

1/Stress in Today's World

Is stress always bad?

Stress seems to be everywhere. Can I really do anything about it, or is it just an inevitable demand of living in today's world?

Was I born with a certain capacity to handle stress? Is successful stress management a result of heredity or environment?

REAL PEOPLE, REAL STORIES

Nicole's Story Nicole was about to graduate, but reflecting on her first year of college still brought some painful memories. Here is Nicole's story.

My first year of nursing school proved to be more stressful and more challenging than I had bargained for. It wasn't just the 18 credits and 6 lab hours that had me floundering. I was also working 20–30 hours per week at a local grocery store and trying to maintain a social life.

Early in the semester I began to feel the stress. I began cutting back on my social life because I needed to study or work. Day after day I kept reminding myself that this situation was "just for this semester," and "I can get through this."

My stress started affecting me physically. By the first week in October, I had lost 5 pounds and was starting to have stomach cramps nearly every day. My weight loss and stomach cramps were caused mainly by my not eating. I would get stressed out and skip meals. My sleep patterns started changing, too. I needed more and more sleep just to be able to function.

Without stress, there would be no life.

— HANS SELYE



Some days I slept 14–16 hours but still felt tired. Other days I couldn't sleep at all. By Thanksgiving break I had lost 10 pounds and was taking prescribed muscle relaxants and ulcer medications.

My emotions started changing, too. I cried at the drop of a hat, sometimes over nothing. I took long, hot showers so my roommates wouldn't see me crying. I also angered easily. I couldn't seem to get happy about anything. I quit caring about my appearance, so I stopped wearing makeup and fixing my hair.

School was the main stressor, and my grades began to show it. As my grades initially began to slip, I became even more stressed out. I was worried that I would fail a class and be out of the nursing program, so I spent more and more time studying.

I tried so hard to conceal my problems because I didn't want to admit I couldn't handle things. I didn't want people to think I was stressed out and such a mess. How could I ever be a good nurse and help other people if I couldn't even help myself?

It was really difficult for me to do, but I finally told my family and friends what I was going through. With their help, I made several changes in my life. The first major change came with the end of my busy, class-loaded semester. When registering for classes the next semester, I cut back my class load. I also found a new job that paid more per hour so I could work less. My parents helped me out financially as much as they could. My boyfriend maintained a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week "hotline" for me, and he encouraged me to call him whenever I felt stressed. I started riding my bicycle and doing yoga to "de-stress." I also set aside time each day just for myself, when I could do anything I wanted.

I'm still learning how to handle my stress, but my first year in nursing school taught me a lot about myself and how I handle stress. I learned what my limits are and what can happen if I don't deal with my stress appropriately. I'll graduate in a month, and I know I'll still have stress, but now I know how to deal with stress in a healthier way.

Student Objectives

Study of this chapter will enable you to:

1. Define the terms *stress* and *stressor*.
2. Define and explain the difference between eustress and distress.
3. Differentiate between acute, acute episodic, and chronic stress.
4. Relate stress to the five dimensions of holistic health—physical, intellectual (also referred to as mental), emotional, spiritual, and social.
5. Discuss some of the most common stressors affecting college students today.

FYI

Got Stress?

Students' self-ratings of emotional health dropped to a record 25-year low in 2010, according to the 2010 CIRP Freshman Survey conducted by the Higher Education Research Institute at UCLA. The survey is based on the responses of over 200,000 first-time full-time students entering four-year colleges across the United States. Findings include:

- Fewer students than ever before are reporting above-average emotional health.
- Students feel increasingly overwhelmed before entering college; twice as many female students report feeling this way.

"Stress is a major concern when dealing with college students," lead author and CIRP Director John H. Pryor said in a statement. "If students are arriving in college already overwhelmed and with lower reserves of emotional health, faculty, deans and administrators should expect to see more consequences of stress, such as higher levels of poor judgment around time management, alcohol consumption, and academic motivation."

Sources: The American Freshman: National Norms. Fall 2010, UCLA Higher Education Research Institute. Retrieved February 11, 2011 from <http://gseis.ucla.edu/heri>.

Stress in Today's World

"It was the best of times, it was the worst of times," Charles Dickens wrote of 18th-century France in his masterpiece, *A Tale of Two Cities*. Could the same be said for you, today's college student? Never before have college students been faced with such vast opportunities, such freedom of choice, and such an array of information. Yet these opportunities, the numerous choices, and the information overload can leave you feeling overwhelmed and stressed.

Will this be the best of times or the worst of times for you? With the proper skills and the right information, you will be in control of your destiny. *Stress Management for Life* is packed with information that will help you do more than merely survive your college years. These can be the best of times for you. The decision is yours.

Stress: What Is It?

Stress, stressors, eustress, distress, good stress, bad stress. What is stress all about? Hans Selye, the noted stress researcher, once said: "Stress is a scientific concept which has suffered from the mixed blessing of being too well known and too little understood."

