

Personal Stress Management



Introduction

This lesson will —

1. Identify personal sources of stress.
2. Explore strategies for reducing stress
3. Improve your ability to cope with stress through developing effective stress management skills.

Objectives

By the end of this lesson you should be able to —

1. Demonstrate an increased understanding of personal stress by identifying ten stressors in your life.
2. Express five ways to manage personal stress.
3. Use one new activity to effectively balance the stress in your life.



Getting Started

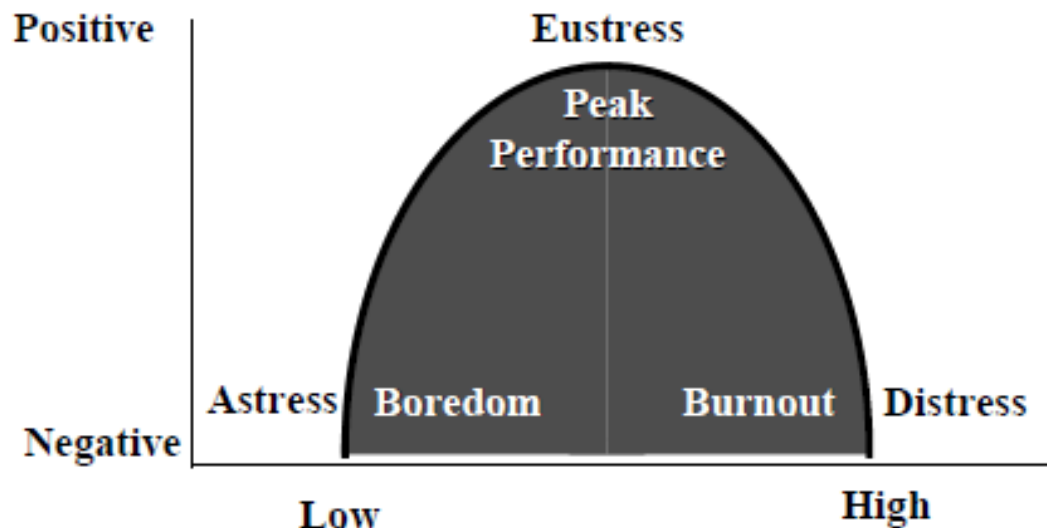
What is Stress?

Stress is anything that places a demand on us physically, mentally, or emotionally. It makes us change the normal way we live.

Most of us think of stress as a crisis, but not all stress is bad. Without stress (astress), life would be boring. There would be no growth and no

change. With too much stress (distress), we reach overload. Our ability to cope becomes limited, and we feel burned out. However, some stress is good. It can provide an opportunity to bring about positive changes in our lives. We call this eustress. This type of stress leads to peak performance.

What is Stress?





The School House

Adding Spice to Your Life!

Stress is the spice of life. Without stress, life would be boring. Productivity would decrease. Excitement in living would dwindle. Believe it or not, we often seek out stressful (or thrilling) experiences to heighten our sense of excitement and adventure in life. Roller coaster rides are stressful, yet some people flock to them. Most movie plots center around the hero or heroine's attempts to get out of a conflict or stressful situation. Athletes talk of getting "psyched up" before a match to help boost their performance. However, most of us view stress as negative and something to avoid. Let's look at the



