

Stress Assessment Questionnaire

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you over the past week. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement. The rating scale is as follows;

0: Did not apply to me at all – NEVER

1: Applied to me to some Degree, or some of the time – SOMETIMES

2: Applied to me to a considerable degree, or a food part of the time – OFTEN

3: Applied to me very much, or all of the time – ALMOST ALWAYS

		<i>Never</i>	<i>Sometimes</i>	<i>Often</i>	<i>Almost Always</i>
1.	I found it hard to wind down.	0	1	2	3
2.	I tended to over-react to situations.	0	1	2	3
3.	I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy.	0	1	2	3
4.	I found myself agitated.	0	1	2	3
5.	I found it hard to relax.	0	1	2	3
6.	I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing.	0	1	2	3
7.	I felt I was rather touchy.	0	1	2	3
	TOTAL				

Add all of your scores together X 2 = *

*Use this score to find your level of severity on the table below.

Score	Severity
0-14	Normal
15-18	Mild
19-25	Moderate
26-33	Severe
34+	Extremely Severe

(Extract from DASS21)

Please contact PeopleSense (08) 9388 9000

A Healthcare Professional will be able to score and interpret your results with you.

Understanding Stress (1)



*People commonly use the term stress to describe moments in their life when they feel 'under the pump'.
But do they really know what stress is?
How do you know if you are stressed?
And if you are stressed, what does that mean?
How is stress going to affect you?
What can you do to reduce stress?*

Understanding Stress

Stress can be thought of as an individual's response to demands or pressures which can severely reduce their capacity to cope. Stress is, therefore, the result of the relationship between an individual's coping mechanisms (internal factors) and the demands or pressures placed on them (external factors). A person is likely to feel stressed if the demands placed on them are greater than their ability to cope. When this happens, people often feel stressed, tense, agitated, frustrated or anxious. These feelings are typical of the stress response that has been activated.

The Body's Response to Stress

The stress response, also known as the fight or flight response, is automatically activated in fearful or perceived threatening situations and is designed to enable survival. For example, if a person is awoken during the night by a loud noise coming from outside, they may perceive someone to be trying to break into their house. This threatening situation will activate their stress or fight/flight response, which will assist the person to run away from the danger or to become sufficiently 'pumped up' to fight the intruder. This reaction will occur even if the noise turns out to be from the neighbour's cat. Whenever a person perceives a threat, their body, their behaviour, and their thoughts are affected in ways to help them either flee from the situation or to remain and fight the danger.

During this time the body and mind can experience:

- An increased heart rate or strength of heart beat;
- A change in blood flow from the skin, fingers and toes to large organs and muscles;
- Increased rate and depth of breathing;
- Sweating;
- Widening of the pupils in the eye;
- Decreased activity of the digestive system;
- Muscle tension;
- Increased focus of attention on surroundings to scan for danger; and
- Reduced ability to concentrate on ongoing tasks.

All of the reactions that occur during a stress response serve a purpose for the individual- that is, preparing the person to either run away or to fight the threatening situation. However, it is not always possible to do this. For example, imagine what would happen if a person ran away from their workplace when they were asked to deliver some new ideas at a staff meeting? Although people cannot always run away or fight a threatening situation, the stress response will still be activated.

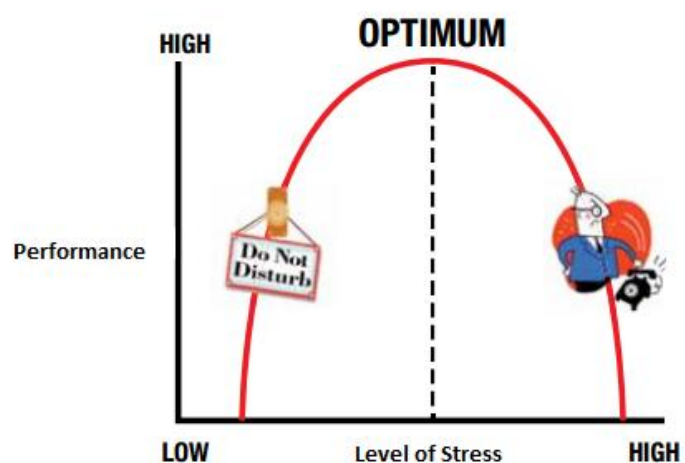
Understanding Stress (2)

The continual, activation of the stress response can result in some of the indicators of stress including muscle tension, problems with concentration, etc. To address this, it is necessary for an individual to find ways to reduce and manage this reaction by reversing the changes that take place.

Helpful and Unhelpful Stress

People live with varying levels of stress in their everyday lives. It may be surprising to you that there is both good and bad stress, dependant on the level being experienced. Low level stress is often called arousal and we need a certain amount to function. The amount that is needed, or that the person can cope with varies largely amongst individuals typically depending on their personalities, coping styles and the way their body responds to stress.

