

BODY & SOUL

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Dealing With Stress

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Your heart starts pounding. Your muscles tighten. Your blood pressure rises. Your breath quickens. Sound familiar? This is your body's reaction to stress. So what is stress? Stress can be defined differently by different people—what is stressful to one person may be pleasurable or have no effect on another person. But in its simplest definition, stress is simply the response of the body to any demand for change.

Stress is actually your body's way of protecting you—to help you stay focused, alert, and energetic. It can help you perform better under pressure and motivate you to excel. But after a while, running on "high" can take a toll on your body. This is when stress stops being helpful and starts affecting your physical health, your mental well-being, your productivity, and your relationships with others. This is why you must recognize the signs of too much stress and learn to reduce its harmful effects.

Chronic stress can disrupt nearly every body system. It can raise blood pressure, increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, suppress the immune system, affect fertility, and leave you vulnerable to depression. It helps to figure out if your stressors are external (work-related, relationship troubles, financial problems, children) or internal (pessimism, unrealistic expectations, perfectionism, uncertainty).

Stress has a way of creeping up on you—you get used to everyday stressors. The chart below shows some common symptoms of stress. The more symptoms that you have, the more easily your stress level may get out of control. Keep in mind that you should always speak with your regular physician to rule out other medical problems.



Symptoms of Too Much Stress:

Cognitive symptoms:	Emotional symptoms:
Inability to concentrate	Moodiness
Anxious or racing thoughts	Irritability or agitation
Constant worrying	Feeling overwhelmed
Physical symptoms:	Behavioral symptoms:
Aches and pains	Sleeping too much or too little
Nausea, dizziness	Isolating yourself from others
Chest pain, rapid heartbeat	Neglecting responsibilities

Factors that influence how you tolerate stress:

Support Network—a strong circle of friends and family

Sense of Control—a sense of self-confidence and feeling of control over your environment; being able to soothe yourself

Attitude—feeling optimistic, embracing challenges, having a sense of humor

Stress Quiz Vulnerability Risk

1-5 Moderate

6-10 High

11-15 Extreme

Isaiah 40:31 They that hope in the LORD will renew their strength, they will soar as with eagles' wings; They will run and not grow weary, walk and not grow faint.

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While we cannot completely eliminate stress from our lives, we can control how it affects us. By investing in our physical and mental health, we can reduce the amount of everyday stress in our lives. Everyone can benefit from getting enough sleep, eating a nutritious diet, and limiting caffeine. Individuals have to find the techniques that work best to keep their system in balance:

- Aerobic exercise
- Meditation or prayer
- Regular “dates” with friends or family
- Yoga
- Massage
- Listening to music
- Playing with pets
- Keeping a journal
- Volunteering
- Talking to a therapist
- Hobbies
- Taking a class

If you are still feeling overwhelmed by stress, contact your regular physician, a mental health professional, your spiritual leader, or your local health department.

— Melissa D. Phillips

Meade County Health Department



Stress Quiz – How vulnerable am I to stress?

Answer YES or NO to the following:

- ◇ I do cardiovascular exercise at least 3 times a week.
- ◇ I sleep at least 7-8 hours per night.
- ◇ I feel comfortable discussing personal issues with someone I trust.
- ◇ I have a good network of friends and loved ones.
- ◇ I have a firm belief in a higher power and gain solace through this belief.
- ◇ I rarely drink alcohol.
- ◇ I have at least one hobby which gives me a sense of fulfillment.
- ◇ I do not smoke.
- ◇ I eat at least one balanced meal per day.
- ◇ I am not over or under weight by more than 15 pounds.
- ◇ I do not drink more than 2-3 caffeinated beverages per day.
- ◇ I am in good physical health.
- ◇ I am in a positive relationship where communication is valued and respected.
- ◇ I feel productive while at work and believe my job is worthwhile.
- ◇ My financial situation is sufficient to meet my basic needs for housing, food, transportation, etc.

Courtesy of <http://allpsych.com/tests/self-help/stresstest>

See front of newsletter for your Stress Quiz Risk

Kid's Corner

Everybody feels stressed out sometimes. The folks at KidsHealth asked 875 kids a few questions about stress.

The top 5 things kids said they worried about were:

1. Grades, school, & homework
2. Family
3. Friends
4. Brothers and sisters
5. Mean or annoying people



What did kids say they did when they were stressed out?

- Played or did something active
- Listened to music
- Watched TV
- Talked to a friend
- Tried to work things out
- Cried
- Talked to a parent

