



## STRESS AND GENDER

While both men and women\* recognize the impact stress can have on physical health, men appear to be somewhat more reluctant to believe that it's having an impact on their own health. Likewise, men put less emphasis on the need to manage their stress than women do. Men see psychologists as less helpful and are less likely to employ strategies to make lifestyle and behavior changes. Yet men are more likely than women to report being diagnosed with the types of chronic physical illnesses that are often linked to high stress levels and unhealthy lifestyles and behaviors, signaling that there may be some important gender differences when it comes to stress management.

### Who's Under More Stress?

- Men (65 percent) and women (66 percent) say that they are generally satisfied with their lives. However, there are aspects of their lives that both find troubling. Fewer than half of men and women report they are satisfied with their financial security (45 percent of men and 44 percent of women).
- Historically, women report higher levels of stress than men, and this year is no exception (5.4 vs. 4.8, respectively, on a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 is little or no stress and 10 is a great deal of stress).
- Compared to women, men are less likely to say they are doing an excellent or very good job handling relationships (family: 50 percent vs. 62 percent; friends: 40 percent vs. 54 percent), eating healthy (27 percent vs. 37 percent) and getting enough sleep (23 percent vs. 31 percent).

### The Impact of Stress: Gender Differences

Not only do men and women manage stress differently, they also place a different level of importance on doing so. Men report being less concerned about managing stress and are more likely to say they are doing enough in this area, whereas women place more emphasis on the need to do so but feel they are not doing well enough.

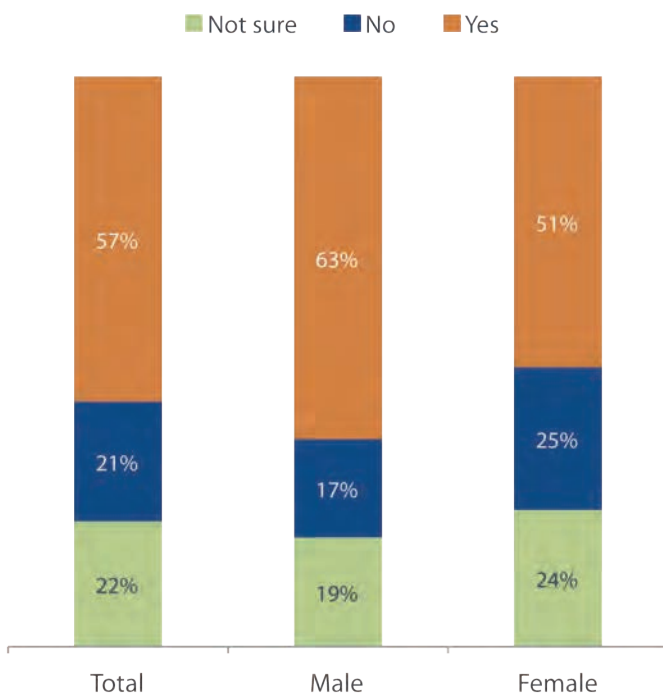


# STRESS AND GENDER

One in four women acknowledge they are not doing enough when it comes to managing stress.

## Stress Management By Gender

Do you feel you are doing enough to manage your stress?



BASE: All respondents (n=1226); Male (n=539); Female (n=687)  
Q1615 Do you feel you are doing enough to manage your stress?

- Only 52 percent of men say it is very/extremely important to manage stress, compared to 68 percent of women. And 63 percent of men say they're doing enough to manage their stress, compared to 51 percent of women.
- One in four women acknowledge they are not doing enough when it comes to managing stress; only 17 percent of men feel this way.
- Women are more likely than men to report using a multitude of strategies including reading (51 percent vs. 32 percent), spending time with family or friends (44 percent vs. 32 percent), praying (41 percent vs. 22 percent), going to religious services (24 percent vs. 17 percent), shopping (18 percent vs. 10 percent), getting a massage or visiting a spa (14 percent vs. 5 percent) and seeing a mental health professional (5 percent vs. 1 percent) to manage stress.
- On the other hand, men are more likely to report relying on playing sports as a stress management technique (14 percent vs. 4 percent).
- When it comes to the things they report as important and how well they are doing achieving them, women see a larger gap in their own performance than men do:
  - Getting enough sleep, 40 percentage point gap for women vs. 24 percentage point gap for men;
  - Being physically active or fit, 33 percentage point gap for women vs. 21 percentage point gap for men; and
  - Managing stress, 33 percentage point gap for women vs. 17 point gap for men.

