



EMPLOYEE ADVISORY SERVICE NEWSLETTER

*Welcome to the NJ Civil Service Commission's Employee Advisory Service (EAS) Newsletter! EAS is committed to improving the quality of life for all New Jersey Civil Service employees by encouraging a good work-life balance. **The EAS Employee Newsletter** contains useful articles and information for managing various well-being and work-life issues in order to create a healthier, happier, and more productive workplace.*

Did You Know you can view archived EAS Webinars?

Discover interesting topics such as: The Keys to Great Employee-Supervisor Communication, Effective Business Communication, The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Leaders, Helping Your Employees Adjust to Change, and so much more.

The information is right at your fingertips.

Logon to <https://www.nj.gov/csc/employees/programs/advisory/webinar.html>
to view EAS Webinar Recordings.

Five Things You Should Know About Stress

Everyone feels stressed from time to time, but what is stress? How does it affect your health, and what can you do about it?

Stress is how the brain and body respond to any demand. Every type of demand or stressor—such as exercise, work, school, major life changes, or traumatic events—can be stressful.

Stress can affect your health. It is important to pay attention to how you deal with minor and major stress events so that you know when to seek help. Here are five things you should know about stress:

1. Stress affects everyone.

Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Some people may cope with stress more effectively or recover from stressful events more quickly than others. There are different types of stress—all of which carry physical and mental health risks. A stressor may be a one-time or short-term occurrence, or it can be an occurrence that keeps happening over a long period of time.

Examples of stress include

- Routine stress related to the pressures of work, school, family, and other daily responsibilities
- Stress brought about by a sudden negative change, such as losing a job, divorce, or illness
- Traumatic stress experienced in an event like a major accident, war, assault, or natural disaster where people may be in danger of being seriously hurt or killed (People who experience traumatic stress often experience temporary symptoms of mental illness, but most recover naturally soon after.)

2. Not all stress is bad.

Stress can motivate people to prepare or perform, like when they need to take a test or interview for a new job. Stress can even be life-saving in some situations. In response to danger, your body prepares to face a threat or flee to safety. In these situations, your pulse quickens, you breathe faster, your muscles tense, and your brain uses more oxygen and increases activity—all functions aimed at survival.

3. Long-term stress can harm your health.

Health problems can occur if the stress response goes on for too long or becomes chronic, such as when the source of stress is constant, or if the response continues after the danger has subsided. With chronic stress, those same life-saving responses in your body can suppress immune, digestive, sleep, and reproductive systems, which may cause them to stop working normally.

Different people may feel stress in different ways. For example, some people experience mainly digestive symptoms, while others may have headaches, sleeplessness, sadness, anger, or irritability. People under chronic stress are prone to more frequent and severe viral infections, such as the flu or common cold.

Routine stress may be the hardest type of stress to notice at first. Because the source of stress tends to be more constant than in cases of acute or traumatic stress, the body gets no clear signal to return to normal functioning. Over time, continued strain on your body from routine stress may contribute to serious health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, and other illnesses, as well as mental health problems like depression or anxiety.

4. There are ways to manage stress.

The effects of stress tend to build up over time. Taking practical steps to manage your stress can reduce or prevent these effects. The following are some tips that may help you to cope with stress:

- **Recognize the signs** of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, being easily angered, feeling depressed, and having low energy.
- **Talk to your doctor or health care provider.** Get proper health care for existing or new health problems.
- **Get regular exercise.** Just 30 minutes per day of walking can help boost your mood and reduce stress.
- **Try a relaxing activity.** Explore stress-coping programs, which may incorporate meditation, yoga, tai chi, or other gentle exercises. For some stress-related conditions, these approaches are used in addition to other forms of treatment. Schedule regular times for these and other healthy and relaxing activities. Learn more about these techniques on the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH) website at <https://nccih.nih.gov/health/stress>.
- **Set goals and priorities.** Decide what must get done and what can wait, and learn to say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload. Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- **Stay connected** with people who can provide emotional and other support. To reduce stress, ask for help from friends, family, and community or religious organizations.
- **Consider a clinical trial.** Researchers at the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), NCCIH, and other research facilities across the country are studying the causes and effects of psychological stress, and stress management techniques. You can learn more about studies that are recruiting by visiting <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/labs-at-nimh/join-a-study/index.shtml> or <https://clinicaltrials.gov> (keyword: stress).

5. If you're overwhelmed by stress, ask for help from a health professional.

You should seek help right away if you have suicidal thoughts, are overwhelmed, feel you cannot cope, or are using drugs or alcohol to cope. Your doctor may be able to provide a recommendation. You can find resources to help you find a mental health provider by visiting <https://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/find-help/index.shtml>.

Call the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline.

Anyone experiencing severe or long-term, unrelenting stress can become overwhelmed. If you or a loved one is having thoughts of suicide, call the toll-free National Suicide Prevention Lifeline (<https://suicidepreventionlifeline.org>) at 1-800-273-TALK (8255), available 24 hours a day, seven days a week. The service is available to anyone. All calls are confidential.

Source: U.S. National Institutes of Health (NIH), National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH). (n.d.). Five things you should know about stress (NIH Pub. No. OM 16-4310). Retrieved July 15, 2019, from <https://www.nimh.nih.gov>

National Family Caregivers Month

November 1-30, 2019

Long-Distance Caregiving

Getting Started

What does a long-distance caregiver do? How many other people are trying to help out from a distance?

If you live an hour or more away from a person who needs care, you can think of yourself as a long-distance caregiver. This kind of care can take many forms—from helping with finances or money management to arranging for in-home care; from providing respite care for a primary caregiver to creating a plan in case of emergencies. Many long-distance caregivers act as information coordinators, helping aging parents understand the confusing maze of new needs, including home health aides, insurance benefits and claims, and durable medical equipment.