Coming up with an accepted definition of stress is not easy. Nurses and physicians, psychologists, biologists, engineers, and students may have different meanings in mind when they talk about stress. One useful definition is: **Stress** is a demand made upon the adaptive capacities of the mind and body.¹ This definition helps us understand three important aspects of stress:

1. How you experience stress depends on your personal view of the stressor, and it can be both a positive and a negative factor in your life.
2. Your *reaction* to events in life, rather than the actual events, is what will determine whether the outcomes will be positive or negative.
3. Stress is a demand upon the body's capacity. When your capacity for handling stress is strong and healthy, the outcome is positive. When you lack the ability to handle the demands, the outcome is negative.

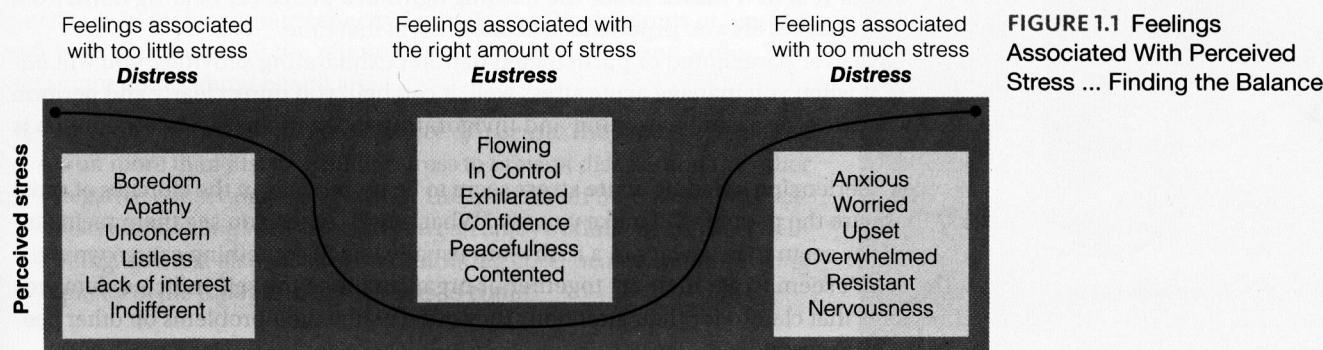
We can relate managing stress to building muscle. To build bigger biceps, you faithfully perform arm curls with gradually increasing weight. Over time, your muscles respond to the overload and become bigger and stronger. The key is in finding the proper balance. Too little weight will not produce the desired results, and too much weight may result in fatigue and injury. You need to overload the muscle just enough to make it stronger. So it is with stress: Too little stress leads to boredom and lethargy, and too much stress leads to physical and emotional breakdown. The right balance leads to a productive, healthy life.

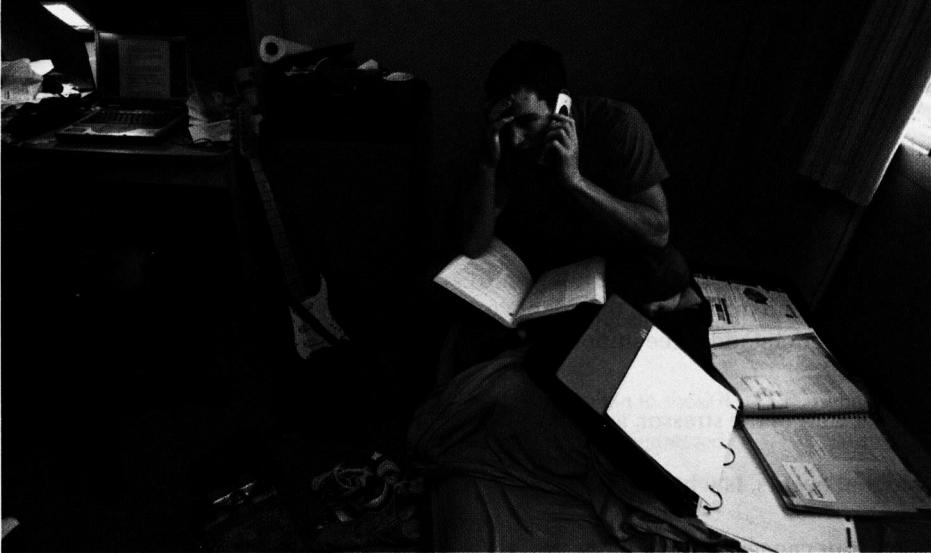
Although we often think of stress as negative, we should keep in mind that stress can be stimulating and helpful. Think of how boring life would be without some changes and challenges to push you along, to provide opportunities to learn and grow, and to provide the impetus for accomplishing your goals in life (see Figure 1.1)!

Yerkes–Dodson Principle

Harvard physicians Robert Yerkes and John Dodson first described the relationship between stress and performance in 1908.² The **Yerkes–Dodson Principle** implies that to a certain point, a specific amount of stress is healthy, useful, and even beneficial. In addition to enhanced performance, this usefulness can be translated into one's health and well-being.

