the STRESSProfiler
Adult’s Version

A simple, self-scoring, stress test that will teach you as much about yourself as it will about stress.

By Maynard Brusman, Ed.D
& James E. Porter, M.A.L.S.
from StressStop
This evaluation is designed to help you and you are the only one who will see it. Be honest with yourself and The Profiler will give you an honest evaluation of your levels of stress.

There are no right or wrong answers. The best thing to do is to briefly evaluate each statement and trust your first response.

Instructions

There are ten sections in this Stress Profiler. Each section has ten statements. Briefly evaluate each statement and indicate how you feel about that statement by using a number from 1 to 4.

1 = strongly disagree,
2 = moderately disagree,
3 = moderately agree,
4 = strongly agree.

Example:
I feel like my life is out of my control.

If you strongly disagree with this statement, put a 1 in the space afterwards. If you moderately disagree with the statement, put a 2. If you moderately agree, put a 3. If you strongly agree, put a 4.

After you’ve finished all ten sections, you’ll be given instructions for tallying and evaluating your scores.

Revised Edition Copyright 2011
James E. Porter
Please do not photocopy without permission. Thank you.

Published by;
StressStop.com
50 Crooked Trail
Norwalk, CT 06853
1-800-367-1604

Section One

I often blame other people for the bad things that happen to me.

2. I often blame other people for the bad things that happen to me.

3. My desk and/or work area is disorganized.

4. I don’t know what my goals are.

5. I feel overwhelmed.

6. I don’t feel like I’m in the driver’s seat of my life.

7. I waste time looking for things around the house like car keys, wallet, glasses, etc.

8. I have trouble saying no to people who ask favors of me.

9. My car and/or closets are full of clutter.

10. I am always running late.

Total____

Section Two

1. When I’m down, it feels like there is no one I can turn to.

2. I can’t really talk to my spouse/significant other about what’s going on in my life.

3. I wish I had friends or a mentor I could rely on for important advice.

4. I do not get much social support from co-workers or superiors.

5. My family is not really there for me when I need them.

6. I’d rather stay home than go to a social event.

7. If I had a major illness or an addiction, I’d be reluctant to join a support group.

8. I rarely attend church or religious services.

9. I’d be reluctant to seek out counseling for a psychological problem.

10. I don’t engage in any sports activities or hobbies that bring me in close contact with others that have similar interests.

Total____
**Section Four**

**Financial Stress**

1. I never have enough money to pay my bills. __
2. I occasionally need to borrow money from family and/or friends.____
3. I have what I consider to be a large monthly mortgage or rent payment.____
4. I have what I consider to be a large monthly car payment.____
5. I feel my retirement plan is inadequate to meet my future needs.____
6. I need to work harder just to make ends meet.____
7. I have what I consider to be a large credit card debt.____
8. I feel I am under constant financial stress.____
9. My spouse/partner and I fight over money. ___
10. I often buy things I really can’t afford.____

**Total____

---

**Section Five**

**Time Pressure**

1. My commute to work is long and draining.____
2. My family life places too many demands on me.____
3. I get impatient easily. ___
4. My schedule is overloaded.____
5. I work too much overtime.____
6. I am always feeling rushed.____
7. I hate to wait.____
8. I never get a sense of completion at the end of the day.____
9. I don’t have adequate time to attend to my personal needs.____
10. I’m not very good at managing my time.____

**Total____

---

**Section Three**

**Change**

1. I have lived in several different places in the last five years. _____
2. I change jobs often. ___
3. My love relationships never seem to last. ___
4. I tend to resist change. ___
5. My job responsibilities are always changing. ___
6. My job security and/or financial security has felt threatened within the last year. ____
7. I’d like to quit my job.____
8. I am considering (or am in the process of) breaking up with my spouse or partner.____
9. From time to time, I feel like my life is in turmoil.____
10. My life has been changed by the addition of a new baby, or a new spouse, or a new roommate.____

**Total____
section six

worry/fear

1 = strongly disagree
2 = moderately disagree
3 = moderately agree
4 = strongly agree.

1. I frequently wake up in the night worrying.___
2. I often worry about losing my job.___
3. I often worry that my spouse/partner might leave me. (Or, that I might never find a partner)___
4. I worry about my kids (or family) constantly.___
5. I worry about crime or terrorism affecting me or my family.___
6. I often worry about dying.___
7. I often worry about getting sick.___
8. I often worry about my safety and/or my performance at work.___
9. Certain fears or phobias affect what I do almost daily.___
10. A particular fear is keeping me from growing in a new direction.___

TOTAL_____
section nine
stress outlets

1 = strongly disagree
2 = moderately disagree
3 = moderately agree
4 = strongly agree

1. I don't have time for exercise.
2. There's never any time for myself.
3. I don't often read for pleasure.
4. My love-life is a source of stress.
5. I don't see humor as an outlet for stress.
6. I don't spend enough time relaxing or socializing with friends.
7. I don't have time for relaxing activities like listening to music or taking a hot bath.
8. I generally don't participate in relaxing activities like yoga, Tai Chi, meditation, etc.
9. My weekends are often more stressful than relaxing.
10. Hobbies don't interest me.