Caregiving, no matter where the caregiver lives, is often long lasting and ever expanding. For the long-distance caregiver, what may start out as an occasional social phone call to share family news can eventually turn into regular phone calls about managing household bills, getting medical information, and arranging for grocery deliveries. What begins as a monthly trip to check on Mom may become a larger project to move her to a new home or nursing facility closer to where you live.

If you are a long-distance caregiver, you are definitely not alone. There may be as many as 7 million people in your same situation in the United States, according to the National Institute on Aging. In the past, caregivers have primarily been working women in midlife with other family responsibilities. That's changing. More and more men are getting involved; in fact, surveys show that men now represent almost 40% of caregivers. Anyone, anywhere can be a long-distance caregiver. Gender, income, age, social status, or employment should not prevent you from taking on at least some caregiving responsibilities and possibly feeling some of the satisfaction.

How will I know if help is needed? Uncle Simon sounds fine on the phone. How can I know that he really is?

Sometimes, your relative will ask for help. Or, the sudden start of a severe illness will make it clear that assistance is needed. But when you live far away, some detective work might be in order to uncover possible signs that support or help is needed.

A phone call is not always the best way to tell whether an older person needs help handling daily activities. Uncle Simon might not want to worry his nephew, Brad, who lives a few hours away, or he might not want to admit that he's often too tired to cook an entire meal. But how can Brad know this? If he calls at dinner and asks, "What's cooking?" Brad might get a sense that dinner is a bowl of cereal. If so, he might want to talk with his uncle and offer some help. With Simon's OK, Brad might contact people who see his uncle regularly—neighbors, friends, doctors, or local relatives, for example—and ask them to call Brad if they have concerns about Simon. Brad might also ask if he could check in with them periodically. When Brad spends a weekend with his uncle, he should look around for possible trouble areas; it's easier to disguise problems during a short phone call than during a longer visit.

Brad can make the most of his visit if he takes some time in advance to develop a list of possible problem areas he wants to check out while visiting his uncle. That's a good idea for anyone in this type of situation. Of course, it may not be possible to do everything in one trip, but make sure that any potentially dangerous situations are taken care of as soon as possible. If you can't correct everything on your list, see if you can arrange for someone else to finish up.

In addition to safety issues and the overall condition of the house, try to determine the older person's mood and general health status. Sometimes people confuse depression in older people with normal aging. A depressed older person might brighten up for a phone call or short visit, but it's harder to hide serious mood problems during an extended visit.

What can I really do from far away? My sister lives pretty close to our parents and has gradually been doing more and more for them. I'm halfway across the country. I'd like to help them and my sister, but I don't feel comfortable just jumping in.

Many long-distance caregivers provide emotional support and occasional respite to a primary caregiver. Staying in contact with your parents by phone or e-mail might also take some pressure off your sister. Long-distance caregivers can play a part in arranging for professional caregivers, hiring home health and nursing aides, or locating care in an assisted living facility or nursing home (also known as a skilled nursing facility). Some long-distance caregivers find they can be helpful by handling things online—for example, researching health problems or medicines, paying bills, or keeping family and friends updated. Some long-distance caregivers help a parent pay for care, while others step in to manage finances.

Caregiving is not easy for anyone, not for the caregiver and not for the care recipient. There are sacrifices and adjustments for everyone. When you don't live where the care is needed, it may be especially hard to feel that what you are doing is enough and that what you are doing is important. It often is.

How can my family decide who does what? My brother lives closest to our grandmother, but he's uncomfortable coordinating her medical care.

This is a question that many families have to work out. You could start by setting up a family meeting and, if your grandmother is capable, including her in the discussion. This is best done when there is not an emergency. A calm conversation about what kind of care is needed in the present and might be called for in the future can avoid a lot of confusion. Ask your grandmother what she wants. Use her wishes as the basis for a plan. Decide who will be responsible for which tasks. Many families find the best first step is to name a primary caregiver, even if one is not needed immediately. That way the primary caregiver can step in if there is a crisis.

Think about your schedules and how to adapt them to give respite to a primary caregiver or to coordinate holiday and vacation times. One family found that it worked to have the long-distance caregiver come to town while the primary caregiver was on a family vacation. Many families report that offering appreciation, reassurance, and positive feedback to the primary caregiver is an important but sometimes forgotten contribution.

What is a geriatric care manager, and how can I find one? A friend of mine thought that having a professional "on the scene" to help my dad would take some of the pressure off me.

Professional geriatric care managers are usually licensed nurses or social workers who specialize in geriatrics. Some families hire a geriatric care manager to evaluate and assess a parent's needs and to coordinate care through community resources. The cost of an initial evaluation varies and may be expensive, but depending on your family circumstances, geriatric care managers might offer a useful service. They are a sort of professional relative to help you and your family identify needs and how to meet them. These professionals can also help by leading family discussions about sensitive subjects. For example, Alice's father might be more willing to take advice from someone outside the family.

The National Association of Professional Geriatric Care Managers, www.caremanager.org, can help you find a care manager near your family member's community. In some cases, support groups for diseases related to aging may be able to recommend geriatric care managers who have assisted other families.

The Employee Advisory Service (EAS) is also available to assist anyone who is having a difficult time adjusting to being a caregiver.

Source: National Institutes of Health, National Institute on Aging. (Updated 2014, March 24). So far away: Twenty questions and answers about long-distance caregiving. Retrieved November 21, 2014, from <http://www.nia.nih.gov/>.