The stimulus of the stress response is often essential for success. We see this in situations such as sporting events, academic pursuits, and even in creative and social activities. As stress levels increase, so does performance. This relationship between increased stress and increased performance, however, does not continue indefinitely. Stress or arousal can increase performance but when stress exceeds one's ability to cope, this overload contributes to diminished performance, inefficiency, and even health problems.





A good image to remind us that we each have an ideal amount of stress is the tension in the strings of a guitar. When a guitar is strung too tightly (too much tension), the string will sound a note higher than desirable. The guitar string, when tightened to its maximum, is likely to snap. The same string, if not tightened sufficiently, will play a note that is lower than is desirable. If it is strung without any tension, no sound at all will come from it. The proper tension results in the desirable note. The same image can be used to depict how healthy one's body is with too much or too little stress.

College students are faced with many stressors. What is your #1 stressor?

The Terminology of Stress

Stress can be good or bad, acute or chronic. These and other variances of stress are explained in the following definitions.

Good and Bad Stress A **stressor** is any event or situation that an individual perceives as a threat that causes him or her to either adapt or initiate the stress response. (The stress response will be explained in detail in Chapter 3.) Therefore, a stressor is a stimulus, and stress is a response. To think of it another way, the stressor is the cause and stress is the effect.

Hans Selye, one of the first people to study the effects of stress, coined the term **eustress** to explain the positive, desirable stress that keeps life interesting and helps to motivate and inspire. Events such as going off to college, getting married, starting a new job, or having a baby can be happy, joyous, and stress-producing. Eustress also involves managing stress successfully even when dealing with a negative stressor. Notice in Figure 1.2 that eustress is represented on the curve where stress level and health and performance increase simultaneously. Eustress implies that a certain amount of stress is useful, beneficial, and even good for our health, much like the perfectly strung guitar string.

Distress refers to the negative effects of stress that drain us of energy and surpass our capacity to cope. Often when we are talking about stress, we are referring to distress. Notice the place on Figure 1.2 where stress continues to increase yet performance and health begin to decline. This downward curve represents distress. For optimal performance and well-being, you want to stay on top of the curve.

Acute and Chronic Stress Stress can be acute or chronic. **Acute stress** results from a short-term stressor. It appears suddenly, is usually quite intense, and then disappears quickly. Imagine being out for a leisurely evening stroll when suddenly, from out of nowhere, a large, mangy dog leaps from the bushes, growling, with teeth bared. Your response would fit the definition of acute stress.

Have you ever been cruising down the highway, relaxing to your favorite tunes when you glanced in your rearview mirror to see the flashing lights of a police car bearing down from behind? If so, chances are you experienced acute stress at that time.

If you have ever parachuted or participated in other exhilarating activities, you will understand that when you manage acute stress well, it can help you think clearly and perform optimally. Acute stress can be exciting and invigorating in small doses—but too much is exhausting.

People experiencing **episodic acute stress** seem to be perpetually in the clutches of acute stress. These are the people who make you say “What now!?” when you see them racing toward you. They seem to be always in a rush—but usually late. If something can go wrong, it will. They can’t seem to get their act together or organize the many self-inflicted demands and pressures that clamor for their attention. They often blame their problems on other people and external events.



© Candy Apple Photography

Getting married is an example of a positive stressor, also known as eustress.

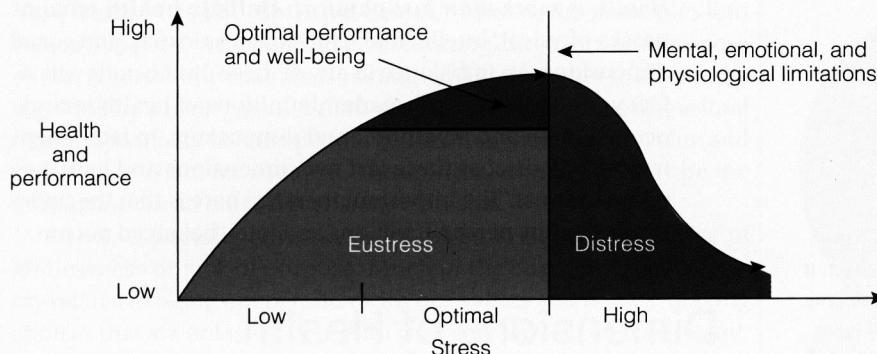


FIGURE 1.2 Relationship among Stress and Health and Performance

Source: "Relationship among Stress and Health and Performance," Figure 12.1 from *Lifetime Physical Fitness and Wellness*, 11th ed., by W. K. Hoeger and S. A. Hoeger (Belmont, CA: Wadsworth/Cengage Learning, 2011, p. 385). Used by permission.

People who have frequent episodes of acute stress tend to be over-aroused, short-tempered, irritable, anxious, and tense. They may describe themselves as having "a lot of nervous energy." As you can imagine, the symptoms of episodic acute stress are the symptoms of extended over-arousal including persistent tension headaches, migraines, digestive problems, hypertension, chest pain, and heart disease.³

Chronic stress is long-term stress resulting from those nagging problems that just don't seem to go away. This is the grinding stress that can wear you down day after day, year after year. Chronic stress can result from credit card debt that keeps growing, from long-term health problems, from emotionally draining relationships, or from staying in an unfulfilling, energy-draining job. Chronic stress can be a result of unrelenting demands and pressures that go on for an interminable time.

