

**Workshop on Stress Management  
By Interactive Measurement Group at  
The University of Nevada, Las Vegas**

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# Workshop on Stress Management

## Purpose

The purpose of this workshop is to help you find ways to manage your stress.

## Prerequisites

No prerequisites are required to start this lesson.

## What is Stress?

Life is full of hassles that we can't run away from. We have job deadlines, school assignments, kids, and financial issues. For many people, stress has become a way of life. Stress can be helpful when you are under pressure and need motivation, but only in small doses. When you are constantly freaking out because there is too much to do, your mind and body will eventually pay the price. Realizing that you are in control is the first step to stress management.

Stress is considered to be the demand made on an organism to adapt, cope, or adjust. It is also defined as the anxious or threatening feeling that comes when we interpret or appraise a situation as being more than our psychological resources can adequately handle. There are situations we are faced with in life that may not seem "stressful," such as, getting a promotion at your job. This would be considered a stressful situation however, because it requires us to adapt and change. "Living a stress-free life is not a reasonable goal. The goal is to deal with it actively and effectively" (Walker, 2007).

## Good and Bad Stress

Stress is not always a bad thing. There are both good and bad types of stress. Four basic types of stress are listed below.

- **Eustress:** good or short term stress that strengthens us for immediate physical activity, creativity, and enthusiasm. This is a positive stress that boosts our ability to meet a challenge successfully and return to normal level of functioning quickly.
- **Distress:** negative or harmful stress that causes us to constantly readjust or adapt. This occurs when we feel like we have no control over an outcome and see few or no choices available to change that.
- **Hyperstress:** happens when stressful events pile up and stretch the limits of our adaptability. When we have to cope with too many changes at once or adapt to radical changes for which we are not prepared, such as, getting a divorce, lose a parent, and have a serious illness.
- **Hypostress:** happens when we are bored, lacking stimulation, or unchallenged. We become frustrated because our need for variety and new experiences is lacking.

## Causes of Stress

Stress consists of an event, called a stressor, plus how we feel about it, how we interpret it, and what we do to cope with it. **What are some of the stressors in your life?**

### Common Stressors:

- The setting in which we live
- Other people
- Places we go
- Our daily routine
- Family members
- Our job
- Time-too little, too much
- Money
- School
- Dating
- Our given health condition
- A spoken word
- A certain event
- A simple thought

## Effects of stress

Stress can be both good and bad, but when there is an overload, our mind and body will pay the price. Below are some effects of stress on our body, thoughts and feelings.

### Effects on your body:

- A tendency to sweat
- Back pain
- Chest pain
- Cramps or muscle spasms
- Erectile dysfunction
- Fainting spells
- Headache
- Heart disease
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Loss of libido
- Lower immunity against diseases
- Muscular aches
- Nail biting
- Nervous twitches
- Pins and needles
- Sleeping difficulties
- Stomach ups

### **Effects on your mind and emotions**

- Anger
- Anxiety
- Burnout
- Depression
- Feeling of insecurity
- Forgetfulness
- Irritability
- Problem concentrating
- Restlessness
- Fatigue
- Sadness

### **Coping with stress**

We all cope with stress differently. Think about how you currently cope with stress in your life. Are these healthy or unhealthy ways to cope with stress? Do they help you or just dig you into a larger hole? The truth is many people cope with stress in ways that just compound the problem.

### **Unhealthy coping strategies:**

- Smoking
- Drinking too much
- Overeating or under eating
- Zoning out for hours in front of the TV or computer
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Using pills or drugs to relax
- Sleeping too much
- Procrastinating
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
- Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry, outburst physical violence)

### **Healthier ways to manage your stress**

If you find that your methods of coping with stress do not contribute to your greater emotional and physical health, it is time that you find healthier ways. There are many healthy ways to manage your stress, but you must take action and change the way you deal with stressful situations. You can do two things: 1). Change the situation 2). Change your reaction. Below are different ways to do these two things. Everyone is different so try a variety of methods to determine which one makes you feel calm and in control.

