**Stress - How well do you cope with stress**

by Luis S. R. Vas

*Rate yourself on how you react in each of the situations listed below. There are no right or wrong answers.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Always = 4</th>
<th>Frequently = 3</th>
<th>Sometimes = 2</th>
<th>Never = 1</th>
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Write the appropriate number in the box after each question. After completing the questionnaire, add up your number of points, and write the total in the box below at the end and look at the results.

1. Do you try to do the maximum you can in the least amount of time?

2. Do delays or interruptions make you impatient?

3. Do you feel you have to win at games to enjoy yourself?

4. Do you speed up the car to beat the red light, or wish your taxi driver would do so?

5. Do you seldom ask for or indicate you need help when you have a problem?

6. Do you regularly expect the respect and admiration of others?

7. Are you excessively critical of the way others do their work?

8. Do you look at your watch or clock every now and then?

9. Are you constantly striving to improve your position and achievements?

10. Do you spread yourself “too thin” in terms of your time?

11. Do you have the habit of doing more than one thing at a time?

12. Do you frequently get angry or irritable?

13. Do you have little time for hobbies or time by yourself?

14. Do you have a tendency to talk quickly or hasten conversations?

15. Do you consider yourself hard-driving?

16. Do your friends or relatives consider you hard-driving?

17. Do you have a tendency to get involved in multiple projects?

18. Do you have a lot of deadlines in your work?

19. Do you feel vaguely guilty if you relax and do nothing during leisure?

20. Do you take on too many responsibilities?

**Total Score Results**

- Between 20 and 30: Chances are that you are non-productive or your life lacks stimulation.
- Between 31 and 50: Shows a good balance in your ability to handle and control stress.
- Between 51 and 60: Your stress level is marginal and you are bordering on being excessively tense
- Exceeding 60: You may be a candidate for heart disease.
Stress Busters

Launch a three-pronged attack on stress with exercise, nutrition and meditation.

1. **Walking** is probably the healthiest and most accessible form of exercise. It should last a minimum of 40 minutes a day, in one or two installments and you should walk fast enough to raise your pulse rate by about a third. Walking all the way, half-way or quarter-way to work, or brisk walking to the market is advisable for people who would rather not waste time allotting 40 minutes to just walking. Jogging, spot jogging and other forms of vigorous exercise follow in health benefits.

2. **Food** has been divided by Indian tradition into three classes: Satvic or fresh food (maximum health benefits); Rajasic or fried food (low health benefits, particularly deep fried); and Tamasic or dead foods like meats and preserved food (more dangerous than healthy). Acquire a taste for fresh foods—raw salads and fruits mean less kitchen work! Also, drink more water as it takes care of the excess salt you may be ingesting. Mark Twain used to say, “I eat whatever I like and let it all fight it out in my stomach.” This is not a good idea since the victim of such skirmishes is likely to be you.

3. **Meditation** can be of many types—from TM, to Vipassana to Sri Sri Ravi Shankar’s breathing exercises. Scientific research seems to support the view that most of them fight back stress and are otherwise beneficial to health. However, if you still haven’t found any suitable meditation technique, try this synchronous meditation that I’ve devised:
   - Sit in a comfortable position, making sure you’re not disturbed for at least 20 minutes. (Later you could do it in a bus or in a car if someone else is driving and cooperates).
   - Pick up a word like peace, heaven, the name of your guru or one-syllable word in accord with your belief system. Close your eyes and repeat it silently and slowly for a minute.
   - Try to synchronize the repetition with your heartbeat. If you can’t sense your heartbeat in your chest or neck, hold your breath for a few seconds. If you still don’t, you can take your pulse by pressing a finger lightly on your wrist.
   - As you do this, after another minute, visualize a bird flying, its wings also flapping synchronously with your heartbeat and your mantra. Practice this for about 20 minutes.
   - During meditation, your mind is likely to wander away from your mantra, heartbeat and/or the bird. This is normal and it shouldn’t bother you. If you find yourself lost in some other thought, just pause, take a breath and return to your meditation. Meditate twice a day but not soon after a meal or before going to bed at night. The scientific justification for this meditation is that all information enters our body and mind through the five senses but we are predominantly, visual, aural or kinesthetic. By synchronizing our tendencies this meditation fosters a greater sense of balance and calm.

You can also consider the following steps prescribed by experts to cope with stress:

- Accept that only you are responsible for whatever you do in any situation.
- Set realistic expectations for yourself. If you are not sure, ask your friends.
- Focus on the process rather than the results, on success rather than failure.
- Learn from your mistakes.
- Develop your own personal definition of success.
- Be realistic about time expectation and perspectives.
- Remember, having problems is normal. Take each moment at a time. This is called the ‘sacrament of the present moment.’
- Recognize that you will be criticized more than praised by your parents, spouse and superiors. Take it in your stride. Learn from the criticism, without taking it personally.
- Create variety. Do routine things in newer ways.
- Make your work/study area more stimulating. Redecorate, play music, change colors, etc.
- Leave the office/campus for lunch and errands, if possible.
- Learn to be detached from problems. See them from a stranger’s viewpoint.
- Do your paperwork immediately. Don’t procrastinate.
- Ask others for positive feedback.
- Develop as many interests as you can and spend as much time on them as available.
- Learn and practice sound money management.
- Avoid taking work home with you.
- Restrict television time to a few worthwhile programs, rather than becoming an idiot box junkie.
- Keep physically fit.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs.
- Get involved in family activities or community activities. They help to get a better perspective of one’s problems.


Questions:

1. What is your “stress number” and do you believe that it is accurate? Why or why not?
2. What is the “three-pronged attack” on stress? Give examples of each of the “prongs”.
3. List three other things you can do to avoid stress according to this article.
4. What are some of the things that stress you out in your life?
5. What do you do to decrease your own stress levels? Are you effective at reducing your own stress in a healthy way?