

HOW DO YOU KNOW YOU ARE STRESSED?

Knowing the signs of difficulties in managing stress helps you manage stress more effectively. The list below is some of the signs in four areas with examples. If you experience one or more of these symptoms, it is time for you to take action in managing your stress! Contact us for information on stress management training offered in English and different Asian languages (Cambodian, Cantonese, Mandarin, Korean and Vietnamese).

Emotional symptoms: e.g.

- Uncontrollable crying
- Nervousness
- Anger
- Feeling down

Physical symptoms: e.g.

- Muscle ache and tension
- Tight neck and shoulders
- Fatigue
- Sleep difficulties
- Diarrhea or constipation

Behavioral symptoms: e.g.

- Fidgeting
- Emotional eating
- Overuse of alcohol
- Taking up smoking or smoking more than usual

Cognitive symptoms: e.g.

- Poor concentration
- Trouble remembering things
- Continual worry
- Trouble thinking clearly

The above information is excerpted from "Stress Management: Approaches for preventing and reducing stress" (p. 22). Harvard Medical School Special Health Report. (2013).

Material in this pamphlet is for informational purposes only. It is not intended to be a medical advice. Always consult a physician or other qualified healthcare professional with any question regarding any medical or mental health condition.

MANAGING STRESS



1 in 5 Canadians report a high degree of stress.

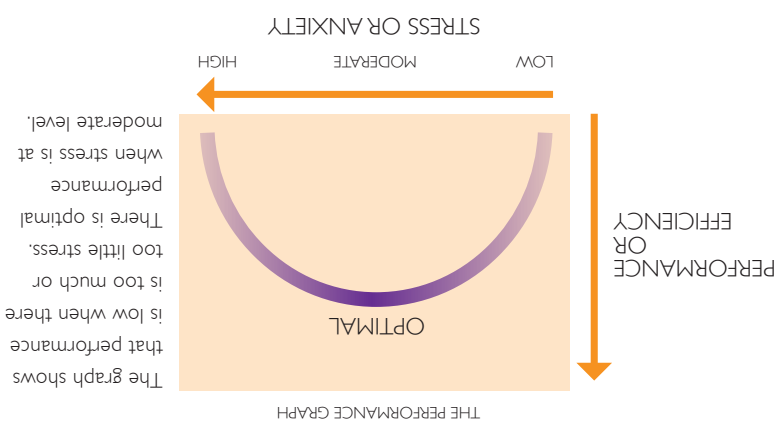
So then you might ask yourself, *when is it good stress or bad stress?* Well, this is different for everyone. We all perceive and react to our stressors differently.

This is bad or negative stress. Too much bad stress for too long undesired or forced, they bring worry, anger and grief.

Bad (Negative) Stress: When stressors are unexpected, active in achieving our goals.

Good (Healthy) Stress: When stressors are anticipated and desired, they bring positive motivation and energy, e.g. a planned celebration or vacation. Good, short-term stress brings better performance and energy level, which is important to keep us

Is Stress always BAD? NO! Some Stress is Good.



Is Stress Necessary? The stress response is helpful and necessary in times of physical danger and challenging situations. Appropriate levels of stress are needed to enable us to rise to occasions and events that reward heightened awareness and abilities, keep us active and motivated to achieve to our potential and maintain performance.

Our body reacts to stressors by stress responses, also known as a "fight-or-flight" response: a natural and automatic physical response caused by stress hormones. When we are stressed, stress hormones are released, causing our breathing to quicken, senses to sharpen, our heart to beat faster, muscles to tighten and blood pressure to increase. All these reactions help us muster all available energy to fly away from the stressors.

What is a Stress Response?

Knowing the sources of stressors helps us to better manage stress.

- **Situation**, e.g. danger or accident (chased by a bear, a car accident), a job change, migration
 - **Social and physical environment**, e.g. high noise level, conflict situations, extreme weather
 - **Mind**, e.g. worries, fear, excitement
 - **Body**, e.g. physical discomfort, diseases particularly chronic diseases, injury, overwork
- Stressors are objects, events, or circumstances that trigger stress. Stressors can be real or potential, coming to us almost all the time and from all directions:

