

Stress

How much is
**TOO MUCH
STRESS?**

Signs of stress
**IN CHILDREN
& TEENS**

Self Quiz:
**MEASURE YOUR
STRESS LEVEL**

10 tips
for better stress
management

Is stress affecting your health?

INSIGHTS magazine is a publication of Pine Rest Christian Mental Health Services and is reviewed by Pine Rest clinical and medical staff. INSIGHTS is produced by the Pine Rest Marketing and Communications Department.

To learn more about stress, visit pinerest.org/stress.

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Pine Rest provides treatment for stress to people of all ages from young children to older adults and at all levels of need.

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CONTENTS

What is Stress3

Who Gets Stress4

How Stress Affects Health.....5

What’s Stressing Us Out.....5
 Social Media Worries..... 5

Stress in Children and Teens6-7
 Signs of Stress in Children 7

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder8-9
 PTSD Symptom Clusters 8

How Stressed Are You 10
 Take the Stress Quiz 10

10 Tips for Better Stress Management..... 11

The Importance of Emotional Support 12

Pine Rest is one of the largest free-standing behavioral health providers in the United States. A nonprofit founded in 1910, it has a comprehensive behavioral health center located in Grand Rapids, Michigan and a network of 18 outpatient offices throughout Michigan and Iowa.

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What is Stress?

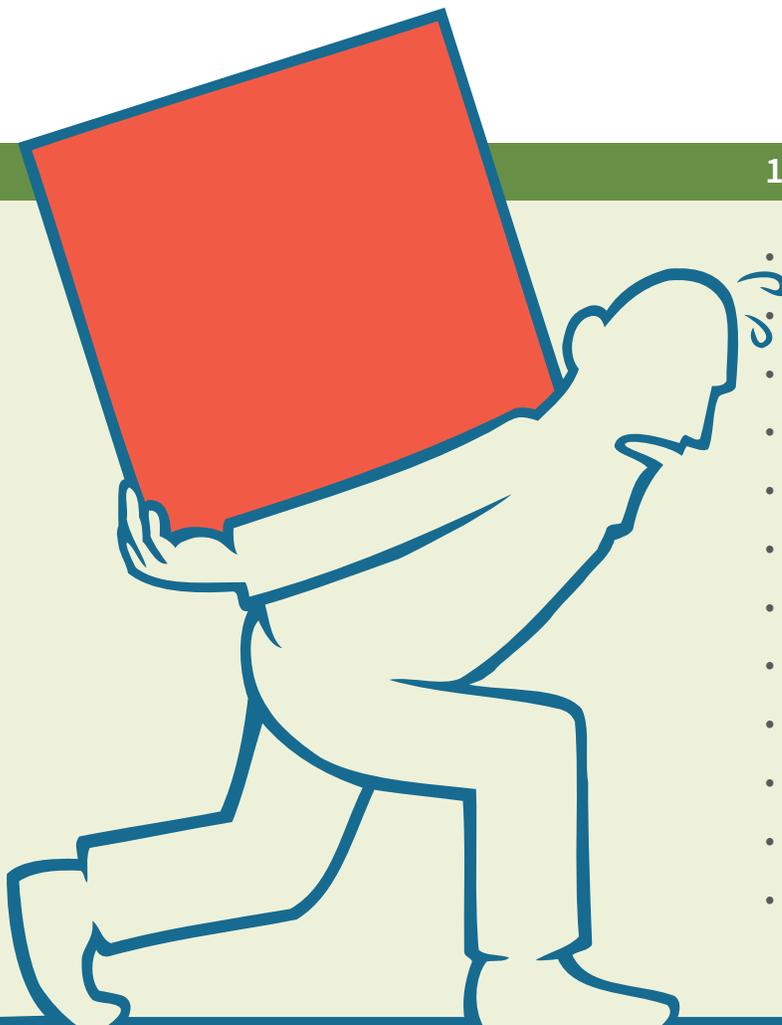
Are You Stressed? Today? Absolutely. I'm late for work and trying to get the kids off to school; my mother needs me to go to the doctor with her this afternoon; I have a mountain of work at the office and piles of laundry at home and there's major construction on the freeway. Yes, I'm definitely stressed!

Stress is a part of life and not all of it is bad. Your body responds to stress as if you are in danger. It produces hormones that increase your heart rate, make you breathe faster and give you a burst of energy. It is the body's way of protecting you. Stress helps you stay focused and alert and in an emergency can save your life.

