

Title	Tools for Managing Stress
Authored By	Denise L. Gray RN, MAS, BSN, CCM Margaret Y. Scott RN, BSN, CCM
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Purpose

The goal of this course is to assist nurses to recognize stress, the sources of stress and to provide tools to manage the stress in their lives.

Objectives

1. Name the two types of stress.
 2. Identify the four major sources of stress.
 3. Assess for the existence of stress.
 4. Identify the short term and long physical symptoms associated with stress reactions.
 5. Develop a stress diary.
 6. Develop an individual stress management action plan.
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Background

According to Confucius, "The gem cannot be polished without friction, nor man perfected without trials." Apparently, stress is not unique to modern times!

Stress has components that are emotional and physical, which results in tension. Individuals feel stress differently from each other and some things which cause stress in you won't cause stress in someone else. Often, stress is considered to be unhealthy, but when managed properly stress can contribute to our feelings of health and well-being. Simply defined, stress is anything that stimulates you and increases your level of alertness. Different situations are perceived as having different levels of stress.

A simplified way of looking at stress is to recognize that there are two main types of stress:

Acute stress, which is the reaction that your body has to a threat, challenge or scare. Some examples of this "flight or fight" type of stress are job interviews, a minor car accident, inserting a Foley catheter or nasogastric tube for the first time, or an exciting physical activity, like skiing fast down a hill. The body reacts to this type of stress immediately, usually in an intense fashion, and it can be thrilling in certain circumstances.

Chronic stress is the result of long-term exposure to acute stress. Possible stressors that lead to chronic stress are day-to-day life situations that seem unrelenting, such as relationship problems, difficulties at work and financial concerns. The body's response to chronic stress is more subtle than that of acute stress, and the effects may be longer lasting and problematic.

Stress Management refers to the effort to control and reduce the tension that is perceived to be

difficult or unmanageable. The art of stress management allows one to maintain a level of stimulation that is healthy and enjoyable. Degrees of stress and the desire to make emotional and physical changes will determine the level of adaptation. It is important to note that stress may be caused by work, lifestyle, environment and food or drink.

The two types of stress described have their roots in sources of stress. These sources are grouped into four major categories:

1. **Survivor Stress**—may occur in cases where your survival or health is threatened, you are put under pressure, or you experience some unpleasant or challenging event. Adrenaline is released and you experience all the symptoms of your body preparing for “fright or flight.”
2. **Internally Generated Stress**---can come from anxious worrying about events beyond your control, from a tense/hurried approach to life, or from relationship problems caused by your own behavior. It may also come from an addiction to and enjoyment of stress.
3. **Environmental and Job Stress**----your living or working environment causes stress. It may come from noise, crowding, untidiness, events and relationships at work.
4. **Fatigue and Overwork**---stress builds up over a long period. This can occur when you try to achieve too much in too little time, or when you are not utilizing effective time management strategies.

Strategies you adopt to manage stress will depend upon the source of stress. For purposes of this course, we will focus on environmental, job, fatigue and overwork effecting nurses in today’s job market.

Environmental and Job Stress

Sources of unpleasant or distracting stimuli include:

- Crowding and invasion of personal space
- Insufficient working space
- Noise
- Dirty/untidy conditions
- A badly organized or run-down environment

Included here are any sources that would be related to food or beverages that you consume. Interestingly, we go to these foods or beverages thinking that they will HELP reduce stress, when in fact they increase stress levels. Some examples include:

- **Caffeine** —raises your level of stress hormones. Often, nurses will drink several cups of coffee or cans of soda pop as a way of staying alert throughout their shifts. The caffeine in these beverages (and even in chocolate candy) will raise your arousal, which is really increasing your stress level. An immediate change that can be made to help reduce the stress level is to cut back on the amount of caffeine that is taken in on a daily basis.
- **Nicotine**---often nurses turn to smoking as a way of reducing their stress. In actuality, this does help in the short term, but the toxic effects of the nicotine will raise the pulse and stress that your body is experiencing. Making a decision to quit smoking will not give immediate help with lowering your stress levels, but after the initial period of being smokeless, most ex-smokers do say that they feel more relaxed in general.
- **Sweets and chocolates**----the bursts of sugar may make you feel more energetic in the short term. However, your body reacts to stabilize abnormally high glucose levels by releasing insulin, causing a serious energy dip shortly after the sugar high.
- **Too much salt**---increases blood pressure and puts your body under chemical stress.
- **High fat content**---slows your thinking processes as the body diverts blood away from

your brain to your intestines for digestion.

