

## What Is Stress?

Stress is our body's reaction to what is happening to us. It is part of our lives. We can have stress when something wonderful happens to us. Or when we are sitting on the beach. Competing in sports can cause stress. Being worried can also cause stress. What is stressful to one person may not be stressful to another person.

Our personality affects how we handle stress. The way we have learned to handle things that happen to us affects how much and when we are "stressed." Things that might cause stress include: Taking a test, being afraid, being blamed for something, being late, getting into an argument or losing something.

Stress has been defined as a "physical reaction to a situation." Our bodies respond to stress in many ways. There are ways we can learn to reduce stress. We can use stress in positive ways. First, we must learn to be aware of stressful reactions in our bodies. The U.S. Department of Health and Human Services says there are three stages of stress: first we feel panic; then, we feel despair; and finally, we feel exhaustion.

The following story will show the three physical stages of stress. Alex was driving along a quiet street listening to the radio. Suddenly a rock hit the windshield, cracking it all the way across. He couldn't see. He went into a panic and stopped the car. His heart was racing. He felt short of breath.

Alex sat for a moment, looking at the cracked window. He tried to figure out what had happened. At this point his heart began to return to normal. He was beginning to feel more calm.

Alex jumped out of the car. He saw a man clearing grass around some trees. He was using a large gas trimmer. Alex decided that the trimmer had thrown a rock into his windshield. He called to the man. The man turned off his trimmer. He argued with Alex. He claimed there was no way to prove his trimmer threw a rock.

They continued to argue. Alex became more and more angry. Finally he drove off in a rage. He even left skid marks on the road. He was so upset, he yelled out the window. Alex was shaking with anger. He stopped to see a friend who lived down the street. He described what had happened. He was worn out from the whole ordeal. He felt like he could go to sleep.



Alex would have felt better and been less tired if he had handled the situation differently. For example, Alex could have tried talking calmly to the man with the trimmer. If the man disagreed with him, Alex could have stayed calm. He could have left the scene calmly. To get help with the problem, he could have talked to his parents. Or he could have called the police and his insurance company. Staying calm and seeking help would have kept his stress under control. He would have had less damage to his body. By staying calm, he might feel tired later, but not worn out.

# Handling Stress



## Why should we learn to handle stress?

Stress over a long period of time can cause serious health problems.



## How can we remove stress from our lives?

We can't take all of the things out of our lives that cause stress, but we can learn to respond to them in a way that our body is able to repair itself.

## What is the best way to handle stress?



Take time for regular exercise. Try running or walking. This will relieve some of the stress on your body. It also will give your mind a chance to relax.



Make time for things you like to do. Take regular breaks from work and study. This will help you relax. You will be able to handle the stress in your life better.



Learn to let go of things that bother you. Let go and move on. If you always want to be right or to win, you will be very stressed. Sometimes it is a good idea to just walk away from a bad situation.



Get eight hours of sleep every night. Drink eight glasses of water and eat right every day.



Find someone you can talk to when you feel stress. This gives you a chance to see the situation through another person's eyes. Get counseling if your stress continues. Asking for help is a mature way to take care of yourself.



Take control and make healthy choices. Don't make unhealthy choices as a way to handle your stress. Alcohol and drugs are not the answer. These choices will lead to new problems and won't ease the old ones.