

Fear not the coming darkness. Let the righteous light of noble deeds and the order of self-discipline keep the dark agents of chaos at bay.

Stress

Objectives:

- Define stress
- Describe the effects of stress on wellbeing
- Identify effective strategies for managing stress
- Assess your own levels of stress

In today's fast-paced society, most people complain about being stressed. However, when they use the term *stress*, they rarely know its true meaning. The word carries many negative connotations and is associated with an unpleasant or traumatic event. As such, people mistakenly believe that stress is simply the nervousness and tension experienced prior to, during, or after a negative event. In fact, the effects of stress are physiological, emotional, and psychological.

Additionally, not all levels of stress are detrimental. The stress athletes experience right before a big game or college students feel right before an exam can enhance focus and increase their ability to concentrate. Stress is either good or bad depending on how long it persists and how it is perceived by the individual.

This chapter will provide a deeper understanding of what stress is and provide effective strategies for managing stress.



Anxiety. By Edvard Munch. 1894.

What Is Stress and How Does It Affect Wellness?

Stress is defined as the body's physical, mental, and emotional response to a particular stimulus, called a **stressor**. This adaption/coping-response helps the body prepare for challenging situations. It is the level of a person's response to a stressor that determines whether the experience is positive or negative. As a hardworking college student, you may feel as if you know the meaning of stress all too well. You may dream of a future where the demands on your time are diminished, so you can escape the high levels of stress you are feeling now. Unfortunately, regardless of

their situation, everyone experiences stress on a regular basis. The good news is, not all stress is bad! Small levels of stress can enhance cognitive brain function. Stress may provide the motivation and concentration you need to write an essay, practice a speech, or prepare for a job interview. For most people, these types of stressors are manageable and not harmful. Stressors that have the potential for harm include the sudden loss of a loved one, the unexpected ending of a romantic relationship, or the unfair demands of an unreasonable boss.

Defining Stress

Stress, then, is more than simply the tension and apprehension generated by problems, obstacles, or traumatic events. Stress is the body's automatic response (physical, mental, and emotional) to any stressor. It is a natural and unavoidable part of life, and it can be empowering and motivating, or harmful and potentially dangerous.

For more information on stress click on the links below:

[What is Stress?](#)

[Understanding and Dealing with Stress](#)

Below is a video on stress.

[What is stress and what causes it?](#)

Effects of Stress on Wellness

As stated previously, not all stress is bad. In fact, the stress associated with riding a roller coaster, watching a scary movie, or scaling a cliff can enhance these experiences. Regardless of whether the stress experienced is negative or positive, the effects on the body are identical. When a person senses that a situation demands action, the body responds by releasing chemicals into the blood. The hypothalamus signals the adrenal glands to release a surge of hormones that include adrenaline and cortisol. The physiological effects of those chemicals—enhanced focus, quicker reaction time, and increased heart rate, energy, and strength—are quite beneficial when faced with a potentially dangerous situation that is temporary.

Unfortunately, most of the stressors people face—work, school, finances, relationships—are a part of everyday life, and thus, inescapable. Experiencing ongoing, unavoidable stress can result in some very unpleasant and harmful effects, both mental and physical. Chronic stress can cause upset stomach, headaches, sleep problems, and heart disease. It can also cause depression, anxiety, and even memory loss.

To watch a video that describes the effects of stress in detail, click on the link below:

[How Stress Affects Your Body and Mind](#)

What Are the Strategies for Managing Stress?

Although stress in everyday life is unavoidable, there are ways to cope with it that will minimize or eliminate its harmful effects.

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America (ADAA) provides a list of effective strategies for coping with stress. That document is linked here: [Tips; Coping Strategies](#). For your convenience, it is also reprinted below with the ADAA's permission.

