

How stressed are you really?

The Health and Wellbeing Stress Test

In this fast paced, constantly changing world, stress is an ever-increasing problem. Undue stress wears down our immune system and leaves us susceptible to all types of physical ailments. The following simple test is designed to see how stressed you are and to give you some ideas as to how to 'take control' if necessary.

Read the following statements and tick the ones you feel often or always apply to you:

A. Your mood and feelings:

- I am often angry or irritable
- I have big mood swings
- I often fail to see the funny side of things
- I spend a lot of time complaining about the past
- I get angry when I'm kept waiting
- I often feel guilty
- I find it hard to make decisions and get frustrated by this
- I often keep everything bottled up inside
- I blow up easily or pick fights
- I am constantly tired
- I feel unable to cope with all I have to do

Total: /11

B. Your lifestyle

- I find it hard to eat healthily or I regularly over- or under-eat
- I do not exercise regularly
- I consume large quantities of caffeine or alcohol
- I have trouble sleeping or wake up still feeling tired
- I get too little rest
- I don't fit relaxation into every day
- I tend to race through the day
- I often ignore symptoms of stress

Total: /8

C. At work

- I am unable to take sufficient breaks
- I feel unsupported by my colleagues and management
- I have to work very intensively
- I have to neglect some tasks because I have too much to do
- There is friction or anger between colleagues
- I have to work very fast
- I don't have a choice deciding what I do at work
- Different groups at work demands things from me that are hard to combine
- I am subject to bullying at work
- I have unrealistic time pressures
- I cannot rely on my line manager to help me with a work problem
- Staff are not consulted about change at work
- Relationships at work are strained

Total: /13

D. In general

- I have few supportive relationships
- I always say yes when I am asked to do more by friends, family or at work
- I tend to put things off
- I complain that I am disorganised
- I try to do everything myself
- I set unrealistic deadlines
- I am working longer and longer to achieve the same or less
- I find it hard to concentrate

Total: /8

Overall total: /40

Your score:

Total up the number of statements you have ticked in each section and your overall total score. This will give you an indicator of how stressed you are and which aspects of your life are causing the most stress.

How stressed are you?

If you scored less than 10 – you have few hassles

Congratulations! There are few hassles in your life right now. Make sure, though, that you are not trying so hard to avoid problems that you don't challenge yourself – some stress is actually good for you.

If you scored 11 – 20 – you are in pretty good control

Well done! You have your life well balanced. Make sure you keep an eye on your choices and lifestyle to avoid unnecessary stress and keep yourself both physical and mentally fit and healthy.

If you scored 21-30 – you are approaching the danger zone

You may well be suffering some stress-related symptoms and your relationships could be strained. You need to think carefully about the choices you've made and your lifestyle and find ways to reduce your stressors and/or improve your coping mechanisms and find time to relax.

If you scored 31 or more – Emergency!

You must stop now, rethink how you are living, change your attitude and pay careful attention to your diet, exercise and relaxation. This may seem selfish but you need to look after number one at the moment or your health will suffer.

What is stressing you?

If you scored high in section A: You're letting it all build up

You must be exhausted carrying around all that tension. You hate letting people down and often ask too much of yourself. You may find yourself having a lot of arguments, even picking fights. Try to smile more and don't take things as seriously – more fun is needed right now! Talk to your friends and family about what's on your mind instead of bottling things up. Make time to relax but also find a way to vent your frustrations – try a martial art, writing a journal or a long walk.

If you scored high in section B: You need to look after yourself more

Our lifestyle choices drastically affect the way we cope with stress. Your body is fighting a battle both from the inside and out. Whilst you rely on sugar and caffeine to keep you going and alcohol and cigarettes to help you unwind, your body is not getting the nutrients it needs to repair the damage these toxins are causing. We're not asking you to become a health freak but make sure you get your five portions of fruit and veg a day, try not to smoke during the day, drink plenty of water, take a five minute relaxation break as often as you can and take some form of exercise every day – try walking or cycling to work, or from the park and ride, taking the stairs or come to a Q-active class – your body and mind will thank you for it!

If you scored high in section C: Work is getting you down

You are struggling at work and don't feel that you have the support necessary to cope with the high demands put on you. Look at your workload – can you delegate any? Are you saying yes to more work because you daren't say no? Try saying 'I'm swamped right now – can anyone else help or do you mind waiting a while?' Look at your time management strategies – prioritise your work into 'urgent and important, important, less important and can wait' then block out slots in your diary to deal with the most urgent ones first. Don't let anyone fill these slots in – imagine they are an important meeting that you can't avoid. Make sure your line manager knows the pressure you are under. If they are unhelpful, find someone else to deal with. Occupational Health, Human Resources and the Chaplaincy all have people that can deal with your worries so don't suffer in silence if you need help.

If you scored high in section D: You're taking on too much

I know it's hard but you need to trust others to take the strain and ask for help. You feel unsupported and take more and more on but you're not a superhero and need to look after yourself too. Support is out there but you must take the time to find it. Be realistic about what you can achieve and use time management strategies to schedule time for your commitments and responsibilities but also for your health and wellbeing. Learn to prioritise effectively and don't be too hard on yourself.