

# A SIMPLE GUIDE

*To Healthy Living*

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## READING STRESS SIGNALS

Know the 'Fight  
or Flight' response

**ARE YOU FRAIL?**  
Try the self-assessment  
to find out more!

**I'M ALLERGIC  
TO PRAWNS!**  
What your GP can do to  
help with food allergies



# ARE YOU STRESSED?



AUTHOR **DR DAVID TEO**, Psychiatrist, Health Wellness Programme, Changi General Hospital

## STRESS IS A FAMILIAR TERM THAT WE OFTEN HEAR. BUT WHAT EXACTLY IS STRESS?



**S**tress can be a positive force which motivates you to perform well in a job interview. However, stress often becomes a negative force when you feel that the demands or pressures which life presents are more than you can cope with.

Stress can affect your emotions, causing you to feel sad, irritable or anxious. Likewise, stress can have a profound impact on your physical health.

Our minds and bodies are intricately linked. Have you ever felt your heart pounding on a first date or noticed your body trembling as you went on stage to give a talk? You may also have heard the expression 'butterflies in the stomach' being

used to describe the feeling when one is nervous. These familiar examples tell you that you can feel stress in both your mind and body.

Our bodies are programmed with an automatic response to protect us from danger. In ancient times, this adaptive 'fight or flight' response helped to protect our ancestors from predators and other threats. Whenever danger is encountered, your body releases hormones which cause your heart to beat faster and your blood pressure to rise. This normal physiological response boosts your blood circulation and energy levels to deal with the threat.

These days, you are unlikely to face the threat of being eaten by predators. However, you are likely to encounter many different challenges in your day-to-day life. Examinations, deadlines at work, interpersonal conflicts, losing a loved one and



physical stresses due to trauma or medical problems – these are just some examples of situations which can trigger a stress response in your body.

When you feel overwhelmed, your body's 'fight or flight' response may get stuck in the activated mode. Chronic stress that is left unchecked can contribute to many health problems such as high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, infertility and obesity. Stress can also affect our breathing. This can be problematic in people who have lung conditions such as asthma. Studies have found that acute stress, such as the loss of a loved one, can trigger asthma attacks.

Fortunately, our body has a unique way of sending us warning signals that our stress levels are in the unhealthy zone.

Have you ever experienced frequent headaches when you had a pile of work to finish within a tight deadline? Or noticed you had to keep going to the toilet during an important examination? These are common physical symptoms which should serve as an amber light, telling us to slow down and monitor our stress levels. Other common physical symptoms of stress include muscle tension or pain, chest tightness, fatigue, stomach upset, sleep problems and changes in appetite and sex drive.

Being aware of how stress commonly manifests as physical symptoms can help you make sense of some nagging physical symptoms your doctor has found no medical explanation for. Perhaps you may wish to pause and ponder if your stress levels are too high. Consider also if you are feeling depressed or anxious because of overly high stress levels. Physical symptoms could be your body's warning indicator beeping, signalling you to stop and identify the cause of stress and take steps to alleviate.

Take a check on your stress levels. Reducing them will not only make you feel better now, it can also protect your physical and mental health in the long-run.

# SWEAT THE RIGHT STUFF

AUTHOR DR LINSEY UTAMI GANI, ECHO Programme Director

Dear Readers,

We are speeding along right into the middle of 2018! For some of us, this may be the time when our various commitments and roles surge in intensity and demand. As a result, it's easy to feel stressed and overwhelmed. We may not realise it, but our mental well-being play a significant role in our physical health. We need to pay attention to important areas – the right stuff, and not let the 'small stuff' take over.



Chronic stress may trigger and worsen control of health problems, such as high blood pressure, diabetes and obesity. In this issue, we have Dr. David Teo, one of our psychiatrists to explain what stress is and how it may also affect our physical health and well-being. Perhaps, this is a good time for us to assess our stress levels and take some steps to address them. Dr. Teo will also be sharing useful methods we can use to cope with stress. It is important to be aware of our stress triggers and learn how to manage these effectively.

