

Choose Life Balance

Manage Your Stress

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Welcome to the Choose Life Balance self-study course from K-State Research & Extension.

Balanced Living Topics

- Manage Your Time
- **Manage Your Stress**
- Feed Your Body
- Move Your Body
- Rest Your Body



This self-study course will examine five topics that are important for balanced living: time management, stress management, nutrition, physical activity and sleep. This session will focus on the importance of managing stress in living a balanced life.

Balanced Living Definition

- Stability, equality, harmony
- Caring appropriately for all life areas
- Don't over-do or under-do



A reminder that the definition of balance is stability, equality, and harmony. Overdoing or underdoing even good things can lead to imbalance. Ultimately, living an unbalanced life can lead to stress, health problems, poor relationships, and lost productivity.

Stress Management Overview

- Understand basics of stress
- Identify stress
- Evaluate stress
- Develop effective stress-coping strategies



In this session, we will first cover some basic information about stress. Next, you will identify your symptoms and sources of stress and then you will evaluate your stress by asking two important questions. Finally, you will learn how to develop effective stress-coping strategies.

What's Stressing Out Americans

- Money and the economy
- Work
- Personal and family health
- Family and relationships
- Personal safety



Every year, the American Psychological Association (APA) conducts a stress survey and publishes the results. While specific statistics change from year to year, the general factors that cause stress tend to be the same. As each item is named, consider whether you feel stressed by it: money and the economy, work, personal and family health, family and relationships, and personal safety. Are there any other major items that are stressful to you?

Understanding Stress

- The ***belief*** that demands are greater than abilities
- It may come from any situation or thought
- It causes physiological responses



Stress occurs when you believe that demands placed on you are greater than your abilities to meet them. It is your personal response to certain situations. It doesn't result from specific life events, but may come from any situation or thought. Events that are stressful to you may not be stressful to someone else.

Understanding Stress

- Short-term
 - Immediate or perceived threat
- Long-term
 - Ongoing situations or thoughts



Stress can be classified as short-term or long-term.

- Short-term. Stress is experienced during an immediate or perceived threat. Your body responds with the fight-or-flight response that prepares you for an emergency, generating a physical response to meet the energy demands of the situation. When the threat passes, your body relaxes.

- Long-term. Stress comes from ongoing situations or thoughts, such as health conditions, relationship problems, or financial worries. Long term stress usually generates less of a physical response, but your body experiences the stressful state for a longer time. Experiencing chronic stress can take a toll on your health and well-being.

The Stress Response

- Stress causes your body to release hormones
 - Adrenaline
 - Cortisol
 - Oxytocin



The stress response is also called the fight-or-flight response. It helps you deal with a physical threat by quickly switching your body into high gear, enabling you to use energy, speed, concentration, or agility to protect yourself or get away as fast as possible. A threat or stress causes your body to release a surge of hormones that stimulate your body's physical response.

The major stress hormones are:

- Adrenaline - Adrenaline increases your heart rate, elevates your blood pressure, and boosts energy supplies.
 - Cortisol - Cortisol is the primary stress hormone. It increases glucose (sugar) in the bloodstream, enhances the brain's use of glucose, and increases the availability of substances that repair tissues. It also curbs functions that are nonessential or detrimental for fighting or fleeing. Additionally, cortisol alters the immune response and suppresses the digestive system, reproductive system, and growth processes.
- Oxytocin – nudges you to seek help instead of bottling it up. A natural anti-inflammatory.

Effects of Stress

- Positive
 - Short-term can boost immune system
 - May improve mental and physical performance
- Negative
 - Chronic exposure may damage health



Stress can have positive or negative effects, depending on the situation and your response to it.

- Positive. Stress with positive effects is exciting and promises opportunity, such as the birth of a child or a new job. It can challenge and motivate you. Thirty years of studies on stress have found that short-term stress that has an end in sight may actually boost your immune system. Positive effects of stress may result in repair or elimination of damaged cellular proteins. This may prevent cell damage, which may, in turn, help prevent disease and promote longevity. Let's face it: life would be pretty boring without some stress. A tolerable amount of stress can be mentally stimulating and increase productivity and performance.

- Negative. Stress with negative effects occurs when you feel out of control or under constant or intense pressure. The less control you have over potentially stressful events and the more uncertainty involved, the more likely you are to feel the negative effects of stress. When experienced on a long-term basis, many of the physical reactions that accompany stress can damage your health. (Stress may contribute to the following health problems: increased or decreased appetite, stomachache, diarrhea, depression, anxiety, increased heart rate, high

blood pressure, high cholesterol, and high triglycerides. Stress may also worsen other illnesses.)