- **Alcohol**---what is wrong with a few drinks after work? Small amounts of alcohol, such as a glass of wine, can help you relax. But, large amounts of alcohol will actually disrupt sleep patterns and increase your stress in two ways. First, the stress is increased because you are becoming sleep deprived and second, often you have a hangover to contend with. Long term effects of drinking large amounts of alcohol are well known for causing damage to your body.

Besides these examples, you may experience stress if you eat an unbalanced or unhealthy diet. You may find that some dietary deficiency or excess causes discomfort and illness which generates stress. If you are obese, then this causes physical stress on your internal organs and emotional stress as self-esteem declines.

Lifestyle and Job Stress

These relate to your environment and job as well. Think about your own life and see if any of these are possible sources of stress for you.

- You have too much or too little work
- You have to perform beyond your experience or perceived abilities
- You have to overcome unnecessary obstacles
- You have time pressures and deadlines
- You must keep up with new developments
- there are changes in policies and procedures
- there is a lack of relevant information, support and advice
- there is a lack of clear objectives
- there are unclear expectations of your role from bosses or colleagues
- You have the responsibility for people, budgets or equipment
- Career development stress:
 - under-promotion, frustration and boredom with current role
 - over-promotion beyond abilities
 - lack of a clear plan for career development
 - lack of opportunity
 - lack of job security
- you have stress from your organization or your patients:
 - pressures from above in your organization
 - interference in your work
 - demands from patients
 - disruptions to work plans
 - telephone
- You have personal and family stresses:
 - financial problems
 - relationship problems
 - ill-health
 - family changes such as birth, death, marriage or divorce
 - moving

Holmes and Rahe have developed the Social Readjustment Scale which allocates Life Crisis Units (LCU's) to different life events, with 100 being the highest. This scale may be useful in helping you recognize the impact that stresses have on your physical and mental well-being so that you can take account of them appropriately. While this approach is obviously a simplification of complex situations, using LCU's may give you some assistance in adjusting to life crises. The scale is below:

SOCIAL READJUSTMENT SCALE

Run down the LCU (Life Crisis Unit) table, totaling the LCU's for life crises that have occurred in the previous two years. As a rule of thumb, you may anticipate some form of serious mental or physical effects of the crises according to the following table:

Life Crisis Units and the Probability of Illness

LCU's	Probability of Illness
300	80%+
200-299	50%
150-199	33%

Life Crisis Scoring Table

Event	LCU's
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Separation	65
Jail Term	63
Death of a close family member	63
Personal illness/injury	53
Marriage	50
Fired at work	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Change in health of family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sex difficulties	39
Gain of a new family member	39
Business readjustment	38
Change in financial state	38
Death of a close friend	37
Change to a different line of work	36
Change in # of arguments with spouse	35
A large mortgage or loan	30
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Change in responsibilities at work	29
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Trouble with in-laws	29
Outstanding personal achievement	28
Spouse begins or stops work	26

Begin or end of school or college	26
Change in living conditions	25
Change in personal habits	24
Trouble with boss	23
Change in work hours or conditions	20
Change in residence	20
Change in school or college	20
Change in recreation	19
Change in church activities	19
Change in social activities	18
A moderate loan or mortgage	17
Change in sleeping habits	16
Change in number of family get-togethers	15
Change in eating habits	15
Holiday	13
Christmas	12
Minor violations of the law	11

What should be pointed out regarding the scale above is that there are internal causes of stress and external causes of stress.

