

# Celebrate *healthy living*

2020 Week Five



**K-STATE**  
Research and Extension

Walk Kansas

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



## Downshift to Manage Stress

Stress can wreck your emotional well-being. While some stress can be positive motivation, chronic stress can bring pain and strain to your life and can make you sick.

During any stressful event, your body's natural response is to defend itself (fight) or get away from danger (flight). This classic response to stress or danger has evolved over time to keep you safe. Unfortunately, we tend to perceive low levels of threat in everyday situations over long periods of time. Situations such as financial strain, conflicts in relationships, stressful work environments, caregiving, and even the coronavirus pandemic could lead to chronic stress for some people.

Unmanaged stress can manifest as a headache, back pain, fatigue, and upset stomach. It can interrupt sleep patterns, decrease concentration and decision-making abilities, and reduce the ability of your immune system to fight off illness.

People in the Blue Zones also experience stress, but they have routines to shed stress. In Okinawa, they take a few moments each day to remember their ancestors. Ikarians take a nap, Sardinians enjoy happy hour, and Adventists pray.

The key to managing stress is finding something that works for you. The Power 9® trait to focus on this week is how to downshift and manage stress. Here are some things that might work for you.

**Relaxation activities.** Some people find that daily meditation, deep breathing, massage, or yoga are helpful. A simple relaxing yoga pose called "Savasana" can be done anytime, and instructions can be found here: [walkkansas.org/benefits/stress](http://walkkansas.org/benefits/stress)

**Physical activity.** This includes activities of moderate to vigorous intensity, like brisk walking, running, biking, and playing some sports.

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**Keep a stress journal.** Take 10 minutes a day to describe any event that caused you to feel stressed and describe your emotional or physical response. Over time, you may be able to see patterns and identify stress triggers.

**Social activity.** Spending time with friends and family in an enjoyable setting will help relieve stress.

**Eat well and sleep well.** A nutritious and well-balanced diet combined with adequate restful sleep are key in keeping your immune system strong.

**Avoid certain substances.** Be aware that caffeine, tobacco, alcohol, and drugs can amplify the effects of stress.

**Seek professional help if needed.** Chronic stress can be debilitating, and if you are struggling to manage stress on your own, don't be afraid to seek professional help. Also, seek medical assistance immediately if you experience physical symptoms like chest pain, dizziness, or shortness of breath.

You will never be able to eliminate all stress from your life, but you can manage how you respond to it and prevent chronic stress from doing long-term harm.



## Posture Exercise and Pec Stretch

It is common for your upper back to sag and hurt after a few hours at the computer or after driving long distances. As you scrunch in front of a screen, or at the wheel, your chest muscles get tight and upper back muscles become overstretched and weak. To improve upper body posture and reverse the effects of "scrunching" try this posture exercise and pec stretch.

1. Sit on a firm chair or stool. Wrap your arms around your shoulders as though you are giving yourself a hug. Can you touch your shoulder blades with your fingers? Now, release your arms.

## Walk Kansas Week 5

- » Keep a stress journal and learn what triggers stress for you.
- » Try the Savasana yoga pose. It is simple and anyone can do it.
- » Check out these videos and resources on the Walk Kansas website. You will find two videos that will introduce you to yoga. [walkkansas.org/activity/strength.html](http://walkkansas.org/activity/strength.html)
- » Think about times when you feel stressed. How do your eating habits change?
- » Talk with your teammates about stress responses. How can you encourage each other to practice a more healthful and effective response to stressful situations?
- » Change your walking route this week. Explore a new area of your community or a different walking trail.
- » Take some time to enjoy a hobby – work in your garden, make something, read for enjoyment.
- » Swap a healthful fat in your diet this week. Try mayonnaise made from olive oil.

2. Lift your elbows and place your fingers behind your head. Keep your head in a neutral position while looking straight ahead (don't look down.) Squeeze your shoulder blades together, count to 5 slowly and then slowly release.
3. Repeat the shoulder blade squeeze. This time, think about holding an imaginary quarter between your two shoulder blades. Hold for the count of 5 and slowly release, then repeat the exercise one more time.

Now, try this pec stretch. Find a corner in a room, stand and face the corner. This stretch is almost like a push-up at the wall. You will stay in a position that will stretch and lengthen your chest muscles.

1. Place the palms of your hand on either side of the wall, approximately shoulder level.
2. Lean toward the wall, going to a point where it feels challenging, but causes no pain. Move your whole body as a unit, do not bend at the waist.
3. Hold this position for 5-30 seconds, then release. You should feel the stretch across your chest. Repeat the stretch.

## Swap Your Fats

Your body needs fat. It is important to include fats in your diet because they provide energy and support cell growth. Healthful fats also help protect your organs, help keep your body warm, produce important hormones, and help your body absorb some nutrients.

While some types of fats are healthful, others are harmful. All fats have the same number of calories, but they have different chemical structures and physical properties. Harmful fats, which include saturated and trans fats, will be more solid at room temperature. Healthful (unsaturated) fats, like canola and olive oil, are liquid. Fats also have different effects on the blood cholesterol level in your body. Solid (saturated and trans) fats raise bad cholesterol (LDL) levels in your blood. Unsaturated fats can lower bad cholesterol levels and should be included as part of a healthy eating style.

Here is a helpful visual that illustrates how to swap your fats: [medinsteadofmeds.com/tips-and-tools/swap-your-fats/](https://medinsteadofmeds.com/tips-and-tools/swap-your-fats/)



## Greek Salad

*Makes 4 servings*

### Ingredients:

4 medium sized tomatoes  
1 English cucumber  
1 large green pepper  
1 small red onion  
1 cup kalamata olives  
3 to 4 tablespoons olive oil  
2 tablespoons red wine vinegar  
1 teaspoon dried oregano  
5 ounces feta cheese  
Salt to taste

### Directions:

1. Wash hands with soap and water.
2. Peel onion. Remove stems and cores from peppers and tomatoes, trim ends of cucumber. Wash tomatoes, cucumber, green pepper, and onion by gently rubbing under cold running water. Cut vegetables and olives into bite-sized pieces and place in a large mixing bowl.
3. Drizzle vegetables with 3 tablespoons olive oil and red wine vinegar, sprinkle with oregano and a pinch of salt.
4. Toss briefly, then top with feta cheese. Finish the salad by drizzling remaining olive oil and another pinch of oregano on top.

### Nutrition Information per 2-cup serving:

260 calories; 21 g fat (0 trans fat, 7 g saturated fat);  
13 g carbohydrates; 7 g protein; 4 g fiber; 550 mg sodium;  
0 g added sugars.

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#### Kansas State University Walk Kansas

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