

APA Press Release

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## **STRESS A MAJOR HEALTH PROBLEM IN THE U.S., WARNS APA**

### **New Poll Shows Stress on the Rise, Affecting Health, Relationships and Work Americans Say Housing Costs an Added Stressor in 2007**

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New York—One-third of Americans are living with extreme stress and nearly half of Americans (48 percent) believe that their stress has increased over the past five years. Stress is taking a toll on people — contributing to health problems, poor relationships and lost productivity at work, according to a new national survey released today by the American Psychological Association (APA).

Money and work continue as the leading causes of stress for three quarters of Americans, a dramatic increase over the 59 percent reporting the same sources of stress in 2006. The survey also found that the housing crisis is having an effect on many, with half of Americans (51 percent) citing rent or mortgage costs as sources of stress this year.

Nearly half of all Americans report that stress has a negative impact on both their personal and professional lives. About one-third (31 percent) of employed adults have difficulty managing work and family responsibilities and 35 percent cite jobs interfering with their family or personal time as a significant source of stress. Stress causes more than half of Americans (54 percent) to fight with people close to them. One in four people report that they have been alienated from a friend or family member because of stress, with 8 percent connecting stress to divorce or separation.

“Stress in America continues to escalate and is affecting every aspect of people's lives — from work to personal relationships to sleep patterns and eating habits, as well as their health,” says psychologist Russ Newman, PhD, JD, APA executive director for professional practice. “We know that stress is a fact of life and some stress can have a positive impact, however, the high stress levels that many Americans report experiencing can have long-term health

consequences, ranging from fatigue to obesity and heart disease.”

### **Stress Affecting Health**

Twenty-eight percent of Americans say they are managing their stress extremely well. However, many people report experiencing physical symptoms (77 percent) and psychological symptoms (73 percent) related to stress in the last month. Physical symptoms of stress include: fatigue (51 percent); headache (44 percent); upset stomach (34 percent); muscle tension (30 percent); change in appetite (23 percent), teeth grinding (17 percent); change in sex drive (15 percent); and feeling dizzy (13 percent). Psychological symptoms of stress include: experiencing irritability or anger (50 percent); feeling nervous (45 percent); lack of energy (45 percent); and feeling as though you could cry (35 percent). In addition, almost half (48 percent) of Americans report lying awake at night due to stress.

### **How Americans Manage Stress**

While Americans deal with high levels of stress on a daily basis, the health consequences are most serious when that stress is managed poorly. Four in ten Americans (43 percent) say they overeat or eat unhealthy foods to manage stress, while one-third (36 percent) skipped a meal in the last month because of stress. Those who drink (39 percent) or smoke cigarettes (19 percent) were also more likely to engage in these unhealthy behaviors during periods of high stress. Significant numbers of Americans report watching TV for more than two hours a day (43 percent) and playing video games or surfing the Internet (39 percent). Healthy behaviors used to manage stress included: listening to music (54 percent); reading (52 percent); exercising or walking (50 percent); spending time with family and friends (40 percent); and praying (34 percent).

### **Motivating Factors in Lifestyle and Behavior Change**

While many Americans recognize that stress has a negative impact on their health, they may lack the motivation to make lifestyle and behavior changes. Only 35 percent report that they would modify their behavior following the diagnosis of a chronic condition. Primary motivators include: a desire to feel better (60 percent); desire to reduce amount of stress (45 percent); and desire to improve self-image or self-esteem (41 percent). Encouragement from a spouse or partner would motivate 38 percent to make behavioral changes.

The Stress in America survey is part of APA's Mind/Body Health Public Education Campaign. For information on the survey or managing stress, visit [www.apahelpcenter.org](http://www.apahelpcenter.org).

### **Methodology**

In September 2007, the American Psychological Association commissioned its annual nationwide survey to examine the state of stress across the country. The research measured attitudes and perceptions of stress among the general public, identifying leading sources of stress, common behaviors used to manage stress and the impact of stress on our lives. The survey explored appropriate and excessive stress levels; circumstances, situations and life

events that cause stress; activities, resources and behaviors people use to deal with stress; and the personal costs of stress.

This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive between August 30 and September 11, 2007, among 1,848 adults (aged 18 and over). Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. Hispanic respondents were also weighted based on language usage. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

With a pure probability sample of 1,848 one could say with a 95 percent probability that the overall results would have a sampling error of +/- 2 percentage points. Sampling error for data based on sub-samples would be higher and would vary. However, that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

*The American Psychological Association (APA), in Washington, DC, is the largest scientific and professional organization representing psychology in the United States and is the world's largest association of psychologists. APA's membership includes more than 148,000 researchers, educators, clinicians, consultants and students. Through its divisions in 54 subfields of psychology and affiliations with 60 state, territorial and Canadian provincial associations, APA works to advance psychology as a science, as a profession and as a means of promoting human welfare.*

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