

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.

COMMON MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT STRESS

- **We always know when we are under stress.** Often people become so accustomed to stress that they become unaware of it. Many of us suffer the debilitating effects of stress even though we don't feel tense. But stress can change the way you treat others, or damage your body even in the absence of feelings of frustration or anxiety.
- **Stress is something that affects only those who have high-pressure lives.** Many ordinary individuals experience the constant stress of worry, leading unfulfilled lives, or of not being who they would like to be.
- **The only way to lower stress is to change your surroundings or to take medication.** Changing your outlook on life is the most reliable and effective way of reducing stress. Stress comes from the way we **perceive** the world, not from the way the world really is.
- **Stress is caused by events that happen to us.** To paraphrase the Stoic philosopher Epictetus, it is not events in themselves that cause our distress, but rather the views we take of events.
- **Emotions have a will of their own and cannot be controlled.** We can change our feelings by first changing our behavior or by changing our thinking. For example, getting some work done can keep us from worrying about it. Creating a new understanding of a situation can make it less threatening or stressful.

Stress Test

TIPS FOR REDUCING STRESS

- **Learn to plan.** Disorganization can breed stress. Having too many projects going on simultaneously often leads to confusion, forgetfulness, and the sense that uncompleted projects are hanging over your head. When possible, take on projects one at a time and work on them until completed.
- **Recognize and accept limits.** Most of us set unreasonable and perfectionist goals for ourselves. But in reality, we can never be perfect, so we often have a sense of failure or inadequacy no matter how well we perform. Set *achievable* goals for yourself.
- **Learn to play.** You need to escape from the pressures of life occasionally and have fun. Find pastimes that are absorbing and enjoyable no matter your level of ability.
- **Focus on the positive.** Avoid criticizing others. Learn to praise the things you like in others. Focus upon the good qualities those around you possess. Be sure to give yourself credit and appreciate your own good qualities as well.
- **Learn to tolerate and forgive.** Intolerance of others leads to frustration and anger. Attempting to really understand the way other people feel can make you more accepting of them. Accept and forgive yourself also.
- **Avoid unnecessary competition.** There are plenty competitive situations in life that we can't avoid. Being too concerned with winning in too many areas of life can create excessive tension and anxiety, and make us unnecessarily aggressive.
- **Get regular physical exercise.** Check with your physician before beginning any exercise program. You will be more likely to stay with an exercise program if you choose one that you really enjoy rather than one that feels like pure hard work and drudgery.
- **Learn a systematic, drug-free method of relaxing.** Meditation, yoga, or any of a variety of relaxation techniques can be learned from various accredited teachers and licensed psychotherapists.
- **Talk out your troubles.** Find a friend, member of the clergy, faculty member, counselor, or psychotherapist you can be open with. Expressing your "bottled up" anxieties to a sympathetic ear can be incredibly helpful.
- **Change your thinking.** How we feel emotionally often depends on our outlook or philosophy of life, but changing your beliefs is challenging process. There is little practical wisdom in the modern world to guide us through our lives. No one has all the answers, but some answers are available. Talk to mentors, teachers, and licensed counselors.

For additional resources, contact the UCLA Learning Skills Office, Dr. Lesley Stahl, 310-206-3828, Student Affairs Office

Source:

Dr. Frank C. Richardson, Associate Professor, Department of Educational Psychology, and author of *Stress, Sanity, and Survival*