TOTAL______

section ten
stress resilience

1 = strongly disagree
2 = moderately disagree
3 = moderately agree
4 = strongly agree

1. I frequently let little things bother me.
2. I often doubt that things are going to turn out OK.
3. I am sometimes paralyzed by indecision.
4. Spirituality, or belief in God, does not play a very big role in my life.
5. I have low self-esteem.
6. I am not very flexible: I don't handle change very well.
7. When I'm under stress, I rarely see the big picture.
8. In an argument, I feel like I have to be right.
9. I find it hard to bounce back after a big let down.
10. I have trouble making decisions.

TOTAL______

what's your stress profile?

Tally your score for each section and enter the totals below. If you scored 20 or more on any one section, you should read more about that subject. Turn to the corresponding page number for more information.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>section</th>
<th>score</th>
<th>see page#</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>section one</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>section two</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>section three</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>section four</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>section five</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>section six</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>section seven</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>section eight</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>13</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>section nine</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>section ten</td>
<td>_____</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Grand Total _____

Determine your stress profile on page 16. If your score falls within 5-10 points of another profile, consider yourself a mix of these two and read up on both.

Transfer the above scores to the graph on page 16 for more tips on handling stress.
Do you remember a time when you overcame a fear of something scary, (like public speaking) or mastered a new skill (like learning a complicated computer program)? Chances are, these were exhilarating moments because you felt a growing sense of control over your own life. When you feel as though you’re in the driver’s seat of your own life, you feel invigorated and empowered. Stress just rolls right off your back. Conversely, when your life feels out of control there’s a good chance that you’ll feel overwhelmed and stressed.

**Get organized. Be on time.**

Feeling like life is out of your control can be caused by many factors. Disorganization is one example. When you’re world is disorganized and messy you forget the one item you need most, you lose track of important bills that need to be paid by a certain date, you misplace your keys and so forth. This level of disorganization will make you crazy. When this occurs you need to take control.

Begin by straightening out your desk. Organize your files, your car and clean out your closets. Devote at least one Saturday a month to simply organizing your life.

Always running late is another example of something that will leave you feeling out of control. To remedy this problem, commit yourself to this one simple idea: **if you’re not early, you’re late.** Think about it, when you

always aim at arriving places **on time**, if you are delayed by just a few minutes, **you’ll be late**. But when you always aim at arriving early, chances are, you’ll always be on time. So get up a bit earlier on work days. **Get things ready the night before.** Put your things for work by the front door. And allow more than enough time to get ready. Aim to arrive at your destination at least 10-15 minutes early and notice how much better you feel when you don’t have to rush to get there.

**Try to determine what you can control and what you can’t.**

When a particular situation seems out of control, stand back and look at it objectively. Try to determine what aspects of the situation you **can** control and what aspects you **can’t**. You may not be able to change the flight path of noisy planes flying over your house at night but you **can** buy ear plugs or turn on a fan or an air-conditioner to drown out the noise. But even if these options fail, **don’t give up.** That will leave you feeling even more out of control. You must take some action. For example, you could help organize a neighborhood coalition to negotiate with the airport, or enlist the support of your state or federal representative. Sometimes taking **any action, even if it doesn’t immediately change the situation, will still help you feel more in control.**

And that’s the mystery of control: An action doesn’t necessarily have to change anything to make you feel more in control. **Control is all in your mind.** If you believe you are in control of your life, you are. So, always take some step, any step - no matter how small - and keep taking these steps, until you feel more in control.

**Things you can do to feel more in control**

1. Develop a **comfortable morning routine**: get up earlier, get things ready the night before such as lunches, attire, etc.
2. **Arrive early.** Commit yourself to arriving places 10-15 minutes early.
3. Celebrate “organization day” at least one Saturday a month. Do nothing but organize all day.
4. **Organize your life.** Clean your desk, organize your files, your closets, your car, and your workspace.
5. **Take any action, no matter how small**, to resolve a situation that feels out of control.

**FOR MORE INFORMATION**

**Suggested reading**

- The Overwhelmed Person’s Guide to Time Management. Ronni Eisenberg, Plume.
section two

about support

In a study of successful CEOs, authors James Quick and Debra Nelson hypothesized that social support was the most important form of stress management practiced by the various executives in the study: “Support relationships are like a shield which serves to protect the executive from potential distress.”

In a study of breast cancer survivors, women who joined a support group lived twice as long as those who didn’t. Research has shown that married men live longer than single men. Even owning a pet, which constitutes a relationship, has long-term medical benefits.