The danger of chronic stress is that some people get used to it, lose hope, and give up searching for solutions. As their physical and mental resources are depleted, they are overcome by feelings of apathy, hopelessness, and fear. Chronic stress can actually kill—through suicide, heart attack, and violence. You will learn in later chapters that this chronic, long-term stress is what results in stress-related disease and reduces the quality of life.

Holistic Health

Understanding Health To understand how stress affects you and to learn how to increase your capacity for handling the demands of life, you will have to understand the relationship between health and stress. Two important points about health are:

1. **Health is more than just the absence of disease.** The focus of this book is on more than just controlling stress to prevent disease and the other negative consequences of stress. The focus is on increasing your capacity for dealing with stress so you can enjoy optimal health and well-being. The text also focuses on promoting good health and improving quality of life today and in the years to come.

Acute stress can be exhilarating!

Author Anecdote

High Stress

The soothing sound of the engine hummed in my ears as the small Cessna airplane slowly climbed to 3,000 feet over Lincoln, Nebraska. I was about to make my first parachute jump—and I was feeling anything but soothed. I have a list of "Things to Do Before I Die," and parachuting was on the list. At this moment I couldn't for the life of me remember why.

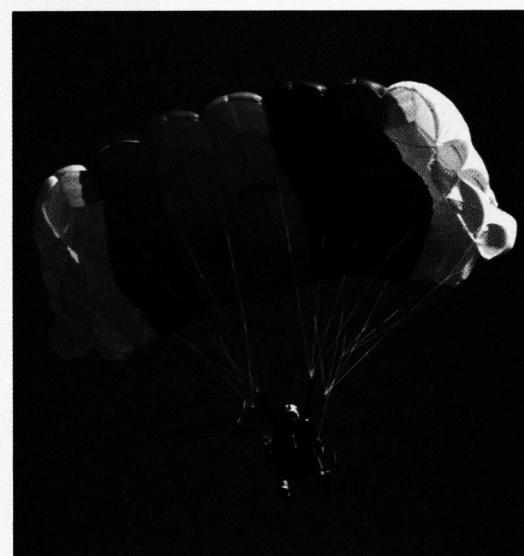
My heart was racing, my jaw was clenched, and I was having trouble thinking clearly. Suddenly the small door flew open and a blast of noisy, cold air brought me to my senses. I knew what I had to do. Rather awkwardly I maneuvered my parachute-laden body so I was sitting in the doorway with my legs dangling in the wind. I tried not to think about the fact that 3,000 feet separated my dangling boots and the earth below. I eased forward slowly to balance precariously on the extremely small step and held on for dear life to the bar attached under the wing of the airplane.

Every cell in my body was shouting, "Whatever you do, don't let go of this airplane!" Somewhere in the distance I heard my jumpmaster, Gary, shout over the tremendous wind, "Margie, let go!"

There it was—the moment of decision. With a deep breath I released my grip, pushed off, arched my back, spread my arms and legs, and began to fall.

Seconds later my parachute popped open and there I was, floating in the sky. It was exhilarating! I have never felt more alive. My stress response was fully engaged. The powerful stress hormones were surging through my body. As I touched down, my knees shaking, I fully understood the feeling of an adrenaline high. My body had served me well in this experience of acute stress.

—MH



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What Else Can I do?

Put the Glass Down

A professor is presenting a lecture on stress management. He raises a glass of water and asks the class, "How heavy do you think this glass of water is?" The students guess about 6 ounces.

"It doesn't matter what the absolute weight is," the professor replies. "It depends on how long you hold it. If I hold it for a minute, it is okay. If I hold it for an hour, my arm will start to ache. If I hold it for a day, you will have to call an ambulance. It is the exact same weight, but the longer I hold it, the heavier it becomes."

If you continue to carry your burdens all the time, sooner or later you will not be able to carry on. The burdens will be too heavy. You will have to put the glass down and rest a while before you hold it up again. You will have to put your burdens down from time to time so you can be refreshed and able to carry on. Whatever burden you are carrying on your shoulders, let it down. Take a rest. If you must, you can pick it up again later when you have rested. Take time to rest and relax.

—Source unknown

Modern man is sick
because he is not whole.

—CARL GUSTAV JUNG

A man too busy to take care of his health is like a mechanic too busy to take care of his tools.

—SPANISH PROVERB

2. *Health is more than just physical.* Holistic health encompasses physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social dimensions. An imbalance in any of these dimensions will affect your health. Even broader definitions of health include occupational and environmental dimensions. In later chapters we will discuss these last two dimensions and how they relate to stress. The important message here is that the holistically healthy person functions as a total, balanced person.

Dimensions of Health

Figure 1.3 depicts the five dimensions of health—physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social.

Following is a brief description of each of the dimensions of health and an explanation of how stress relates to that dimension. Understanding each of these dimensions will help you plan a more balanced approach to managing stress.

