Know the red flags of stress

Everyone has stress in their lives. But when high levels of stress go on for too long, it takes a toll on the body. Is stress taking a toll on your health? If it is, don't ignore it. This is a chance to find healthy ways to tackle stress before the problem becomes worse.

The following are some "red flags" or signs that your stress levels may be too high.

- Muscles feel tense and sore. You have a sore back or neck. You are getting tension headaches or migraines.

- Your heart feels like it's beating faster. Your palms are sweaty.

- You are breathing shallow, quick breaths.

- You have more heartburn or acid reflux than usual.

- Your stomach feels upset or you have vomiting or diarrhea.

Other effects of stress are harder to notice. Stress can affect reproductive hormones, which can disrupt a woman's period. In men, it can cause reduced fertility. Both men and women may have lower sexual desire. Stress can also raise your risk of a heart attack if it's ignored for too long.

If you notice warning signs of stress, it's a sign that you need some extra care. Talk to someone you trust, your doctor or a mental health professional.
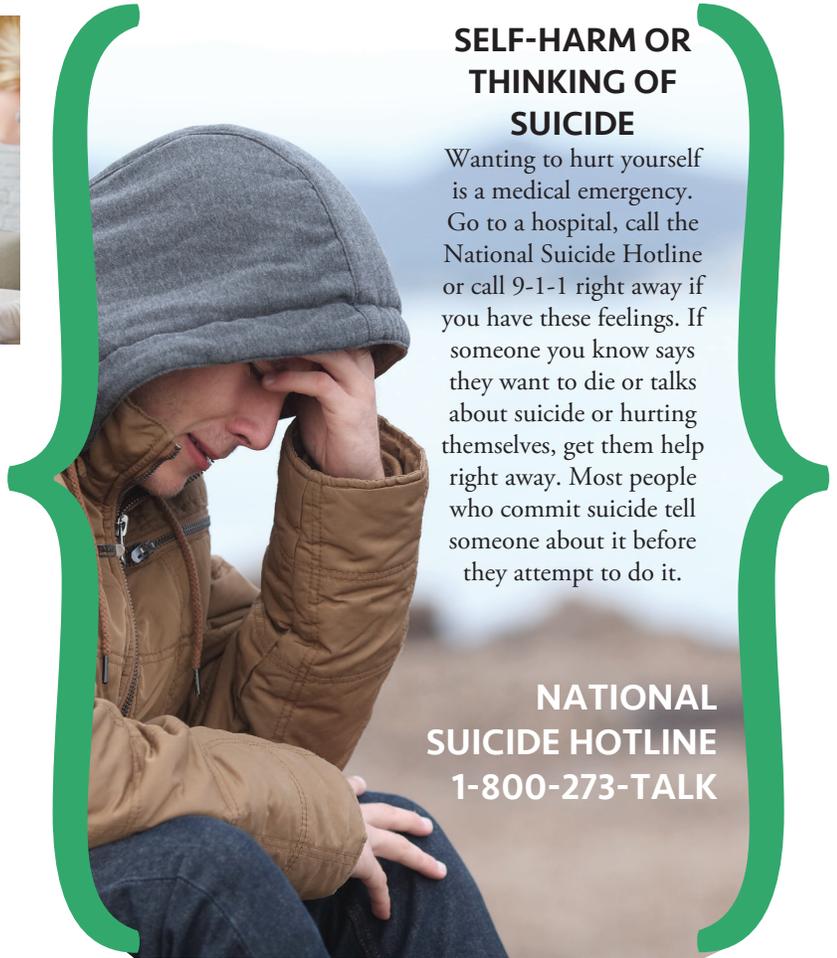
SELF-HARM OR THINKING OF SUICIDE

Wanting to hurt yourself is a medical emergency. Go to a hospital, call the National Suicide Hotline or call 9-1-1 right away if you have these feelings. If someone you know says they want to die or talks about suicide or hurting themselves, get them help right away. Most people who commit suicide tell someone about it before they attempt to do it.

NATIONAL SUICIDE HOTLINE 1-800-273-TALK

Sources: American Psychological Association, National Institute of Mental Health