Up to a certain point, performance improves as the level of challenge or arousal increases. However, if the level of arousal moves past the 'critical point', stress can become too much and can start to impair performance. This accounts for why before a performance appraisal, or before a race, feeling a bit 'hyped' up can help motivate a person. Performance benefits from this state of tension. Initially, attention and focus are intensified and sharpened, preparing and enabling the athlete to think more quickly and more clearly for the effort required ahead. This is the same in all areas related to performance including at work and undertaking tasks at home.



Causes of Stress

Stress is the result of a combination of internal and external factors. Differences in peoples' vulnerability and interpretation of stress provides an explanation as to why some people feel stressed in a particular situation while others remain to be unaffected.

External Causes of Stress

Includes stressful life events and work stressors that occur in everyday life. These can differ greatly amongst individuals and may cause stress in some people and not others. Individuals experience unhelpful levels of stress when the interaction between their internal and external factors is unbalanced.

Understanding Stress (3)

Stressful Life Events

Negative life events including the death of a loved one, unemployment or conflict with your partner, are not the only causes of stress among individuals. Positive events like buying a new house, starting a new job or even becoming engaged, can also lead to stress. This is the result of the events requiring a change or response from a person. In fact, any change in a person's life can be a source of stress because the change places a demand on the individual to deal with the new situation. If a person experiences a lot of life events or changes over a short period of time, the resulting additive stress can sometimes lead to the development of a depressive or anxiety disorder or even burnout.

Personality and coping skills play a significant role in determining how an individual will react to stressful life events. Additionally, the values attached to each event and the order in which they are presented, are likely to differ for each person. For example, you may find that trouble with your boss is more stressful than changing your job. This may be the result of you having the skills to cope with changing jobs more effectively than coping with conflict with your boss.

Work Stressors

May include, but are not limited to:

- Bullying or harassment by a work colleague or manager;
- Discrimination;
- Lack of autonomy;
- Unreasonable performance demands and heavy workload;
- Uninteresting or non-challenging work;
- Inadequate communication and conflict resolution;
- Insufficient skills for the job;
- Lack of workplace resources and equipment;
- Job insecurity;
- Limited promotional opportunities;
- Long hours;
- Excessive travel requirements;
- Conflicting work demands and personal values;
- Conflict between staff;
- Low pay; and
- Crisis incidents such as an armed hold up

As you can see, any personal change or event can be a source of stress for individuals. Furthermore, if you have experienced numerous changes over a short period of time, the stress can accumulate and become problematic.

Internal Causes of Stress

As you are now aware, stress is caused by an interaction between internal and external factors in your life. By identifying your external as well as your internal sources of stress, you will be in a better position to assemble your individualised 'Stress Management Toolkit' to deal more effectively with your unique stressful circumstances.

Understanding Stress (4)

Personality

Personality is an important factor to consider when examining the causes of stress. Essentially, personality can determine how a person reacts in certain situations and how stressed they may feel as a result. There are a number of characteristics that underpin an individual's personality. In this section, however, the discussion will be limited to three different but interrelated concepts relative to stress development. These include Type A/B personality, perfectionism and procrastination.

Type A versus Type B Personality

You may be familiar with personality Type A and Type B. The theory of these two types of personality was developed by two cardiologists, Friedman and Roseman, who observed that many of their patients appeared to be impatient and hostile, were tense, fidgety and had rapid speech. Patients with these characteristics were identified as Type A. Patients who displayed more relaxed behaviours, were easy going and able to listen without interrupting were labelled Type B. The two doctors discovered that their patients who resembled the Type A personality were twice as likely to have suffered from a heart attack, compared to individuals with Type B personality.

Take a moment or two to now answer the following questions that will determine whether you more closely resemble Type A or Type B:

I usually walk, eat or move more rapidly than others	yes	no	I am obsessed with deadlines	yes	no
I'm obsessed with deadlines	yes	no	Usually waiting in line irritates me	yes	no
I feel guilty if I'm not busy doing something	yes	no	I often take over if others are too slow	yes	no
I feel rushed and pressured	yes	no	I play to win, not for enjoyment	yes	no
I usually do several things at once	yes	no	I evaluate my success in terms of money earned, projects completed or similar objective standards	yes	no
I need to complete a task before taking a break	yes	no	I lack a sense of inner peace or contentment	yes	no
I often feel tense or anxious	yes	no			

There is no right or wrong personality type and often people are a mixture of traits, however Type A's are more likely to have higher levels of stress and anxiety.

If you answered mostly 'Yes' to the questions above then you are likely to have Type A personality. Conversely, if you answered mostly 'No' to the questions above then you are more likely to resemble Type B personality.

