

Stella's Story

Stella is generally a healthy person. She eats nutritious food and gets exercise by walking to work every day. She does not drink or smoke.

Stella has a very busy schedule. Every weekday, she wakes up at 5:30 a.m. and gets her children ready for school. Then she walks to the hospital where she works from 7 a.m. to 3 p.m. In the afternoon Stella helps her children with homework, does the laundry, and cooks dinner. After that, she goes to school from 6 p.m. to 9 p.m. Most nights she has homework or housework and does not get to bed until midnight. On the weekends, Stella works overtime, if possible, and does the shopping.

This afternoon Stella is seeing her health care provider, Dr. Monteiro. She made the appointment because she is feeling ill. At the beginning of the appointment, Dr. Monteiro asks Stella how she has been feeling. "OK, but tired all the time," Stella answers. "Sometimes I am worried that I have some illness or disease." Dr. Monteiro asks if being tired is her only symptom or if something else is wrong. Then Dr. Monteiro checks Stella's blood pressure and asks if he can do a blood test. He explains that a blood test can detect chronic illnesses such as hepatitis and diabetes. Next, he asks Stella about her diet and if she is sleeping well. He also does a clinical breast exam (CBE). Dr. Monteiro asks if Stella has been remembering to do a monthly breast self-exam (BSE) and they talk about how CBE and BSE help detect breast lumps.

"Stella," Dr. Monteiro says, "Your blood pressure is too high. I know you don't smoke or drink alcohol. Your high blood pressure may be a symptom of stress. I know you have a very busy schedule. Do you ever do anything that helps you relax?" Stella says that sometimes she takes her children to the park in the afternoon, but lately she has no energy. She also says that she worries about her parents and wants to spend more time with them.

Dr. Monteiro tells Stella about how stress can affect a person's health. He recommends that Stella try to relax more and get more sleep. The doctor explains that high blood pressure can lead to a heart attack. Dr. Monteiro and Stella talk about ways Stella can take care of herself. The doctor asks Stella to come back to have her blood pressure checked in two weeks. He also reminds Stella to make an appointment for her annual checkup.

When Stella gets home, she calls a friend to tell her what happened. "What can I do?" she says. "I don't have time to change my life." Her friend says, "Let's meet and think about ways we can help each other. I am feeling stressed out, too."

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