

Stress and What to do about it

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So what is Stress anyhow?

Defining stress is much like defining happiness. Everyone knows what it is, but no one can agree on a definition!

Stress is what you experience when you believe you cannot cope effectively with a threatening situation.

Stress is created when your mind overrides the body's basic desire to choke the living daylights out of some idiot who desperately deserves it!

How Much Stress Are you Experiencing? The Stress-Symptom Scale

This index gives you a measure of your stress level by looking at the number and severity of your stress-related symptoms and behaviors. Using the scale to rate the frequency with which you've experienced the following items in the last *two weeks*.

0 = Never 1 = Sometimes 2 = Often 3 = Very often

Fatigue or tiredness ___	Stomach discomfort ___	Increased irritability ___
Pounding heart ___	Nail biting ___	Worrisome thoughts ___
Rapid pulse ___	Twitches or tics ___	Impatience ___
Increased perspiration ___	Difficulty swallowing or dry mouth ___	Feelings of depression ___
Rapid breathing ___	Colds or flu ___	Loss of sexual interest ___
Aching neck or shoulders ___	Lack of energy ___	Feeling angry ___
Low back pain ___	Over-eating ___	Sleep difficulties ___
Gritting teeth or clenching jaw ___	Feeling helpless or hopeless ___	Forgetfulness ___
Hives or skin rash ___	Excessive drinking ___	Racing or intrusive thoughts ___
Headaches ___	Excessive smoking ___	Feeling restless ___
Cold hands or feet ___	Excessive spending ___	Difficulty concentrating ___
Tightness in chest ___	Excessive drug or medication use ___	Frequent periods of crying ___
Nausea ___	Feeling upset ___	Frequent absences from work ___
Diarrhea or constipation ___	Feeling nervous or anxious ___	

Your total Stress-Symptom Score ___

If you scored 0 to 19 then you have **Lower than average** amounts of stress

If you scored 20-39 then you are experiencing **Average** amounts of stress

If you scored 40-49 then you are experiencing **Moderately higher than average** amounts of stress

If you scored 50 or above then you have a **Much higher than average** amounts of stress

The ABCs of Stress

A= Activating event or potentially stressful situation.

B= Beliefs, thoughts, or perceptions about A.

C= Emotional Consequences or stress that results from holding these beliefs.

Example:

Having to wait → my thoughts about the waiting → potential stress



Changing A means modifying your environment. Sometimes this isn't possible, such as when the stock market turns south and you lose part of your investments. Even if you can't change your stressful environment, you can **Change B** and the way you perceive your environment. Learn to look at the picture in a different way, see additional possibilities and options. When you can't change your environment, and you cannot see your situation in a new way, you can **Change C** and learn to manage your stress by mastering other skills.

(A) Recognizing Potential Financial Stressors

- ◆ Prices rise but your income stays the same
- ◆ Cut-backs, layoffs, or other restructuring creates job instability
- ◆ You feel frustrated with a family member's spending or debt
- ◆ You have medical, automobile, or household expenses piling up
- ◆ An unexpected event of crisis creates money problems for the family (illness, death, divorce, etcetera.)
- ◆ Other?

(B) Individual Perceptions and the Big Picture

- ◆ How do you perceive the above?
- ◆ Is there anything you can do to change that belief?

(C) Managing Stress

Physically

- ◆ Eat a healthy and balanced diet.
- ◆ Take time for an enjoyable physical activity.
- ◆ Get enough sleep!
- ◆ Reduce alcohol and cigarette consumption.

Emotionally

- ◆ Don't blame yourself for what has happened.
- ◆ Look for the positive side of things – remember the economy cycles up and down.
- ◆ Set aside some time every day to laugh, relax, and enjoy life.
- ◆ Find support; talk to someone you trust when times are tough. This could be a spouse or partner, sibling, parent, or good friend. Be honest about the situation and your feelings.
- ◆ Take one thing at a time. Don't try to resolve all your problems at once.
- ◆ Recognize anger and depression as natural, temporary feelings, and then let them go.
- ◆ Keep yourself occupied, active, and involved. Spend time doing those things you've been postponing for years. Donate your time and talents to a community project, your church, or someone who needs your help.
- ◆ Work on accepting change as a natural part of life.
- ◆ Don't be afraid to ask for help. It won't make you look bad or weak or anything else.
- ◆ Consider seeing a professional if you feel too overwhelmed and can't see your way out the crisis.

One-minute body scan

With your eyes closed, scan your body for any muscle tension. Start with the top of your head and work your way down to your toes. Ask yourself:

- Is my brow furrowed? Relax your forehead.
- Are my eyebrows knitted? Relax your eyes.
- Is my jaw clenched? Relax your jaw.
- Are my lips pursed? Relax your mouth.
- Are my shoulders hunched? Relax your neck and shoulders.
- Are my arms tense? Relax your arms.
- Are my thigh and calf muscles tight? Relax your legs.
- Are my toes curled? Relax your feet.
- Do I notice any discomfort anywhere else in my body?

Try to do a body scan three or four times a day. It's a great way of making you aware of your stress and then, of course, finding ways to reduce it!

Long-term Effects of Stress

Decreased immune system, heart-attacks, high blood pressure, cancer, some kinds of arthritis, migraine headaches, asthma, allergies, kidney disease, thyroid disease, contributes to accidents due to human error, fatigue, or haste.

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