Internal stressors would include things such as:

- Fears---such as the fear of flying, the fear of speaking to a group, or the fear of being in charge of your nursing unit.
- Uncertainty---changes in staffing on your unit, waiting for medical test results for yourself or family member
- Attitude---if you have a negative perception of the world (or of your nursing unit), you are creating an unpleasant environment in which to work.
- Unrealistic expectations----this is commonly experienced by a perfectionist or someone with a controlling personality.

External stressors include things such as:

- Major life changes----these can be positive, such as a much anticipated job promotion or change, or they can be negative, such as the death of a loved one, a divorce, or the loss of a job.
- Environment---usually a noise disturbance or a visual disturbance.
- Unpredictable events---such as a pay cut, an increase in living expenses, or being rotated to an unfamiliar nursing unit.
- Family---disagreements with family members that go unresolved and the increased stress affects your ability to work on a level that you normally do.
- Workplace---such as an overwhelming workload (too many critically ill patients assigned to you) or a head nurse who has impossible expectations.
- Social----such as making a case presentation at grand rounds or going on a blind date.

Where you are in danger of suffering the ill effects of life crises, try to minimize the disturbance to your life. If, for example, you have lost someone close to you, try to avoid changing your

job.

If you have a high score, or know that you will have a high score in the future, it may be worth preempting any problems by adopting stress management strategies now. Look after yourself!

Fatigue and Overwork

A term applied to a very unpleasant source of stress---HURRY SICKNESS.

What is hurry sickness?

- a vicious circle of stress
- causes you to hurry through jobs and do them badly
- under-performance causes feelings of frustration and failure, causing more stress
- additional stress causes more hurry and less success

Stress-creating behavior may compound this, as can an inability to relax at home or on vacation. If you do not manage long-term stress effectively, stress may lead to long term fatigue, physical or mental ill-health. By learning how to prioritize effectively, hurry sickness will be reduced or eliminated.

Now that we have discovered that virtually everything in our lives is capable of producing stress, how do we know when we are under stress? A moderate level of stress is necessary to avoid boredom. High levels of stress over a sustained period will damage your health. It is important to note that as the stress increases, your ability to recognize it decreases.

Short Term Physical Symptoms mainly occur as your body adapts to perceived physical threat, and are caused by the release of adrenaline and cortisol throughout your body. Within minutes, the cardiovascular and respiratory systems are stimulated and there is a heightened sense of perception. When the body is pumped up with adrenaline and cortisol, we feel some of these symptoms:

- faster heart beat
- increased sweating
- cool skin
- cold hands and feet
- feelings of nausea, or "butterflies"
- rapid breathing
- tense muscles
- dry mouth
- desire to urinate
- diarrhea

While you are in a "fight or flight" situation, the extra adrenaline and cortisol will help you to survive. Unfortunately it has negative effects in less serious situations.

- Stress interferes with clear judgment and makes it difficult to make good decisions. Stress can reduce your enjoyment of your work in these ways:
 - where you need good physical skills, stress gets in the way of fine motor control
 - stress consumes mental energy in distraction, anxiety, frustration and temper
 - stress damages the positive frame of mind you need for high quality work by:
 - promoting negative thinking
 - damaging self-confidence

- narrowing attention
- disrupting focus and concentration
- making it difficult to cope with distractions

Long Term Physical Symptoms occur when the body has been exposed to adrenaline over a long period of time. Remember that adrenaline prepares you for action by diverting resources to the muscles from the areas of the body which carry out body metabolic maintenance. This means that when you are exposed to adrenaline for a sustained period, your health may start to deteriorate and show up in these ways:

- change in appetite
- frequent colds
- sexual disorders
- aches and pains
- feelings of intense or long-term tiredness
- illnesses such as asthma, back pain, digestive problems, headaches, skin eruptions

When you have been under stress for a long period of time, you may find you are less able to think clearly and rationally about problems. The effects can be felt in numerous ways:

- worry or anxiety
- confusion, an inability to concentrate or make decisions
- feeling ill
- feeling out of control or overwhelmed by events
- mood changes (depression, hostility, helplessness, restlessness, frustration, irritability, impatience)
- lethargy
- difficulty sleeping
- increased smoking and alcohol use
- changing eating habits
- reduced sex drive
- relying more on medication

If you are a manager or co-worker, you will probably notice that the highly stressed person neglects his/her personal appearance. The person develops increased absenteeism, is more accident prone and makes mistakes. They become forgetful; have difficulty making decisions while overreacting emotionally. You will note an increase in bad moods and defensiveness. Other factors may cause each of these behavior changes. If you find that you or someone you know is exhibiting one or more of these symptoms the time has come to investigate stress management techniques.

Assessing the Existence of Stress

Factors to keep in mind:

ATTITUDE: An individual's attitude may influence whether a situation or emotion is stressful or not. A person with a negative attitude will often perceive many situations as being stressful, even when others do not.

PHYSICAL WELL-BEING: If the nutritional status of the person is poor, the body is stressed and the individual is not able to respond to a stressful situation. As a result, they can be more susceptible to infections. A poor nutritional state can be related to unhealthy food choices, inadequate food intake, or an erratic eating schedule. A nutritionally unbalanced eating pattern may result in an inadequate intake of nutrients.

PHYSICAL ACTIVITY: Inadequate physical activity may result in a stressful state for the body. Physical activity has many physiologic benefits. A consistent program of physical activity may contribute to a decrease in depression, if it exists. It also improves feelings of well-being.

SUPPORT SYSTEMS: It is vital to be able to obtain physical or emotional support from people who are important to you.

RELAXATION: When a person has no hobbies or means of relaxation, they become unable to handle stressful situations; as they have no outlet for their stress.

An Individual Stress Management Program

This can be the easiest (or the hardest) thing you will ever do. For example, if you are a smoker, the idea of giving up that habit increases your stress level! There are several components of a stress management program and they involve attitude, diet, physical activity, and time management. In other words, just about every aspect of your life! Don't change everything at the same time. Tackle those areas you feel more comfortable changing first. After you have experienced success with them, move forward to more challenging areas.

Begin by:

- Thinking positively
- Plan some fun
- Making an effort to stop negative thoughts
- Starting an individualized program of physical activity
- Planning to eat foods for improved health and well-being
- Utilizing the food pyramid to help select healthy food choices eat an appropriate amount of food on a reasonable schedule.
- Making an effort to interact socially with people
- Nurturing yourself and others
- Using relaxation techniques—learn about different types (guided imagery, listening to music, etc.) and choose one or two that work for you
- Take time out for personal interests and hobbies
- Take a mini retreat (even if it is just out to your back yard)
- Laugh! Laugh frequently! Laughter has an immediate impact on our body. Laughter increases circulation and decreases blood pressure. Laughter increases our respiratory exchange, our metabolism and activity of our muscles, which improves the condition of the body and heart muscles. It also helps to improve our immune system. First, it increases the concentration of circulating antibodies in the bloodstream and, second, it increases the concentration of circulating white blood cells.

As you begin to tackle managing your stress, be aware of what causes you to feel stressed. Develop an understanding of what stress level you prefer to live with. Remember, not all stress is bad.

Try keeping a stress diary for a short time. You will find that the longer you keep a diary, the smaller the benefit. In this stress diary, write down your stress levels and how you feel throughout the day. In particular, write down stressful events. Record the following information:

At a regular interval, record routine stress. Write down:

- The time that you are feeling stress

- the amount of stress that you feel (perhaps on a scale of 1 to 10)
- how happy you feel
- whether or not you are enjoying your work
- how efficiently you are working
- when stressful events occur, write down:
 - What the event was
 - when and where did it occur
 - important factors which made the event stressful
 - how did you handle the event
 - Did you tackle the cause or the symptom?
 - Did you deal with the stress correctly?