Physical Health When the cells, tissues, organs, and systems that function together to form your body are in working order, you can claim to be in good **physical health**. You are able to minimize disease and injury and function optimally. Physical qualities include body weight, visual acuity, skin integrity, and level of endurance, among others. Examples of promoting

health in the physical dimension are taking care of your body by eating healthy foods, exercising, getting adequate sleep, avoiding alcohol and drugs, and getting regular health screenings.

Physical health and stress are closely related. Stress is a risk factor for many of the serious health problems that plague us today. Stress has been shown to weaken the immune system, resulting in increased susceptibility to a variety of health problems. A strong, healthy body is better able to resist many of the damaging physiological changes that otherwise might result from excessive stress. It works both ways: Stress can cause disease and illness, and disease and illness can cause stress.

Intellectual Health **Intellectual health**, also called mental health, relates to the ability to think and learn from experiences, the ability to assess and question new information, and an openness to new learning. Your mind—how and what you think—has a powerful impact on your health and well-being. In this text you will learn about exciting new research that sheds light on the connection between the body and the mind.

Learning about stress is an important first step in preventing and managing it. Intellectual understanding of the physical and psychological aspects of stress and wise decision-making skills will allow you to process the information you learn and apply this information to a plan that will improve your health and well-being. In this book you will learn a variety of stress prevention and management techniques. Through critical thinking and informed choice, you will decide on the tools and techniques that work best for you. Your ability to process and act on this information will strengthen the intellectual dimension of your health.

Emotional Health In contrast to mental health, which encompasses thoughts and the mind, **emotional health** pertains to feelings. It involves experiencing and appreciating a wide range of feelings and the ability to express these feelings and emotions in a healthy manner. An indication of emotional wellness is the ability to remain flexible in coping with the ups and downs of life.

Stress and emotional health are strongly related. Everyone is affected by feelings such as anger, fear, happiness, worry, love, guilt, and loneliness. Emotionally healthy people use healthy coping skills to keep from becoming overwhelmed by these feelings. Dealing successfully with stress means taking control of your emotions rather than letting your emotions take control of you.

Spiritual Health Spiritual health relates to the principles and values that guide a person and give meaning, direction, and purpose to life. A conviction that life is meaningful and a belief that your life is guided by a reality greater than yourself are indications of spiritual health. Spiritually healthy people believe that their life has value and that they are here for a reason. The spiritual dimension may be the foundation for all other dimensions of health.

Stress, especially chronic stress, often arises from a sense of aimlessness or lack of purpose. Much of the stress in today's society relates to being out of touch with our values and beliefs. Making choices that are not consistent with your core values can be stressful. For example, if you highly value family and find that the demands of work and school leave little time for family, you likely will experience distress. In later chapters you will learn how techniques such as values clarification can contribute to spiritual peace.

Nurturing your spiritual dimension through religion, volunteer work, nature, art, music, or other avenues above and beyond your own immediate needs will most certainly reduce stress and promote health. Spirituality as a key component in stress management will be discussed further in Chapter 10.

Social Health Social health refers to the ability to relate to others and express care and concern for others. The ability to interact effectively with others, to develop satisfying interpersonal relationships, and to fulfill social roles is important for social health. Relationships with others, particularly family and friends, affect social well-being. When you are socially healthy, you feel accepted by others and see yourself as an important part of your world.

A strong social support system increases the capacity for handling the demands of life. As you will learn in Chapter 13, study after study shows that people who have the support of friends and family are better able to deal with the ups and downs in life.

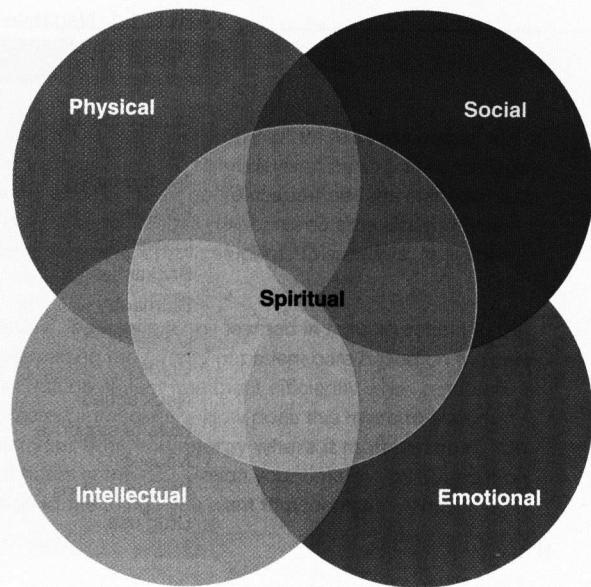


FIGURE 1.3 Dimensions of Health



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The support of family and friends is vital for health in the social dimension.