This is called the “fight or flight” stress response and you use it frequently. It is what keeps you energized and focused during a presentation, allows you to respond quickly – like preventing your infant from falling down a flight of stairs and prompts you to study up on recent tax legislation rather than golfing with your buddies.

But too much stress can be harmful to your health.

Often, the problem is that you can get so used to stress that it begins to feel normal and you are unaware of how it's affecting you. Stress can negatively impact your mood and productivity, your relationships with family and friends, your health, even your ability to enjoy life.



12 Warning Signs of Too Much Stress

- Agitation, inability to relax
- Anxious or racing thoughts
- Chest pain, rapid heartbeat
- Diarrhea or constipation
- Eating too much or not enough
- Feeling overwhelmed
- Irritability, moodiness
- Nausea, dizziness
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities
- Unable to concentrate
- Using alcohol or drugs to relax and “unwind”
- Worrying incessantly

Who Gets Stress

Everyone gets stressed at some point in their lives but not everyone reacts the same way. What may be overwhelming stress to one person might not even faze another. Stress comes in different forms and affects people of all ages, in all occupations, and in various stages of their lives. Stress can be affected by such things as your physical health, the quality of your personal relationships, the amount and extent of your responsibilities and commitments, how much help or support you receive from others, and if you have gone through a traumatic event such as death of a spouse, a serious illness, or loss of a job.

Generally, those who have a strong support network – whether it’s family or friends – are better equipped to handle stress than those who do not. Individuals who don’t eat well, get insufficient sleep, or have other types of health problems are less able to handle the pressures of everyday life and are more likely to respond poorly to stress. Those who are going through transitions in life – teenagers, working parents, and older adults – often are stressed because of the changes associated with that stage of their lives.

Men and Women React Differently to Stress

While it is true that anyone can be stressed, women are more likely to experience ongoing stress than men. This is partly due to the added family and social responsibilities that women typically take on—day-to-day overseeing the children; caring for older parents; jobs outside the home plus cooking, laundry and housework in the home. This

additional burden can set the stage for serious health problems. Men tend to experience stress over financial concerns, which complies with their traditional role as “breadwinner.”

Men and women also react differently in stressful situations. According to a study reported in the *Psychological Review*, women are less likely to either “fight” or “flee,” but rather to “tend and befriend.” To tend is a nurturing behavior “designed to protect and to relieve stress” and befriending seeks and maintains social connections, which is behavior most frequently associated with women. Men tend to react more aggressively and to combat the situation or to flee from it.

Age and Stress

Aging can bring on a whole set of stressors. These may include the illness or death of a spouse, accidents, health problems, unpleasant side effects of certain medications, poor eating habits, inability to sleep, diminishing eyesight or hearing to name but a few.

In addition, limited physical ability due to joint pain or imbalance can curtail physical exercise or even getting out to church or family activities. The stress is compounded by the fear of further endangering their health through everyday tasks such as cooking, cleaning or gardening.



How Stress Affects Health

Long-term bouts with stress may lead to serious health problems and chronic stress can affect nearly every system in your body.

Stress can cause or exacerbate anxiety disorders, depression and abuse of alcohol or drugs. Stress can suppress the immune system, increase the frequency and severity of migraine headaches, asthma, and blood sugar fluctuations in diabetics. If you already have a health condition, stress can make it worse.

Stress has been associated with:

- Skin rashes
- High blood pressure
- Heart disease
- Stomach ailments
- Cancers
- Aging



What's Stressing Us Out?

Politics, international threats, personal safety, health, work, personal finances and the economy are leading sources of stress for Americans today according to the American Psychological Association. And though what causes the most stress for us personally varies, one thing is clear – we appear to be more stressed out than ever before.

Digital technology and the pressure to constantly check electronic devices is another leading source of stress. Smartphones, social media and other digital forms of communication, while offering convenience and entertainment, also feed into a need for many of us to stay connected at all times. These modern conveniences have breached the wall between work and personal time and at times seem to prioritize online interactions with strangers over human-to-human connections with our loved ones who are in the same room with us.



SOCIAL MEDIA WORRIES

I worry about negative effects of social media on my physical and mental health.
(% that strongly /somewhat agree)



SOURCE: Stress in America™ Report, American Psychological Association (www.stressinamerica.org)

According to a recent Stress In America™ study, “Almost two-thirds of Americans (65 percent) somewhat or strongly agree that periodically “unplugging” or taking a “digital detox” is important for their mental health. However, only 28 percent of those who say this actually report doing so.”

