

Stress Management

Strategies for Emotional Fitness

Third Edition

**Merrill F. Raber, MSW, Ph.D.
and George Dyck, M.D.
with Barbara Preheim, MSW**

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Learning Objectives for

STRESS MANAGEMENT

The objectives for *Stress Management* are listed below. They have been developed to guide the user to the core issues covered in this book.

The objectives of this book are to help the user:

- 1) Define stress and understand its effects on emotional health
- 2) Examine strategies for coping with stress
- 3) Employ mindfulness meditation techniques
- 4) Make personal contacts positive and meaningful
- 5) Explore ways to attain and maintain emotional maturity

Assessing Progress

Course Technology has developed a Crisp Series **assessment** that covers the fundamental information presented in this book. A 25-item, multiple-choice and true/false questionnaire allows the reader to evaluate his or her comprehension of the subject matter.

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Preface

During the past decade considerable attention has been devoted to the importance of good physical health. The results have been impressive. Large numbers of people now exercise regularly, watch their diets, and take other preventative health measures.

This book was developed to focus similar attention on managing stress to maintain good emotional health. Many of the principles presented in this book can be developed and practiced like a thoughtful exercise program or diet.

The pressures of life are many. It is important to remember that everyone experiences some stress. Stress is normal and, properly managed, can be useful. This book will focus on finding the level of stress that may be useful for you and teaching you ways to recognize and avoid stress beyond that level. Other topics will help you understand the basic ingredients of emotional health, improve self-awareness and self-image, and clarify the link between physical wellness and emotional wellness.

One reading will simply point you in the right direction. Completing the various exercises and activities can be a significant step toward self-awareness and growth in the challenging arena of your emotional health.

Good luck!

Merrill F. Raber, MSW, Ph.D.

George Dyck, M.D.

Barbara Preheim, MSW

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PREVIEW

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1

Understanding Stress

PREVIEW

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PREVIEW

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The Effects of Stress on Emotional Health

Stress is a part of life. Life today is complex and it is impossible to avoid stress. How much stress individuals encounter and how they deal with it has a direct connection with emotional health. This part will look at stress and its many dimensions.

Stress is what we experience internally in response to a situation we find hard to deal with. Most of us handle routine stress readily. In other words, we are able to “handle the situation.” We can resolve our feelings and dissipate the tension.

Stress is essentially *within* us even though we may perceive it as coming from outside. This is why not everyone experiences the same circumstances as stressful. What is stressful for one person may not be for another. In this sense, it may be counterproductive to tell someone not to worry about a situation if you do not consider the same situation as stressful. We all react to situations differently; it is part of being human.

Stress Management and Emotional Fitness

Stress is a learning laboratory that constantly teaches us about how to handle the difficulties we encounter. In the same way that exercising keeps our bodies physically fit, dealing effectively with the demands that affect our emotions keeps us emotionally fit.

Anxiety is a signal that we are under stress. If this feeling keeps recurring, stress is not being dealt with effectively. For example, if you find yourself continually upset and angry, it would be worthwhile to determine the source of your anger and then find an appropriate way to deal with it. Otherwise your feelings will build and produce negative effects.

When our feelings build beyond a certain point, we begin to experience strain. If the situation we find troublesome disappears, the feeling of stress goes away. If the pressure does not let up, however, we eventually will show signs of emotional and physical exhaustion.

Expected life events that we all encounter are often stressful. These events include the entire range of experiences: a new birth, entering school, marriage, divorce, and the loss of a family member.

Sudden, unexpected catastrophic events are well-known causes of stress. Situations that result in our chronically feeling bad, either about ourselves or others, also can result in stress.

Expressing emotions is often difficult. The ability to recognize stress and then learn to manage it through an appropriate expression of emotions is extremely important in coping with stress.

People who continually hold their emotions inside often “boil over” at inappropriate times. This may damage their relationships with others. This seems to occur most often where stress has built up over a period of time. One way to help avoid this is to talk things over before the “boiling point” is reached.

Recognizing Stress

Different people recognize stress in different ways. For some, stress is a set of feelings that makes them aware that “something is not right.” For others, stress comes from a series of stressful events. For still others, stress might be more accurately identified as a lifestyle, or lifestyle choice, that affects themselves and others. Finally, some people see stress as the resulting physical symptoms. Recognizing that all of these describe the same process is helpful in understanding stress.

