



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

Stress in America™

Mind/Body Health: For a Healthy Mind and Body, Talk to a Psychologist

THE IMPACT OF STRESS

Reported stress levels for Americans overall are continuing to drop and have reached their lowest point since 2007, when the *Stress in America*™ survey first began tracking stress levels. While stress levels appear to be balancing out, they remain high and exceed what Americans consider to be healthy. Year after year, many Americans report extreme stress (22 percent in 2011; 24 percent in 2010 and 2009; 30 percent in 2008; and 32 percent in 2007) — an 8, 9 or 10 on a 10-point scale where 1 is little or no stress and 10 is a great deal of stress. These findings are indicative of a serious trend that could have long-term consequences on people's health.

Overall, people seem to recognize that stress can have an impact on health and well-being, but they do not necessarily take action to prevent stress or manage it well. Survey findings also suggest that time management may be a significant barrier preventing people from taking the necessary steps to improve their health. The good news: there appears to be a growing understanding about the impact of stress in general and an increased value placed on effectively managing it.

Stress Continues to Be a Burden

- On a scale of 1 to 10, the mean rating for stress this year fell to 5.2, the lowest level in 5 years (5.4 for 2009 and 2010; 5.9 for 2008; and 6.2 for 2007).
- The gap between what Americans see as a healthy level of stress and their perception of their own stress level continues to exceed one point, reaching a 1.6-point differential this year (compared to 1.7 for 2008 – 2010 and 1.8 for 2007) on a scale of 1 to 10.
- More adults report that their stress is increasing than decreasing. 39 percent said their stress had increased over the past year and even more said that their stress had increased over the past five years (44 percent). Only 27 percent of adults report that their stress has decreased in the past five years and fewer than a quarter of adults report that their stress has decreased in the past year (17 percent).



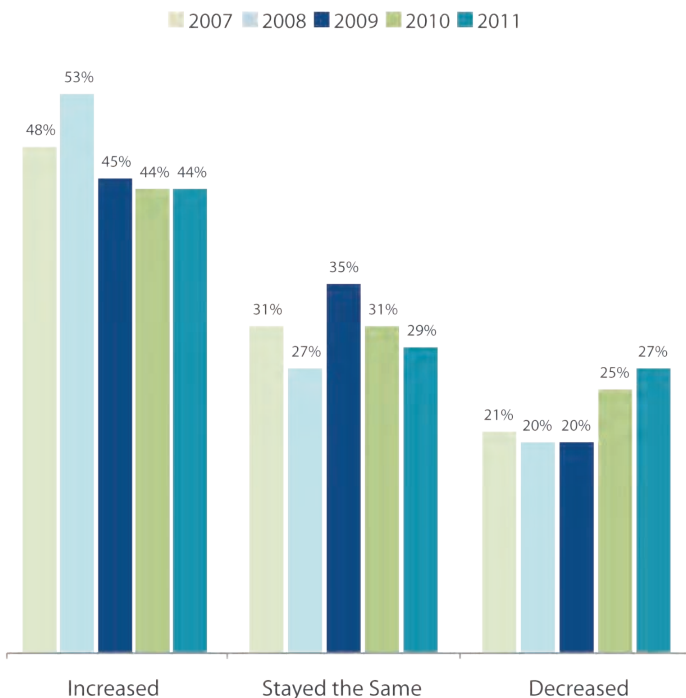
IMPACT OF STRESS

A growing number of Americans are citing personal health and their family's health as a source of stress.

- While adults continue to fall short of their ideal when it comes to how well they are achieving key goals related to specific aspects of well-being, there does appear to be some improvement related to stress management. The gap between the importance that respondents placed on stress management and their success at managing stress shrank from 32 percent in 2010 to 26 percent in 2011.

While people's perceptions of their own personal stress may be improving, the impact of stress on their physical health and their inability to prevent stress is cause for continued concern. At the same time, while there is an awareness that stress can have a health impact, there is a disconnect when it comes to the awareness of the impact stress may have on an individual's personal health.

Stress Over the Past 5 Years



BASE: All respondents 2007 (n=1848); 2008 (n=1791); 2009 (n=1568); 2010 (n=1134); 2011 (n=1226)
 Q620_54 Thinking about the past 5 years, would you say the level of stress in your life has increased over time, decreased over time, or has it stayed about the same?

- More than half of Americans reported personal health problems (53 percent) as a source of stress, roughly the same level (52 percent) as last year but up from 2009 (47 percent).
- More than half (56 percent) of adults say they are doing an excellent or very good job of knowing when they are feeling stressed, but only about half as many (26 percent) report doing an excellent or very good job at preventing themselves from becoming stressed.
- When stress occurs, only 29 percent say they are doing an excellent or very good job at managing or reducing it.
- The majority of adults (83 percent) report that they think stress can have a strong or very strong impact on a person's health.
- More than 9 in 10 (94 percent) adults believe that stress can contribute to the development of major illnesses, such as heart disease, depression and obesity, and that some types of stress can trigger heart attacks, arrhythmias and

even sudden death, particularly in people who already have cardiovascular disease (92 percent).

