

EVALUATE YOUR LEVEL OF STRESS

Excess stress affects different people in different ways at different times in their life. Your ability to cope will depend on several factors, such as your overall health, your personality type, the way you've learned to cope in the past and how many stressful events you have experienced recently without having the opportunity to recover in between. We can take so much stress, but eventually we reach a point when even small amounts of pressure can result in emotional or physical collapse.

The Results of Chronic Stress (exhaustion)

- Stress hormones go out of balance
- Insulin is erratic – hypoglycaemia becomes diabetes
- Poor sleep recovery
- Immune system significantly deficient – more frequent infections
- Major illnesses begin
- Heart disease
- Stroke
- Cancer
- Infections
- Autoimmune disorders

Degenerative diseases

To avoid this situation of deterioration or collapse of your physical or emotional/psychological state of health, it is wise to learn how to spot the signs of stress. Knowledge is power – power to take action to reduce the stressful events or circumstances.

Following are several short questionnaires regarding psychological, emotional, physical, and behavioural symptoms which give an indication of the levels of stress you are suffering . For each questionnaire, place a tick next to any of the symptoms you frequently suffer from. *If you tick three or more symptoms in any one questionnaire, you are likely to be experiencing a significant amount of stress in that area, and it is time to take action to reduce the stress.*

Psychological Symptoms

- inability to concentrate
- not thinking clearly
- difficulty in making simple decisions
- loss of self-confidence
- being vague or forgetful
- frustration
- feeling out of control and helpless
- depression

- difficulty making rational judgements
- getting things out of perspective
- undue mental tiredness
- feeling there's never enough time
- diminished sex drive
- loss of sense of humour
- more arguments with spouse or children

Emotional Symptoms

- feelings of anxiety or worry
- irritability
- angry outbursts
- feelings of guilt
- feelings of hostility
- defensive and over-sensitive to criticism
- feeling isolated from colleagues and friends
- fear of rejection
- fear of failure
- fear of success or promotion
- panicky feelings or panic attacks
- nightmares or disturbing dreams
- feelings of impending doom
- feelings of worthlessness
- feelings of hopelessness
- feel lonely or sad

Physical Symptoms

Place a tick against any symptoms that you experience frequently or severely

- sweaty, clammy hands
- shaking hands
- knot in the stomach
- butterflies in the stomach
- hyperventilation
- erratic breathing
- palpitations
- rapid pulse
- dizziness
- faintness
- ringing in the ears
- difficulty in swallowing
- lump in the throat
- sore throat or hoarseness
- enlarged glands in the neck
- high-pitched voice
- talking faster than usual
- jelly legs

- cramps
- restless leg syndrome
- physical tiredness
- feeling of being drained
- insomnia
- waking up in the middle of the night or too early
- still tired after a night's sleep
- headache
- dry mouth
- muscle tension
- tight neck or shoulders
- teeth grinding
- sexual difficulties
- stiff jaw
- constipation
- diarrhoea
- nausea
- abdominal pain or indigestion
- loss of appetite
- excess hunger
- high or low blood pressure
- frequent urination

Women only:

- Difficult menstruation
- Premenstrual syndrome
- Menopausal or pre-menopausal difficulties

Men only:

- Weak or slow urine stream
- Prostate trouble
- Trouble with erections

Behavioural symptoms

- Smoke more than usual
- Drink more alcohol than is generally accepted is good for health
- Eat more sweets, chocolate or pastries than usual
- Take antidepressants, tranquilizers, sleeping pills, narcotics, pain relievers, marijuana or other street drugs
- Eat less than usual
- Eat more than usual
- Bingeing on foods or alcohol
- Taking laxatives or purging to control weight
- Becoming a workaholic with no time for relaxation or pleasurable activities
- Absenteeism from work
- Avoidance of certain people or places

- ❑ Withdrawal from social gatherings
- ❑ Obsessive or compulsive behaviour; for example, checking and
- ❑ re-checking you have locked the doors, switched the lights off,
- ❑ washing your hands over and over again, etc.
- pulling your hair out, e.g. hair on head, eyebrows, arms, etc.

If you have ticked three or more symptoms in any one category, you are likely to be suffering significant stress.

How to deal with overstress

Reduce your stress load:

1. Make your life regular as clockwork
2. Give yourself a break today
3. Lighten up your load of social engagements
4. Postpone making any changes in your living environment
5. Reduce the number of hours you spend at work or school
6. Keep your blood sugar steady
7. Eat more vegetables
8. Take a quality multi vitamin and mineral capsule
9. Reduce use of pick-me-up's (sugar, caffeine, chocolate, alcohol)
10. Avoid allergens
11. Start an enjoyable exercise – rest your mind
12. Stop your put-me-down's (valium/other drugs)
13. Visit your Doctor
14. Visit a professional counsellor
15. Visit a nutritional consultant
16. Have a regular massage

Why do we feel stressed?

It is important for survival that our bodies produce the stress response known as the fight-or-flight reaction.

When we are stressed, our bodies produce adrenaline, and it is this hormone which makes us experience most of the physical and emotional feelings when we are distressed.

If we did not produce adrenaline, we would not feel stressed, but we also would not respond appropriately to the dangers or tasks of life. Without adrenaline, we would not survive in the jungle, and we would not survive in the modern city, with all its expectations.