One social scientist has suggested that, indeed, 85% of our satisfaction in life comes from relationships (i.e., social support) and less than 15% comes from material items like cars, new gadgets or money. Yet most of us live our lives as though these figures were exactly the opposite.

You may be unaware of the beneficial effects a rewarding close relationship can have on your self-esteem, happiness and your ultimate well being. But you can easily prove this to yourself by thinking back to when you first fell in love. How did it make you feel? When you are falling in love, nothing fazes you. You’re almost impervious to any kind of stress. To put it simply, falling in love and being in love, make you feel good. And there’s not a gadget on earth that can substitute for this powerful emotional lift.

But love relationships take time to build, both new ones and ongoing ones. You can’t expect to build meaningful relationships with people without dedicating a significant amount of time to interacting and being together. (One time-management study showed the average husband and wife spend less than five minutes per day in meaningful conversation!)

Perhaps you need to schedule time to be alone with your spouse, or with your kids. Plan to spend at least one night alone per week with your spouse or companion. Plan some family activities. Make optional family get-together times, like dinner hour, mandatory. As you build your most important relationships, look at other areas where you can foster meaningful relationships, such as at your place of worship, in your community, or even by rekindling an old friendship.

To build your business relationships, try joining a trade organization. If you suffer from a major illness, or from a disabling psychological problem, join a support group. The bottom line is this: supportive relationships are beneficial to your health. Once you understand the therapeutic benefit of building and maintaining your network of social support, you won’t need a good reason to call an old friend; you’ll need a good reason not to.

for more information

suggested reading

Love And Survival, Dean Ornish, M.D., Perennial Currents.
The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People, Stephen Covey, Ph.D., Free Press.
If you scored high on this section of the profiler, you may be going through a lot of changes right now. Change can be stressful. But if life never changed at all, that would be even more stressful. A key to managing stress is to manage the amount of change to which you're exposed. Dr. Thomas Holmes and Dr. Richard Rahe realized this when they came up with a stress test that measured the amount of change in a person's life. They called it the Social Re-adjustment Rating Scale.

The scale measures change by assigning standardized point values from 1 to 100 for each change in a person's life that has taken place during the 12 months just prior to taking the test. The death of a spouse was determined to be the biggest change and certainly the most stressful one, so that event was assigned the highest value: 100 points. Divorce got a 73. Death in the family, 63. Marriage, 50. Getting fired, 47.

Change can be stressful. But if life never changed at all, that would be even more stressful. A key to managing stress is to manage the amount of change to which you're exposed. Dr. Thomas Holmes and Dr. Richard Rahe realized this when they came up with a stress test that measured the amount of change in a person's life. They called it the Social Re-adjustment Rating Scale.

The scale measures change by assigning standardized point values from 1 to 100 for each change in a person's life that has taken place during the 12 months just prior to taking the test. The death of a spouse was determined to be the biggest change and certainly the most stressful one, so that event was assigned the highest value: 100 points. Divorce got a 73. Death in the family, 63. Marriage, 50. Getting fired, 47.

The key to managing change is to understand that some changes can be controlled and some can't. Therefore, you need to plan those changes you can control as a counterbalance to those you can't. For example, if someone you love has just died and you've recently been through a bitter divorce, it's probably not the best time to move or change jobs. This is a time to minimize the change you can control. If you don't, you could be putting your health at risk.

Too much change at any one time can make you sick. Holmes and Rahe discovered this by monitoring the health of the people who took their test. They found that people who scored 300 or more were 80% more likely to get sick than those who had scored lower. So if you want to stay healthy, try to avoid too much change at one time.

But if you do find yourself overwhelmed by change that seems beyond your power to control, try to improve your coping skills as a way of getting through it. Regular exercise, meditation or yoga can help you stay on course when you're sailing through rough seas. (For more information on coping skills see section 9 on stress outlets.) Also remember that social support and strong spiritual values can help in times of change.

Ways to help you better cope with change

1. Accept the changes you can't control (like downsizing and the economy.)
2. Reduce the amount of change you can control. In times of high stress, reduce or eliminate the changes you can control (like moving or looking for a new job).
3. Increase your outlets for reducing stress. Work on coping skills during periods of change. (See section 9 on stress outlets.)
4. Manage change. Understand that too many major life changes at one time can be detrimental to your health.
5. Some change is good. Remember, absence of all change is even more stressful than the presence of too much change. Change is inevitable so learn to flow with it.

Suggested reading

New Passages, Gail Sheehy, Random House.

How you can do

Ways to help you better cope with change

1. Accept the changes you can't control (like downsizing and the economy.)
2. Reduce the amount of change you can control. In times of high stress, reduce or eliminate the changes you can control (like moving or looking for a new job).
3. Increase your outlets for reducing stress. Work on coping skills during periods of change. (See section 9 on stress outlets.)
4. Manage change. Understand that too many major life changes at one time can be detrimental to your health.
5. Some change is good. Remember, absence of all change is even more stressful than the presence of too much change. Change is inevitable so learn to flow with it.