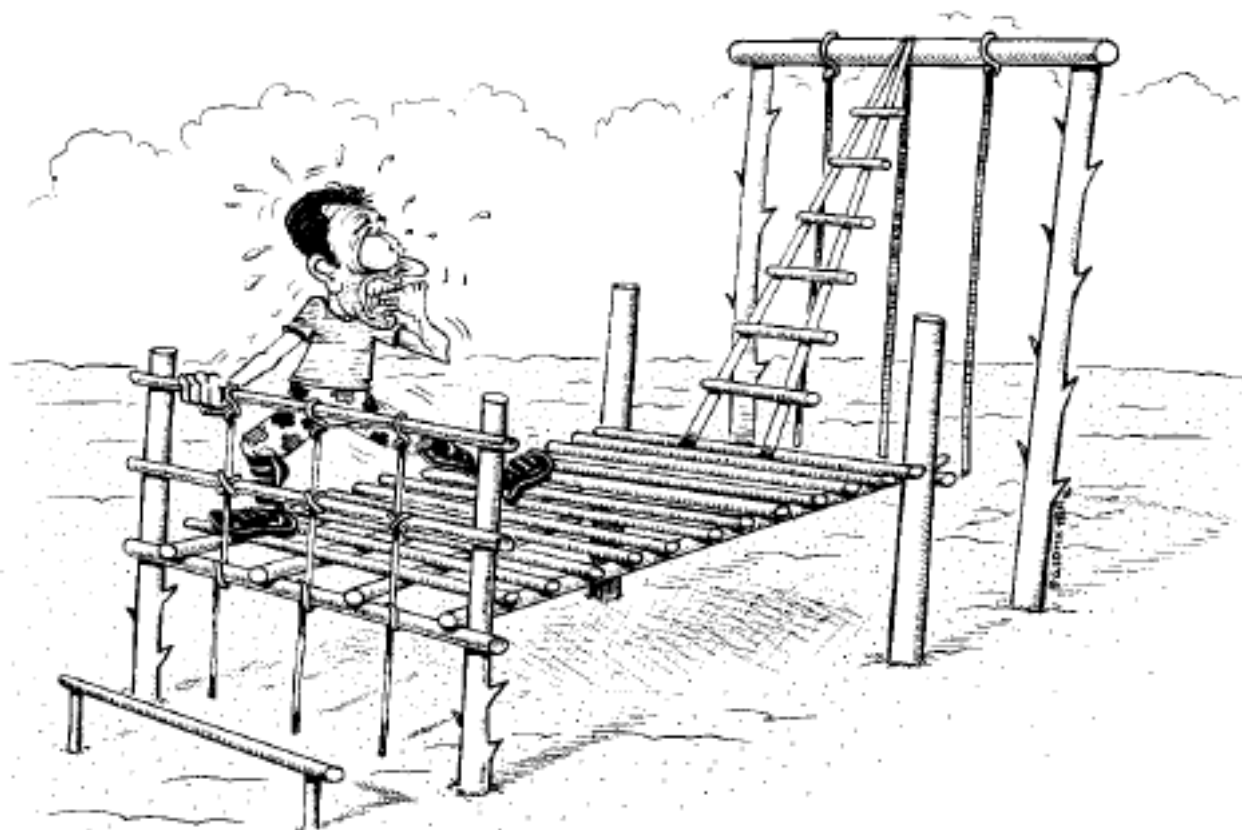
negative side of stress.

What are the Signs of Stress?

Physiological	Emotional/Mental	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none">Pounding heartRapid breathingSweaty palmsCold hands and feetLack of energyHeadachesMuscle tensionSleep difficultiesStomach disturbances	<ul style="list-style-type: none">IrritabilityNervous, edgyLack of patienceCryingLosing temperWorryingEmotional sensitivityMemory lapseLack of concentrationIncrease in careless errorsNegative attitudePre-occupation	<ul style="list-style-type: none">Sleeping moreSleeping lessEating moreEating lessAngry outburstsWithdrawing from others

The Eye of the Beholder

How a person reacts to a stressor depends on their own constitution, temperament, past experiences, training, and a number of other factors. However, probably the two factors that most affect how we react to stress is how we perceive the stressor and our own ability to handle the stressor successfully. For some, jumping out



of perfectly good airplanes is extremely anxiety arousing. They doubt their own ability to cope successfully with this unnatural situation. However, others find parachuting exciting and thrilling. They may experience some fear, but do not doubt their ability to cope. Military obstacle courses are often called “Confidence Courses”. They stress us by presenting novel situations, which upon successful completion expand our confidence in our own abilities to meet these challenges successfully. Tough, realistic training is one of the best ways to help soldiers develop resistance to the effects of stress on the battlefield.

Can you have too much stress?