## Stress and Physical Illness Between the Genders

Research shows that prolonged periods of stress — which releases the hormone cortisol — can decrease proper cell function, thereby contributing to numerous emotional and physical disorders including depression, anxiety, heart attacks, stroke, hypertension and immune system disturbances that increase susceptibility to infections.<sup>10, 11</sup>

Survey results suggest that the link between stress and physical health could be harder for men to recognize. Men are less likely than women to believe that it can have any impact upon their health, despite the fact that they are more likely than women to report having been diagnosed with the types of illnesses that are often exacerbated by stress.

- Men are less likely than women to report that stress has a very strong/strong impact on a person's health (78 percent vs. 88 percent).
- Furthermore, they are more likely than women to report that their own stress has slight or no impact on their physical (36 percent vs. 26 percent) or mental health (40 percent vs. 32 percent).

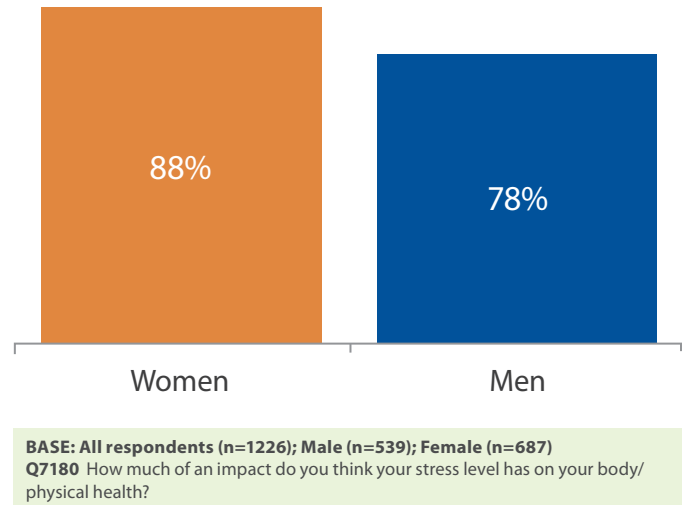
These beliefs may be why men are less willing to do anything about stress.

- Women are substantially more likely than men (70 percent vs. 50 percent) to say they have tried to reduce stress over the past 5 years.

<sup>10</sup> National Institutes of Mental Health. (2009). Research Shows How Chronic Stress May Be Linked to Physical and Mental Ailments. Retrieved from <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/science-news/2009/research-shows-how-chronic-stress-may-be-linked-to-physical-and-mental-ailments.shtml>

<sup>11</sup> The American Institute of Stress. (2011). Effects of Stress. Retrieved from <http://www.stress.org/topic-effects.htm>

**Impact of Stress on Health**  
(% Very Strong/Strong Impact)



**Effect of Stress on Physical and Mental Health**  
(% Slight/No Impact)





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Men are also less likely than women to report that they think psychologists can help with making lifestyle changes and behavior changes.

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- When adults who decided to make a lifestyle or behavior change, either independently or in response to a recommendation, were asked what strategies they used to help them make the desired changes, more men than women indicated they did not use any strategies at all (61 percent vs. 45 percent).
- Men are also less likely than women to report that they think psychologists can help with making lifestyle and behavior changes (30 percent vs. 38 percent, reporting a great deal/a lot of help) and coping with chronic illness (19 percent vs. 38 percent, reporting a great deal/a lot of help).

There may be consequences for men in not recognizing the need to address the link between stress and physical health.

- Men are more likely than women to report having been diagnosed with the following chronic illnesses: high blood pressure (32 percent vs. 23 percent), type 2 diabetes (12 percent vs. 7 percent) and heart disease or heart attack (6 percent vs. 2 percent).