Suggested reading

New Passages, Gail Sheehy, Random House.

The key to managing change is to understand that some changes can be controlled and some can't. Therefore, you need to plan those changes you can control as a counterbalance to those you can't. For example, if someone you love has just died and you've recently been through a bitter divorce, it's probably not the best time to move or change jobs. This is a time to minimize the change you can control. If you don't, you could be putting your health at risk.

Too much change at any one time can make you sick. Holmes and Rahe discovered this by monitoring the health of the people who took their test. They found that people who scored 300 or more were 80% more likely to get sick than those who had scored lower. So if you want to stay healthy, try to avoid too much change at one time.

But if you do find yourself overwhelmed by change that seems beyond your power to control, try to improve your coping skills as a way of getting through it. Regular exercise, meditation or yoga can help you stay on course when you're sailing through rough seas. (For more information on coping skills see section 9 on stress outlets.) Also remember that social support and strong spiritual values can help in times of change.
financial security

Nothing defines stress like hearing the words: “You’re fired.” Besides the predictable problems with self-esteem, losing your job leaves you scrambling to maintain your financial security. Many of us carry such a large debt load that any interruption of our income leaves us vulnerable to losing everything we supposedly “own.” While ever-increasing debt-load seems to be an American way of life, so too are ever-increasing stress levels. Could there be some correlation?

Living with debt is so ingrained in the American psyche, the few people who have spoken out against it, from writer, philosopher Henry David Thoreau to former presidential candidate, H. Ross Perot, have been viewed as a bit eccentric. Thoreau’s famous line, written over 100 years ago: “the great mass of men lead lives of quiet desperation,” in a sense, predicted the level of stress we all suffer from today. Many of us just accept stress-related physical conditions like depression, headaches, burnout, colitis, allergies, recurrent colds, exhaustion, anxiety, insomnia, or backaches in exactly the same way we accept our debt load. We just take it all for granted, as if it were an inevitable part of our modern day lives. But it doesn’t have to be.

If you are concerned about a correlation between debt and stress, take a look at this issue in your life. Are you in “debt denial?” Begin to notice how often issues of stress and money are related. Are you strapped by debt? Do you ever lie awake at night worrying about changes in your company’s management or the economy that might affect your job status?

All change starts with awareness of what to change. And as far as servicing your debt goes, we’ve dedicated most of this space to just making you aware of the need to change. Since most people don’t see a relationship between debt and stress, making you aware of this fact is our first priority. Remember, if you do address this issue, you will be among a very small minority. Most people believe that debt is as all American as apple pie.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Things you can do to improve your financial security

1. Pay off debt. Recognize the importance of paying off debt, if only for your own peace of mind.
2. Put aside an amount equal to six months’ salary in the event you’re ever fired or laid off.
3. Save 10%. Begin saving 10% of your income every month. Use 5% for paying off debts.
4. Put the money you save in tax-sheltered retirement accounts that penalize you for early withdrawal (i.e., IRAs and SEPs and Keogh plans).
5. Saving adds up. $100 a month for 40 years will yield over $1,000,000 (assuming 10% average annual growth over the life of the account).
6. A home mortgage, with its tax advantages, is the only debt worth having. Real estate usually retains its value and as you pay off your mortgage you’ll be, in effect, saving money. But don’t use your home equity like a credit card to buy things like cars that depreciate quickly.

For more information

Suggested reading

The Laws of Money, Suze Orman, Free Press.
How to Want What You Have, Timothy Miller, Ph.D., Avon Books.
To address the problem of time pressure, first look for any statements you responded to in this section of the test with a number 4. These are the areas of immediate concern. Let’s say you responded to question 1 (on commuting) with a 4. You need to ask yourself, “What can I do to address this particular problem?”

Sometimes simply identifying a problem area can lead to solutions. In this case, you might request flex hours, try leaving for work 15 minutes earlier, take a different route, listen to a book on tape or CD in the car, telecommute from your home, or move closer to your place of business. Tackle each question you responded to with a 4 in this manner and you’ll immediately begin to lower your stress.

Second, you need to recognize the “tyranny of the urgent.” Most of us run around all day taking care of urgent things like faxing, FedExing, getting out rush orders, putting out fires and trying to cover up mistakes that inevitably get made when we’re under the gun. This leaves little or no time for the important things that really matter, like planning, exercise, furthering your education, pursuing a big dream, or spending quality time with your spouse, children or closest friends.

Most people don’t set aside time each day for planning and writing down goals because it doesn’t seem urgent. They may take the time to write out a list of things to do but rarely do they prioritize the list and, even more rarely, jot down goals for the week, month and year ahead. This tunnel vision approach to planning can quickly lead to frustration and burnout: You’ll spend your days continually adding items to your “to do” list and never finishing everything you’ve so carefully jotted down. And without a sense of what’s important, (i.e., goals) you’ll probably wind up fulfilling other people’s dreams and goals rather than your own. When you plan your day, week or month ahead, include time for activities that really matter to you, without losing track of urgent matters which must be resolved.