- Although the majority of adults understand that stress has a strong impact on a person's health, a sizeable minority still think that stress has only a slight or no impact on their own physical health (31 percent) and mental health (36 percent).

What's Causing Stress in America

Money, work and the economy continue to be the most frequently cited causes of stress for Americans, as they have every year for the past 5 years. In addition, a growing number of Americans are citing personal health and their family's health as a source of stress.

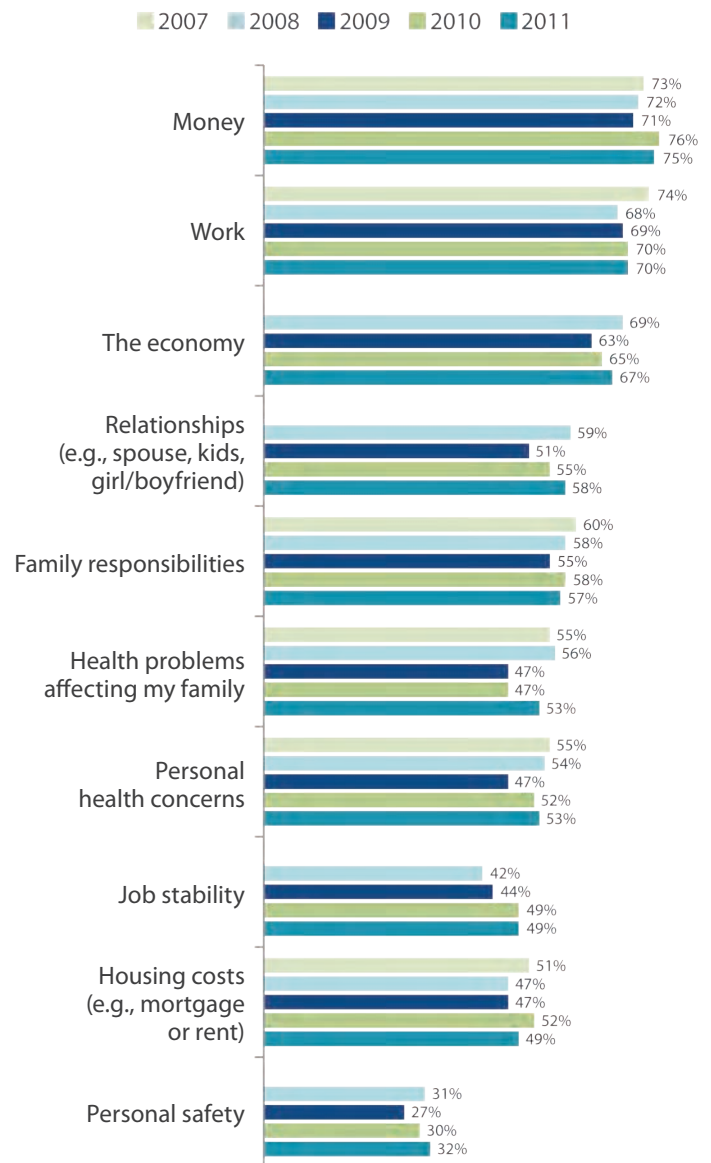
- Significant sources of stress include money (75 percent), work (70 percent), the economy (67 percent), relationships (58 percent), family responsibilities (57 percent), family health problems (53 percent), personal health concerns (53 percent), job stability (49 percent), housing costs (49 percent) and personal safety (32 percent).
- The percentage of adults reporting that family health problems are causing them stress (53 percent) increased in 2011 compared to the last 2 years (47 percent for both 2009 and 2010).

Stress Management Strategies Rooted in Sedentary Activities

Though exercise does rank among one of the top choices for managing stress, a great many Americans continue to choose more sedentary activities to wind down.

- Adults manage their stress in a variety of ways. Some of the most common techniques include listening to music

Causes of Stress
(% Somewhat/Very Significant)