When stress is too high or lasts too long, some of the negative effects of stress may be felt. These include —

- Depression
- Ulcers
- Headaches
- Hypertension
- Anger/Irritability
- Weight Gain/Loss
- Fatigue
- Spill Over Into Family or Work



Good and Bad — It All Adds Up

Instructions: Score yourself on this *Life Change Test**. Check only those events which you have experienced in the past year. Add the points assigned to each life event.

Life Event	Value	Life Event	Value
Death of spouse	100	Change in responsibilities at work	29
Divorce	73	Trouble with in-laws	29
Marital separation	65	Outstanding personal achievement	28
Jail term	63	Wife begins or stops work	26
Death of close family member	63	Begin or end school	26
Personal injury or illness	53	Change in living conditions	25
Marriage	50	Revision of personal habits	24
Fired at work	47	Trouble with boss	23
Marital reconciliation	45	Change in work hours or conditions	20
Retirement	45	Change in residence	20
Change in health of family member	44	Change in schools	20
Pregnancy	40	Change in recreation	19
Sex difficulties	39	Change in church activities	19
Gain of new family member	39	Change in social activities	18
Business readjustment	39	Mortgage or loan less than \$10,000	17
Change in financial state	38	Change in sleeping habits	16
Death of close friend	37	Change in number of family get-togethers	15
Change to different line of work	36	Change in eating habits	15
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35	Vacation	13
Mortgage over \$80,000	31	Christmas	12
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	Minor violations of the law	11
		Total Score for 12 Months	

The more change you have, the more likely you will suffer a decline in health. Of those who scored over 300 "life change units", 80 percent have a chance of a serious health change. With 150-299 life change units, you have a 50 percent chance of getting sick in the near future. With less than 150 life change units, your chances drop to 30 percent.

← Too Much	Dimension	Too Much →
Family and social life suffer Divorce Withdrawal by friends	Work vs. Play	Lost productivity at work Missed deadlines Mission delayed
Stepping on others	Aggressive vs. Passive	Being stepped on
Too self-centered	Self vs. Others	Lose self
Increased risk of injury	Exercise vs. Inactivity	Sedentary diseases
Excessive weight loss	Dieting vs. Indulgence	Obesity

The following are some activities to help keep a balance in your life.

Exercise	Moderate exercise, at a pace where you can talk comfortably (physician approval recommended for males 40 or older, females 50 or older, or those who are not already participating in a regular exercise program).
Play	Participate in hobbies, sports, games, music, theater.
Social support	Build friendships, join a social or church group.
Mini-Vacations	Take short one to three minute breaks throughout the day to take a walk, stretch-in-place, take a few deep relaxing breathes, etc.
Keeping a Healthy Perspective	Read a humorous book, don't make a negative comment without proposing a constructive alternative.
Diet	Eat a balanced, nutritional meal to help keep you functioning at your best.
Assertiveness	Learn to say "No". Standing up for your own rights without violating the rights of others.
Skill Building	Learn more about your job and how to do it better.
Relaxation, Prayer, Meditation	Practice these effective stress relievers.

What Can Be Done to Reduce Stress.

(From the *American Cancer Society*)

1. **Break down every big job into small components** so it doesn't become overwhelming to you. Make a list of the work you want to accomplish each day. Prioritize your list and work on accomplishing the top 3 items.
2. **Do neck rolls frequently throughout the day** to relieve the stiffness and tightness in neck muscles. Let your shoulders drop. Release the tension.
3. **Become more aware of your surroundings.** By deliberately slowing down your walk and conversation, you absorb more of your surroundings and reorient yourself to a slower pace.
4. **Avoid being a perfectionist.** Put your best effort into whatever you are doing; then relax and don't worry about the results. Perfection implies unrealistic expectations. Perfectionists are hard to live with because of the excessive demands they make on themselves and others.
5. **Temporarily remove yourself from the situation** when problems begin to overwhelm you. Once your mind is rested, you will see solutions.
6. **Be assertive.** Take action and speak clearly and openly on your ideas and needs.
7. **Take time out from your work.** Schedule regular vacations and opportunities to get away from it all. Try to plan these in such a way that they are long enough and frequent enough to allow you to relax and change your routine and pace.
8. **Exercise regularly and moderately.** Research has suggested that those who exercise regularly, i.e., 3 to 4 times a week, tend to live longer and healthier lives than those who do not. Walk, run, bike, play sports.
9. **Maintain a reasonable diet.** Three meals a day is important for all of us. A number of research studies have suggested that those who have 3 meals a day (especially those who eat breakfast) live longer and healthier lives. Avoid junk food and try to eat a balanced diet. Listen to your body and its reaction to your food intake. If you attend to your body's reactions, you will learn the importance of regular and balanced meals.
10. **Develop outside interests and activities.** Total involvement in job or home responsibilities can produce total isolation and an obsession with work. Relax on weekends by doing something different from the pattern you have established during the week.
11. **Think about something entirely different than work.** Close your eyes and visualize an extremely relaxing and peaceful scene. Try to see it as clearly and distinctly as you can in your mind's eye. Color in the trees and the ocean. Focus on color. Let yourself relax. Let the tension slip away. Take a breath--deeply and slowly.
12. **Talk it out.** When things get to you, find someone you can talk to and confide in. Expressing your feelings has a purpose. It allows you to release the feelings of tension and anger that have built