Here’s how: First, allow at least 15 minutes each day for planning. Then allow 60-90 minutes a day of uninterrupted time, five days a week, for working on something that could really make a difference in your life (like exercising, pursuing a big dream, educating yourself, or improving your marketable skills).

So where are you supposed to find this extra block of time each day? The answer is simple. You steal it from activities (like TV watching) that are neither urgent nor important. For example, you could turn off the TV at 9PM, go to bed two hours earlier, get up two hours earlier and voila, there’s your free block of time.

Time pressure is undoubtedly the number one cause of stress in the USA. Most stressful events wouldn’t be stressful if you weren’t under some kind of time pressure. But if you can learn how to manage time, by planning each day, jotting down goals, prioritizing your list of things to do, and always allowing more time than you think to complete a task, you’ll eliminate an extraordinary amount of stress.

---

Section Five

About Time Pressure

---

For more information

Suggested reading

First Things First, Stephen Covey, Ph.D., Free Press. Getting Things Done: The Art of Stress Free Productivity, David Allen, Penguin.

---

What You Can Do

Ways to reduce hassles and time

1. Plan your day. Don’t underestimate the time saved by planning. Allow at least 15 minutes daily just for planning.
2. Think long term. Spend at least an hour every day working on something important with long-term benefits (like exercising, educating yourself, or improving your marketable skills).
3. Don’t be a slave to the urgent things. Important things are seldom urgent and urgent things are seldom important.
4. Allow extra time between meetings and errands, which always take longer than you think.
5. Make a short list of the six most important things you need to do every day. Keeping it short will force you to prioritize.
Worrying is a habit. People who worry excessively get into the habit of worrying. But habits are learned and can be replaced with new, more productive habits. Here are three new ways of dealing with worry. Get in the habit of substituting one of these three strategies whenever you find yourself feeling anxious or worried.

1. **Only worry about the things you can control.** You can’t control the economy, interest rates or the weather, so don’t waste your time worrying about them. For example, you can’t control the weather on your daughter’s wedding day, but you can rent a tent for the occasion. Look for what you can control in a situation and don’t worry about what you can’t.

2. **Always worry with a writing instrument.** Idle worrying is not constructive. Limit your worrying to those occasions when you can sit down and write out a list of what’s troubling you. Once you commit your concerns to paper, you will have at least identified the problem. Now that you’ve written it down, your mind is cleared of the problem and can go to work on finding a solution. You’ll be amazed at the constructive solutions you’ll come up with if you simply take the time to write your worries down.

3. **Most worries never come to pass.** And really dire problems—often hit you by surprise. Take comfort in the simple logic of these two universal truths. If you doubt the first one, keep a list of everything you worry about for one day. Save the list to see how few of these worries ever come to pass.

   **Fear is one of the most potent stressful emotions you will ever encounter.** It can paralyze and incapacitate you. And the only way to overcome a fear is to face it. When trying to decide what fears to face you first have to decide whether your fear is rational (healthy) or irrational (holding you back). If a fear of heights is keeping you from getting too close to a dangerous cliff, that’s a healthy fear. But if it prevents you from going into tall buildings, then it’s holding you back. It’s these irrational fears that must be faced.

   **The best way to tackle fear is to first familiarize yourself with the frightening activity without actually participating in it.** Learn as much as you can about what it is you fear. Get a book on the subject. Watch a video or DVD. Learn from people who have overcome this same fear. Find a friend who has done it. See if you can try out what it is you fear under controlled circumstances, where mistakes won’t be so costly.

   For example, if you’re deathly afraid of addressing large audiences, but need to make a presentation, you could take a course on public speaking. There are books and videos readily available to you. You could “rehearse” your presentation with your family, or other friendly audiences at a church, or a retirement home. You’ll begin to gain confidence as you practice your skills in these places where you can afford to make mistakes.

   If you’re one of those people who believes you’ll never conquer your fears, try to remember learning how to drive. You were probably intimidated at first. And why not? One mistake could cost you thousands of dollars in damage, or even worse. Yet you overcame this initial fear. How? You talked to your friends who had already learned. You took a course. You practiced. At first, you drove under controlled circumstances on a vacant street, in an empty parking lot or with a driving instructor.

   Now you drive everywhere and seldom give that initial fear a passing thought, despite the fact that driving is probably the most dangerous thing that you will ever do. And it’s undoubtedly more dangerous than anything you are currently afraid to try.

   So remember, when it comes to fear, it’s simply your lack of familiarity with an activity that determines your level of anxiety, not necessarily the inherent danger of the activity itself.
Some psychologists suggest that expressing anger is the best way of dealing with it. But there is a difference between expressing anger rationally, by calmly letting someone know how you feel, and expressing anger irrationally, by raising your voice and/or losing your temper. When you express anger irrationally, your anger overwhelms you, you may have trouble communicating, or you may find it hard to resist telling the person you are angry with—what a “big jerk” he or she is.

