



IMPACT OF stress

Is “Stressed Out” the New Normal?

Stress is so commonplace in American culture that a Google search generates millions of results with essays, opinions and missives on what stress does and what it is doing to us.

Since its inception, the *Stress in America*™ survey has explored the place that stress has in American life and the impact it is having on our health and wellness. Survey findings illustrate a scenario in which Americans consistently experience stress at levels higher than what they think is healthy. And while the average level of stress may be declining, people have a hard time achieving personal stress management goals — many still report extreme stress (an 8, 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale) and even more say their stress has increased in the past year.



4.9

IS THE **average stress level** REPORTED BY ADULTS IN 2012

Missing the Mark on Stress Management

On a scale of 1 to 10 (where 1 is “little or no stress” and 10 is “a great deal of stress”), adults report their stress level is 4.9 compared with 5.2 in 2011, 5.4 in 2010 and 2009, 5.9 in 2008 and 6.2 in 2007. Comparatively, Americans believe 3.6 is a healthy level of stress.

Almost three-quarters (72 percent) of respondents say that their stress level has increased or stayed the same over the past five years and 80 percent say their stress level has increased or stayed the same in the past year. Only 20 percent say their stress level has decreased in the past year.

The number of Americans reporting extreme stress continues to be high — 20 percent say their stress is an 8, 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale, which is comparable to the numbers reporting extreme stress in 2011 (22 percent), 2010 (24 percent) and 2009 (23 percent).

Over the past five years, 60 percent of adults have tried to reduce their stress. More than half (53 percent) are still trying to meet this goal.

Only 37 percent of Americans feel they are actually doing an excellent or very good job of managing their stress.

Top sources of stress include money (69 percent), work (65 percent), the economy (61 percent), family responsibilities (57 percent), relationships (56 percent), family health problems (52 percent) and personal health concerns (51 percent).



AMERICANS DEFINE

A healthy level of stress AS **3.6**





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AMERICANS CONSISTENTLY REPORT STRESS AT LEVELS THAT EXCEED WHAT THEY BELIEVE IS HEALTHY.



BASE: All respondents 2007 (n=1848); 2008 (n=1791); 2009 (n=1568); 2010 (n=1134); 2011 (n=1226); 2012 (n=2020)
 Q605 On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means you have little or no stress and 10 means you have a great deal of stress, how would you rate your average level of stress during the past month?
 Q610 On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means little or no stress and 10 means a great deal of stress, what would you consider a healthy level of stress?

High and constant stress levels can negatively affect a person’s physical and mental health. In addition to the ongoing mental strain, stress affects people physically — and not everyone is coping well.

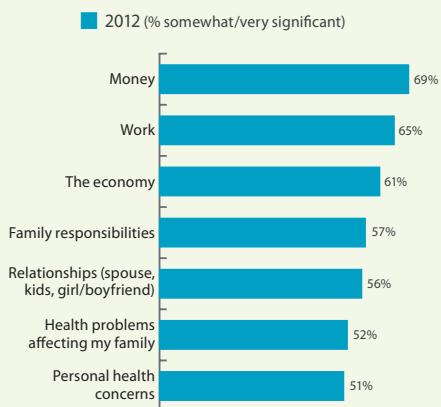
Americans continue to recognize the impact of stress — 66 percent believe their stress has a moderate, strong or very strong impact on their physical health, and 63 percent believe the same for their mental health.

Approximately seven in 10 Americans report that they experience physical (69 percent) or non-physical symptoms (67 percent) of stress. Symptoms include irritability or anger (37 percent), fatigue (37 percent), feeling overwhelmed (35 percent) and changes in sleeping habits (30 percent).

In addition, many people are not coping effectively with stress: People report lying awake (42 percent), overeating or eating unhealthy foods (36 percent) and skipping meals (27 percent) in the past month due to stress.

WHAT CAUSES STRESS FOR AMERICANS?

Sources of Stress: Percent Somewhat/Very Significant



BASE: All respondents 2012 (n=2020)
 Q625 Below is a list of things people say cause stress in their lives. For each one, please indicate how significant a source of stress it is in your life.

Despite the negative effects stress appears to be having on people’s physical and mental health, there is good news in terms of ways people cope with stress: More people appear to be making healthier stress management choices.

More people are turning to exercise to manage their stress (52 percent compared with 47 percent in 2011).

Sedentary behaviors like listening to music (48 percent), reading (40 percent) or watching television or movies for more than two hours per day (34 percent) continue to be popular strategies for managing stress.

Unhealthy behaviors like eating and drinking alcohol to manage stress are on a steady decline. Twenty-five percent of Americans report eating to manage stress compared to 34 percent in 2008. Thirteen percent report drinking alcohol to manage their stress compared with 18 percent in 2008.





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Struggling to Achieve Healthy Living Goals

More people appear to place importance on healthy behaviors this year. The survey found that more than half of people say it is extremely or very important to manage stress (64 percent in 2012 vs. 61 percent in 2011), eat healthy (60 percent in 2012 vs. 54 percent in 2011) or be physically active (57 percent in 2012 vs. 54 percent in 2011), yet they continue to have a hard time accomplishing these goals.

Only 37 percent say they are actually doing an excellent or very good job at managing stress.

Only 35 percent say they are actually doing an excellent or very good job at eating healthy.

Only 33 percent say they are actually doing an excellent or very good job at being physically active.

Despite their interest in making changes for a healthier life, many adults face barriers that prevent them from achieving their health and wellness goals.

For those who have been recommended to make a change or have decided to make a change, they say the following barriers prevent them from actually making lifestyle or behavior changes: lack of willpower (31 percent), lack of time (22 percent), the cost of making the change (16 percent) and stress (12 percent).

While many adults acknowledge barriers to more effectively managing their stress and making healthier lifestyle and behavior choices, they appear to appreciate the role psychologists can play in mental and physical health care.

More than half of adults think psychologists can help people a great deal or a lot in coping with mental health issues (56 percent), and almost half (47 percent) think psychologists can help with stress management. Forty-two percent believe psychologists can help with making lifestyle or behavior changes, and 33 percent think psychologists can help them with issues of work/life balance. Despite their perceptions about the role of psychology in living healthier lives, only 6 percent report that they see a mental health professional or a psychologist to help them manage their stress.



31%

OF AMERICANS SAY THAT A LACK OF willpower STANDS IN THE WAY OF CHANGE*

*BASE: Change has been recommended or decided to make a change (n=1928)