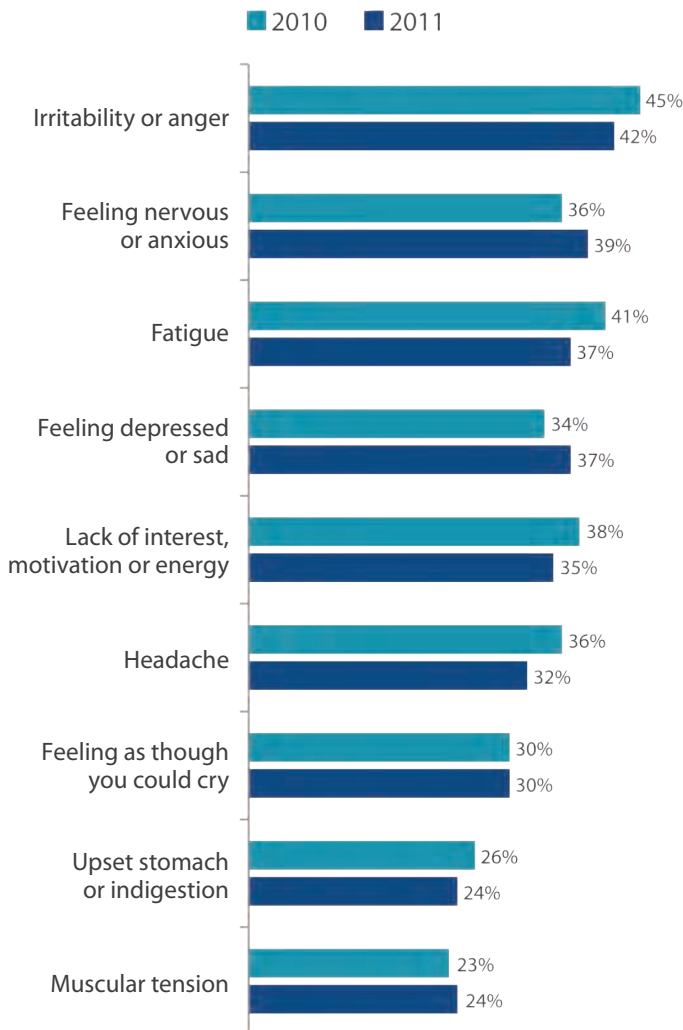
BASE: All respondents 2007 (n=1848); 2008 (n=1791); 2009 (n=1568); 2010 (n=1134); 2011 (n=1226)
Q625 Below is a list of things people say cause stress in their lives. For each one, please indicate how significant a source of stress it is in your life.



IMPACT OF STRESS

Spending time with friends or family has declined as a stress management strategy since last year.

Physical Symptoms of Stress



BASE: All respondents 2007 (n=1848); 2008 (n=1791); 2009 (n=1568); 2010 (n=1134); 2011 (n=1226)

Q810 Which of the following, if any, have you experienced in the last month as a result of stress?

(48 percent), exercising or walking (47 percent), reading (42 percent), spending time with friends or family (39 percent) and napping (34 percent).

- Spending time with friends or family, while ranked as important by many (76 percent reported that having good relationships with family and 60 percent reported that having good relationships with friends was extremely/very important), has declined as a stress management strategy since last year: Only 38 percent reported spending time with friends or family as a stress management technique, compared with 46 percent in 2010.
- Strategies for dealing with stress that are believed to be effective among those who use them are focusing on the positive (62 percent), managing time better (56 percent), being flexible and willing to compromise (53 percent), avoiding people or situations that are stressful (53 percent), expressing feelings instead of bottling them up (51 percent), saying “no” (50 percent) and adjusting expectations (41 percent).

The Emotional and Physical Toll of Stress

While awareness about the impact stress can have on emotional and physical health seems to be present, many Americans continue to report symptoms of stress.

- Americans report irritability or anger (42 percent); fatigue (37 percent); lack of interest, motivation or energy (35 percent); headaches (32 percent); and upset stomachs (24 percent) due to stress. A smaller percentage report having a change in appetite (17 percent) and sex drive (11 percent).

Similar proportions of adults engage in unhealthy behaviors due to stress as did last year.

- 29 percent skipped a meal due to stress (31 percent in 2010).
- 39 percent reported overeating or eating unhealthy foods (40 percent in 2010).
- 44 percent reported lying awake at night, the same number as in 2010.

There's some indication that Americans are beginning to exercise more. The number reporting that they exercise "a few times a week" rose from 36 percent in 2010 to 41 percent in 2011; however, many continue to report barriers to being more physically active, particularly a lack of time.

- Lack of motivation seems to be a key part of why people are not exercising more frequently (41 percent), but both work and personal obligations might also be at play, with one-third (33 percent) of respondents exercising once a week or less saying they are too busy to exercise more often.
- Half (51 percent) of adults with families report that it takes a great amount or some effort to get their families to exercise.

Finding Time for a Healthy Lifestyle

Clearly, there's still room for improvement when it comes to making changes to improve one's health. Americans continue to rank key behaviors such as exercise and eating a healthy diet as less important than other activities.

- Eating well and exercising (54 percent each) are ranked at the bottom in terms of importance when compared with other aspects of well-being, including good family relationships (76 percent), managing stress (61 percent), getting enough sleep (60 percent), good friendships (60 percent) and doing well in career or studies

Americans continue to rank key behaviors such as exercise and eating a healthy diet as less important than other activities.



Eating a healthier diet, exercising more and losing weight are the most common behavior changes adults said they have attempted in the past 5 years.

(59 percent). These actions are also rated lowest for achievement; only 27 percent of Americans believe they are doing a very good/excellent job at performing them. However, eating a healthier diet (77 percent), exercising more (75 percent) and losing weight (66 percent) are the most common behavior changes adults reported they have attempted in the past 5 years.

- Second only to willpower (27 percent), lack of time was mentioned by 26 percent of adults as a barrier preventing them from creating lifestyle and behavior changes. In fact, lack of time has been mentioned as a barrier by more adults year after year (20 percent in 2009 and 22 percent in 2010).