



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

# Stress in America

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

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

October 7, 2008

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## **THE UNRAVELING ECONOMY PUTS CHICAGOANS UNDER PRESSURE MONEY AND HOUSING AMONG TOP STRESSORS FOR AREA RESIDENTS, APA SURVEY FINDS**

**Chicago, October 7, 2008** — By simply turning on the news or opening a newspaper, it is easy to see that money, work and the economy are worrying many Americans. With layoffs and foreclosures, the Midwest has been hit particularly hard by this recent financial storm. And those living in the Windy City are feeling the pressure. According to a survey released today by the American Psychological Association (APA), most adults living in Chicago are feeling stress because of the state of the economy and money, and more are stressed about housing costs than Americans nationwide.

Mirroring the national survey response, nearly 70 percent of Chicagoans report feeling significant stress because of the economy. However, roughly three-quarters of local residents reported that they are managing their stress well. Chicago residents are less likely than the rest of the Nation to view their own health problems and health problems affecting their family as significant sources of stress. Notably, more Chicagoans tended to turn to alcohol to manage stress than the rest of the nation (36 percent vs. 18 percent nationally)

The APA survey also found that Chicagoans are just as likely to exercise or walk to handle their stress as the rest of the country, with nearly 50 percent citing such an activity as a stress reliever. Chicago, a city known for its super fans, also outperforms the rest of America with the percentage of residents who play sports to relieve stress.

How Chicago compares to the rest of America on significant sources of stress:

- 76 percent cite money (72 percent nationally)
- 69 percent cite the economy (69 percent nationally)
- 55 percent cite housing costs (47 percent nationally)
- 52 percent cite relationships (59 percent nationally)
- 43 percent cite their own health problems (54 percent nationally)
- 76 percent say they are managing their stress well (81 percent nationally)
- 11 percent play sports to manage stress (9 percent nationally)

“Exercise, walking and other forms of physical activity are healthy and proactive ways for Chicagoans — and everyone, everywhere — to handle your stress,” says psychologist Dr. Nancy Molitor, the public education coordinator for the Illinois Psychological Association. “People often turn to overeating, drinking or other destructive behaviors in times of stress; however, such activities are harmful to their physical and emotional well-being. Remember, the healthy choice is always the best choice.”

APA’s annual survey revealed that money (72 percent), the economy (69 percent) and work (68 percent) are the most frequently cited causes of stress by Americans. Housing costs are a source of stress for almost half (47 percent) of Americans and job insecurity causes stress for more than one-third of employees (34 percent).

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In fact, a later nationwide poll conducted in September found that stress about the economy has increased further with 80 percent of Americans citing it as a significant cause of stress, a jump from the 66 percent in April.<sup>1</sup>

Nationally, stress is having an increased physical impact on Americans, with 53 percent reporting fatigue (51 percent in 2007) and 61 percent reporting irritability or anger (50 percent in 2007). Other symptoms include lack of interest or motivation, feeling depressed or sad, headaches and muscular tension. More than half of those surveyed (52 percent) said that stress had caused them to lose sleep in the past month.

The Illinois Psychological Association offers these tips in dealing with your stress:

**Understand how you experience stress and identify your sources of stress.** How do you know when you are stressed? How are your thoughts or behaviors different from times when you do not feel stressed? What events or situations trigger stressful feelings? Are they related to your children, family, health, financial decisions, work relationships or something else?

**Learn your own stress signals.** People experience stress in different ways. You may have a hard time concentrating or making decisions; feel angry, irritable or out of control; or experience headaches, muscle tension or a lack of energy. Identify your stress signals and pay attention when they appear.

**Recognize how you deal with stress.** Determine if you are using unhealthy behaviors (such as smoking, drinking alcohol and over-/undereating) to cope. Is this a routine behavior, or is it specific to certain events or situations? Do you make unhealthy choices as a result of feeling rushed and overwhelmed?

**Find healthy ways to manage stress.** Consider healthy, stress-reducing activities such as meditation or exercising. Keep in mind that unhealthy behaviors develop over time and can be difficult to change. Don't take on too much at once. Focus on changing only one behavior at a time.

**Take care of yourself.** Eat right, get enough sleep, drink plenty of water and engage in regular physical activity. Ensure you have a healthy mind and body through activities like yoga, taking a short walk, going to the gym or playing sports that will enhance both your physical and mental health. Take regular vacations or other breaks from work. No matter how hectic life gets, make time for yourself — even if it's just simple things like reading a good book or listening to your favorite music.

**Reach out for support.** Accepting help from supportive friends and family can improve your ability to manage stress. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by stress, you may want to talk to a psychologist, who can help you better manage stress and change unhealthy behaviors.

### **Survey Methodology**

The *2008 Stress in America* research was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of the American Psychological Association between June 23, 2008, and August 13, 2008, among 1,791 adults aged 18+ who reside in the U.S. and an oversample of 231 adults aged 18+ who reside in Chicago. No estimates of theoretical sampling error can be calculated; a full methodology is available.

*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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<sup>1</sup> The September data was collected online within the United States between September 19 and September 23, 2008, among 2,507 U.S. residents 18 or older and the April data was collected online within the United States between April 7 and April 15, 2008, among 2,529 U.S. residents aged 18 or older. Data for the April and September polls were collected using an omnibus survey; the causes of stress question included a "not applicable" response. Data presented here were calculated excluding those who responded "not applicable."