



## **Know the Facts: You can manage the stress of dealing with a chronic illness**

### **What is stress?**

Stress is your body's reaction to situations that are new, unpleasant, or frightening. When someone has a chronic health condition, it is possible to feel stress for many reasons.

Chronic illness can cause mental stress as well as physical stress. You may feel nervous and anxious, or sad and depressed. If you don't manage your stress, it can lead to unhealthy lifestyle choices like smoking, overeating, weight gain, and decreased physical activity.

### **How can I control stress?**

Everyone experiences stress at one time or another. Here are a few ways that you can decrease stress:

- Exercise regularly. Exercise can help reduce tension and improve your general health. Try walking, biking, or swimming.
- Eat healthy. Fuel your body with fresh vegetables, fruits and whole grains. Avoid high sugar foods which give you a quick energy boost. When it wears off, you might feel more tired, anxious or depressed. This can INCREASE your stress.
- Don't skip meals. Eating regular meals and snacks gives your body a steady energy level.
- Limit caffeine. Caffeine can make you feel jittery and nervous and it can increase your heart rate, blood pressure and stress.
- Quit smoking. The nicotine in tobacco is a strong stimulant. Look for other ways to deal with your stress. Ask your doctor about exercise, relaxation techniques or breathing exercises.
- Look for the positive in every situation. Make mental lists of the things you do well and things that you enjoy. Instead of focusing on what you didn't get done today—think about the things you were able to finish.
- Relax and breathe. Sit quietly and take a few slow, deep breaths each day.

Another way to control your stress is to do this breathing exercise:

1. Sit in a comfortable position;
2. Take a slow deep breath in through your nose for a count of 5;
3. Slowly let out the breath through your mouth for a count of 8; and
4. Repeat!

**Call 1-888-545-1710 to speak to a nurse 24-hours a day  
or visit [www.WYHealthyTogether.com](http://www.WYHealthyTogether.com)**

*Disclaimer: Information or education provided in this fact sheet is not intended to replace medical advice from your healthcare provider. The information provided on this fact sheet is not all-inclusive of this topic.*

**Healthy Together!** is offered by the Wyoming Department of Health to all Wyoming EqualityCare clients at no cost. The program provides one-on-one support from a nurse, educational materials to encourage the self-management of health and assistance in coordinating care among multiple providers. **Healthy Together!** also provides EqualityCare clients with information on weight loss, smoking cessation, and how to adopt healthy lifestyles. **Healthy Together!** was named the Best Government Disease Management Program by the Disease Management Association of America in 2005.



**Not everyone reacts to stress in the same way. What is important about stress is how you deal with it.**