TABLE 1.1 Negative Effects of Stress on Each Dimension of Holistic Health

Physical	Intellectual	Emotional	Spiritual	Social
Muscle tension	Forgetful	Anxiety	Lack of meaning	Isolated
Headaches	Poor concentration	Frustration	Lack of purpose	Lashing out
Teeth grinding	Low productivity	Nervousness	Lonely	Clamming up
Fatigue	Negative attitude	Worrying	Depressed	Lowered sex drive
Insomnia	Confusion	Tension	Low self-esteem	Nagging
Backaches	No new ideas	Mood swings	Loss of self-worth	Fewer friends
Stomach problems	Lethargy	Easily discouraged	Feeling abandoned	Using people
Colds	Boredom		Inability to love	
Neck aches		Crying spells		
Loss of sex drive		Irritability		
Nausea		Anger		
Shoulder pains		Hostility		
Drug use		Fear		

Holistic Health: Putting It All Together Upon reviewing Nicole's story in the opening vignette, you will readily see that stress affected every dimension of her health. Physically, she had trouble eating and sleeping. She developed ulcers and required medication for muscle tension. Intellectually, as she became more overwhelmed by all the demands, her grades began to drop. Emotionally, she was overwhelmed by all the pressure, was depressed, and felt like a failure. Spiritually, she began to question her purpose and meaning in life. She doubted her value as a person, saying to herself, "How can I ever be a good nurse and help other people if I can't even help myself?" Nicole initially withdrew from her friends and family, cutting back on her social life so that she could study and work. She had difficulty admitting that she needed help and support from others. Table 1.1 is a summary of how stress negatively affects every dimension of health.

You will find in this book a toolbox of various techniques and strategies for managing stress, and you will determine what works best for you. Understanding the holistic model of health will guide you in assessing all dimensions of health.

Nature or Nurture

Everyone is unique. Genetic variations may partly explain the differences in how we react to stressors. Some people are naturally laid-back, while others react strongly at the slightest hint of stress. Life experiences also may increase your sensitivity to stress. Strong stress reactions sometimes can be traced to early environmental factors. People who were exposed to extremely stressful events as children, such as abuse or neglect, tend to be particularly vulnerable to stress as adults.⁴

Your unique genetic makeup, your unique experiences in life, and your unique environment as you were growing and developing all play a part in your individual reactions to the inevitable stressors of life.

Stress is an individual experience representing a personalized physiological, psychological, and spiritual response to the presence of a stressor. Many factors affect our experience with stress. Table 1.2 lists some of the factors influencing the impact of stress. The important point is to remember your uniqueness. Stress affects each person differently. Getting in touch with your individual circumstances will help you determine the stress management techniques that are most effective for you.

Sources of Stress

Nobody has to tell you that the college years can be years of high stress. Even though the sources and causes of stress are unique for each person, many college students face some common stressors. Each of these stressors will be dealt with more fully in later chapters, but here are some of the most common sources of stress. See if any of these apply to you.

TABLE 1.2 Factors Influencing the Impact of Stress

Heredity
Environment
Number of stressors
Magnitude of the stressor
Subjective meaning of the stressor
Developmental level of the individual
Availability of social support

TIME TIP

Students reported that time management is so important to stress management that they want tips in every chapter to help them develop healthy time management habits. We listened. In addition to an entire chapter on time management (Chapter 11), we asked our students to share their proven time tips with you. Watch for these time management tips, from students to students, in every chapter.

Time Tip: “Triage ruthlessly! *Triage* is a term I learned in nursing school to describe the process of determining the priority of patient care based on the severity of their condition. This rations patient treatment efficiently when resources are insufficient for all to be treated immediately. How does this relate to time management and you? **Invest your time and energy where it matters most.** You have a limited number of hours in the day. Ration your time so you spend it on your priorities. Apply triage to the things you want to accomplish today.”

Evan H.

Research HIGHLIGHT

Stress and the Developing Brain

We know, from a plethora of research, that the early months and years of life are crucial for brain development. Still, the question remains: How do early influences act on the brain to promote or challenge the developmental process? Researchers have suggested that positive and negative experiences, chronic stressors, and various other environmental factors may affect a young child's developing brain. Now, studies involving animals reveal in more detail how this may happen.

One important line of research has focused on brain systems that control stress hormones such as cortisol. Cortisol and other stress hormones play an important role in emergencies: They help make energy available to enable effective responses, temporarily suppress the immune response, and sharpen attention. Excess cortisol may cause shrinkage of the hippocampus, a brain structure required for the formation of certain kinds of memory.

In experiments with animals, scientists have shown that a well-defined period of early postnatal development may be an important determinant of the capacity to handle stress throughout life. In one set of studies, rat pups were removed each day from their mothers as briefly as 15 minutes, and then returned. The natural maternal response of intensively licking and grooming the returned pup was shown to alter the brain chemistry of the pup in a positive way, making the animal less reactive to stressful stimuli. Although these pups were able to mount an appropriate stress response in the

face of threat, their response did not become excessive or inappropriate.

Striking differences were seen in rat pups that were removed from their mothers for 3 hours a day—a model of maternal neglect, compared to pups that were not separated. After

3 hours, the mother rats tended to ignore the pups, at least initially, upon their return. In sharp contrast to the pups that were greeted attentively by their mothers after a short absence, the “neglected” pups showed a more profound and excessive stress response in subsequent tests. This response appeared to last into adulthood.