This style of expressing anger almost always makes the situation worse. Both for you and the person on the receiving end. Let’s start with you. When you lose your temper, you usually feel awkward, embarrassed, or perhaps even angrier than you were before. In fact, getting angry has the odd effect of helping you justify being angry. Thus, losing your temper can often intensify anger and prolong it.

When you think about it, getting angry rarely gets you what you want. You think your anger is going to change another person’s behavior and thus improve your situation but it rarely does. Most people you get angry with, walk away mad. So instead of solving the problem that made you angry, it just makes the situation worse.

And to further complicate matters, the person you were angry with may hold a grudge, or tell your friends what a big jerk you are, and this radiated anger may come back to haunt you. Now you have two problems to fix instead of one.

So the next time you feel like expressing anger irrationally, think twice. Venting your emotions in this way may:
1. Make you feel worse.
2. Make your situation worse.
3. Cause additional problems you’ll have to fix later.

There are other ways of dealing with anger that don’t involve a confrontation of any sort. First, when you’re in a tense situation, try walking away. Don’t let it escalate. Give yourself some time to breathe and/or cool down. Remind yourself that (for the three reasons just mentioned) it might be better not to get angry.

Another thing you can do is try talking the situation over with someone who can be objective about it. Remember the expression, it takes two to tango. To put it another way, you may have done something you are unaware of, that contributed to the situation. A neutral third party (like a relative, coworker, supervisor, spiritual counselor or trusted friend) can help you sort this out.

But even if you didn’t do anything to provoke the situation, ask yourself the following question: Is there any situation in the past where I might have done the same thing to someone else? (Let’s say you were treated in a mean way. Ask yourself: Have I ever treated someone else in a mean way?) Think hard, and if the answer is yes, try to remember the circumstances (I didn’t intend to be mean) and perhaps this bit of insight will help you better understand your current situation.

And finally, avoid blame. Blaming others makes you feel helpless and hostile. Taking responsibility for contributing, even in some small way, to the cause of a tense situation helps you feel more in control and less angry. By honestly admitting your own role in the conflict you will immediately get a handle on what you need to do to correct the situation, should it happen again in the future.

Ways to help you deal with your anger
1. Think twice before losing your temper. Angry outbursts usually leave you feeling worse.
2. Ask objective friends if your anger is justified. If they don’t agree with you 100%, let it go.
3. Is it worth getting angry over? Before expressing anger, ask yourself: Am I truly inconvenienced by this situation? If not, it isn’t worth getting angry over.
4. Try putting yourself in the other person’s shoes. Assume they had a good reason for doing what they did and talk it out on that basis.
5. Avoid blame. Blame only makes you feel helpless and more upset. Take responsibility instead for any role you might have had in creating the situation.

For more information
Suggested Reading
Physical symptoms of stress include a pounding heart, an upset stomach, rapid pulse, cold hands, dry mouth, unexpected perspiration, skin rashes, diarrhea, insomnia, recurrent colds, headaches, fatigue, and muscle tension. Emotional symptoms of stress include anger, frustration, worry, fear, panic, anxiety and depression.

Becoming aware of your stress symptoms is the first step toward overcoming them. One way to heighten this awareness is to keep a log of the times you experience these stress symptoms. Who were you with? What were you doing? And on a scale of one to ten, how strong were the symptoms? Once you begin to track your symptoms, you may uncover a particular person, place or thing that is causing them.

There are certain situations where it’s normal for you to feel stressed: the first time you chair a meeting, your first day on a new job, your first date with someone new, or the first time you try a challenging sport, like skiing. These are all examples of situations where it’s quite normal to feel stress symptoms. As the newness of these activities fade, your stress symptoms will too.

There are also situations where your stress symptoms will always be present. When you perform on stage, go to the dentist for a root canal, put on a presentation, or even host a big party, chances are, you’re always going to feel stressed. This is OK too, since these events don’t happen every day.

But if just thinking about one of the above examples causes you stress, and you think about it often enough, your stress symptoms can become a problem. This is how acute (or occasional) stress becomes chronic (or ongoing) stress.

Chronic stress can eventually lead to stress-related illness. When acute stress becomes chronic, an occasional episode of diarrhea can become a chronic case of diarrhea (also known as irritable bowel syndrome). An occasional case of indigestion can become a chronic digestive disorder. An occasional headache can become a chronic problem with headaches and/or migraines. An occasional episode of shoulder tension can become a chronic problem with upper back pain. An occasional problem with temper can become a chronic problem with hostility.

There are many things you can do right now to avoid these chronic problems. Try to keep track of your stress symptoms and notice what causes them. As you begin to establish a link between the causes and effects of stress, you can begin to make changes that will lower your stress in these situations.

