



Stressful Life Events

Stress affects us in many ways. Not only is it difficult to cope with emotionally, but it can affect our physical health as well.¹ The following is a list of some of the most common stressful life events. How many of these events have you experienced in the past year?

- Death of spouse**
- Divorce**
- Marital separation**
- Jail sentence**
- Death of close family member**
- Personal injury or illness**
- Marriage**
- Losing a job**
- Marital reconciliation**
- Retirement**
- Change in health of a family member**
- Pregnancy**
- Sex difficulties**
- Gain of a new family member**
- Change in financial status**
- Death of close friend**
- Change to a different line of work**
- Change in number of arguments with spouse**
- Foreclosure**
- Change in responsibilities at work**
- Son or daughter leaving home**
- Trouble with in-laws**
- Outstanding personal achievement**
- Spouse begins or stops work**
- Begin or end school**
- Change in living conditions**
- Vacation**

If you've experienced a number of events listed here, you may be more prone to physical illness due to stress. Everyone deals with stress differently. It may help to be aware of where your stress comes from, and then you can learn how to cope with it.

References:

1. Holmes, T. H. & Rahe, R. H. (1967). The social readjustment rating scale. *Journal of Psychometric Research*, 11, 213-218.

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Are You Under Stress?

You may already be familiar with the physical symptoms of stress such as headache, tense muscles and sweaty palms but symptoms may also be psychological and interpersonal.

Think about a stressor you have experienced recently. Take a look at the chart below and circle the way you commonly experience the stress:

Physical	Emotional	Mental	Social
Exhaustion	Depression	Boredom	Isolation
Colds	Irritability	Lack of creativity	Passiveness
Back aches	Nervousness	Lack of concentration	Lashing out
Insomnia	Moodiness	Negative attitude	Loneliness
Neck aches	Anxiety	Confusion	Lowered sex drive
Stomach aches	Frustration	Low productivity	Lack of patience
Teeth grinding	Easily discouraged	Forgetfulness	Fewer contacts with friends
Headaches	Crying	Laziness	
Increased use of alcohol/drugs			

Look over the stress symptoms you've circled.

Which ones occur most often?

What can you do to stop these stress symptoms from happening?

Once you know some of your symptoms of stress and are aware of when stress occurs, you can begin to use stress management strategies to deal with stress. In fact, how a person deals with stress may be more important than the number or type of demands he or she faces.

References:

Adapted from: Center for Disease Control and Prevention. (2002). *Stress Management Strategies*. Retrieved July 1, 2008 from: <http://www.cdc.gov/nasd/docs/d000001-d000100/d000008/d000008.html>

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Are You Aware of Your Stress?

Stress is a natural mental and emotional reaction to demands placed upon us. These demands may be challenges we have chosen ourselves, such as getting married or having a baby. They may also be challenges imposed upon us, such as changes in work schedules or duties, a baby sitter who gets sick and can't watch your children, or a car breaking down. Whether we've chosen the changes or they've chosen us, a reaction is normal. *How* we react, however, has a major impact on our long-term health and happiness.

Stress can be positive, negative, or both. It can motivate us to excel on a project or cause us severe anxiety and medical problems. Identifying stressors, managing them effectively, and being proactive to change are the keys to balancing stress.

Here are some common symptoms of stress:

- headaches
- irritability
- low productivity
- low energy
- memory loss
- appetite change
- insomnia
- frequent illness
- poor time management

Identifying your specific responses to stressful situations is the first step in becoming aware of your stress level. Does your heart pound when a stressful situation occurs? Do you eat more/less? At night, does your mind race with thoughts of the day and prevent you from sleeping? Once you've identified your symptoms, you can build a plan to combat your stress.

The ideal way to keep your stress in check is to ward off the symptoms on a daily basis. Some general "stress busters" to accomplish this are:

- eat balanced meals
- play with children
- solve problems
- exercise
- relax
- express feelings
- drink plenty of water
- avoid alcohol or drugs
- do something just for you

As you become more skilled at identifying your specific reactions to stress, you can add stress buster activities to meet your needs. For example, let's say one of your symptoms is insomnia at night because your thoughts are racing. You can combat this symptom by telling someone your thoughts or writing them down. By "dumping" your thoughts, you can clear your mind to go to sleep.

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Self Care Plan

Directions: At the end of each seminar section, place a check mark beside those areas you would like to improve. Later, at your convenience, fill in the blanks to create a personal self-care plan using the Stress Management information you have just learned.

Support Systems

Evaluate your support system. Does it provide support for you in times of stress? What could you do to make your support system serve you better?

Perfectionism

Are you a perfectionist? What could you do to relieve your tendency toward perfectionism?

Self-Talk

Is your self-talk positive or negative? What could you do to make sure your self-talk remains positive?

Assertiveness

Are you assertive enough? Are you experiencing conflict by expressing yourself too aggressively? What could you do to express your needs honestly and forcefully, yet politely?

Workaholism

Do you exhibit workaholic tendencies? What could you do to ensure a positive balance between work and other areas of your life?