Another study reported that infant monkeys raised by mothers who experienced unpredictable conditions in obtaining food showed a pattern often seen in humans with post-traumatic stress disorder and depression. The distressed monkey mothers, uncertain about finding food, behaved inconsistently and sometimes neglectfully toward their offspring. The affected young monkeys were abnormally anxious when confronted with separations or new environments. They also were less social and more subordinate as adult animals.

It is too early to draw firm conclusions from these animal studies about the extent to which early life experience produces a long-lived or permanent set point for stress responses. Nevertheless, animal models that show the interactive effect of stress and brain development deserve serious consideration and continued study.



Monkeys deprived of love and support as babies become less social and more anxious as adults.

© Dan Lamont/CORBIS

Source: National Institute of Health, *Stress and the Developing Brain* (NIH Publication No. 01-4603) (Bethesda, MD: NIH, 2001).

Time Management Do you have too much to do? No matter how hard you work, do you feel like you never get caught up? If you are like many people, the answer is “yes.” You will learn in Chapter 11 (on time management) that we don’t so much need to manage our time as we need help to manage ourselves!

Personal Expectations Are you your greatest stressor? Do you put demands on yourself that may be unrealistic? Do you have feelings of low self-esteem or feelings that your life is out of control? Do you take on more than you should? Would you be better off if you could learn to say “no” more often?

Family Expectations and Family Life “So what are you going to do with the rest of your life?” Do you find well-intentioned family members about to drive you crazy with their desire to help you find direction in your life? Family life stressors can include, among many others, health problems, substance abuse, strong disagreements, loss of family members, difficulties with stepparents, homesickness, and divorce.

Employment Decisions and Finances Do you work more so you can pay your tuition, or go even deeper in debt so you have more time to study? In Chapter 12 you will learn how to manage your finances to help reduce stress caused by money (or lack of it).

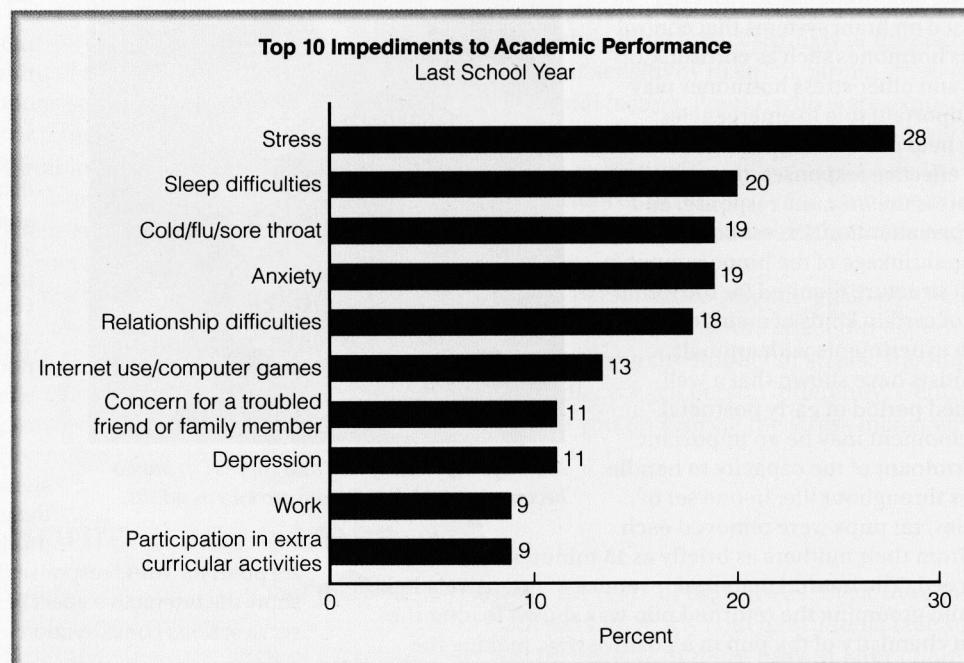
School Pressures Where to begin? Deciding on a major, teachers who expect too much, and failing a test are just the start of a list of school pressures. Do the demands and pressures of school leave you feeling overwhelmed? Figure 1.4 shows that students rate stress as the number 1 factor affecting their academic performance!

Living Arrangements What do you do with the “roommate from hell”? Would you be better off moving out of the dorm and into an apartment? Maybe you should consider a fraternity or a sorority. How do you find some quiet time for yourself when you are surrounded by people constantly?

Relationships You get a “Dear John” letter from your girlfriend/back home. Your best friend meets another best friend. You are left behind when the gang goes out for an evening

FIGURE 1.4 Top 10 Reported Impediments to Students’ Academic Performance

Source: American College Health Association. National College Health Assessment II: Reference Group Executive Summary Fall 2009. Linthicum, MD: American College Health Association, 2009.



CULTURE Connection Life Out of Balance

Ko.yaa.nis.qatsi, n. 1. Crazy life. 2. Life in turmoil. 3. Life disintegrating. 4. Life out of balance. 5. A state of life that calls for another way of living.