Parents struggle to balance their children’s use of digital technology while trying to manage their own dependence on these devices. Many feel their family is threatened by their child’s overuse of technology and are concerned about the influence of social media on their child’s physical and mental health.

Stress in Children and Teens

Children and young people also experience stress: from doing well in school, making friends or meeting expectations from parents, teachers or coaches. Positive stress can provide the energy to tackle a big test, presentation or sports event. Too much stress, however, can create unnecessary hardship and challenge.

Adults may not realize their children or teens are experiencing overwhelming stress so tuning into emotional or behavioral cues is important. Here are some tips to recognize stress in children:

Negative Changes in Behavior

Youth, especially younger children, find it difficult to verbalize when they are experiencing stress. It can manifest itself through changes in behavior, including: acting irritable or moody, withdrawing from activities that used to be fun, routinely expressing worries or complaining more than usual about school. Teens may significantly avoid parents, abandon longtime friends

or express excessive hostility toward family members. These negative changes in behavior are not always linked to excessive stress but almost always a clear sign that something is wrong.

“Feeling Sick” May Be Caused By Stress

Stress can also appear in physical symptoms. Excessive trips to the school nurse, frequent stomachaches or headaches (when they have been given a clean bill of health by their physician), or an increase in complaints in certain situations (before a big test) may indicate significant stress.

Changes in Interactions With Others

Sometimes a child or teen may seem like their usual self at home but be acting out in unusual ways in other settings. Network with other parents, teachers, school administrators, coaches and extracurricular activity leaders so that you know how your child or teen is doing in the world around them.



Listen and Translate

Children may use other words for stress such as “worried,” “confused,” “annoyed” and “angry.” They may also say negative things about themselves, others, or the world around them such as “No one likes me,” “I’m stupid” or “Nothing is fun.”

Seek Support

If you are concerned that your child or teen is experiencing stress on a regular basis, get help from a licensed mental health professional. Psychologists have special training to help people identify problems and develop effective strategies to resolve overwhelming feelings of stress.



Signs of Stress in Children

- Acting irritable, moody or crying
- Withdrawing from activities that used to be fun
- Routinely expressing worries
- Complaining more than usual about school
- Displaying surprising fearful reactions
- Clinging to a parent or teacher
- Sleeping too much or too little
- Eating too much or too little
- Frequent stomachaches or headaches
- Acting out in unusual ways
- Using words like “confused,” “annoyed” or “angry”
- Negative self-talk like “I’m stupid,” or “No one likes me.”

SOURCE: American Psychological Association Help Center

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

Many think of combat veterans when talking about post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). However anyone who witnesses or experiences an event or events that involve actual or threatened death, serious injury or sexual violation is at risk to develop PTSD. These events can be as wide ranging as a car accident, natural disaster,

witnessing a crime, workplace accident or traumatic birth experience. Individuals who learn of a close relative or friend involved in death or threatened death and professionals (e.g. first responders) repeatedly exposed to the traumatic details can also be diagnosed with PTSD.



PTSD Symptom Clusters

In order to be diagnosed with PTSD, a doctor or clinician will look for symptoms from each of four symptom clusters: intrusion, avoidance, negative alterations in cognitions and mood, and alterations in arousal and reactivity.

Intrusion	Avoidance	Cognition & Mood Changes	Arousal & Reactivity Changes
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involuntary & recurrent memories • Traumatic nightmares • Flashbacks • Intense or prolonged distress after exposure to reminders 	Avoiding trauma-related <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughts • Feelings • People • Places • Conversations • Activities • Objects • Situations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Can't recall key features of event • Negative beliefs about self or world • Distorted blame • Persistent fear, horror, anger, guilt or shame • Diminished interest in activities • Feeling alienated • Inability to feel positive emotions 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Irritable or aggressive • Self-destructive • Hypervigilance • Exaggerated startle response • Problems with concentration • Sleep problems

The symptoms adults experience may vary. For a few people, the symptoms become so severe they cannot take care of themselves.

Children may show symptoms like repetitive play or physical problems such as stomachaches and headaches. Just as the symptoms differ, so does the onset of PTSD. While symptoms typically appear within three months of the traumatic event, it can be many months or even years later that people begin to have problems.

