

Stress Assessments

Stress is a necessary part of our lives and can have both beneficial and negative effects. The stress response is primarily determined by our perception of an event, transition, or problem. Finding a balance in our lives and managing our stress can be a challenge. An important first step is recognizing the degree to which we are affected by the stress in our lives and then move toward strategies to make it better.

The following are series of self-assessment scales to help us determine the degree and type of stress we are experiencing and how well our stress coping skills are working.

Disclaimer: Test scores on the following self-assessments do not reflect any particular diagnosis or course of treatment. They are meant as a tool to help assess your level of stress. Should you have any further concerns about your current well-being, you may contact NYSUT Social Services and talk confidentially to one of our social service specialists.

Symptoms of Stress

How frequently do you find yourself experiencing such problems as headaches, problems going to sleep or staying asleep, unexplained muscle pain, jaw pain, uncontrolled anger, and frustration? Using the table below, assess the frequency that you experience these common symptoms of stress.

Symptoms	Frequency of symptoms						
	Almost all day, every day	Once or twice daily	Every night or day	2-3 times per week	Once a week	Once a month	Never
Headaches							
Tense muscles, sore neck and back							
Fatigue							
Anxiety, worry, phobias							
Difficulty falling asleep							
Irritability							
Insomnia							
Bouts of anger/hostility							
Boredom, depression							
Eating too much or too little							
Diarrhea, cramps, gas, constipation							
Restlessness, itching, tics							

The more often you experience these symptoms of stress, the more likely stress is having a negative impact on your life. You may be so used to feeling a certain way that you assume this is normal. Look back over the Symptoms of Stress Table. Are there symptoms of stress that you would like to eliminate or change?

Perceived Stress Scale

A more precise measure of personal stress can be determined by using a variety of instruments that have been designed to help measure individual stress levels. The first of these is called the **Perceived Stress Scale**.

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a classic stress assessment instrument. This tool, while originally developed in 1983, remains a popular choice for helping us understand how different situations affect our feelings and our perceived stress. The questions in this scale ask about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way; rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

For each question choose from the following alternatives:

0 – never 1 - almost never 2 – sometimes 3 - fairly often 4 - very often

- _____ 1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
- _____ 2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
- _____ 3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?
- _____ 4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
- _____ 5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
- _____ 6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
- _____ 7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
- _____ 8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
- _____ 9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
- _____ 10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Figuring your PSS score:

You can determine your PSS score by following these directions:

First, reverse your scores for questions 4, 5, 7, & 8. On these 4 questions, change the scores like this: 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1, 4 = 0.

Now add up your scores for each item to get a total. **My total score is _____.**

Individual scores on the PSS can range from 0 to 40 with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress.

Scores ranging from 0-13 would be considered low stress.

Scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered moderate stress.

Scores ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress.

The Perceived Stress Scale is interesting and important because your perception of what is happening in your life is most important. Consider the idea that 2 individuals could have the exact same events and experiences in their lives for the past month. Depending on their perception, total score could put one of those individuals in the low stress category and the total score could put the second person in the high stress category.

The Ardell Wellness Stress Test

Don Ardell developed a stress assessment that is unique in its holistic approach to stress. In chapter one, you learned about the importance of incorporating all dimensions of health in your understanding of stress. The Ardell Wellness Stress Test incorporates physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of health for a balanced assessment.

Rate your satisfaction with each of the following items by using this scale:

+ 3 = Ecstatic

-1 = Mildly disappointed

+ 2 = Very happy

- 2 = Very disappointed

+ 1 = Mildly happy

- 3 = Completely dismayed

0 = Indifferent

- _____ 1. Choice of career
- _____ 2. Present job/ business/ school
- _____ 3. Marital status
- _____ 4. Primary relationships
- _____ 5. Capacity to have fun
- _____ 6. Amount of fun experienced in last month
- _____ 7. Financial prospects
- _____ 8. Current income level
- _____ 9. Spirituality
- _____ 10. Level of self-esteem
- _____ 11. Prospects for having impact on those who know you and possibly others
- _____ 12. Sex life
- _____ 13. Body, how it looks and performs
- _____ 14. Home life
- _____ 15. Life skills and knowledge of issues and facts unrelated to your job or profession
- _____ 16. Learned stress management capacities
- _____ 17. Nutritional knowledge, attitudes, and choices
- _____ 18. Ability to recover from disappointment, hurts, setbacks, and tragedies

- _____ 19. Confidence that you currently are, or will in the future be, reasonably close to your highest potential.
- _____ 20. Achievement of a rounded or balanced quality in your life
- _____ 21. Sense that life for you is on an upward curve, getting better and fuller all the time
- _____ 22. Level of participation in issues and concerns beyond your immediate interests
- _____ 23. Choice whether to parent or not and with the consequences or results of that choice
- _____ 24. Role in some kind of network of friends, relatives, and/or others about whom you care deeply and who reciprocate that commitment to you.
- _____ 25. Emotional acceptance of the inescapable reality of aging

Total _____

Ardell Wellness Stress Test Interpretation

+ 51 to + 75 You are a self-actualized person, nearly immune from the ravages of stress. There are few, if any, challenges likely to untrack you from a sense of near total well-being.