## 1. Avoid unnecessary stress

You can't avoid every stressful situation that comes your way. If you did, you would not learn how to adapt to new situations. However, you would be surprised at the amount of stressors you can eliminate from your everyday life.

- **Learn how to say “no”** – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when you're close to reaching them. Taking on more than you can handle is a surefire recipe for stress.
- **Avoid people who stress you out** – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can't turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.
- **Take control of your environment** – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic's got you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.
- **Pare down your to-do list** – Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If you've got too much on your plate, distinguish between the “should” and the “must.” Drop the tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.

### Group Activity:

Estimated time: 15 minutes

For this activity, we will practice saying “no”. All of us take on challenges to improve ourselves, but sometimes accepting more and more projects can overwhelm you. To prevent that from happening, we all need to know how to say “no” to projects that we cannot handle at a certain time. Lab members will get into groups of two to practice saying “no”. Each team will go through each scenario below, going back and forth between who is asking for assistance and who is saying “no”. This way, each person has a chance to ask for assistance and say “no”.

1. “I have a project that is due this weekend and I was wondering if you could help me finish it?”
2. “I know you have finals coming up, but I was wondering if you'd go to my friend's wedding with me. We would have to be out of town for the whole weekend.”
3. “I know you have a couple of projects you are working on, but could you take on this new project as well? You are the best person for this and I could really use your input.”
4. “I am going to be out of town for a month. Would you mind house sitting for me and taking care of my dogs?”

5. "I know you have a 9 am meeting tomorrow, but can you work a closing shift for me tonight?"

### **Alter the situation**

If you are unable to avoid the stressful situation you can always change it to make it less stressful for you. Determine what it is that you change so the problem does not come up in the future. This could be changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.

- **Express your feelings instead of bottling them up.** If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you don't voice your feelings, resentment will build and the situation will likely remain the same.
- **Be willing to compromise.** When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you'll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
- **Be more assertive.** Don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk.
- **Manage your time better.** Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you're stretched too thin and running behind, it's hard to stay calm and focused. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don't overextend yourself, you can alter the amount of stress you're under.

#### **1. Adapt to the stressor**

You can regain a sense of control by changing yourself instead of the actual stressor. Change the attitude you have when faced with a problem or the expectations you have in people and yourself. Expecting too much from a person is a sure way to increase the stress you have when you are around them.

- **Reframe problems.** Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
- **Look at the big picture.** Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.

- **Adjust your standards.** Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with “good enough.”
- **Focus on the positive.** When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

## 2. Accept the things you are unable to change

You can't prevent or change everything that is pushed your way; a death in the family, a serious illness, or a national recession like we are in today. In such cases, the only thing we can do to cope with the stress is to accept them. This is by far the hardest thing to do, but it will be easier in the long run than clashing against something that can't change.

- **Don't try to control the uncontrollable.** Many things in life are beyond our control— particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- **Look for the upside.** As the saying goes, “What doesn't kill us makes us stronger.” When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- **Share your feelings.** Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Expressing what you're going through can be very cathartic, even if there's nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.
- **Learn to forgive.** Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.

## 3. Make time for yourself to relax

You can reduce stress in your life by taking care of yourself. Instead of the “taking-charge” of a situation approach, making time for fun and relaxation regularly is important. Your physical and mental state will be in a better place to handle what life throws at you in the near or late future.

- **Set aside relaxation time.** Include rest and relaxation in your daily schedule. Don't allow other obligations to encroach. This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your batteries.
- **Connect with others.** Spend time with positive people who enhance your life. A strong support system will buffer you from the negative effects of stress.

- **Do something you enjoy every day.** Make time for leisure activities that bring you joy, whether it be stargazing, playing the piano, or working on your bike.
- **Keep your sense of humor.** This includes the ability to laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways.