Understanding Stress (5)

Perfectionism

Perfectionism has been reported to include:

- Setting unrealistic standards for yourself;
- Imposing unrealistic standards on others; and
- A belief that others have perfectionistic expectations for you.

Perfectionists always strive to do things perfectly and expect others to strive for excellence. When perfectionism is taken to the extreme, perfectionists become critical of themselves and others, and can feel like a failure because the expectations set for themselves and others were unreasonable and unattainable. Perfectionism is closely related to aspects of Type A personality. Specifically, people who are perfectionists strive for goals (which maybe unachievable) and measure their own worth largely in terms of success and failure. They can also set unrealistic standards for others and frequently feel let down and frustrated when others do not meet their expectations.

In the workplace, perfectionism can be an obstacle. Perfectionists often struggle with delegating tasks to others and end up taking on too much because they believe they alone are capable of completing it perfectly. Perfectionists do not trust others to do a 'good enough job' which can result in tension and frustration and ultimately reduce productivity and effectiveness in the workplace

Procrastination

Procrastination refers to the avoidance of specific tasks or work that needs to be completed. This technical definition, however, does not capture the emotional issues associated with procrastination including guilt, inadequacy and anxiety.

For perfectionists, procrastination results from the fear of being imperfect and not living up to expectations placed by themselves or others. This in itself can create overwhelming feelings that can lead to avoidance of tasks. Thoughts such as 'if I can't do it perfectly then what's the point in doing it at all?' and avoiding the tasks until the last minute are typical characteristics of a procrastinator. Furthermore, perfectionists who procrastinate are often driven by a fear of failure in which they believe it's better to delay the task or completely avoid it rather than risk the failure of not meeting the self-imposed standard of perfection.

Example – Jennifer

Jennifer is a receptionist in a medical clinic. She has been asked to make four phone calls to reschedule appointment times for tomorrow and to type up several documents that are needed by the end of the day. Her supervisor has also asked her to complete a report that she has not done before.

It is now 4pm and Jennifer has not begun any of the tasks she was asked to complete. During the day she has occupied herself with other less important tasks. Now that she is forced to begin, Jennifer does not know where to start and is feeling extremely stressed and overwhelmed.

Understanding Stress (6)

Unhelpful Thinking Styles

How an individual thinks contributes towards stress. Specifically, a person's thinking style, or what a person tells themselves (thoughts) can influence their level of stress.

People often believe that events or situations produce emotions directly. However, there is an intermediate step that affects how a person feels. An individual places their own interpretation on the events that happen around them. These interpretations, thoughts or what people say to themselves, are often influenced by an individual's particular value system or experiences which in turn produce the emotions resulting from a situation:

Event or situation → Feeling/Emotion → Interpretation/Thought

Event or situation	Feeling/Emotion	Interpretation/Thought
Melissa and Jan are both stuck in traffic on their way to an important work meeting	Melissa thinks to herself "I'm never going to get to this meeting. My boss is going to think I'm slack. This is going to affect my appraisal". Jan thinks to herself "The meeting never starts on time and this is the first time I have been running late. I'm sure the boss won't even notice or think anything of it".	Melissa feels highly upset, frustrated and stressed. Jan feels quite relaxed and drives calmly through the traffic.



If the information provided above resonates with you, it's time to do something about it. It's up to you to put in place a plan to start addressing and improving some of the symptoms you have identified. If you struggle with this, or your anxiety is too high to contemplate doing it on your own, contact PeopleSense (08) 9388 9000 or 'contact us' page www.peoplesense.com.au to discuss how a Psychologist may be able to assist you to do this. The following pages are some activities to assist you to find your triggers and initiate some general calming behaviour.

Coping with Stress Action Plan

My Stressors: External Causes of Stress

Use the table below to write down situations or events that have come up for you during the week and have made you feel stressed. You may also like to list other recent situations that have caused you to feel stressed. In the second column, list how your mind and body reacted during these situations.

Stressful Situation	Physical sensations, thoughts or feelings
What actually happened? What were the demands placed on you during the situation? What were the specific external stressors?	Did you experience any physical indicators or changes, such as change in your breathing or heart rate? How did you feel during the event? What thoughts went through your head? What did you say to yourself?
For Example: Argument with a work colleague about the use of the company car.	Physical Sensations: Tightness in chest, sweaty hands, tense shoulders, increased heart rate. Feelings: Angry and frustrated. Thoughts: He is so unfair. No one values what I do.

My Early Warning Signs

Use the list of indicators below to help you identify your early warning signs of stress.