+ 25 to + 50 You have mastered the wellness approach to life and have the capacity to deal creatively and efficiently with events and circumstances.

+ 1 to + 24 You are a wellness-oriented person, with an ability to prosper as a whole person, but you should give a bit more attention to optimal health concepts and skill building.

0 to - 24 You are a candidate for additional training in how to deal with stress. A sudden increase in potentially negative events and circumstances could cause a severe emotional setback.

- 25 to - 50 You are a candidate for counseling. You are either too pessimistic or have severe problems in dealing with stress.

- 51 to - 75 You are a candidate for major psychological care with virtually no capacity for coping with life's problems.

(Adapted from High Level Wellness: An Alternative to Doc, Drugs and Disease by Don Ardell)

Look back at the items in the Ardell Wellness Stress Test. Identify which items related more to physical health, to mental health, to emotional health, to spiritual health, and to social health. Do you see any patterns develop? For instance, are more areas of disappointment related to physical health than to social health? Remember, for holistic health we are seeking a balance in all dimensions of health.

Source: <http://faculty.weber.edu/molpin/healthclasses/1110/bookchapters/selfassessmentchapter.htm>

If you find yourself needing to talk to someone about how you are being affected by stress, you can call NYSUT Social Services, Monday through Friday, 9:00am to 5:00pm at 1-800-342-9810, ext. 6206, and speak to one of our social service specialists.

Stress Coping Resources Inventory:
A Self-Assessment

Instructions: People differ remarkably in their responses to potentially stressful events. For instance, about one in ten hostages comes out of captivity a mentally healthier person than when entering, while the others may face extreme emotional difficulty. What are the factors associated with coping success? The questions below relate to factors most closely associated with the capacity to cope successfully with stress. Circle the letter which lists the option that you choose. Answer each question as honestly as possible.

1. How frequently do you moderately exercise?
 - a. Daily or more often
 - b. Once or twice a week
 - c. Once or twice a month
 - d. Seldom

2. How often do you get a full, restful night of sleep?
 - a. Most every night
 - b. Four to five times a each week
 - c. Two to three times each week
 - d. Seldom

3. To what extent is your energy sufficient for your work and daily activities?
 - a. to a very great extent
 - b. to some extent
 - c. to little extent
 - d. to very little extent

4. How closely does your weight approach the ideal level?
 - a. My weight is at the ideal level
 - b. My weight is close to the ideal level
 - c. My weight is not close to the ideal level
 - d. I am dangerously overweight (underweight)

5. To what extent do you eat a nutritious diet?
 - a. to a very great extent
 - b. to some extent
 - c. to little extent
 - d. to very little extent

6. Which of the following best describes your use of tobacco?
 - a. In no period of my life have I had the habit of smoking or chewing tobacco.
 - b. Early in my life for a short period I smoked or chewed tobacco
 - c. I stopped smoking or chewing tobacco over the past two years
 - d. I currently smoke or chew tobacco

7. Which of the following best describes your use of alcohol?
 - a. I do not abuse alcohol, and never have. (Abuse is defined as drinking more than two drinks within a short period such as an evening.)
 - b. Very occasionally I abuse alcohol.
 - c. I have a history of abusing alcohol, but am not presently abusing it.
 - d. I am presently abusing alcohol.

8. To what extent do you believe that you have a history of coping well with highly stressful situations?
 - a. to a very great extent
 - b. to a great extent
 - c. to a little extent
 - d. to a very little extent

9. How confident are you of being able to control your emotions in stressful situations?
 - a. I never let my emotions run away me.
 - b. I seldom let my emotions run away with me.
 - c. I sometimes let my emotions run away with me.
 - d. I often let my emotions run away with me.

