



Taming the Tiger

A saber-toothed tiger is approaching! Your brain goes into survival mode: your heart pounds, your breathing accelerates, you start sweating, digestion slows sharply, causing “butterflies” in your stomach, and your muscles tighten. Your body is preparing to run for its life or fight to the death, often called the “fight or flight” response.

Now, remove the tiger and substitute a job interview, an argument with your parents, or an upcoming final exam.

There's no way to avoid it...

What is Stress and Where Did It Come From?

Stress is a part of everyone's life. School, sports, parents, friends – our relationships and responsibilities can all lead to stress.

Your body's automatic response to stressful situations is essentially the same response your cave-dwelling ancestors had to the approach of a 450-pound carnivore with seven-inch fangs.

This fight-or-flight mode can provide energy and focus for facing a predator or making a public speech. Our bodies are not designed to endure this condition for long periods of time. It's like flooring the accelerator of a car. Keep it up long enough, and something is going to break.



Stress affects people differently. Some people may be grumpy, or angry when they're stressed, while others may get physically sick. If you don't learn how to deal with your stress it can have serious effects on the mind and body.

Before dealing with stress, you have to figure out why you are stressed to begin with – and that's not always an easy thing to do.

...but you can learn to manage STRESS.

For More Information

There are a number of Internet sites offering in-depth information about stress and its management. Several of them contain stress-assessment tests you can take yourself.



Stress assessments and information:

www.webmd.com
Search “stress” for resources.

www.bbc.co.uk/apps/iff/health/gigaquiz?infile=stress_quiz&path=stress_test

health.discovery.com/centers/stress/balancing/stress/assessment.html

Stress

your survival guide



in the know

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Stress – 1, 2 & 3

There are three stages of acute (short-term) stress:

- The mobilizing stage, which prepares you to face a stressful event.
- The energy-consuming stage, in which your body dumps stored fats and sugars into your bloodstream to give you quick energy.
- The energy-depletion stage, in which your reserves are exhausted, moving you toward physical and psychological collapse.

When Stress Becomes A Problem

In the energy-consuming second state of acute stress, you're already beginning to feel negative effects:

- You are driven and pressured
- You are fatigued
- You become anxious
- Your memory becomes less reliable
- Your immune system weakens, rendering you vulnerable to infections

Stage three marks the onset of chronic stress. Now your body's defense mechanisms no longer improve your chances for success in fleeing the tiger or acing

the test. Instead they become a second enemy, making you vulnerable to:

- Poor judgment
- Personality changes
- Hostility and anger
- Depression
- Anxiety disorders

Some people seem to thrive (for a time, at least) under pressure. But no one is immune to the long-term hazards of chronic stress. The symptoms include all those from the earlier stages, plus:

- Insomnia
- Ulcers and other stomach problems
- Frequent constipation or diarrhea
- Inability to focus or concentrate
- Nervousness, trembling and inappropriate sweating
- Headaches
- Significant unintended weight gain or loss
- Substance Abuse
- Heart disease

Identifying Stress

To deal with stress, you must first identify it. Keep a stress diary and jot down notes on the events that cause stress – not just the big ones, all of them. Stress is usually cumulative. Even minor stressful events add up.

By carefully writing them down, you may discover patterns you might otherwise have overlooked.

depression



Dealing with It

Having identified the sources of stress, begin reducing them. Even if stressful situations or events can't be changed, you can change your actions.

- **Be decisive.** Hesitancy and procrastination are more stressful than making a decision. The uncertainties that block decision-making are often just excuses for not taking action.
- **Manage your time.** It is overwhelming to think that there aren't enough hours in the day to do what you need to do. Learning time management skills will make you far more productive, and less stressed.
- **Manage your commitments.** Don't promise more than you can reasonably do. But don't duck commitments that would benefit you, your family or your sense of self-worth.
- **Communicate.** Don't hold anything inside. Avoid making others feel hostile, intimidated or ignored. But be assertive enough to make sure your position is understood.
- **Know what matters.** A clear understanding of your own wants, values and goals is your best protection from a life adrift and full of stress.
- **Balance your life.** You have obligations to your family, your school, your friends, and yourself. Keep those needs and obligations in balance.
- **Avoid excess.** Too much of a good thing is bad. Too much of a bad thing is disastrous. Keep your appetites in check and your ambitions in perspective.



relaxation

- **Sleep better.** Sleep heals the mind and body. Improving the quality and duration of your sleep is a major stress reliever.
- **Exercise.** Aerobic exercise such as walking, swimming, and bicycling reduces stress.
- **Laugh and cry.** Both are natural stress relievers.
- **Talk.** A conversation with a sympathetic listener can be a great tension reliever. Another point of view may suggest new solutions to what's troubling you.
- **Have fun.** Hobbies, pets, community service – any activity that keeps you from obsessing about your problems can greatly reduce your stress level.
- **Relax.** A variety of relaxation techniques exist. They include yoga, tai chi, meditation, and self-hypnosis. They can be well worth the investment in time and discipline required to learn them.