We also have a reminder from our GP about conditions that can be easily treated in the GP practice, such as food allergies. There is also an article from our physiotherapist sharing about frailty and how to screen for it. I encourage you to participate in the various programmes available in the community to start getting more active. Engaging in physical activity may prevent or remedy the progression of frailty.

Finally, ECHO 2018 screening dates for Tampines, Kembangan-Chai Chee, Joo Chiat and Pasir Ris are now available! Let's continue helping each other to get healthy, both physically and mentally!



# GPFIRST

## YOUR GPs CAN TREAT THIS CONDITION



AUTHOR DR ANG KAI KOK, General Practitioner

In January 2014, the GPFIRST Programme was launched to encourage patients in eastern Singapore to see their general practitioners (GPs) for mild-to-moderate conditions rather than head to the emergency department first. In this regular series, our Eastern GPs offer advice on common ailments the community might face.

Visit [www.gpfirst.sg](http://www.gpfirst.sg) or see your GP for more information on common conditions such as cuts, bruises, mild scalds, nausea, headaches, sprains and fevers. This issue touches on a common condition experienced by most Singaporeans - food allergies.

### Food Allergies

There are many types of food allergies and they vary in their characteristics and severity. Food allergy is caused by the body's immune system overreacting to the protein in the food consumed.

Shellfish allergy tops the list of common allergies in Singapore. This is when one's body has allergic reactions to crustaceans (such as prawns, crabs and lobster) and/or mollusks (such as clams, mussels, oysters and scallops). If you have a shellfish allergy, it is advisable to avoid all of the aforementioned seafood unless advised by a doctor, as most people have allergies to both groups. A person's immune system actually 'remembers' the food you eat and reacts more vigorously with repeated exposure.

A GP can treat most mild food allergy by prescribing antihistamines or bronchodilator (medication that relaxes lung muscles), while injectable epinephrine could treat more severe cases. Self-injectable epinephrine pens may be prescribed by a GP, while oral steroids may be used as supplementary therapy to maximise the effectiveness of the treatment.



#### YOU HAVE SEVERE FOOD ALLERGY IF YOU EXPERIENCE TWO OR MORE OF THESE SYMPTOMS:

- Respiratory symptoms, such as difficulty breathing, stridor or wheezing
- Fainting spells, giddiness or incontinence (signs of low-blood pressure).  
**Note: It is considered a severe allergy if you experience low-blood pressure even without other symptoms, after consuming food you are allergic to.**
- Rashes, swelling of the lip, tongue or throat
- Persistent abdominal pain or vomiting



If you have been diagnosed with food allergy, it is important to carefully read the labels of the food you purchase or eat. It is also advisable to understand the ingredients in the dishes you would like to order and ask how the food is prepared when eating out. If you have severe food allergy, it is recommended that you also carry an epinephrine pen with you (be sure to check its expiry date upon use). In the event of severe allergic reaction(s), it is advisable to call 995 immediately.



# Coping with Stress

**AUTHOR STEPHANIE CAI**, Psychologist, Health Wellness Programme, Changi General Hospital



**WHILE SOME FACTORS THAT CONTRIBUTE TO STRESS ARE OFTEN NOT WITHIN OUR CONTROL, THERE ARE SIMPLE STEPS WE CAN TAKE TO HELP US COPE BETTER WITH STRESS.**

**S**tress management involves taking charge of your lifestyle habits, the way you manage or perceive challenging situations and utilising support when needed. Here are some effective stress management tips:

**1 Identify your stressors:** Knowing your triggers allows you to anticipate problems and find solutions to resolve them. Take some time to reflect on situations that may be contributing to your stress. These could be one-off events that are on your mind (e.g., examinations, public speaking), or ongoing stressful events (e.g. relationship issues, financial problems, raising your children). Are there things within your control that can be managed better?

**2 Reframe problems:** Despite successfully identifying your stressors, some stressful events might indeed be beyond your control. Try to view these situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause by listening to your favourite radio station or enjoying some alone time. Problems can also be reframed as challenges and opportunities for personal growth.