Ways to identify stress include the following:

Feelings Restlessness Keyed-up feeling Anxiety Depression	Lifestyle Intensive drive Aggressiveness Impatience Workaholism
Crisis Events Death of a family member Separation Divorce Business failure	Physical Symptoms Headaches Fatigue Insomnia Hypertension Abdominal discomfort Excessive eating or loss of appetite

Testing Your Stress Level

Our lives are filled with both happy and sad events. Many of us do not realize, however, that all of life's changes can result in stress on both our physical and emotional health.

Changes occur in everyone's life. Some are everyday experiences. Others are not-so-common. All can cause stress and anxiety.

The list that follows is a stress test that was developed by Drs. Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe to help people understand what causes stress in their lives. Place a check (✓) beside each event that you have experienced in the last year and then add the attached point values.

HOLMES-RAHE STRESS TEST*			
Rank	Event	Value	Your Score
1.	Death of spouse	100	_____
2.	Divorce	73	_____
3.	Marital separation	65	_____
4.	Jail term	63	_____
5.	Death of close family member	63	_____
6.	Personal injury or illness	53	_____
7.	Marriage	50	_____
8.	Fired from work	47	_____
9.	Marital reconciliation	45	_____
10.	Retirement	45	_____
11.	Change in family member's health	44	_____
12.	Pregnancy	40	_____
13.	Sex difficulties	39	_____
14.	Addition to family	39	_____
15.	Business readjustment	39	_____
16.	Change in financial status	38	_____
17.	Death of close friend	37	_____
18.	Change in number of marital arguments	35	_____
19.	Mortgage or loan over \$10,000	31	_____
20.	Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	_____
21.	Change in work responsibilities	29	_____
22.	Son or daughter leaving home	29	_____
23.	Trouble with in-laws	29	_____
24.	Outstanding personal achievement	28	_____
25.	Spouse begins or stops work	26	_____

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Rank	Event	Value	Your Score
26.	Starting or finishing school	26	_____
27.	Change in living conditions	25	_____
28.	Revision of personal habits	24	_____
29.	Trouble with boss	23	_____
30.	Change in work hours, conditions	20	_____
31.	Change in residence	20	_____
32.	Change in schools	20	_____
33.	Change recreational habits	19	_____
34.	Change in church activities	19	_____
35.	Change in social activities	18	_____
36.	Mortgage or loan under \$10,000	18	_____
37.	Change in sleeping habits	16	_____
38.	Change in number of family gatherings	15	_____
39.	Change in eating habits	14	_____
40.	Vacation	13	_____
41.	Christmas season	12	_____
42.	Minor violation of the law	11	_____
		Total	_____

SCORING: Add up the point values of all the items checked. If your score is 300 or more, you stand an almost 80% chance of getting sick in the near future as a result of the events. If your score is 150 to 299, the chances are about 50%. If less than 150, the chances are about 30%.

This scale suggests that life changes require an effort to adapt and then to regain stability. This process probably saps energy the body would ordinarily use to maintain itself, so susceptibility to illness increases.

Thomas H. Holmes and Richard R. Rahe, "Social Readjustment Rating Scale," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* II, (1967): 214. Reprinted with permission.

Identifying Behavior Patterns

Considerable research has been focused on two distinct personality types, Type A and Type B, over the past several decades. You can recognize Type A as people who are generally more competitive, restless, and quick to anger. Their counterparts, Type B, show behaviors that are calmer and less rushed by the day's events.

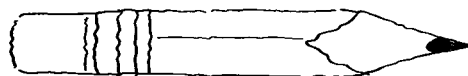
Type A behavior has been described by researchers and cardiologists Meyer Friedman, M.D., and Ray H. Rosenman, M.D., as the kind of stressful lifestyle that is much more likely to lead to heart disease. On the other hand, recent research suggests Type A individuals may be better prepared to survive a heart attack when it does occur.

Type B behavior seems to produce fewer physical problems related to stress. Type Bs tend to be less pressured and often deal with others more easily, yet they rise to the "top" as frequently as do Type As. They also seem to enjoy the little things in life that add meaning.

We know that it is possible to modify our behavior and make a significant difference in our risk for heart attacks. The potentially hazardous behavior pattern of Type A can be altered by learning to think and plan differently.

