

# STRESS

## What is Stress?

The stress response or fight-or-flight response is a natural and important part of our defense system. We can't eliminate it nor should we. Remember the time you jumped away from the bug on the floor only to realize it was a piece of fuzz? This was your unconscious warning system at work. The stress response enables quick action in response to a threat.

However, not all things we find threatening today are things that we can outrun or out fight. Many of our current stressors are ongoing conditions of life. Consequently, we can find ourselves in a constant state of alert without an action that will eliminate the threat. People experience this state of high alert in different ways: Some may feel anxious or frightened, others may experience muscle tension and body aches. Still others may suffer from stomach upset and pain.

Medical literature is full of studies demonstrating the connection between prolonged stress and decreased levels of health and well-being.

*Apply to your own life:* How is prolonged stress affecting you?

## A Mind-Body Connection

Researchers have also discovered our thoughts significantly influence our stress levels. If stress is the response to threat, then how we define threat greatly determines whether we will experience stress. Our experiences and how we've made sense of them combine to form the lens through which we see and interpret our world and the threats in it.

Yes, threat is in the eyes of the beholder.

## Voluntary Stress?!

Did it ever occur to you that your thoughts could determine how stressed you feel? We are often unconscious of thoughts we associate with situations, events, or people. We label something as bad or even awful. These evaluations can become assumptions that drive our thinking and contribute to our seeing greater catastrophe and threat, than may be before us.

It is the meaning that we give events or conditions that trigger our stress. Just because you think something doesn't make it so. Thoughts are just thoughts. They aren't who you are. They don't determine what is real. They are just thoughts.

Therefore, one effective way to manage stress is to become aware of your own thinking and how your thoughts affect your stress levels.

## Applying the Thought-Stress Connection: "I'm" statements

How you label yourself at one time of the day can anchor your emotions later in the day. Suppose someone asks, "How are you this morning?" If you say, "I'm great," you will position yourself to feel great all day. However if you reply that you are feeling stressed and anxious, then that is how you are likely to feel all day. What would you choose?

## Learning More about Better Managing your Stress

Life has a way of throwing us a curve when we least expect. When it happens, it is an invitation to grow into a new way of living. Let us help you take the first step.

To further explore how to cope with life, sign up for Dr. Linda Karlovec's FREE Stress Management Class. Please call the Meers, Inc. office to reserve a spot at (614) 451-0176.



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