**3 Time management:** This is essential when you have to juggle many responsibilities. Remember the phrase '*work smarter, not harder*'. Assign time limits to tasks, write to-do lists, group tasks together or prioritise important tasks. Be realistic about what you are trying to achieve with the resources you have. Sometimes, it may be necessary to say 'no' or cut down your to-do list.

**4 Make time for yourself:** Downtime is important! You need to be on top of your priority list. You may want to consider taking the day off to pamper yourself or do things you enjoy (e.g., craft, reading). Spending time with family and friends may also recharge you. This may ensure that you do not get lost in the hustle and bustle of life.

**5 Be kind to yourself:** Being overwhelmed by stress can lead to feelings of inadequacy and a sense of failure. Hence, it is important to pay attention to how you feel and turn down the volume of your inner critic. To reduce self-criticism, ask yourself, 'What would I say to a good friend?' and say that to yourself.

**6 Adjust your standards.** Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Try to adjust

your expectations of yourself and others. Accept that we live in an imperfect world, where people are flawed and make mistakes.

**7 Practice deep breathing exercises:** These are a good way to help your body relax and relieve stress. Try this: sit or lie down comfortably and place both hands over your belly button. Now, imagine your stomach is a balloon. Inhale deeply and slowly to inflate that balloon. As you exhale gradually, allow your stomach to sink back in. Try this for 10 minutes.

**8 Look after your physical health:** Taking steps to look after your physical health can help you manage stress. For example, getting adequate sleep, physical exercise and eating regular healthy meals can make a difference to how you feel.

**9 Use your support network:** Remember, whatever you are going through, you do not have to cope with it alone. Sometimes just sharing your problems with loved ones can reduce your sense of isolation and hopelessness.

**Seek professional help:** If you notice that your stress continues and impacts your day-to-day life, talk to your doctor. Persistent struggles with negative thinking and communication difficulties (e.g. self-assertion) may increase stress. It may help to discuss with your doctor if seeing a counsellor to address these issues would be appropriate.

# WHAT IS FRAILTY?



AUTHOR LIM JIAMIN, Senior Physiotherapist, Changi General Hospital

**F**railty is a state of increased vulnerability to falls, hospitalisation, disability and death. It is characterised by an individual losing strength, endurance and physiological functions. This is common as a person ages. However, research has shown that frailty may be preventable or its progression can be slowed down through maintaining an active lifestyle.

## Are you frail?

You can perform a quick self-assessment below to find out whether you are frail (Morley, 2012).

- F**atigue – How much time during the previous 4 weeks did you feel tired? (Most of the time or all of the time = 1 point)
- R**esistance – Do you have any difficulty climbing up a flight of stairs without resting and by yourself?
- A**mbulation – Do you have difficulty walking several hundred yards without rest and by yourself?
- I**llnesses – Do you have 5 or more chronic diseases?
- L**oss of weight – Have you had unintentionally loss of 5% or more weight in the past 1 year?

You'll score yourself one point for each component if it is a yes - You are considered "Robust" if you score 0 points, "Pre-frail" if you score 1-2 points and "Frail" if you score 3-5 points. You are, of course, recommended to remain "Robust" or "Pre-frail".

This is merely a brief assessment and should not be regarded as the sole determinant of one's state of health. An individual should still undergo thorough health checks for a more comprehensive and accurate assessment of one's health.

Currently, there are no exercise programmes that are designed to specifically manage frailty. However, maintaining an active lifestyle may prevent or remedy the progression of frailty. In conjunction with the exercise campaign 'You Can Get Moving', various programmes have been launched in Singapore to promote exercise among the public.

**Here are some activities you can participate in:**

### 1. Sundays@The Park

Check out the following website for the schedule and to find a venue near you to join the activities:  
<https://www.healthhub.sg/programmes/33/sundays-at-the-park>

### 2. The 7-sit down exercises

The exercise video can be viewed or downloaded from [www.HealthyAgeing.sg/GetMoving](http://www.HealthyAgeing.sg/GetMoving), and the exercises can be done in the comfort of one's home. Individuals will only require a sturdy chair and a towel to perform the exercises.

