

# What is Stress

Stress is the body's reaction to a perceived threat, or a demand, either pleasant or unpleasant. Stress is not the result of an event, but the body's reaction to the event.

Stress can be good (eustress) or bad (distress). Good stress can be beneficial in that it motivates us to do well and it goes away after the stressor is gone. (Example: nervousness before a speech or performance.) Good stress can help us be more creative and energetic. Too little stress leaves us bored and unchallenged.

Bad stress is unrelieved anxiety that persists over a long period of time, emotionally paralyzes us and interferes with normal life. This kind of stress can manifest itself in many ways:

- physical - appetite change, headaches, tension, fatigue, insomnia, nervous habits; increased alcohol, drug and tobacco use, digestive problems, restlessness, high blood pressure
- emotional - anxiety, frustration, mood swings, nightmares, crying, irritability, depression, discouragement
- spiritual - emptiness, loss of meaning, loss of direction, apathy
- mental - forgetfulness, poor concentration, negative attitude, confusion, boredom, negative self-talk
- relational - isolation, intolerance, loneliness, distrust, resentment

What is a stressor?

A stressor is something that is asking us to respond.

Happy events and positive changes in our lives can be stressors just as unhappy events or negative changes can. Marriage, starting school, moving, the birth of a baby, a new relationship or a new job, even though positive, can produce stress.

How can stress be managed?

1. Use good time management. A major cause of stress for students is feeling that there is not enough time to get everything done. Students with families and/or jobs find that this is a real problem. A planner in which you can schedule your semester and weekly obligations and study time is essential. Then have a daily "game plan" or "to do" list with tasks prioritized. When you feel that you are controlling your schedule instead of your schedule controlling you, stress will decrease.

2. Avoid clutter - have at least one place where you can study that is orderly, organized and clutter free.

3. Don't be afraid to say "no." Remember that school is temporary, and while you are a student, other activities may have to be put on hold. Take a look at all your activities and see which ones can be eliminated, at least temporarily.

4. Don't procrastinate. Discipline yourself to do **what** needs to be done **when** it needs to be done.

5. Enlist the help of those around you. Delegate. Ask yourself, "Does this **have** to be done? Does it have to be done by **me**, or could someone else do it?"

6. Try to avoid situations that you know are stressful. For example, if trying to study at home or in your room is stressful because you feel you don't accomplish anything, arrange to study in the library.

7. Deal with frustrations when they occur - take a break, exercise. Decide if the frustration is something that you can control. If so, devise a plan. What are your options? If the frustration is something you cannot control, try to let go of it.

8. Try to keep perspective and balance in your life. Schedule an activity you can look forward to at the end of an especially busy week.

9. Find time to exercise, even if it's only for a few minutes. Exercise is one of the best stress busters.

10. Learn to deal with negative people. Stay away from them if possible. If you can't avoid them, try to think of positive ways to counter their negativity.

11. Learn to find something positive in every situation.

12. Replace negative self-talk with positive self-talk.

13. Try to get rid of unrealistic expectations, such as:

- I should know everything.
- I should be liked by everyone.
- I should never make a mistake.
- My house (room) should always be neat and clean.
- I should do everything well.
- I should always be cheerful.
- I should never lose my temper.
- I should always be doing something constructive.
- I can't rest until I get it all done.

14. Get enough sleep and eat healthy foods. When you feel good, you can handle stress better.

15. If you are experiencing severe long-term stress that you find unmanageable, do not hesitate to ask for help.