When you are feeling anxious or stressed, these strategies will help you cope:

- **Take a time-out.** Practice yoga, listen to music, meditate, get a massage, or learn relaxation techniques. Stepping back from the problem helps clear your head.
- **Eat well-balanced meals.** Do not skip any meals. Do keep healthful, energy-boosting snacks on hand.
- **Limit alcohol and caffeine,** which can aggravate anxiety and trigger panic attacks.
- **Get enough sleep.** When stressed, your body needs additional sleep and rest.
- **Exercise daily** to help you feel good and maintain your health. Check out the [fitness tips](#) below.
- **Take deep breaths.** Inhale and exhale slowly.
- **Count to 10 slowly.** Repeat, and count to 20 if necessary.
- **Do your best.** Instead of aiming for perfection, which isn't possible, be proud of however close you get.
- **Accept that you cannot control everything.** Put your stress in perspective: Is it really as bad as you think?
- **Welcome humor.** A good laugh goes a long way.
- **Maintain a positive attitude.** Make an effort to replace negative thoughts with positive ones.
- **Get involved.** Volunteer or find another way to be active in your community, which creates a support network and gives you a break from everyday stress.
- **Learn what triggers your anxiety.** Is it work, family, school, or something else you can identify? Write in a journal when you're feeling stressed or anxious and look for a pattern.
- **Talk to someone.** Tell friends and family you're feeling overwhelmed, and let them know how they can help you. Talk to a physician or therapist for professional help.
- **Get help online.** [Lantern](#) offers online programs guided by professional coaches to help you turn healthy anxiety management into a habit. *(Sponsored)*
 - [Listen to podcasts on a wide range of topics](#)
 - [Watch recorded webinars on topics ranging from how to worry less, coping with panic attacks, treatments for children, and helping suicidal families, and many more.](#)

Fitness Tips: Stay Healthy, Manage Stress

To receive the greatest benefits from exercising, try to include at least 2½ hours

of moderate-intensity physical activity (e.g., brisk walking) each week, 1¼ hours of a vigorous-intensity activity (such as jogging or swimming laps), or a combination of the two.

- **5 X 30:** Jog, walk, bike, or dance three to five times a week for 30 minutes.
- **Set small daily goals** and aim for daily consistency rather than perfect workouts. It is better to walk every day for 15–20 minutes than to wait until the weekend for a three-hour fitness marathon. Lots of scientific data suggests that frequency is most important.
- **Find forms of exercise** that are fun or enjoyable. Extroverted people often like classes and group activities. People who are more introverted often prefer solo pursuits.
- **Distract yourself** with an iPod or other portable media player to download audiobooks, podcasts, or music. Many people find it is more fun to exercise while listening to material they enjoy.
- **Recruit an “exercise buddy.”** It is often easier to stick to your exercise routine when you have to stay committed to a friend, partner, or colleague.
- **Be patient** when you start a new exercise program. Most sedentary people require about four to eight weeks to feel coordinated and sufficiently in shape so that exercise feels easier.

Additional strategies for coping with stress are linked below:

[The Single Most Important Thing You Can Do for Stress](#)

Stress

[Stress Management](#)

[10 Tips to Manage Stress](#)

Below is a link to a video on stress:

[How to Reduce Stress and Anxiety](#)

To hear the world’s most relaxing sound (according to research), click on the link below:

[World’s Most Relaxing Sound](#)

Assess Your Stress Level

Are you more or less stressed than your peers? The website linked below contains a stress test. On the website, scroll down to the “Quiz: Are You Stressed?”

[How Stressed Are You?](#)

Below is a link to the Lab for this chapter on stress. Please be certain to get a PDF of your results and submit it in D2L:

[Lab for Chapter on Stress](#)

Terminology Checklist:

Stress- the body's physical, mental, and emotional response to a particular stimulus

Stressor- Something that causes stress

Eustress- Good Stress

Distress- Bad stress

Adrenalin- a hormone secreted by the adrenal glands, especially in conditions of stress, increasing rates of blood circulation and breathing

Test Your Knowledge

1. The stage of stress where the stressor can cause death or health problems
 - a. Alarm
 - b. Resistance
 - c. Exhaustion
 - d. Relapse
2. Which of the following does not occur when the body first encounters stress
 - a. Heart rate increase
 - b. Breathing increase
 - c. Increased sweating
 - d. Faster digestion
3. What hormone is most likely to be released when stress is encountered
 - a. Testosterone
 - b. Adrenaline
 - c. Estrogen
 - d. Leptin
4. The immune system becomes stronger when a stress is first encountered
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. Stress can cause all of the following except
 - a. Headaches
 - b. Insomnia
 - c. Muscle cramps
 - d. Upset stomach
6. Stress can lead to some mental concerns
 - a. True
 - b. False