Does this sound like your life? *Koyaanisqatsi* (Ko-YAWN-is-SCOTS-ee) is a Hopi Indian word that may have meaning for your life today. Consider how another way of living can improve your well-being. Throughout *Stress Management for Life* you will find Culture Connections to offer you different perspectives on stress. Use these opportunities to step out of your box and think about things in a new way.

We become so accustomed to our way of seeing things that we easily may come to believe that everyone thinks the same way we do. Sometimes, if we pause and reflect with an open mind, we may perceive a better way. If *koyaanisqatsi* describes your life, maybe it's time to investigate a different way of living.

Source: Retrieved October 18, 2010, from <http://www.philipglass.com/music/films/koyaanisqatsi.php>

of fun. University counseling services report that relationship problems are one of the top reasons that students seek professional help.

Physical Health Issues Just a few of the physical challenges facing college students are lack of sleep, poor nutrition, hormonal fluctuations, and no time to exercise. Is it any wonder that colds and flu plague students, especially during finals? And what about more serious health problems such as sexually transmitted infections; drug, tobacco, and alcohol abuse; anorexia; depression? And the list goes on.

Environmental Stressors You live with environmental stressors including noise, crowding, traffic, weather, pollution, and violence. A sign of the times, terrorism has been added to the list of things that students most fear. Chapter 14 will teach you how you can create a more healing environment.

Information Overload Never before in history have we had access to such tremendous amounts of information. Surrounded by technology and computers, you have more information available than you could have imagined two decades ago. One computer search for information on "stress in college students" yielded 357,405 results. And don't forget iPhones, twitter, Facebook, pagers, palm pilots, e-mail. You have information coming at you 24/7. All this information has had such an impact on stress that it has been given a name: **technostress**. In Chapter 14 you will learn more about technostress and how you can control it.

Choices The world of today's college student is filled with choice, much of it consequential. This explosion of choice in the university reflects a pervasive social trend. Americans are overwhelmed with choices in virtually every area of life—from what products to buy (300 kinds of cereal, 50 different cell phones, thousands of mutual funds) to where to go for spring break and how to pay for that vacation (credit card, debit card, check, loan, or even cash).⁵

Daily Hassles Finally, we cannot forget those hundreds of small but significant hassles that can creep into your day and absolutely put you over the edge. Lazarus⁶ described **hassles** as the irritating, frustrating, or distressing incidents that occur in our everyday transactions with the environment. His research supports the premise that the petty annoyances, frustrations, and unpleasant surprises that plague us every day may add up to more grief than life's major stressful events.



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Daily hassles can exceed our ability to cope. Do you know the feeling?

Stress Busting Behavior

YOUR SOURCES OF STRESS

Check those items that are major sources of stress for you. Circle your biggest source of stress.

- | | |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Time Management | <input type="checkbox"/> Relationships |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal Expectations | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical Health Issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family Expectations and Family Life | <input type="checkbox"/> Environmental Stressors |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Employment Decisions and Finances | <input type="checkbox"/> Information Overload |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School Pressures | <input type="checkbox"/> Choices |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Living Arrangements | <input type="checkbox"/> Daily Hassles |

Hassles can take the form of a flat tire, a dead cell phone, a computer crash, a toothache, the dog who ate your homework, and the list goes on. A wise person once said, "Sometimes it is not the mountain in front of you, but the grain of sand in your shoe that brings you to your knees."⁷

Identifying the causes of your stress can be an important first step in developing a plan to reduce or eliminate stress. Throughout the chapters of this book, you will find helpful information and proven strategies to help you deal with many of these common sources of stress.

Conclusion

The key lesson to be derived from this chapter is to strive for balance in your life. Even though stress can be challenging and useful at times, it also can become chronic and excessive to the point where you no longer are able to adapt to and cope with the pressures. An optimal level of stress is characterized by high energy, mental alertness, high motivation, calm under pressure, thorough analysis of problems, improved memory and recall, sharp perception, and a generally optimistic outlook.⁸

In *Stress Management for Life* you will learn that you can prevent and manage stress through three basic approaches:

1. *Eliminate the stressor.* By confronting the problems that are causing you stress, you sometimes can change or eliminate their source.
2. *Change your thinking.* At times you cannot eliminate the cause of your stress, but you do have the power to change your interpretation of the situation and the way you think about it.
3. *Manage the stress.* Sometimes the best you can do is to manage the stress through skills that will help you cope most successfully. When you can't prevent stress, relaxation techniques will help you manage the resulting effects of stress.

You are about to embark on an exciting journey of discovery. You will learn about stress in your life. What factors are causing negative stress for you? You will learn how stress affects you physically, emotionally, intellectually, spiritually, and socially. Most important, though, you will learn how to increase your *capacity* for handling the demands of today's world. You will learn how to prevent stress. You will learn how to manage and cope successfully with the stresses you can't prevent. So what will it be for you? Will these be the best of times, or the worst of times? The decision is yours. Let the journey begin.