**It is important to note that** individuals who are unsure or who are with medical conditions (such as heart disease, high blood pressure, joint or muscle conditions) should consult their doctor before starting on any exercise programme.

Start early to keep frailty away - An active lifestyle is the key to making our old age more liveable!

#### Reference:

Morley, J.E., Malmstrom, T.K. and Miller, D.K. 2012. A simple frailty questionnaire (FRAIL) predicts outcomes in middle-aged African Americans. *The Journal of Nutrition Health and Aging*, 16(7): 601-608.





# Home Recipes

AUTHOR **BRYAN TAN**, Sous Chef, Dietetic & Food Services,  
Changi General Hospital



## Curried Tomatoes and Chickpeas

YIELDS 4

### INGREDIENTS

- 2 Tablespoons canola oil
- 2 shallots, sliced
- 1 Tablespoon ginger, grated
- 6 curry leaves
- 400g cherry tomatoes, washed, stems removed
- 1 chili padi, sliced
- 1 can (439g) chickpeas, rinsed
- 1 Tablespoon fresh lime juice
- 2 scallions, cut into 2cm length
- 1 small sprig, fresh coriander leaf
- Salt and ground black pepper, to taste

### METHOD

1. Heat oil in a large skillet (or cooking pan). Cook shallots, ginger and curry leaves until fragrant, 1 to 2 minutes.
2. Add tomatoes and chili padi, and cook for about 3 to 4 minutes, before tomatoes break.
3. Add chickpeas and lime juice, sprinkle with scallions and coriander leaf, and season with salt and pepper.
4. Serve with toasted pita bread.

### RECIPE ANALYSIS (PER SERVE):

	Per Portion
Calories (kcal)	217
Carbohydrates (g)	21.6
Protein (g)	9.1
Fat (g)	11.2
Cholesterol (mg)	0
Fibre (g)	7.6
Sodium (mg)	256

**SHARE YOUR RECIPES!**



**Send in the recipes of your home-cooked food to the ECHO team! Our Dietitian from Changi General Hospital will review and provide suggestions to make it better and healthier and share the recipes in A Simple Guide!**

#### Guidelines for recipe submission

1. The recipes should include ingredients and methods
2. All ingredients should have a unit of measurement (e.g. 1 teaspoon oil, 150g skinless chicken fillet)
3. Each recipe should indicate how many people the dish serves
4. The cooking equipment used to cook the dish should be mentioned (e.g. pot, non-stick pan, wok)

# 2018 ECHO HEALTH SCREENING

**T**he ECHO health screenings in Tampines, Kembangan-Chai Chee, Joo Chiat and Pasir Ris are happening! **SPREAD THE NEWS!** If you have family members, friends or relatives residing in the following constituencies, please encourage them to register for the ECHO health screening!



**Note:** You will no longer be receiving invitation letters by post. If you need to change your mailing address, please email to [ECHO@cgh.com.sg](mailto:ECHO@cgh.com.sg) or contact our ECHO coordinators during office hours.

## HOW TO REGISTER?

- 1) Log on to [www.echohealth.com.sg](http://www.echohealth.com.sg) for online registration when registration starts, payment by VISA / MASTERCARD only.
- 2) Register in-person @ respective CCs listed (right) when registration starts. Bring along your NRIC, together with your cash payment to register.

Screening Site	Health Screening		Registration Start Date
	Day 1	Day 2	
Tampines North CC	14 Apr (Sat)	15 Apr (Sun)	6 Feb 2018
Tampines Changkat CC	28 Apr (Sat)	29 Apr (Sun)	
Tampines West CC	12 May (Sat)	13 May (Sun)	
Kamong Kembangan CC	5 May (Sat)	-	13 Mar 2018
Siglap South CC (#02-04)	9 Jun (Sat)	-	17 Apr 2018
Pasir Ris East CC	23 Jun (Sat)	-	10 Apr 2018
Pasir Ris Elias CC	7 Jul (Sat)	-	

## CONTACT ECHO!

Please keep your subject: **ATTN to ECHO Programme**

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