You may consider cutting back on overtime, or going to the bank on a different day when the lines aren’t so long. You may want to talk to HR about a particular co-worker or supervisor that is causing you stress. And sometimes it’s simply a matter of reminding yourself not to sweat the small stuff. And while it isn’t all small stuff, a lot more of it is than most people realize.

**Things you can do about your stress**

1. Make a list of stress symptoms mentioned in the first paragraph of this section. Notice when and where you experience any of these symptoms over the next week.
2. Try to establish a link between your symptoms and a particular person, place, or thing. Look for repeating patterns.
3. Breathe deeply several times whenever you feel any stress symptoms.
4. Stress often starts in your mind and it can end there too. Don’t let yourself dwell on stressful thoughts. Consciously substitute a more pleasant thought.
5. Don’t sweat the small stuff.

**Suggested reading**

- *The End of Stress As We Know It*, Bruce McEwen, National Academies Press.
Section Nine

Stress Outlets

Under stress, our bodies react with a flood of changes that include increased heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tension, as well as rising levels of blood sugar and cholesterol. Our body's immune system and digestive system are also adversely affected. This reaction to stressful events is commonly known as the fight or flight response.

Yoga, meditation, deep breathing and point by point relaxation have the opposite effect on the body. They decrease heart rate, lower blood pressure, diminish muscle tension and reduce blood sugar and cholesterol levels. These activities restore balance to the body and produce what is known as the relaxation response. A study of medical students at Ohio State University College of Medicine, conducted by Drs. Ron and Janice Glaser, showed that students' immune systems were suppressed at exam time. But when a group of these students were taught how to elicit the relaxation response, their immune system functioning improved.

One way to bring about the relaxation response is by practicing deep breathing. To do this, place one hand over your belly, take a really deep breath in as you count silently to five. Hold your breath in to another count of five. Then breathe out to a count of five, noticing your hand rising and falling with each in-breath and out-breath. Now close your eyes, and repeat the process for a minute or two until you feel more relaxed.

Meditation is another way to elicit the relaxation response. Harvard professor, Dr. Herbert Benson, (see suggested reading box) recommends that you find a quiet place where you won't be disturbed, sit or lie down in a comfortable position, and silently repeat a calming word or short phrase until you feel relaxed. Benson recommends words like one, peace or anything you find personally meaningful. Remember, meditation requires patience and practice. When distracting thoughts pop up as they often do, just return to your word or phrase. Practice every day for 15 to 20 minutes until you get the hang of it.

Yoga is a great way to relieve stress. The word yoga means union, which refers to the union of mind and body. It's a very light form of exercise, that combines breathing, stretching and meditation all into one. It does a fabulous job of relaxing tense muscles and taking your mind off of distracting thoughts. You can find yoga classes at health clubs, on TV and at your local Y. There are books, videos and DVD's on yoga as well.

Point by point relaxation (also known as progressive muscle relaxation) is a simple technique for tensing and relaxing muscles, one muscle group at a time. You can start at the top and work down: Tense all the muscles in your forehead, scalp and face, and clench your jaw, while you count to ten. Now release, and focus on the relaxation that naturally follows. Concentrating on one area at a time, tense and relax your neck and shoulders, your lower back and belly, your arms and chest, and finally your legs and feet.

Other outlets for reducing stress include journaling, guided imagery, living in the moment, (mindfulness) reading a good book, listening to music, getting a massage, taking a hot bath, talking to a trusted friend, laughing and exercise. (See Benson's The Wellness Book for more information on these techniques.) Remember, most people just ignore their stress symptoms - but you don't have to. Don't put up with aching muscles, tension headaches, recurrent colds, and certain stomach pains. Choose one or more of the above outlets and practice it for 20 minutes every day.

What You Can Do

Ideas for Developing Better Stress Outlets

1. Save for stress. Think of stressful events like money spent and relaxing events like money saved. Consciously save for unexpectedly stressful periods in your life.

2. Make big deposits (that require 20-30 minutes): exercise, meditate, or practice yoga.

3. Make little deposits: laugh, read, listen to music or imagine yourself in a relaxing place.

4. Try them all. Try every technique mentioned on this page, at least once. Then choose the ones that work best for you.

5. Practice mindfulness. Think about what it is you're doing. For example, when taking a shower, think about how good the water feels running down your back, instead of what you are going to do later.
Things you can do to increase your resilience

1. **Build your coping resources.** Meditate and/or exercise on a regular basis.
2. **Be flexible.** Inflexible thinking can lock you into old unproductive patterns of behavior.
3. **See setbacks as temporary.** Trust that you'll come out OK on the other side of a crisis.
4. **Nurture an attitude of gratitude.** Make a mental list of everything you have to be thankful for before you fall asleep at night.
5. **Take action.** Don't let your problems cripple you to the point of inertia or inaction.

