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# Stress Management

*Last updated: October 3, 2024*

*Together, we can change the course of the HIV epidemic...one woman at a time.*

#onewomanatatime

[www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)

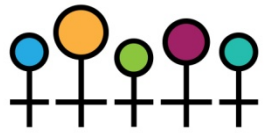
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# Stress Management

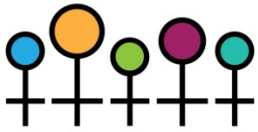
- Everyone deals with some stress
- For WLHIV, stress can become overwhelming
  - Can damage immune system
  - Can cause physical/emotional illnesses
  - Can speed up progression of HIV
- In U.S., WLHIV more likely to:
  - Have post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
  - Have survived domestic violence



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# Physical Signs of Stress

- Allergies
- Change in appetite
- Back pain
- High blood pressure
- Shortness of breath
- Chest pain
- Clammy hands
- More colds than normal
- Constipation/diarrhea
- Dizziness
- Fatigue
- Headaches
- Racing heartbeat
- Muscle tension
- Nausea
- Rashes
- Restlessness
- Sleeping problems (e.g., nightmares)
- Stomach aches



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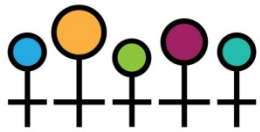
# Emotional and Behavioral Signs of Stress

## Emotional

- Uncontrollable anger
- Anxiety
- Loneliness
- Nervousness
- Feeling powerless
- Feeling rejected
- Feeling trapped
- Feeling unhappy for no reason
- Worrying frequently

## Behavioral

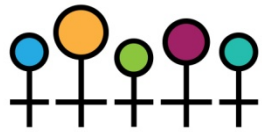
- Increasing alcohol, tobacco, drug use
- Not tending to physical appearance
- Arguing with friends or family
- Avoiding tasks and responsibilities
- Difficulty concentrating
- Crying easily
- Being late to work
- Eating too much or not enough
- Snapping at people
- Watching more TV
- Withdrawing from friends and family
- Difficulty making decisions
- Denial of problem



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# Common Causes of Stress

- Health problems
- New HIV diagnosis
- Financial difficulties
- Children
- Substance use (own or loved one's)
- Stigma/discrimination
- Social isolation
- Disclosure
- Focus on death
- Chronic impatience
- Grief
- Lack of purpose/goals
- Lack of self-assertiveness
- Lack of support
- Poor coping skills
- Poor eating habits
- Sleep disturbances
- Insufficient exercise
- Limited ability to care for yourself
- Poor relationship with healthcare provider
- Domestic/intimate partner abuse



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# Reducing Stress

- Remember that you are human and may need help
- Make a list of:
  - Areas in which you feel overwhelmed
  - Who or what can help
  - How to get available services
- Potential resources:
  - City/town list
  - City/town referral service
  - HIV/AIDS service organization case worker



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# Finding Help

## ***Free or low cost services that can help with stress:***

- Medical services
- Counseling/ psychological help
- Childcare
- Taxi rides
- Bus passes
- Acupuncture
- Yoga classes
- Massage
- Support groups
- Drug and alcohol programs
- Recovery-related groups
- Dating services for PLWH
- Free computers
- Employment services
- Nutrition counseling
- Legal aid

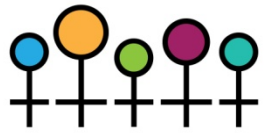


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# Finding Help

- Apply to as many programs as you need
  - No shame in accepting help
- If limits on how many services you can get:
  - Apply to most important/necessary ones first
- Don't forget family/friends!
  - Speak up when asked what you would like
  - Ask for help with childcare/rent instead of present
  - Worst case: they say no – but they may say yes!
- Self-care
  - Find balance between giving and receiving help





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# Stay Well at Home

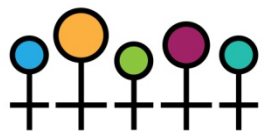
**JOIN US**  
as we launch  
our new  
wellness  
series!

Every other  
Wednesday,  
starting April 8  
at noon ET

**Well**  
**STAY AT HOME**

with  
thewellproject

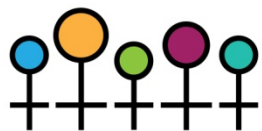
**REGISTER HERE:** [bit.ly/TWPstaywell](https://bit.ly/TWPstaywell)



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# Depression

- Long-time high stress can lead to depression
- Important to get diagnosed
  - Depression is major reason for not taking HIV drugs
- Depression can be treated
- Talk to your healthcare provider
  - Get referral to mental healthcare provider
- If physical problem, get it treated. Same is true for mental health problem.



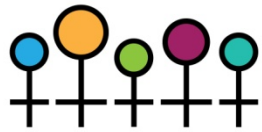
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# Important!

*If you are thinking of hurting yourself or committing suicide, **please tell someone immediately.***

*In the US, you can **call or text 988**, or call **1-800-SUICIDE (1-800-784-2433)** or **1-800-273-TALK (1-800-273-8255)**.*

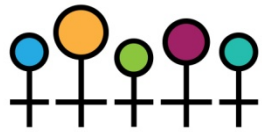
*Or go to <http://www.suicide.org/suicide-hotlines.html> to find a suicide hotline near you*



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# Self-Care

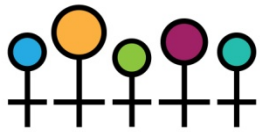
- Self-care isn't selfish!
  - Take time for exercise, getting a massage, talking with friends, ...
- Who will handle your responsibilities if you are overwhelmed?
- Don't prioritize kids or partners to the point where you get burned out
- Find balance between giving and receiving help



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# Other Tips for Reducing Stress

- Talk and laugh about it
- Join a support group, get mental health help
- Get enough physical activity, rest and sleep
- Change your own outlook, don't try to change others'
- Keep a journal
- Practice assertive communication
- Take a break and treat yourself
- Try hypnosis, massage, other relaxation techniques
- Listen to music
- Eat healthfully
- Remind yourself of your accomplishments
- Find positive aspects of change
- Look at crisis as learning opportunity



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## Learn More!

- To learn more, and for links to articles featuring more details, please read the full fact sheet:
  - [Stress Management](#)
- For more fact sheets and to connect to our community of women living with HIV, visit:
  - [www.thewellproject.org](http://www.thewellproject.org)
  - [www.facebook.com/thewellproject](http://www.facebook.com/thewellproject)
  - [www.twitter.com/thewellproject](http://www.twitter.com/thewellproject)
  - [www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv](http://www.instagram.com/thewellprojecthiv)
  - [www.youtube.com/thewellprojecthiv](http://www.youtube.com/thewellprojecthiv)