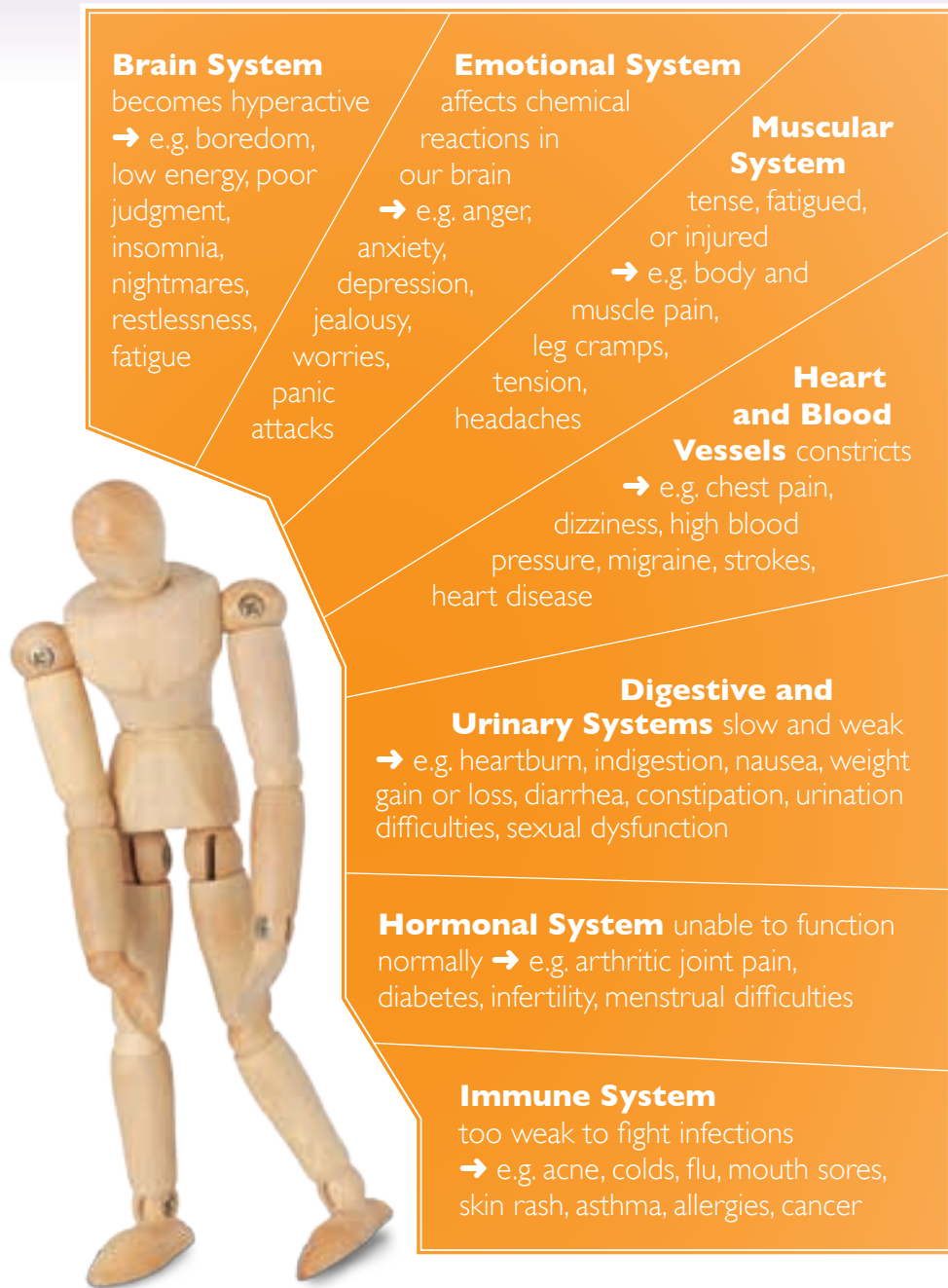
What is a Stressor?

Stress is a fact of life and inevitable. It is our body's response to stressful situations, which are called "stressors".

WHAT IS STRESS?

WHAT IMPACT DOES STRESS HAVE ON YOU?

When we have too much bad stress for too long, it starts impacting our health in many different ways:



IS YOUR STRESS SIMILAR TO OTHERS?

Depending on your age, gender, health and social conditions, your stressors and reaction to stress may be different.

Youth: stressors typical of their age:

- parental expectation (particularly in Asian communities)
- academic pressures (especially for those aiming for universities)
- social pressure (related to friendship, romance, bullies, body image)

Women: consistently report greater stress than men do. Stressors:

- gender role expectation as home-makers and caregivers
- concern about body image

Men: feel more stress for matters related to

- financial woes
- work overload
- argument with children

Seniors: aging definitely has an effect on stress. Stressors:

- declining health and frailty
- chronic diseases and disability
- death of spouse
- pain and sleep disturbances

Chronic Disease Patients and Caregivers: chronic disease is a major contributor of stress and caring for others can be fulfilling but very stressful, bringing fatigue, burn-out, exhaustion, anger, guilt, and grief. Two-thirds of caregivers are women.

New Immigrants: migration is a very stressful process. New immigrants face social determinants of health that bring a high level of stress: finding a house, a job, and school for children; credential recognition, building new social network.

Culture: cultural expectations and practices create stress to different groups of people, e.g. toilet training, puberty rites, competition, adult roles.



HOW CAN YOU MANAGE YOUR STRESS?

Enhancing Your Stress Management Toolbox to reduce and manage with stress.

Reducing Stress:

1 Be comfortable to **say NO** to prevent yourself being overwhelmed and to **set priorities**.

2 **Set timeline** for tasks to avoid stress caused by procrastination.



Managing Stress:

When stress is inevitable, face it by developing skills to manage it.



Relaxation response:

choosing a calming focus and then letting go and relaxing. Examples are:

- (1) Mindfulness meditation
- (2) Breath focus
- (3) Body scan
- (4) Yoga, taichi, qigong
- (5) Guided imagery

Healthy living practices:

practicing healthy living gives you a foundation for physical wellness:

- (1) Healthy eating
- (2) Physical activity

(3) Good rest and adequate sleep

(4) Nurturing yourself – Doing something you love and allowing for quiet time, e.g. taking a bath, listening to music

Cognitive coping skills:

negative thoughts make you lose perspective:

(1) Healthy stress – Viewing stress as helpful and positive helps you create the biology of courage, trusting yourself the ability to handle life's challenges

(2) Reframing bad worries – Bad worries are circular, habitual thoughts about things that may not happen or things you cannot control. Bad worries convey the message that “I can't do anything about it” and send out fear that scares the body. Reframing bad worries to focus on things you can change helps bring calmness and confidence.

Social support:

connecting with others when you are under stress creates resilience in you:

- (1) Strengthening social bonds – expanding your social circle through volunteering, religious or interest groups reduces isolation and build resilience.
- (2) Sharing humor, laughter and play time with family and friends improves blood circulation and releases pain-relief hormones.

For more information on stress management tools, please visit hongfook.ca