and relax your fingers. Tense your arms and release. Tense your leg muscles and release. Repeat the activity with different muscle groups in the body.
3. **Relaxation Vacation.** Sit quietly in a comfortable position with both feet on the ground. Close your eyes. Imagine you are in a quiet place that you would enjoy visiting like a meadow, mountain, garden, beach. Feel the warmth of the sun shining down on you. A refreshing breeze gently wafts over you. Think about the sounds around you—the wind blowing through the trees, a bubbling stream, birds singing. What fragrances would you encounter on your vacation? Try to imagine them. Spend a few minutes engaging all your senses in this vacation spot.

University of Missouri Extension has developed a website with many resources for reducing stress. It is located at <http://extension.missouri.edu/hes/healthystaff/index.htm> Click on the Stress Less link on the left side of the page.

## Make Cooking Simple

Many tasty, easy and quick to fix meals begin with the same first step—browning ground beef. With this simple step, you can then go on to make spaghetti sauce, lasagna, tacos, chili, sloppy joes, and many more family favorites. Just think how handy it would be to have this first step completed, giving meal preparation a jump-start. The next time you buy ground beef, buy another pound or two and cook up the extra to freeze in recipe-sized portions according to the tips given below. The same process can be used with ground turkey or chicken as well.

The handout included this month gives more tips on buying, using and storing ground meat as well as some additional recipes for using it.

## Make-Ahead Brownd Meat

1. Place one pound of ground meat in large skillet. Brown no more than one pound of meat at a time to avoid overloading the skillet and trapping moisture so meat is steamed rather than browned.
2. Cook over medium heat 8 to 10 minutes or until meat is not pink, breaking it up into  $\frac{3}{4}$ -inch pieces. Add one chopped medium onion to meat as it is browning. Remove meat and onion with slotted spoon to bowl or shallow container lined with paper towel to absorb grease.
3. To freeze browned meat for later use, remove and discard paper towel and loosely cover bowl or container. Place in refrigerator to completely cool meat. When cold, transfer meat to freezer bag. Press out as much air from bag as possible before sealing, then label and date package. When placing bag in freezer, flatten to speed freezing now and thawing later. Bags may be stacked in freezer after they are completely frozen.
4. Wipe skillet with paper towel before starting next batch if making multiple batches of browned meat to freeze, or return browned meat to skillet and continue with recipe.



## Tips for Make-Ahead Brownd Meat

- ◆ A nonstick skillet works best for browning ground meat especially if it is lean. Avoid using uncoated iron or aluminum skillets which can speed unwanted flavor changes in frozen cooked ground meat.
- ◆ Browning meat with onions or bell peppers speeds future recipe preparation and helps slow flavor changes.
- ◆ Do not add salt to browned meat until using it in your recipe as salt too can speed up unwanted flavor changes.
- ◆ Use frozen browned meat within 2 to 3 months for best flavor and quality.

*This information based on "Easy Ground Beef Recipes from Your Freezer" by Alice Henneman, Extension Educator, Lancaster County, University of Nebraska Extension.*

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## Words to Consider

"Wise are those who learn that the bottom line doesn't always have to be their top priority." —William A. Ward