

# StarTribune | health

News Local Sports Business Politics Opinion **Lifestyle** Entertainment Obituaries Classifieds Autos Housing Jobs

Taste Home + Garden Travel Health Kids' Health Style Relationships Steals Blogs + Columns

Home Lifestyle **Health**

## Stress can be as contagious as germs

Article by: JEFF STRICKLER, Star Tribune Updated: January 11, 2014 - 5:28 PM

We can easily pick up secondhand stress from the people around us. We also can pass it on.

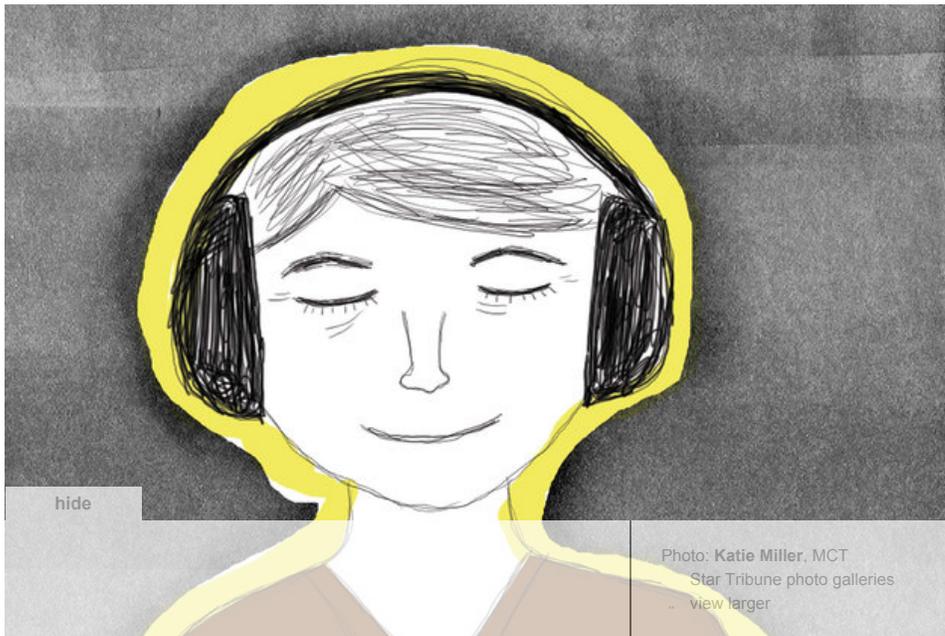


Photo: Katie Miller, MCT  
Star Tribune photo galleries  
view larger

resize text print buy reprints

Debra Safyre was standing in line waiting to order lunch when she was hit by a sudden wave of anxiety.

"There was no reason for me to be triggered that way," she said. "Then I noticed the person in front of me. She was jittering so badly, shaking so badly, that I was responding to her stress — and I didn't even talk to her."

Her experience was not unusual.

Secondhand stress — tension that we pick up from the people and activities around us — is a natural defense mechanism that helped keep our ancestors alive, said Dr. Amit Sood, an expert on stress at the Mayo Clinic. But as soon as we pick up that tension, we risk becoming carriers, passing it on to any friends, family members or co-workers — and, yes, even strangers — who we encounter.

"Stress travels in social networks," he said. "It is highly, highly contagious."

Fortunately for Safyre, a former nurse and founder of Safyre Catalyst, a Richfield-based company focusing on personal and group energy management, she quickly realized where her surprise anxiety was coming from and was able to move away from its source.

"It's kind of like a tuning fork," she said of secondary tension. "When

### from the homepage

**Minnesota restaurant owners want break on tipped workers**

**French premier wants to boost anti-terrorism measures**

**Buckeye Bash: Ohio State claims title in playoff's debut**

most read most emailed most watched



**Ice castle opens in Eden Prairie**



**A look at fashion at this year's Golden Globes**



**Prep Power Play: Mahtomedi success started in off season**



**Wolves center Nikola Pekovic returns to practice**



**Packers to play Seattle for NFC title**

More Video

### more from health

**Virus or bacteria? Know how to fight your enemy**

**New tax forms to fill out on health insurance coverage**

**Judge cuts damages for teacher fired for in vitro treatment**



you hit a tuning fork, everything around it starts vibrating with it. It's the same thing with stress. If stress is a very strong vibration around you, you're going to start reacting to it."

