

Some Facts Psychologists Know About...

Stress

What is stress?

- Stress is anything that physically, emotionally, and psychologically, pressures you.
- Any effort on your part whether its trying out for the basketball team, preparing for an upcoming exam, establishing an outline for a paper, requires some degree of stress.
- Stress is an everyday part of many of our lives.
- Without some stress in our lives, they would seem boring and dull.
- Stress can be both positive and negative. In that while it is difficult to handle at one time, at moderate doses, it can be a motivator and contribute to our happiness and success at another time.
- Stress is not only desirable but essential to life. Whether your stressful situation is the result of a major life change or the effects of minor everyday hassles, it is how you respond to it that determines if it is harmful.

Stress or distress

- There is a type of stress that can be harmful.
- Distress can be defined as continual stress that requires you to constantly readjust and adapt. Too subject to great strain or difficulties. For example, having a major that your do not like can produce feelings of frustration, defeat, and discouragement. If these symptoms last long enough, they can result in fatigue, exhaustion and even physical or mental breakdown.
- The healthiest way to avoid distress is to seek work or tasks that you are (1) capable of doing, (2) you really enjoy (3) other people appreciate. In addition, have available places that will allow you to participate in activities that you enjoy, that help you to relax.
- Your friends, family, peers, and school can be positive resources for challenging good stress or harmful distress.

How do you react to stress?

- You experience stress from your environment, your body, and your thoughts:
 1. **Environment-** Your surroundings bombard you with the demands to adjust.
 2. **Physiological-** Your response to environmental threats and changes along with the rapid growth of adolescence, menopause in women, aging, illness, accidents, poor eating habits and exercise, and sleep difficulties produce physiological changes that are stressful.
 3. **Thoughts-** Your brain interprets and translates complex changes in your environment and decides when to fight or flight. How you perceive and label each experience in your present and future life can either relax or stress you.

- You may not be consciously aware of the ways in which you respond to stressful events. However, there are signs or symptoms of difficult to manage stress:

<u>Psychological</u>	<u>Behavioral</u>	<u>Psychosomatic</u>
Short Fuse Irritability	Drug/Use Abuse Alcohol Use/Abuse	Ulcers High Blood Pressure
Depression Frustration Emotional Irritability Insecurity	Smoking Strained Relationships Eating Problems Suicide Attempts	Insomnia Indigestion Headaches Other
Mental Illness Anxiety	Violence Impulsive/ Irrational Behavior	Cardiovascular Body Infections Irregular Pulse rate

What are some possible ways we can handle stress?

- Stress is a part of living and may never be eliminated from your life. However, you do have the ability to **manage and react to** the stress that occurs in your life. When stress becomes overwhelming and hard to handle, there are healthy resources that can help you deal with it. Here are some techniques for alleviating stress:
 1. Relaxation Techniques
 2. Deep Breathing
 3. Taking a Walk
 4. Exercising
 5. Backwards Counting
 6. Imagery
 7. Meditation
 8. Positive Self-Talk
 9. Listening to Relaxing Music
 10. Talking to Someone
 11. Have a good cry
 12. Have a massage
 13. Take up a new hobby
- In addition to the previously mentioned techniques for managing stress, the magazine *Current Health*, vol. 3, no.8, provided other suggestions that sometimes help with coping with stress:
 1. *Learn to accept what you cannot change* - if your have no control in a situation, learn to accept what you cannot change.
 2. *Avoid self-medication* - Although there are many street drugs (including alcohol) that may temporarily

camouflage or seem to ward off psychological pain, they do not help you adjust to the stress yourself.

3. *Get enough sleep and rest* - Lack of sleep can make you feel more irritable and decrease your ability to deal with stress.
4. *Balance work and recreation* -Have available time for recreation to help relax your mind.
5. *Do something for others* - Sometimes when you are distressed, you spend the majority of your time and energy concentrating on yourself and the stressful situation. Doing something for someone else can help to get the focus from yourself.
6. *Take one thing at a time* - Learn to prioritize things in your life. Attempting to tackle all the tasks in your life can be overwhelming and self-defeating.
7. *Give in once in a while* - If you notice that other people are the source of your stress, try giving in instead of fighting and insisting that you are always right. Perhaps others will begin to give in, too.
8. *Make yourself available* - If your life feels dull and boring, get involved. Isolation and withdrawal will make you more frustrated.

A Quick Relaxation Technique:

1. **Deep Breaths:** Take a very deep breath, hold it for about 10 seconds, and exhale as if you are blowing up a balloon. Exhale as much of the air from you lungs as possible. Breathe normally for about 15-20 seconds, and repeat. Breathe normally another 15-20 seconds and repeat a third time.
2. **Circular Breathing:** Take shallow, “tummy breaths” paying particular attention to there being a comfortable, constant in and out air flow without holding your breath between the inhale and exhale, and exhale and inhale. This is the most relaxed kind of breathing and it usually causes the rest of your body to become more relaxed.

3. **Letting Go:** While sitting in a comfortable chair, or better still, while lying down, use you imagination to attempt to let gravity take over your body. Don't fight against gravity at all. Let gravity win. Feel the regions of your body becoming heavier and sinking into the chair, bed, couch, etc. This is a good way to trick your muscles into becoming more relaxed.

4. **Quick Meditation:** Every time you inhale think the words “I AM” and when you exhale, think the word “RELAXED.” Do this for about five minutes or more. Although it may feel silly if you've never meditated before, eventually the boring repetition of the nice words causes your mind to become more relaxed.

NOTE: Although it may be ideal to find a quiet place and progress through all four of these steps, it is very useful to perform any one of these steps very often throughout each day. Relaxation is a learned response and it takes a while for the brain to learn how to send out relaxation signals without using tricks like those above. So do the above often and, over the next few months you will react less intensely to stress. If it doesn't seem to help, please stop in to see us at your counseling services.

Your Counseling Service: Timely, confidential, and professional assistance is available for U.C. students at the University **Psychological Services Center** (8:00am – 5:00pm, M-F) located at 316 Dyer Hall. Phone (513-556-0648) or stop in for a no charge screening interview.

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Center** 

This fact sheet is provided as service by the University of Cincinnati Psychological Services Center, and the Division of Student Affairs and Services. This fact sheet was prepared by Dr. Kellie Warren and the professional staff of the Psychological Services Center. Please contact our office (513-556-0648) or our Web site at <http://www.psc.uc.edu> if you would like additional copies.

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