#### 4. Create a healthy life style

Last but not least, taking better care of your physical health can increase your resistance to stress by a lot. We have all been sick and know how hard it can be to tackle stressful situations

- Exercise regularly. Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Make time for at least 30 minutes of exercise, three times per week. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension.
- Eat a healthy diet. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress, so be mindful of what you eat. Start your day right with breakfast, and keep your energy up and your mind clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.
- Reduce caffeine and sugar. The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in with a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in your diet, you'll feel more relaxed and you'll sleep better.
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. Don't avoid or mask the issue at hand; deal with problems head on and with a clear mind.
- Get enough sleep. Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body. Feeling tired will increase your stress because it may cause you to think irrationally.

#### **Group Activity:**

Estimated time: 30 minutes

In the workshop, you learned about ways to create a healthy lifestyle. They included

- Exercise regularly
- Eat a healthy diet
- Reduce caffeine and sugar
- Avoid alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs
- Get enough sleep

Each person should pick one of these life style goals. Spend 5 minutes creating a list of next actions that will help you accomplish this goal. Form groups of 3-4 students. Discuss your

actions with your group. Then write down two actions you commit to taking in the next week. Then the entire lab will discuss next actions and a few volunteers will state what next actions they are taking.

## Resources

Here are some additional resources to assist with stress management:

UNLV – CAPS (Counseling and Psychological Services)

- Academic support group
  - “The academic support group is designed to provide students with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed in their academic work such as time and stress-management, overcoming procrastination, managing test anxiety, problem-solving as it relates to challenges that may hinder academic progress and motivation, and learning how to optimize one’s functioning from a wellness perspective. Additionally, students have an opportunity to provide and receive support from their peers that can minimize a sense of isolation in dealing with academic challenges and introduce creative strategies for staying on their academic mission.”\*
- Mindfulness and relaxation group
  - “Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and in a non-judgmental manner. This group draws upon the practices of mindfulness, yoga, and cognitive therapy to support participants who are coping with anxiety, depression, and/or physical problems. This group aims to teach ways to increase awareness of thoughts, feelings, and physical sensations, and utilize cognitive restructuring techniques, such as making changes to ineffective thought patterns. No previous experience with Yoga is necessary.”\*
- The Balance: First Generation College Student Support Group
  - “Balance is a support group for first-generation college students which are defined as students whose parent(s) have not attained a college. First-generation college students often face a unique set of challenges including limited knowledge about the university setting, resources, and expectations, as well the added pressure from family members who do not understand the demands of college work. Balance aims to facilitate students’ success by providing additional support in a safe and nurturing environment. Along with the support, students will learn skills and knowledge to successfully navigate the university system and enhance their academic performance while feeling more socially integrated and supported.”\*

- Relationship Group
  - “Interpersonal group therapy is often the treatment of choice for students who experience troubled relationships. Group therapy offers many significant therapeutic benefits. Members learn about themselves and how to improve their interpersonal relationship skills. Group therapy offers peer feedback, self-awareness building, support and the unique opportunity to practice, in vivo, with other students who may be experiencing similar difficulties. In an interpersonal group therapy, students learn how to have close, meaningful and rewarding relationships.”\*
- 1-on-1 Therapy Sessions

#### UNLV – SRWC (Student Recreation and Wellness Center)

- Yoga
- Pilates
- Meditation Workshops
- Dietitian
- Relaxation Room
  - “Come to the RWZ and use our state-of-the-art relaxation room. We have three automated massage chairs that are free for use for all SRWC members! Just stop in or call for an appointment. Times are limited to 30 minutes per visit. Bring your headphones and plug in to our individualized playlists while you relax.”\*
- Exercise Equipment
- Personal Training

#### Community Assistance

- Las Vegas Stress Management Clinic
  - 702-435-0006 - East Flamingo
  - Updated July 2011
- Stress Remedy
  - (702) 898-7125 - 2920 N Green Valley Pkwy # 321, Henderson, NV 89014
  - Updated July 2011

\* information came from <http://srwc.unlv.edu/index.html>

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## Recommended Resources

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- Girdano, D. A., Dusek, D. E., & Everly, G. S. (2013). *Controlling stress and tension: A holistic approach* (9th ed.). Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice Hall.