101 Stress Relievers

Need a quick—or not so quick—stress-break? Fresh out of ideas? Try one of these:

Stop and look out the window.

Work a crossword puzzle.

ANGRY? TALK TO A FRIEND ABOUT IT.

Apologize for a mistake. **Meditate.**
Stand up and **stretch.**

Ask for help.

Call up an old friend. **Run.**

Change coffee break to exercise break.



Build a model ship.

TELL someone "I love you." a joke.

STOP AND YAWN.

DANCE
Eat an orange slowly, segment by segment.
CLIMB A MOUNTAIN.

Close your eyes. What do you see?

Count to ten—or 1000—before exploding.
Count your blessings—make a list.

Cut back on caffeine.

WATCH A REALLY GOOD MOVIE.

Plan ahead.

DAYDREAM spend your coffee break at the beach.

Do one thing at a time.

Eat a good breakfast.

Forgive someone.

Fly a kite.

Get a massage.

Get a pet.

Find someone you're grateful to and thank them.

Go fishing.

Get a good night's sleep.

Get up fifteen minutes early.

Keep a journal of thoughts and feelings.

GO

for a brisk walk.

swimming.

to work a different way.

Hug a tree.

Hug someone you love.

Laugh at something you did.

Leave the car at home and take the bus.

Lie in a hammock.



Lift weights.

Listen to the birds.

LOOK at the big picture.
Look closely at a flower, leaf, blade of grass or tree trunk.
Look off into the distance.

Read a good book.

READ SOMETHING FUNNY EVERY DAY.

Plant a flower.

Smell a rose.

Ride your bike to work.

...a cat in your lap.
...on some music.
...plants in your office.
...your feet up.

Share feelings with someone.

Practice Yoga.

Work out at the gym.

Do a good deed.

Play a round of golf.

Make a list. Then follow it.

- ✓ Take a child to the playground.
- ✓ Take a deep breath and let it all out.
- ✓ Take a leisurely stroll.
- ✓ Take a long bath.
- ✓ Take a nap.
- ✓ Take an herb tea break.
- ✓ Take one day at a time.
- ✓ Take the back roads.
- ✓ Take the stairs.
- ✓ Take time for the sunset—or sunrise.
- ✓ Take up knitting.

Massage your temples.

Quit smoking.

Write a poem.

Write a letter to the editor.

Roll your shoulders up and around in a circular motion.

TALK TO YOURSELF: "I CAN DO A GREAT JOB." "I CAN STAY CALM UNDER PRESSURE."

Paint a peaceful scene—in your imagination.

Make time for play.

Spend an evening without TV.

Write... down your fears.
down your dreams.
your congressman.

PRACTICE LAUGHING OUT LOUD.

Watch a cloud for 5 minutes. Watch an ant or other insect for 5 minutes.

Sit by a fire.



Turn cocktail hour into exercise hour.

Walk barefoot in the grass.

CLASP YOUR HANDS BEHIND YOUR HEAD AND STRETCH YOUR SHOULDERS.