For a reason, your stress resilience is going to go sky high.

6. **Seek support.** Your friends, family, co-workers, spiritual counselors can help you weather any storm. These are your pillars of strength. Don't be afraid to lean on them in times of trouble. Tell these supportive people exactly what is going on: I'm having trouble financially. I feel really depressed. I am having trouble with co-workers who I thought were my friends. There is an old saying that applies here: A problem shared is a problem halved.

7. **Take action.** Don't let your problems cripple you to the point of inertia, or inaction. Take any action that moves you forward even if it is only a "baby step."

Stress resilience is about facing stress head on and looking at stressful situations as opportunities for growth. Begin to see your stress like a professional athlete sees a workout or practice: It's how you get better at what you do. Your stress is like a workout for your mind. It builds character and exercises your problem-solving ability. It's part of being human. When you see stress in this way - and learn to take it in stride - you will begin to appreciate life more, enjoy challenges and overcome obstacles that only temporarily block your way.

**Suggested reading**

- Resilience: Bouncing Off and Bouncing Back, Robert Wandberg, Capstone Press
- The Resilience Factor, Karen Reivich, Ph.D., Broadway Books.
1. Try taking the test again in six months. Compare your scores.
2. Give the test to your spouse or closest friend. Encourage him or her to take it too and talk it over.
3. Show your answers to a trusted friend. See if he or she agrees with your assessment.
4. Look for any statement you responded to with a number 4. These are mini-areas of concern.
5. This assessment is designed to provide you with a snapshot of your day to day stress levels and is not meant to be a predictor of your future health. It is not a substitute for professional counseling or a doctor's advice. If you feel your problems are serious, seek professional help.

### About the Authors

**Maynard Brusman, Ed.D.** Dr. Maynard Brusman is president of Working Resources - a leadership consulting, and executive coaching firm. He has conducted workshops or provided coaching for such organizations as American Express, Chevron, Hitachi America, and the IRS. He has appeared as an expert on MSNBC and CBS Health Watch and has been quoted in The San Francisco Chronicle and The Wall Street Journal. He is a full professor in counseling psychology in the Northern Arizona University Statewide Education Program.


**Medical Advisor:**

**Paul Rosch, M.D.**, is Clinical Professor of Medicine and Psychiatry at New York Medical College and President of the American Institute of Stress.

### What's Your Stress Profile?

Check your grand total either below or on page 5 to determine your stress profile.

**100-139 Stress Guru** You should be teaching courses in stress management. Either you're divine or in stress denial. **Check your answers again.**

**140-189 Easygoing** You usually don't let stress bother you and probably have a reliable method for blowing off steam. You may have one or two areas of weakness that you could fine-tune, as indicated by the scores below. **Read the corresponding article for these “problem” areas and pick at least one item from each What You Can Do List to work on in the coming weeks.**

**190-239 A Little on Edge** You sometimes let stress get under your skin but are in complete control at other times. You probably have several areas of weakness as indicated by your scores. **Read the corresponding article from these “problem” areas and pick at least two things from each What You Can Do List to work on. Introduce these changes one per month. Practice them until they become a habit.**

**240-279 Anxious** You are either not adept at handling stress or have just too much stress to handle. **Read this profiler from cover to cover. Pick three areas with the highest scores and focus on making one change from each area right now. If control is an issue, work on this first and spend time getting yourself organized. You might want to talk about your stress with a counselor or trusted friend.**

**280-329 Too Tense** For you, stress has become a habit. You will need to work hard to replace your ineffective old behaviors with effective new ones. **Read this profiler from cover to cover and pick the one area (let your scores be your guide) you need to work on most. Make as many changes as you can in just this one area. Learn as much as you can about it. (Check out the books listed under suggested reading.) Take the test again in three months. If your score is at least 5 points lower, repeat the above steps for your next area of greatest concern. Seek additional advice from a mentor, coach or counselor.**

**330-369 Over the Edge** Unless your score was exceptionally low in section 9, you may already be suffering from health problems related to stress. (See stress symptoms on page 13.) Your stressful habits are so ingrained that you may need help overcoming them. Still, you need to make major changes now. **Read this profiler from cover to cover. Pick your area of greatest concern (based on your test scores) and work on this area first. Read up on this area. Make as many of the suggested changes as you can from the What You Can Do List. Talk to friends who you perceive as skilled in this area and ask their advice. Take the test again in two months. If you feel you are making progress, repeat the above steps for the next area of greatest concern. If you feel you are not making progress, seek professional help immediately.**

**370-400 A Walking Time Bomb** If your health isn't already affected in a major way by stress, it probably will be soon. **Seek professional help now.**

---

**Graph Your Results**

To graph your results: Put a dot on the vertical line under each section number that corresponds with your score for that section. (See page 5 for your scores.) Connect all the dots for a graphic representation of your overall levels of stress. Follow the lines to the right for your action advice on each section.