Vary Work and Play Activities

Assess your leisure time activities. What changes would you make to ensure that they are the best activities for your re-creation?"

Resolve Conflict

Are there areas of your life where you may have unresolved anger? What can you do to address it? Think of an issue of conflict between you and another person. Write down an "I" statements that directly addresses the issue in a respectful way.

Relax

What do you do now to relax? Do you ever spend time doing nothing? Do you exercise regularly? What could you do to provide yourself needed relaxation?

Self Management

Are you in control of your time? Why or why not? What could you do to gain control of your time?

Action Plan

Identify one thing you can do today to begin impacting your #1 area to work on:

Keep your plan where you can remind yourself of your goals. Continue to work through your personal self-care plan and adjust or add goals.

Relaxation Exercise



Let go of your worries using the following 10-step relaxation exercise:

1. Find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed.
2. Sit in a comfortable position with your arms and legs uncrossed and relax your body.
3. Close your eyes, focusing only on what is happening in the present moment.
4. Tell yourself that you're going to spend the next few minutes concentrating and relaxing.
5. Take a slow, deep breath. As you inhale, say the word "RELAX" to yourself.
6. As you exhale, say the word "CALM" to yourself.
7. Notice how the air moves in and out of your body as you continue to breathe slowly.
8. If your mind begins to wander, imagine your thoughts disappearing into the air, and then simply return your focus onto your breathing.
9. Continue this process for as long as you feel necessary.
10. When you feel relaxed, slowly open your eyes and bring your thoughts back to your present environment.

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100 WAYS TO COPE WITH STRESS

- ♦ Talk to a friend ♦ Make time for fun ♦ Ride a bike ♦ Release expectations ♦ Make a to-do list ♦ Accept change ♦ Say no ♦ Make a decision ♦ Plan a vacation ♦ Take a deep breath ♦ Ask for help ♦ Keep a journal ♦ Hum a tune ♦ Fly a kite ♦ Get enough sleep ♦ Plan ahead ♦ Rent a funny movie ♦ Take a vacation ♦ Listen to relaxing music ♦ Be positive ♦ Go on a picnic ♦ Pet a dog/cat ♦ Play with a child ♦ Read a book ♦ Get a massage ♦ Go to the gym ♦ Take the scenic route ♦ Avoid complainers ♦ Take action ♦ Join a support group ♦ Take a class ♦ Schedule fun ♦ Smile at a stranger ♦ Go with the flow ♦ Schedule a day off ♦ Get some fresh air ♦ Believe in yourself ♦ Tell a joke ♦ Pay a compliment ♦ Stretch ♦ Delegate ♦ Take the stairs instead of the elevator ♦ Play ♦ Volunteer ♦ Try a yoga class ♦ Dance ♦ Practice forgiveness ♦ Take a nap ♦ Find a new hobby ♦ Get organized ♦ Go to the beach ♦ Get a pedicure ♦ Garden ♦ Take a bubble bath ♦ Meditate ♦ Be a good listener ♦ Establish a date night ♦ Give a hug ♦ Clean a junk drawer ♦ Develop a support network ♦ Live in the moment ♦ Watch a sunset ♦ Listen to the birds ♦ Swim ♦ Blow a bubble ♦ Learn to knit ♦ Send someone a card ♦ Cook a new recipe ♦ Clean up your email inbox ♦ Sing ♦ Walk a dog ♦ Yawn ♦ Color in a coloring book ♦ Rent a canoe ♦ Ride a horse ♦ Go to a concert ♦ Write a poem ♦ Visit a museum ♦ Play soccer ♦ Play the air guitar ♦ Make a sandcastle ♦ Go fishing ♦ Catch a butterfly (and release it) ♦ Play with clay ♦ Tickle a baby ♦ Make duplicate keys ♦ Splash in a puddle ♦ Walk in the rain ♦ Use time wisely ♦ Golf ♦ Jump rope ♦ Daydream ♦ Get to work early ♦ Kiss a loved one ♦ Pick up litter ♦ Bake cookies ♦ Doodle ♦ Eat well ♦ Laugh ♦ Have a positive attitude

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Telephone Seminar Evaluation

Please complete this form and fax it to 1.952.996.2702, or email it to eshcomments@cigna.com

Your company: _____

Seminar date: _____ Company city, state: _____

Presenter: _____ Title of seminar: _____

Please state your agreement/disagreement with the following statement using this scale.

4 Strongly Agree	3 Agree	2 Disagree	1 Strongly Disagree
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1. SEMINAR CONTENT:

- | | | | | |
|--|---|---|---|---|
| a. The information I received was helpful. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| b. The seminar met the stated objectives. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

2. SPEAKER EVALUATION:

- | | | | | |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| a. The speaker presented the information clearly. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| b. The speaker responded well to participants. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |
| c. The speaker was knowledgeable on the subject. | 4 | 3 | 2 | 1 |

3. Overall I was satisfied with the seminar presentation. 4 3 2 1

4. What part(s) of the seminar did you like best, and why?

5. What part(s) of the seminar did you like least, and why?