



Stress Management



What is Stress?

Introduction

Stress is a part of day to day living. As a college student, you may experience stress while adjusting to a more challenging environment, social pressures, juggling a full schedule, lack of finances, and changes in eating or sleeping habits. Stress is what you feel when you have to handle more than you normally do.

The stress you experience isn't necessarily harmful. Positive stress adds anticipation and excitement to life, and we all thrive under a certain amount of stress. As a positive influence, stress can help compel us to action; it can result in a new awareness and an exciting new perspective. As a negative influence, it can result in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger, and depression, which in turn can lead to health problems. Insufficient stress acts as a depressant and may leave us feeling bored or dejected; on the other hand, excessive stress may leave us feeling "tied up in knots." What we need to do is find the optimal level of stress which will individually motivate but not overwhelm us.

How Can I Tell What is Optimal Stress for Me?

There is no single level of stress that is optimal for all people. We are all individual creatures with unique requirements. As such, what is distressing to one may be a joy to another. And even when we agree that a particular event is distressing, we are likely to differ in our physiological and psychological responses to it.

It has been found that most illness is related to unrelieved stress. If you are experiencing stress symptoms, you have gone beyond your optimal stress level; you need to reduce the stress in your life and/or improve your ability to manage it.

How Can I Manage Stress Better?

1. Become aware of your stressors and your emotional and physical reactions to it.

Notice your distress. Don't ignore it. Determine what events distress you. Determine how your body responds to stress. Do you become nervous or physically upset? If so, in what specific ways?

2. Recognize what you can change.

Can you change your stressors by avoiding or eliminating them? Can you reduce the intensity or shorten your exposure to stress? Can you make a change?



3. Reduce the intensity of your emotional reactions to stress.

The stress reaction is triggered by your perception of danger either physical or emotional. Are you viewing your stressors in exaggerated terms? Are you expecting to please everyone? Are you

overreacting? Do you feel you must always prevail in every situation? Try to temper your excess emotions. Put the situation in perspective. Don't labor on the negative aspects and the "what ifs."

4. Learn to moderate your physical reactions to stress.

Slow, deep breathing will bring your heart rate and respiration back to normal. Relaxation techniques can reduce muscle tension. Medications, when prescribed by a physician, can help in the short term. Learning to moderate these reactions on your own is a preferable long-term solution.

5. Build your physical reserves.

Exercise for cardiovascular fitness three to four times a week.

Eat well-balanced, nutritious meals.

Maintain your ideal weight.

Avoid nicotine, excessive caffeine, and other stimulants.

Mix leisure with work. Take breaks and get away when you can.

Get enough sleep. Be as consistent with your sleep schedule as possible.



6. Maintain your emotional reserves.

Develop some mutually supportive friendships/relationships.

Pursue realistic goals which are meaningful to you, rather than goals others have for you.

Expect some frustrations, failures, and sorrows.

Always be kind and gentle with yourself -- be a friend to yourself.



ARE YOU STRESSED OUT?

This self-assessment is an adaptation of the popular Holmes and Rahe's Life Events Scale for measuring stress levels (from Rutgers University @ New Brunswick/Piscataway campus website). To determine your stress score, circle the numbers for each event which has occurred to you in the **past 6 months**. Then add 'em up!

<u>Event</u>	<u>Points</u>
Death of spouse	100
Female unwed pregnancy	92
Death of a parent	80
Male partner in unwed pregnancy	77
Divorce	73
Death of a close family member	70
Death of a close friend	65
Divorce between parents	63
Jail term	61
Major personal injury or illness	60
Marriage	55
Fired from a job/loss of job	50
Loss of financial support from college	48
Failing grade in an important/required class	47
Sexual difficulties	45
Serious argument with significant other	40
Academic probation	39
Change in major	37
New love interest	36
Increased workload from college	31
Outstanding personal achievement	29
First semester in college	28
Serious conflict with instructor	27
Lower than expected grades	25
Change in college (transfer)	24
Change in social activities	22
Change in sleeping habits	21
Change in eating habits	19
Minor violation of the law (e.g. traffic ticket)	15
❖ Add you own!	



TOTAL _____

Score considerations:

<150: You appear to have a “reasonable” level of stress

150-299: You appear to have a risk for stress-related health issues

300 and above: You appear to have an elevated risk for stress-related health issues

Note: This is an “awareness activity”, **not** a diagnostic tool to determine your **actual** stress level and/or the health implications. Please seek professional help if you deem it necessary

41 Stress Busters

Many stresses can be changed, eliminated, or minimized.
Here are some ideas you can do to reduce your stress.
Pick and practice a few that work for you!

- ❖ Become aware of your own reactions to stress
- ❖ Recognize and accept your limits
- ❖ Focus on positive self-statements and attitude
- ❖ Exercise regularly - a walk around the block is just fine
- ❖ Eat a balanced diet and take a vitamin supplement
- ❖ Watch your intake of caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, and sugar
- ❖ Avoid habit-forming self-medication
- ❖ Talk with friends or someone you can trust about your worries
- ❖ Make a daily “to do” list and plan ahead with a weekly schedule
- ❖ Schedule “realistic” days - avoid back to back appointments if possible
- ❖ Set SMART goals (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-oriented)
- ❖ Determine priorities (urgent and important activities take priority)
- ❖ Practice relaxation techniques - deep breathing using the diaphragm
- ❖ Let go and delegate tasks to capable others
- ❖ Organize your living/work spaces AND don't let paperwork pile up.
- ❖ Say “no” to extra commitments and obligations - they will understand!
- ❖ Read an uplifting article or listen to a relaxing piece of music.
- ❖ Schedule in time to de-stress - hot bath, lunch with a friend, etc.
- ❖ Learn to accept what you cannot change
- ❖ Use your peak energy time for the tough-to-tackle issues
- ❖ Remind yourself of your strengths, talents, and accomplishments
- ❖ Avoid unnecessary competition - give in when possible
- ❖ Try a new hobby for relaxation and fun
- ❖ Don't hit the snooze button and/or get up 15 minutes earlier
- ❖ Prepare for morning the evening prior - lunch made, workout bag, etc.
- ❖ Write things down - appointments, events, when things are due, etc.
- ❖ Take stretch breaks or a quick walk
- ❖ Make friends with non-worriers for a balanced perspective
- ❖ Journal your thoughts and feelings as a release
- ❖ Do something for someone else/volunteer - walking a dog is great
- ❖ Find joy in at least one activity each day

- ❖ Take a lunch break, if even for just 15 minutes
- ❖ Have a forgiving view of events and people
- ❖ Visualize success when approaching a stressful activity or event
- ❖ Try to get 15 minutes of sun exposure each day
- ❖ Take a mini-vacation in your mind
- ❖ Try aromatherapy/light a scented candle - especially lavender
- ❖ Give a hug, get a hug
- ❖ Tense then relax the major muscle groups one set at a time
- ❖ Break it up - complete daily mini tasks for a large and looming project
- ❖ Shake it up - avoid doing the same activity for more than 2 consecutive hours

Adapted from Red Rocks Community College website