# Finding Peace

## In The Chaos

Do you feel overwhelmed, stressed, and unsure about the future? You are not alone. Studies show that Americans are feeling unprecedented levels of stress. While everyone experiences stress from time to time, serious health consequences can result when stress levels stay high for an extended period.

If you are experiencing stress and chaos in your life, it's essential to identify the causes and take steps to lower your stress level, take care of yourself, and build strength and resilience from now on.

Read on to learn more about the physical impact of stress and simple practices you can adopt to help you cope better.

## The Emotional and Physical Toll of Stress

In a 2019 Gallup survey of moods worldwide, 55% of Americans said they had felt stressed the previous day – much higher than the global average of 33%. People under 50 and those with a low income had the highest levels of stress.

In addition to stress, many people are also experiencing other negative moods. For example, loneliness is a significant issue with roughly the same health impact as smoking 15 cigarettes a day. Loneliness increases the risk of heart disease by 29% and the risk of stroke by 32%. Sadly, in the US, 40% of adults sometimes or always feel that their social relationships are not meaningful, and almost half say they feel lonely or socially isolated at least some of the time.

Both stress and loneliness can contribute to more severe mood disorders, including depression and anxiety. Rates of anxiety are growing, and it's worse for children than adults. Estimates suggest that as many as 32% of adolescents experience anxiety. Among American adults, around 40 million (or 18% of the population) have an anxiety disorder. Depression is also ubiquitous, with around 17 million, or 7% of Americans, experiencing a major depressive episode each year.

In addition to the increased risk of mood disorders, stress also affects our physical health. Short-term stress can cause headaches, muscle pain, digestive problems, trouble sleeping, and a lowered immune system. It will also worsen asthma, arthritis, and skin problems such as acne, eczema, and psoriasis, which increases the risk of heart disease, stroke, diabetes, and dementia in the long term.

If thinking about the harmful effects of stress is increasing your stress levels, that's normal. Fortunately, stress, while serious, can be managed. Stress reduction starts with simple self-care such as getting enough sleep, exercise, healthy food and connecting meaningfully with others. Once you have the basics down, soothing practices such as meditation, connecting with nature, and practicing gratitude will help you build the internal resources to keep your calm, no matter what life throws at you.