

# Got Stress?

1. **Welcome to a two part series on managing stress.** Balancing work, family, and personal lives is a never-ending challenge that can be stressful. Failure to cope with stress causes anxiety, depression and eventually damages health and well-being. This workshop will explore what stress is, where it comes from, how it affects us, and how to deal with it in healthy ways.

Mostly, we experience the feeling of stress when our levels of alertness are kept artificially high by overexposure to problems. We all know people who are essentially "laid back" while others are getting ulcers. The real difference (medical conditions aside) is that some people know how to avoid stress, while others do not.

2. **Stress is a natural phenomenon that affects us physically, emotionally and mentally.** Researcher Hans Selye defined stress as a response made by the body to any demand placed upon it and this is known as the fight or flight syndrome.
3. **The body deals with stress** using a number of normal bodily responses that prepare for the flight or fight response and if not understood, can be pretty scary. The bodies stress alarm system positions us moving from a healthy relaxed stance to "ready for action" and then there is a recuperation period where all of the bodily functions return to normal.
  - a. Stress Alarm >>Healthy Recuperation
  - b. Fight or Flight is essential for survival when dealing with short-term threats
4. **The Bodies Responses to Stress** The first thought is well this is only if someone has a gun to my head, think again, this can happen in everyday stress too. First there are racing thoughts, teeth gritting, pupils dilate ready for action. There is rapid pulse, digestions stops to prepare for flight of fight muscles tense up in arms and legs and blood begins to clot to protect against injury.
5. **Why be concerned about stress?** Chronic stress compromises our physical, mental and emotional
  - a. The stimulating factors may be either positive or negative and come in the form of demands, opportunities, or just simply change
  - b. Threatens health if unmanaged
  - c. Can be managed and used for growth
  - d. Its physiological opposite is relaxation
6. **Stressors are any demand, situation, or circumstance** that disturb an

individual's equilibrium and initiate the stress response. Changes due to living are inevitable. With work, family, sleep issues, relationships and just managing a home there are many stressors in living.

7. **According to the U.S. Center for Disease Control** environmental and societal pressures—our competitive, success-oriented way of life—may lead us to potentially hazardous health. According to the United States Center for Disease Control in Atlanta, Georgia, “Eighty-three percent of all deaths for adults between the age of 21 and 65 are related to lifestyle.” Unmanaged stress is increasingly a characteristic of many Americans today. In addition,
8. **Medical research** estimates as much as 90 percent of illness and disease is stress-related. Stress can interfere with your physical functioning and bodily processes. High blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, and heart disease have been linked to stress factors. Other stress-related ailments include ulcers, allergies, asthma, and migraine headaches. Most health professionals agree stress can be a contributing factor in making existing medical problems worse.
9. **Caffeine; alcohol & other drugs; food; over-spending** are typically the way we handle stress and these coping mechanisms can be a quick fix. Unfortunately, we require more and more in order to keep our stress at bay. One glass of wine or drink usually leads to 2, then 3 and more.
10. **Summary** Excessive stress in your life interferes with your interpersonal relationships at home, on the job, and socially. It can make you spend your efforts on being unhappy, rather than on being happy.
  - Monitoring life events helps
  - Notice your physical responses
  - Use healthy coping mechanisms
  - Establish a support system, and again most importantly
  - Monitor your breathing

## Stress Is All About Perception

11. **Welcome to the second part on Stress.** We all know that stress is a fact of life that can waste your vitality and deplete your personal energy resources that could be used for enjoyment. Stress can negatively influence your attitudes and feelings about yourself and others as well.
12. **There are Common causes of stress** U.S. Center for Disease Control, states that everyone differs in what is stressful or potentially stressful. What for one person might seem to be a catastrophic event may be a minor setback for another. The following are some common causes of stress:
  - a. **Physical Fears**—examples include working with heavy/dangerous machinery, exposure to toxic chemicals and dangerous/congested traffic situations.

- b. **Psychological Fears**—such as failure, not being able to get the job done and inability to manage debts.
  - c. **Uncertainty**—In each person’s life there are uncertainties that can cause stress. The change of a job may necessitate many other changes in the life of a person or family members. Trying to sell a home and buy another in the new location may be stressful. We can use reason to logically predict outcomes, but often stress piles up because there are so many “unknowns” in such situations. Life is filled with uncertainty. It is discomfoting not to know what is going to happen, particularly if your control of the situation is impeded by weather, market fluctuations, illness or traffic accidents.
  - d. **Attitudes**—A positive or negative attitude influences a person’s reaction to stressful situations. For example, if you feel your job is worthwhile, you may see some of the problems you encounter as challenges. Seen as pluses, the problems or potential problems become motivators. However, if you resent your situation or feel “stuck” in your job, similar experiences create stress, a stress that frustrates instead of motivating you.
13. **Personal Perceptions**—Past experiences and the resources you feel you have available to meet life’s demands will affect the degrees of stress you may experience. The degree of stress experienced will be affected by your perception of your ability to meet the particular demands. How you perceive the situation determines if it is or is not stressful.
14. **Perception can be broken down in the following ways:**
- a. How you see yourself & others - Your sense of competency, self-esteem, values, interests and needs.
  - b. Past practices - Past experience in handling stress and your health.
  - c. Material resources - Finances, equipment and storage.
  - d. People resources - Other people who can assist you, such as friends, coworkers, family members and professionals.
15. **Change**—All change produces stress, even positive changes. Marriage is a positive change that is also a period when adjustment is necessary. For some people, this adjustment can be stressful. A vacation may also be stressful; arrangements must be made for the trip and for work, and there is always a tendency to plan too many activities.

Negative changes are not as difficult to identify as stress-producing. These are situations you would not like to occur, such as children leaving home to start careers, economic recession causing financial crisis, or loss of a valuable possession.

Change demands your adjustment to the particular situation, whether you desire the change or not. Developmental changes that you are able to plan for— pregnancy and birth, children growing up, the aging process— may still be stressful even though anticipated.

16. **In summary, stress is a normal part of living** that can be managed. When

experiencing stress, you may be affected totally, not only in your body but also in your emotional reactions, your personal thoughts, and your relations with others. Additionally, stress levels can be elevated within your environment. Here are a few helpful tips for keeping your stress levels under control:

- a. Deep Breathing: You can obtain a more relaxed state by slowing and deepening your breathing. Your body can influence the calming of your mind.
- b. Attitude Adjustment: Your reactions to potentially stressful situations are the real causes of your stress. It is important to analyze these situations and adjust your attitude to accept them positively. Have a sense of humor.
- c. Planning Ahead: Planning is essential to everyday life. Whether you are high detail or not. Even simple pocket calendars can help you stay organized. Keeping things in your head increases stress.

I want to leave you with a simple example of planning. Many recent scientific studies have shown that congested traffic conditions can heighten stress levels in drivers. This is the number one factor in stress in coastal regions of the USA in big cities in general. The longer distance one has to commute can cause a dramatic increase in the level of stress one experiences. Simple planning, and scheduling your routines can help. With commute time plan your route and schedule carefully ahead of time to avoid preventable problems. Do you have to take this route? Would another route with less traffic be an option? How about carpooling? While you are in traffic this is a great time to practice breathing techniques... You get the picture. So get your life on track. The Time is Now!