Having a plan for a balanced lifestyle is important. Such a plan takes into account the need for work and play, for regular exercise, for diet control, for relaxation, and for building positive relationships. These things will help you reduce stress and improve your emotional—and physical—health.

The exercise on the following page will help you identify your own behavior patterns.



WHICH TYPE ARE YOU?

Listed below are 10 statements. Place a check (✓) in the column that is most descriptive of your behavior.

	Usually		Seldom		
1. Do you move, walk, and eat rapidly?	1	2	3	4	5
2. Do you feel impatient with the rate at which most events take place?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Do you attempt to finish the sentences of persons speaking to you?	1	2	3	4	5
4. Do you become irritated or even enraged when a car ahead of you in your lane runs at a pace you consider too slow?	1	2	3	4	5
5. Do you find it uncomfortable to watch others perform tasks you know you can do faster?	1	2	3	4	5
6. Do you find it difficult to be interested in others' conversations if the subject is not of special interest to you?	1	2	3	4	5
7. Do you feel vaguely guilty when you do nothing for several hours or several days?	1	2	3	4	5
8. Do you schedule more than is possible to accomplish in a given time span?	1	2	3	4	5
9. Do you believe that whatever your success may be, it is because of your ability to get things done faster than others?	1	2	3	4	5
10. Do you frequently clench your fist or bang your hand on the table to confirm your point during conversation?	1	2	3	4	5

Now add up your points. If your score is below 25, then you tend to be more like Type A. If it is above 25, then you tend to be more like Type B.

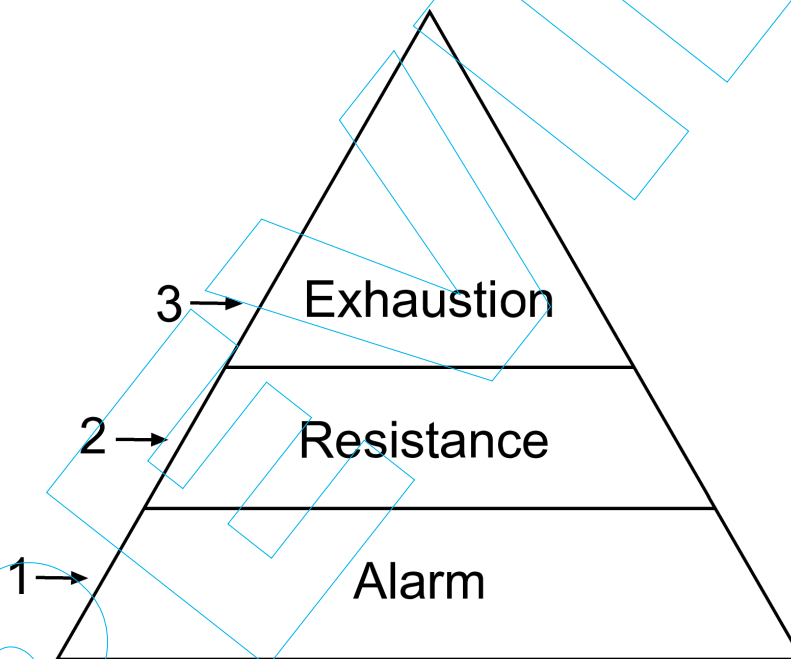
Meyer Friedman and Ray H. Rosenman, *Type A Behavior and Your Heart*, (New York: Fawcett Crest, 1974). Reproduced by permission.

The Three Stages of Stress

It is natural to resist or deny the presence of stress. We all have a tendency to “plow on,” working harder and harder to overcome stressful situations rather than acknowledge the situation and “back off.” In a stressful work environment, for example, a person may return to the office night after night trying to deal with the stress.

But there comes a point when the mind and the body simply become exhausted—stage 3 of stress. When this happens, efficiency decreases.