Indicators of Stress- My warning signs	Tick in this column if you have experienced this indicator <u>some of this week</u>	Tick in this column if you have experienced this indicator <u>most of this week</u>
Constant or excessive worrying		
Thoughts going round and round		
Use of unhelpful thoughts		
Low self esteem		
Problems with concentration		
Low motivation		
Forgetfulness		
Fatigue		
Irritable		
Anxious		
Tense		
Unhappy		
Change in appetite		
Increased smoking		
Change in sleep patterns		
Increased consumption of alcohol		
Aggressive behaviour		
Decreased work performance		
Loss of interest in sex		
Conflicts in relationships		
Ulcers		
Muscle tension and pain		
Migraines/headaches		
Depression		
High blood pressure		
Frequent colds or flu's		
Skin disorders (e.g. acne or rash)		
Problems with digestive/immune systems		
Allergies		
Asthma and other respiratory conditions		

Breathing

When we are anxious, our breathing is disrupted. Essentially, we take in more oxygen than the body needs – in other words we over-breathe, or hyperventilate. When this imbalance is detected, the body responds with some chemical changes that produce symptoms such as dizziness, light-headedness, confusion, breathlessness, blurred vision, increase in heart rate to pump more blood around, numbness and tingling in the extremities, cold, clammy hands and muscle stiffness. The normal rate of breathing is 10-12 breaths per minute.

Use the calming technique by following these steps and you'll be on your way to developing a better breathing habit.

1. Ensure that you are sitting on a comfortable chair or laying on a bed
2. Take a breath in for 4 seconds (through the nose if possible)
3. Hold the breath for 2 seconds
4. Release the breath taking 6 seconds (through the nose if possible), then pause slightly before breathing in again.
5. Practise, regularly.

When you are doing your breathing exercises, make sure that you are using a stomach breathing style rather than a chest breathing style. You can check this by placing one hand on your stomach and one hand on your chest. The hand on your stomach should rise when you breathe in.

Try to practise at least once or twice a day at a time when you can relax, relatively free from distraction. This will help to develop a more relaxed breathing habit. The key to progress really is practise, so try to set aside some time each day. By using the calming technique, you can slow your breathing down and reduce your general level anxiety. With enough practice, it can even help to reduce your anxiety when you are in an anxious situation.



Progressive Muscle Relaxation

One method of reducing muscle tension that people have found helpful is through a technique called Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR). In progressive muscle relaxation exercises, you tense up particular muscles and then relax them, and then you practise this technique consistently.



Preparing for relaxation

- **Select your surroundings.** Minimise the distraction to your five senses. Such as turning off the TV and radio, and using soft lighting.
- **Make yourself comfortable.** Use a chair that comfortably seats your body, including your head. Wear loose clothing, and take off your shoes.
- **Internal mechanics.** Avoid practicing after big, heavy meals, and do not practice after consuming any intoxicants, such as alcohol.

General procedure

1. Once you've set aside the time and place for relaxation, slow down your breathing and give yourself permission to relax.
2. When you are ready to begin, tense the muscle group described. Make sure you can feel the tension, but not so much that you feel a great deal of pain. Keep the muscle tensed for approximately 5 seconds.
3. Relax the muscles and keep it relaxed for approximately 10 seconds. It may be helpful to say something like "Relax" as you relax the muscle.
4. When you have finished the relaxation procedure, remain seated for a few moments allowing yourself to become alert.

Relaxation sequence

1. Right hand and forearm. Make a fist with your right hand.
2. Right upper arm. Bring your right forearm up to your shoulder to "make a muscle".
3. Left hand and forearm.
4. Left upper arm.
5. Forehead. Raise your eyebrows as high as they will go, as though you were surprised by something.
6. Eyes and cheeks. Squeeze your eyes tight shut.
7. Mouth and jaw. Open your mouth as wide as you can, as you might when you're yawning.
8. Neck. !!! Be careful as you tense these muscles. Face forward and then pull your head back slowly, as though you are looking up to the ceiling.
9. Shoulders. Tense the muscles in your shoulders as you bring your shoulders up towards your ears.
10. Shoulder blades/Back. Push your shoulder blades back, trying to almost touch them together, so that your chest is pushed forward.
11. Chest and stomach. Breathe in deeply, filling up your lungs and chest with air.
12. Hips and buttocks. Squeeze your buttock muscles
13. Right upper leg. Tighten your right thigh.
14. Right, lower leg. !!! Do this slowly and carefully to avoid cramps. Pull your toes towards you to stretch the calf muscle.
15. Right foot. Curl your toes downwards.
16. Left upper leg. Repeat as for upper right leg.
17. Left lower leg. Repeat as for lower right leg.
18. Left foot. Repeat as for right foot.

Practice means progress. Only through practice can you become more aware of your muscles, how they respond with tension, and how you can relax them. Training your body to respond differently to stress is like any training – practising consistently is the key.