The impact that secondhand stress has on us has only recently been appreciated by psychologists, said Dr. Berendina Numan, co-founder of the Center for Counseling and Stress Management, with offices in [Minneapolis](#) and [Minnetonka](#).

"It's been only the last 10 years" that the topic has been explored in much depth, she said. "There hasn't been enough research to know all the answers about secondhand stress."

Doctors do know that stress in small doses is essentially a good thing, Sood said. It's part of the body's warning system that creates the fight-or-flight response and generates a surge of energy that helps us deal with a crisis. But excessive or prolonged stress can lead to health issues ranging from headaches to heart problems.

### Know thy enemy

Protecting oneself from secondhand stress begins with identifying its causes, said Dana Kadue, owner of Life Flow Coaching in Minneapolis.

"The first step is awareness of the things around me that create stress in my life," said Kadue, who teaches a class called "From Stress to Well-Being" for the Pathways Minneapolis health resource center. "It's all about self-awareness, discovering when the stress shows up."

Start the investigation with who's around at the time, suggested Sood, who wrote the recently published "The Mayo Clinic Guide to Stress-Free Living."

"Many of us have partners, supervisors, colleagues or neighbors who are stress-provoking," he said. "How do I recognize these people? These are the people I feel judged by too much. I feel anxious when I'm meeting them. I try to avoid being with them. I find these people unpredictable. They often have high expectations and I feel like I have to be perfect with them; they are very rigid. And I've often found that many of these people have different moral values than mine."

Once you've identified the problem people, you have three basic courses of action: You can change them. You can get away from them. Or you can learn to protect yourself from them.

The first two have limited applicability. A person might be open to constructive criticism about their behavior, but it must be presented in a way that doesn't put them on the defensive, Sood said. Even then, there's no guarantee they'll be responsive.

As for getting away from the irritant, that's not always a viable option, either, especially for someone whose stress is coming from a boss or co-worker in a job they don't have the financial wherewithal to leave.

[read full article](#)

1 2 [next](#)

[resize text](#) [print](#) [buy reprints](#)

#### from around the web sponsored links

More from Star Tribune  
[Developer explains how an 80-story tower can work in Minneapolis \(StarTribune.com\)](#)  
[Maintenance worker killed when he becomes entangled in concrete crusher \(Nation\)](#)  
[Person dies after south Minneapolis fire overnight \(StarTribune.com\)](#)  
[Polaris to get \\$80M in tax, other breaks for new Alabama factory \(StarTribune.com\)](#)  
['Seinfeld' actor Taylor Negron dead at 57 \(StarTribune.com\)](#)  
[Athletics get Zobrist, Escobar from Rays for Jaso, 2 minor leaguers \(StarTribune.com\)](#)

[?]

## inside the StarTribune

[entertainment](#)

[home](#)

[lifestyle](#)

[local](#)

[news graphics](#)

[home](#)



MIA has some surprises in store as it turns 100



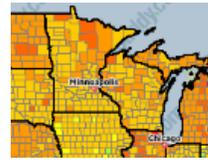
Northern Lights: 10 special Minnesotans who died in '14



State of Wonders: Amid a golden land, beauty in the details



Viking stadium construction cam



Interactive map: Finding best gas prices in metro



Play Upickem: Pick the games, win prizes



Search the Star Trib

- News
- Local
- Sports
- Business
- Politics
- Opinion
- Lifestyle
- Entertainment
- Obituaries
- Classifieds
- Autos
- Housing
- Jobs

425 Portland Av. S.  
Minneapolis, MN 55488  
(612) 673-4000

Company

About the StarTribune  
Advertising  
Directory + Contacts  
Jobs at the StarTribune  
Newspaper in Education  
Vita.mn: Entertainment  
Business Listings

Subscriber Services

Newspaper Subscriptions  
Digital Access  
Today's Paper  
Vacation Holds/Billing  
Newsletters

Website

Terms of Use  
Privacy Policy  
Ad Choices  
Site Index

Buy Ads

Online Ads  
Newspaper Ads  
Classifieds

Store

Article Archives  
Back copies  
Commercial Reprints  
Permissions

Connect with Us

Contact Us  
Send a press release  
Become a Fan  
Follow Us  
RSS

© 2015 StarTribune. All rights reserved.

StarTribune.com is powered by LimeLight Networks

- Newspaper Subscriptions
- eEdition
- RSS
- Newsletters