It is essential to learn to identify the stages of stress* before you get to exhaustion. If you continue to experience stress and do nothing to alter the situation, you are likely to develop physical problems. The three stages of stress are as follows:



* Hans Selye, M.D., *The Stress of Life*, rev. ed. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

Identifying the Symptoms of Stress

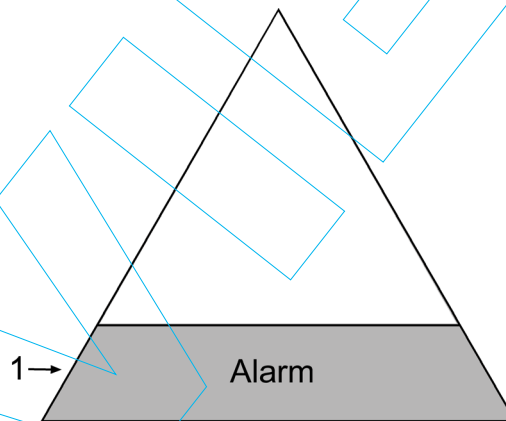
The impact of stress usually can be reduced by identifying and accepting (owning) the feelings of stage 1 (alarm), avoiding the isolation and withdrawal of stage 2 (resistance), and seeking medical attention and/or psychological counseling for stage 3 (exhaustion). This section helps you see the symptoms at each stage so you can act on your stress and avoid moving into the next stage.

Alarm

Example: You discover that an expected promotion you had been promised and have already announced to friends is being held up for budget reasons.

Symptoms include:

- Restlessness
- Anxiety
- Anger
- Depression
- Fear

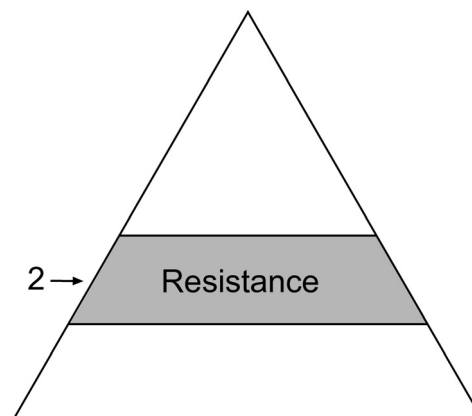


Resistance

Example: You resolve not to let anyone know about your disappointment.

Symptoms include:

- Denial of Feelings
- Emotional Isolation
- Narrowing of Interests

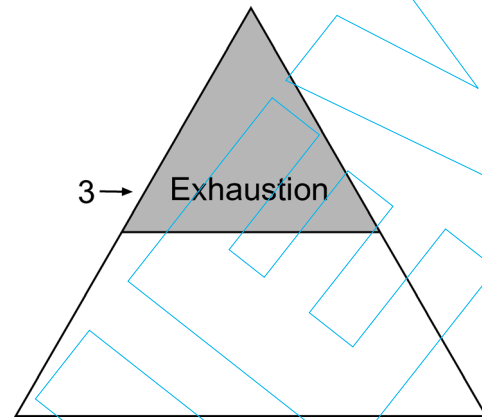


Exhaustion

Example: There is no change in your situation after several weeks—and you remain uncertain of whether you will ever receive the promotion.

