

What is stress?

Stress can be a reaction to a short-lived situation, such as being stuck in traffic. Or, it can last a long time if you're dealing with relationship problems, a spouse's death or other serious situations. Stress becomes dangerous when it interferes with your ability to live a normal life over an extended period.

Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker.¹

In today's fast-paced world, stress seems to have become a way of life. Your shoulders may tense up, your back may hurt, and you might become irritable, angry, or unable to concentrate. Life's pressures and demands can come from work, relationship and other responsibilities.

Types of stress

Eustress is known to many as positive or good stress. This type of stress can feel pleasant and/or rewarding after the stressful situation subsides.

Distress is known as negative stress. Most people attribute their own stress to distress. Negative stress can be acute or chronic.

- **Acute stress**—This type of distress is extremely intense when it occurs but disappears after the event passes. An example of acute stress is if you are pulled over by a

police officer while driving, you may begin to sweat and notice your heart rate increases substantially. After the police officer leaves you begin feeling normal again.

- **Chronic stress**—This type of distress is less intense but usually lasts for a long period of time. An example of chronic stress is if you are dealing with pressure from credit card debt. You may feel an increase in headaches and have difficulty sleeping at night. These physical changes take a toll on your health and well-being.

What does stress do to the body?

Stress causes your body to make physical and chemical changes. When you are under stress all of your senses go on high alert.

Physical changes to your body include:

- Changes in blood pressure.
- Increased breathing.
- Increased perspiration.
- Increased heart rate.
- Dilated pupils.

1. www.cdc.gov/niosh/docs/99-101



In 2012, 80% of Americans reported that their stress level increased in the past year. Top stressors include money (69%), work (65%), and the economy (61%).²

These physical changes are part of the **fight-or-flight response**. This is a natural and instinctive response meant to protect us from threats to survival.

The **flight** response acts as a reaction to fear and the body prepares to avoid or hide from the situation. Your body reacts to stress in the same way.

The **fight** response increases adrenaline and prepares the body to protect or defend itself. The body stays alert until the danger or stress passes and then returns to a state of calmness. If the levels of stress continue, the body stays activated which can cause problems. When the body no longer has the energy to adapt and keep up, it becomes exhausted.

Symptoms of stress

The effects of stress can be both physical and emotional. If you think you may be experiencing too much stress, here are signs to look for:

- Difficulty sleeping.
- Digestion problems.
- Tension headaches, backaches, stomachaches or other physical discomforts.
- Rise in blood pressure.

- Anxiety.
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs, including smoking cigarettes.
- Change in eating habits (under eating or overeating).
- Isolation.
- Irritability.

Contact us

Your program provides access to tools and other resources online or call us directly to speak to a professional counselor who is available everyday at any time to provide confidential assistance at no cost to you.

Resources

National Institute of Mental Health

www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml

American Psychological Association

www.apa.org/topics/stress

2. 2012 online Stress in America survey of 2,020 U.S. adults age 18 and older by Harris Interactive for American Psychology Association.

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