The good news is that PTSD can be treated. If someone you know experienced a trauma, encourage them to get help dealing with the event. The sooner they talk about it and work on it, the better off they will be and the less likely they are to experience PTSD.

How Stressed Are You?

Stress is additive. It piles up. Stress affects both mind and body and without your being aware of it, stress can add up to dangerous levels that can have serious health consequences. This Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale is a well-known tool for measuring the amount of stress you've experienced within the past year. To calculate your score:

1. Circle the value of each event that has occurred in your life within the past 12 months.

2. Add the values you circled. Note: If you experienced the same event more than once in the same year, add its score again to your total for each extra occurrence.

3. From your total, find the relationship to health changes that may result in hospitalization as shown below. That's your probability unless you have the internal or external resources to manage stressful conditions.

Life Event	Mean Value	Life Event	Mean Value
1. Death of spouse	100	23. Son or daughter leaving home	29
2. Divorce	73	24. Trouble with in-laws	29
3. Marital separation	65	25. Outstanding personal achievement	28
4. Jail term	63	26. Spouse begins or ends work	26
5. Death of close family member	63	27. Begin or end school/college	26
6. Personal injury or illness	53	28. Change in living conditions	25
7. Marriage	50	29. Revision of personal habits	24
8. Fired at work	47	30. Trouble with boss	23
9. Marital reconciliation	45	31. Change in work hours or conditions	20
10. Retirement	45	32. Change in residence	20
11. Change in health of family member	44	33. Change in school/college	20
12. Pregnancy	40	34. Change in recreation	19
13. Sexual difficulties	39	35. Change in church activities	19
14. Gain of new family member	39	36. Change in social activities	18
15. Business readjustment	39	37. A moderate loan or mortgage	17
16. Change in financial state	38	38. Change in sleeping habits	16
17. Death of close friend	37	39. Change in number of family get-togethers	15
18. Change to different line of work	36	40. Change in eating habits	15
19. Change in number of arguments with spouse	35	41. Vacation	13
20. A large mortgage or loan	37	42. Christmas	12
21. Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	43. Minor violations of the law	11
22. Change in responsibilities at work	29		
Your total: _____			



Total	Probability of Becoming Ill from Stress
150-199	37% - low to moderate chance of becoming ill in the near future
200-299	51% - moderate to high chance of becoming ill in near future
300+	79% - high or very high risk of becoming ill in near future

10 Tips for Better Stress Management

There are a variety of ways to handle stress, but all of them depend upon the individual's willingness and ability to make some significant changes in his or her life.

1. **Exercise** is one of the best ways to manage stress. Just 30 minutes a day can make you feel better mentally and physically and reduce stress.
2. Explore other ways to cope with stress such as **meditation, yoga, tai chi** or other similar types of programs that are both physical and contemplative.
3. **Set priorities.** Decide what you can do and what you are unable to do. Say no when asked to take on another task if it will add too much stress to your life.
4. Stay in touch with those who provide your **support network** whether it's family, friends, church associates or community organizations. Ask for help if needed to relieve stress from family obligations such as caring for an elderly parent.
5. If you cannot cope with all the stress in your life, **seek help** from your family physician or a qualified mental health professional, particularly if you are using alcohol or drugs to cope.
6. If work is your biggest stressor, instead of a "coffee break," **take work breaks.** Take a short walk; go out to lunch and avoid talking about work; try to make a clean break from work at night and on the weekends.
7. If you have a health problem or condition, don't ignore it as the stress in your life may make it worse. Make sure that you **get enough sleep.**
8. Make sure your **diet is a healthy,** nutritious one.
9. Make time to **relax** and **schedule activities that you enjoy.**
10. Reach out to a good friend and **talk about the stress in your life.** Sometimes just sharing your worries and concerns with someone you know and trust can help relieve some of the stress and increase your ability to deal with it all.

The Importance of Emotional Support

Having a strong social network of family, friends, neighbors and/or coworkers improves your ability to cope with life's stressors on your own. Your network doesn't need to be large for you to benefit. It's the quality of your connection ... your ability to open up, trust your confidence won't be broken and that you will not be judged ... that's most

important. It's best if you don't lean on just one since different people in your life can support you in different ways. If you don't have anyone you can feel safe with, reach out to a mental health professional to help you through a stressful time.

