



# Stress and the Brain

By: Mateo Ramirez



Feeling tired and unable to focus on tasks throughout the day? Are you finding yourself daydreaming in school or constantly checking your phone during meetings? Have you ever considered that maybe you are just too stressed?

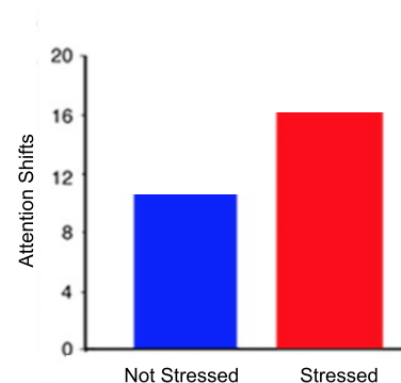
It is time to take a step back and do some learning for self-care.

Let's take a look at the impact of stress on our life.

## Stress and Focus

Scientists have been studying the impacts of stress on daily activities for many years. Dr. Mackey's lab at the University of Pennsylvania studies stress and the brain. I spoke with Dr. Mackey, who said that, "There are studies of stress over months and so there are some really nice studies with people who are studying to be doctors and as they prepare for these like really high stakes medical school exams and their stress levels go up and their brains change."

In one of these studies researchers followed a group of students who are in medical school studying to become doctors. It is well known that medical students are constantly under a lot of stress to perform well on difficult medical exams that determine whether they will become doctors. Students prepare for these exams for months and their stress levels go way up. The researchers tested the students' ability to focus on a difficult task. They measured the number of times the students got distracted and shifted their attention away from the task they were supposed to be doing (number of attention shifts). The research team was shocked to find that the stressed medical students shifted their attention (got distracted) almost TWICE as much as non-stressed students who served as the control group. The stressed students also had much higher levels of the stress hormones. It seems that these stress hormones were blocking the ability to focus.



**Stress and high levels of stress hormones dramatically reduce your ability to focus on school tasks!**

## So how can we reduce stress?



<https://www.health.harvard.edu/heart-health/7-ways-to-reduce-stress-and-keep-blood-pressure-down>

There are actually several ways we can reduce stress. The key is to take some time for self-care, time for yourself to de-stress and be in sync with your body. Going for a walk, breathing slowly, meditating, and just slowing down once a while can help!

School work can be hard and stressful, but keep in touch with your mind and body and take care of them.