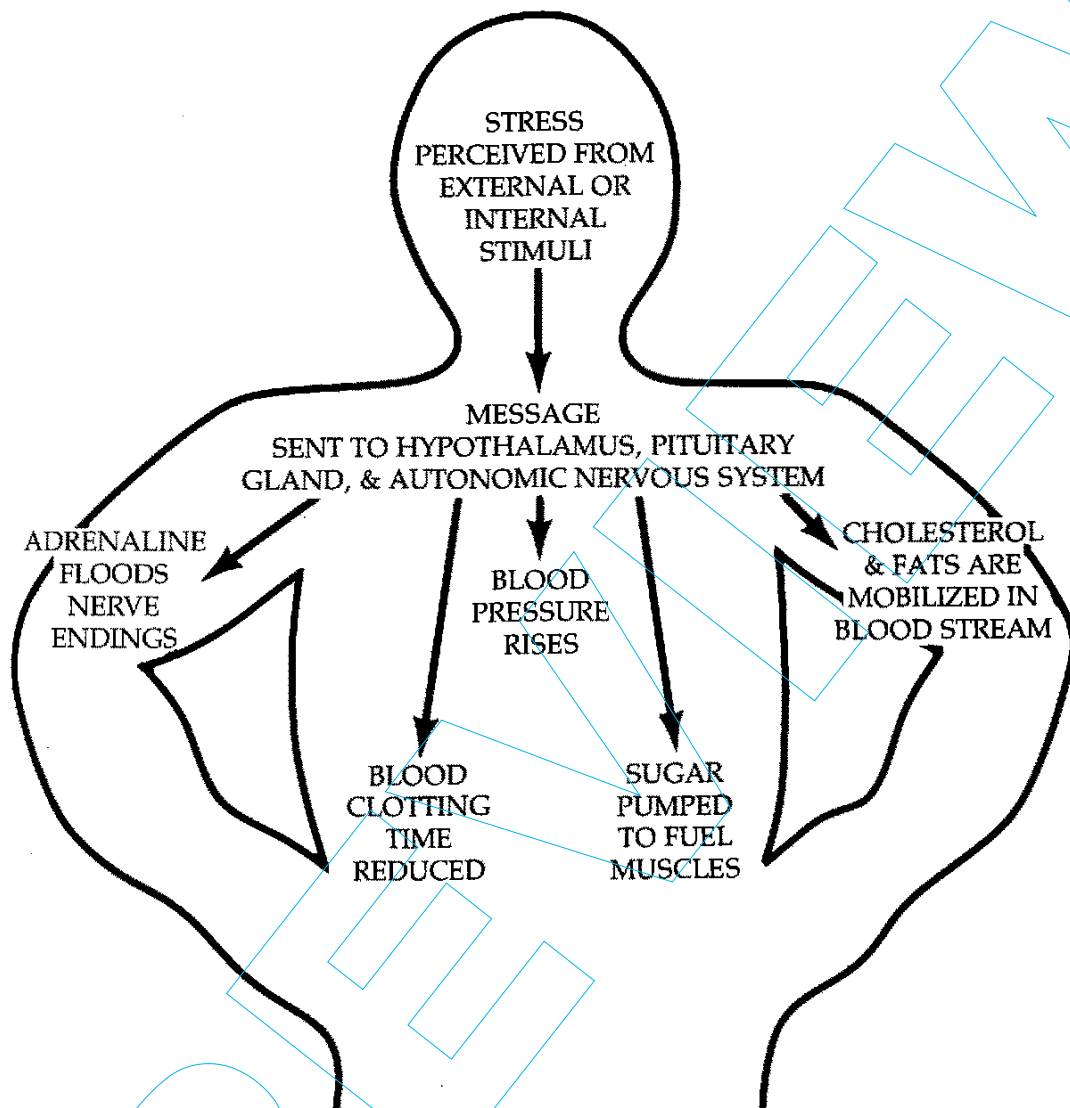
Symptoms include:

- Loss of Self-Confidence
- Poor Sleep Habits
- Unusual and Erratic Behavior
- Physical Problems, such as
 - Headaches
 - Hypertension
 - Abdominal Discomfort



At each stage, taking a break (that is, doing something else or getting away from your work) is a helpful way to relieve stress. Sharing your situation with another caring person and talking out your feelings may help give a new perspective.

The Effect of Stress on the Physical Self



Continuous stress has been shown to have a gradual damaging effect on the cardiovascular system, which can hasten the aging process.

Keeping the Adrenaline in Check

We have all heard stories of people being able to lift pianos and do other amazing feats under conditions of a house fire, automobile accident, and the like. Although that “high-voltage” charge of the hormone adrenaline in our system makes it possible to do incredible things, it also can be a kind of poison in the system if conditions stay at a peak indefinitely.

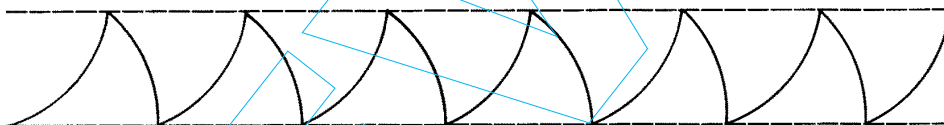
Yet it is possible to live in stressful situations over a relatively long period if you find ways to manage the stress. The diagram below suggests what happens as our system responds biochemically when we are under stress.

Our task is to find a way to restore our normal hormone balance. Finding our own best way to bring the stress level down regularly, and preferably daily, is both a challenge and a discipline. If we do not find that systematic way of bringing our stress level down to “normal,” then our system tends to adjust to being at the “high-voltage” level. This then becomes destructive to both our physical and emotional systems.

Bloodstream Flooded with “High-Voltage” Charge of Chemicals

System Under Stress:

High Stress Level



System When Relaxed:

Normal Level

System Returns to Normal
Hormone Balance

The goal is to return to a normal hormone level on a regular basis.