



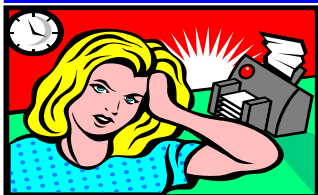
# Today's Collegian



Mr. Breitsprecher's Edition

July 15, 2005

FREE!



# STRESS!



Wouldn't life be boring if we didn't have a variety of things to stimulate our minds? Too much stimulus, however, can be a problem too – it can actually harm our health. Stress makes itself felt with mental, social, and physical symptoms which include exhaustion, loss of/increased appetite, headaches, crying, sleeplessness, and oversleeping. When stress becomes overwhelming, it prevents us from functioning efficiently.

Those symptoms are bad enough – some people make stress even more of a problem in their life when they try to escape through alcohol, drugs, or other compulsive behaviors. When people are under stress, they report feelings of alarm, frustration, or apathy.

Adjusting to college life can be stressful, but making healthy adjustments is part of the experience. It can be an excellent opportunity to learn more about ourselves and how we can handle different situations. Stress management is the ability to maintain control when situations, people, and events make excessive demands. Truly, this is an important life-skill.

## Recognizing Stress

**Short Term Physical Symptoms.** The body responds to stress by releasing adrenaline. While this can

feel uncomfortable, it is nature's way of getting us ready for quick action. Signs of stress that are felt immediately in a stressful situation include:

- Faster heart beat
- Increased sweating
- Cool skin
- Cold hands and feet
- Feelings of nausea, or 'butterflies in stomach'
- Rapid breathing
- Tense muscles
- Dry mouth

- A desire to urinate
- Diarrhea

### Short Term Performance Effects.

While that shot of adrenaline that our bodies provide can help us in 'fight-or-flight' situations, it can create problems, such as:

- Interferes with clear judgment and makes it difficult to take the time to make good decisions.
- Can seriously reduce your enjoyment of your work
- Where you need good physical skills, it gets in the way of fine motor control.

## Sources of Stress

Stress has a number of different causes. How we react to stress determines whether our anxiety increases or decreases. There are several major sources of stress:

- **Survival Stress:** This may occur in cases where your survival or health is threatened, where you are put under pressure, or where you experience some unpleasant or challenging event. Here adrenaline is released in your body and you experience all the symptoms of your body preparing for 'fight or flight'.
- **Internally Generated Stress:** This can come from anxious worrying about events beyond your control, from a tense, hurried approach to life, or from relationship problems caused by your own behavior. It can also come from an 'addiction' to and enjoyment of stress
- **Environmental and Job Stress:** Here your living or working environment causes the stress. It may come from noise, crowding, pollution, untidiness, dirt or other distractions. Alternatively stress can come from events at work.
- **Fatigue and Overwork:** Here stress builds up over a long period. This can occur where you try to achieve too much in too little time, or where you are not using effective time management strategies.

Check It Out!



## Tools for Coping: Stress Reduction

Coping.org has an entire series of online resources for coping with life's stressors. A HUGE variety of topics and strategies for healthy living make this a valuable resource for college students

<http://www.coping.org/growth/stress.htm>

- Causes difficult situations to be seen as a threat, not a challenge.
- Damages the positive frame of mind you need for high quality work
- Promotes negative thinking,
- Damages self-confidence,
- Narrows attention,
- Disrupts focus and concentration
- Makes it difficult to cope with distractions
- Consumes mental energy in distraction, anxiety, frustration and temper. This is energy that should be devoted to the work in hand.

### Long Term Physical Symptoms.

The body's response to stress can have affects over longer periods of time. The adrenaline that is released in the bloodstream, if maintained for long periods of time, can have a negative impact on health. This may show up in the following ways:

- Change in appetite
- Frequent colds
- Illnesses
- Asthma
- Back pain
- Digestive problems

- Headaches
- Skin eruptions
- Sexual disorders
- Aches and pains
- Feelings of intense and long-term tiredness

**Internal Symptoms of Long Term Stress.** When you are under stress or have been tired for a long period of time, you may find that you are less able to think clearly and rationally about problems. This can lead to the following internal emotional 'upsets':

- Worry or anxiety
- Confusion, and an inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Feeling ill
- Feeling out of control or overwhelmed by events
- Mood changes
- Depression
- Frustration
- Hostility
- Helplessness
- Impatience & irritability
- Restlessness
- Being more lethargic
- Difficulty sleeping

- Drinking more alcohol and smoking more
- Changing eating habits
- Reduced sex drive
- Relying more on medication

**Behavioral Symptoms of Long Term Stress.** When you or other people are under pressure, this can show as:

- Talking too fast or too loud
- Yawning
- Fiddling and twitching, nail biting, grinding teeth, drumming fingers, pacing, etc.
- Bad moods
- Being irritable
- Defensiveness
- Being critical
- Aggression
- Irrationality
- Overreaction and reacting emotionally
- Reduced personal effectiveness
- Being unreasonably negative
- Making less realistic judgments
- Being unable to concentrate and having difficulty making decisions
- Being more forgetful
- Making more mistakes
- Being more accident prone
- Changing work habits
- Increased absenteeism
- Neglect of personal appearance

We all feel stress from time to time. Most people that read these lists of short term and long term symptoms will be able to recognize and identify with a few of them. That is not a cause for alarm.

A person that recognizes many of the symptoms, however, might benefit from looking at stress management techniques, especially if they are experiencing change in their lives.

Adapted from, *The Book of Stress Survival - How to Relax and Live Positively*  
by Alix Kirsta

## Stress Test

1. Do you worry about the future?
2. Do you sometimes have trouble falling asleep?
3. Do you often reach for a cigarette, a drink, or a tranquilizer in order to reduce tension?
4. Do you become irritated over basically insignificant matters?
5. Do you have less energy than you seem to need or would like to have?
6. Do you have too many things to do and not enough time to do them?
7. Do you have headaches or stomach problems?
8. Do you feel pressure to accomplish or to get things done?
9. Are you very concerned about being either well-liked or successful?
10. Do you perform well enough in life to satisfy yourself?
11. Do you get satisfaction from the small joys or simple pleasures of life?
12. Are you able to really relax and have fun?

**Scoring:** 1 point for a yes answer to 1-9 or no answer to 10-12. A score of 4 or more suggests that you may be under significant stress.