The information that you record in your stress diary should provide two types of information. First, you will gain understanding of a comfortable level of stress. Second, you should understand at what level of stress you work most effectively. You may find that your performance is acceptable even when you feel upset by stress. This exercise will reveal your main sources of stress. You will develop an understanding of what circumstances make the stresses unpleasant and should begin to understand whether your strategies for handling the stresses are effective.

Making an action plan to manage stress

Once you identify your stress tolerance to your particular stressors, the next stage is to work out how to manage effectively. Develop an action plan that will spell out your interventions to contain, control, or eliminate problems that are causing you stress.

A plan of action might look something like this:

1. Improve coordination with Dr. Smith
2. Set work goals for what I want to achieve this year
3. Ask for more feedback from my manager
4. Tidy up my work space to reduce distraction
5. Take breaks every two hours at work
6. Go to sleep at a set time each night to maintain adequate sleep (tape your favorite late night shows to be watched at a later time)
7. Reduce the amount of caffeine I drink
8. Use deep breathing whenever I feel stressed at work
9. Infuse humor into your life. Don't forget that even patients with dementia can laugh, too!

The contents and structure of your plan are for you to devise—it will depend entirely upon your circumstances.

Why humor?

Let's discuss a little more about the positive effects of humor and laughter when dealing with stress. Did you know that laughter really does have a positive impact on most of the major physiologic systems of the body? Dr. William Fry, a psychiatrist and humor researcher, has found this to be a true statement!

According to Dr. Fry, mirthful laughter is a total body activity because it involves the entire physiology of the body. He states that the interaction between humor and stress is complicated because stress itself is complicated. However, it is important to remember that humor has an immediate impact on the body. The stimulation of laughter increases our circulation because of

its effect on the heart and blood pressure (it lowers blood pressure). Laughter increases respiratory exchange, with more oxygen coming in and more carbon dioxide going out. It also increases the metabolism and activity of our muscles, improving the condition of body muscles and conditioning the heart muscle.

Laughter helps to improve the immune system in two ways. First, it increases the concentration of circulating antibodies in the bloodstream and, second, it increases the concentration of circulating white blood cells in the immune reaction to combat foreign proteins. These changes make you more resistant to developing infection.

You can start some humor infusion at work. Several hospitals in the U.S. utilize "humor wagons" where a wagon is wheeled from room to room with humor items on it. In-house humor TV channels, clowns (some are actually on hospital staffs), and humor facility visitors who provide programs to patients (and staff!) on a scheduled basis.

Hopefully, you see that stress management is not a static event. Quite to the contrary, stress management is something that is constantly evolving and changing as you react to different sources of stress throughout your day. Keeping your mind and body in the best condition possible has a huge influence on how you handle stress on a daily basis. After all, "a permanent state of transition is man's most noble condition." (Juan Ramon Jumenez)

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Course Exam

1. Long shifts, heavy patient loads, and pay considered to be inadequate are potential sources of chronic stress and can lead to long lasting effects to your body.
 True False
2. A diet that is high in salt and fat has absolutely no impact on your ability to manage stress.
 True False
3. If you are serving as a preceptor for new nurses, you need to be aware of signs that they are not handling acute stress very well.
 True False
4. Chronic stress can lead to problems such as aches and pains, tiredness, changes in appetite and frequent upper respiratory infections because adrenaline is being diverted from the muscles to areas of your body that are required for metabolic function.
 True False
5. If you are experiencing stress at work, it really isn't important if you have support from your family, roommates or significant other.
 True False
6. Laughter decreases the amount of antibodies that are circulating throughout our bodies.
 True False
7. Developing a stress management program for yourself can cause stress.
 True False
8. Your stress diary will help you to identify a comfortable level of stress as well as the level of stress at which you work most effectively.
 True False
9. Once you develop your stress management plan, you should not make changes to it because that will cause more stress.
 True False
10. Nurse to nurse, as well as nurse to patient, relationships can be improved and more effective when humor is used appropriately.
 True False