10. When things are not going well, how likely are you to view the situation as being temporary rather than permanent?
 - a. very likely
 - b. likely
 - c. unlikely
 - d. very unlikely

11. When something bad happens to you, how likely are you to exaggerate its importance?
 - a. very unlikely
 - b. unlikely
 - c. likely
 - d. very likely

12. When stressed by a complex situation, how likely are you to focus your attention on those aspects of the situation that you can manage?
 - a. very likely
 - b. likely
 - c. unlikely
 - d. very unlikely

13. When highly stressed, how capable are you of changing your thinking to calm down?
 - a. very capable
 - b. capable
 - c. incapable
 - d. very incapable

14. When confronted with a stressful situation, how likely are you to wait passively for events to develop rather than to take charge?
- very unlikely
 - unlikely
 - likely
 - very likely
15. Which of the following courses of action are you most likely to take when you have become thoroughly frustrated?
- identify an alternate goal and pursue it
 - pursue a relaxing activity
 - withdraw and feel sorry for yourself
 - vent your aggression on someone weaker than you
16. If you had worn an article of clothing one day and then found it to be flawed, how likely would you be to return it and ask for a refund?
- very likely
 - likely
 - unlikely
 - very unlikely
17. When an unexpected, negative event happens to you, how likely are you to actively seek information about the event and how to cope with it?
- very likely
 - likely
 - unlikely
 - very unlikely
18. How much decision-making power do you have in your family?
- more power than any other member of my family
 - as much power as any other member of my family
 - less power than most members of my family
 - less power than any other member of my family
19. How much decision-making power do you have in your working environment? (if not working outside the home at present, use your last job as a basis for answering this question.)
- more power than most members of my work team
 - as much power as any other member of my work team
 - less power than most members of my work team
 - less power than any other member of my work team
20. To what extent do you believe that events in your life are merely the result of luck, fate, or chance?
- to very little extent
 - to little extent
 - to some extent
 - to a great extent
21. What is your best guess as to the extent and quality of contact you had with your parent(s) shortly after birth?
- was given an above average amount of contact by happy parent(s)
 - was given an average amount of contact by happy parent(s)
 - was given an average amount of contact by unhappy (perhaps angry) parent(s)
 - was given a below average amount of contact by unhappy (perhaps angry) parent(s)

22. During your early childhood, to what extent was your mother both calm and generally permissive?

- a. to a very great extent
- b. to some extent
- c. to little extent
- d. to very little extent

23. How easily do you make friends in a strange situation?

- a. very easily
- b. easily
- c. uneasily
- d. very uneasily

24. When highly stressed, how likely are you to ask friends or relatives for help?

- a. very likely
- b. likely
- c. unlikely
- d. very unlikely

25. In comparison with other people, how likely are you to see others as threatening, uncooperative, or exploitative?

- a. highly unlikely
- b. unlikely
- c. likely
- d. highly likely

26. How often are you confused about the intentions of others toward you?

- a. very infrequently
- b. infrequently
- c. frequently
- d. very frequently

27. To what extent are you aware of practical, healthy ways of relaxing?

- a. to a very great extent
- b. to some extent
- c. to little extent
- d. to very little extent

28. How frequently do you pursue some highly relaxing practice?

- a. daily or more often
- b. once or twice a week
- c. once or twice a month
- d. seldom

29. How often do you engage in a spiritual practice such as prayer, meditation, or inspirational reading to enrich your interior life?

- a. daily or more often
- b. once or twice a week
- c. once or twice a month
- d. seldom

30. How connected do you feel to your conception of a higher power or to a worthy cause?
- to a very great extent
 - to some extent
 - to little extent
 - to very little extent
31. To what extent do you believe your life has purpose?
- to a very great extent
 - to some extent
 - to little extent
 - to very little extent
32. How much contact do you have with what you would consider a spiritual community?
- very much
 - much
 - very little
 - none

Scoring Legend

Please note that the scoring legend has been derived rationally, not empirically. Nevertheless, you might find it interesting to compute your score for each of the scales below using the following legend: 'a' = 4; 'b' = 3; 'c' = 2; 'd' = 1.

Wellness Scale (sum of scores for questions 1-7 divided by 7)	_____
Thought Control Scale (sum of scores for questions 8-13, divided by 6)	_____
Active Coping Scale (sum of scores for questions 14-20, divided by 7)	_____
Social Ease Scale (sum of scores for questions 21-26, divided by 6)	_____
Tension reduction Scale (sum of scores for questions 27-28, divided by 2)	_____
Spiritual Practice Scale (sum of scores for questions 29-32 divided by 4)	_____
Overall Score (sum of the scale scores above, divided by 6)	_____

Interpreting Your Score. A perfect score on each scale would be 4. With this in mind, we might construct the following interpretive key:

An overall score of 3.5+ suggests you may be a superior stresscoper.

An overall score of 2.5-3.4 suggests you may be an above average stresscoper.

An overall score of 1.5-2.4 suggests you may be an average stresscoper.

An overall score of less than 1.5 suggests you may be a below average stresscoper.

Source: *'Write Your Own Prescription for Stress'*

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