Getting a Handle on Stress

- Identify stress symptoms and sources
- Evaluate stress
- Develop effective stress-coping strategies



Today you will consider three steps to help you manage stress in your life:
Identify symptoms and sources of stress
Evaluate your stress
Develop effective stress-coping strategies.

Symptoms of Stress

- Symptoms may be physical, emotional, behavioral, intellectual
- Nervous habits may appear
- Health problems may develop

Handout 1



The first step to identifying your stress is to recognize the symptoms of stress that you experience. Stress can produce physical, emotional, behavioral, and intellectual symptoms. Nervous habits may appear, and health problems may develop. You may not realize that your body is telling you when you are experiencing too much stress.

Handout 1, "The "Symptoms of Stress" lists common warning symptoms of stress. Identify and circle the symptoms that you usually experience when under stress.

Sources of Stress

- External
 - Work
 - Family
 - Life changes
 - Unpredictable events
 - Social
- Internal
 - Expectations
 - Worry
 - Attitude
 - Behavior
 - Health

Handout 2



The sources of stress can be divided into two categories:

- External. Stress in this category includes events and situations that happen in your life. You have control over some of this stress but not all of it.

- Work. Examples include an overwhelming workload or an impossible boss or coworker.

- Family. Examples include a fight with your spouse, an uncooperative child, or a pushy mother-in-law.

- Life changes. Examples include getting married, being pregnant, having a new child, being promoted, moving to a new house, experiencing the death of a loved one, or going through a divorce.

- Unpredictable events. Examples include acts of terrorism, increase in monthly bills, an uninvited house guest, or a pay cut.

- Social. Examples include making a speech or going on a blind date.

- Internal. Stress in this category comes from within you, like thoughts, feelings, and actions. Generally, you have more control over internal stress than you do external stress.

- Expectations. Being a perfectionist or having a controlling personality can lead to high stress levels. Overscheduling or not planning ahead can also greatly contribute to stress.

- Worry. Stress can come from worrying about what may happen in the future or how someone may react.
- Attitude. Being negative increases stress for yourself and others.
- Behavior. Poor choices, such as being inconsiderate or wasting time, will elevate your stress and others' stress.
- Health. Short- or long-term disease is stressful to your mind and body. While you can't control everything about health, there are some aspects of health you do have control over. Poor health habits may include smoking or chewing tobacco, not getting enough sleep, chronic over- or undereating, and not being physically active.

Handout 2, "The "Sources of Stress" lists some general sources of stress. In the table at the bottom of the handout, identify and list specific sources of stress in your life that lead to negative stress symptoms.

Evaluating Stress

- Ask yourself two questions
 - Is it important?
 - Can I control it?

Now that you have identified some sources of stress in your life, you can evaluate your stress by asking yourself two questions:

- 1) Is it important to you? Will it matter in a day, week, month, or year from now?
- 2) Can you control it?

In the table on Handout 2, check whether the source of stress is important and/or controllable. Evaluating your stress will help you to develop effective coping strategies.

Important and Controllable

- Alter
 - How can you change your situation to reduce stress?
- Avoid
 - How can you get away from or prevent stress?



You should strive to spend most of your time and energy on stressors that are *important* and *controllable*.

There are two ways you can reduce this kind of stress:

- Alter. How can you change your situation to lessen the impact of stress on you?
- Avoid. How can you get away from or prevent this source of stress?

Alter

- Ask others to change and be willing to do the same
- Communicate feelings openly
- Take action
- State limits in advance



Taking inventory is one of the most important things you can do during times of stress. To alter your stress, you will attempt to change your situation so that things work better in the future.

- Ask others to change and be willing to do the same. If small problems are not resolved, they often create larger ones. For example, if your children always fight while riding in the car, ask them to keep the noise level down. To help them, provide activities to keep them busy, like positive conversation, games, music, or videos.
- Communicate feelings openly. In order to communicate effectively, use "I" statements, such as "I feel frustrated by shorter deadlines and a heavier workload. Is there something we can do to balance things out?"
- Take action. Sometimes inaction causes tension and stress. Making a decision, even one with risks, gets you moving and can actually relieve a lot of stress in the long run. Nothing ventured, nothing gained. For example, if work is a chronic source of stress, start step-by-step plans to find another job.
- State limits in advance. Be proactive. One example may be to share budget limits with family members before a shopping trip or holiday.

Avoid

- Plan ahead
- Take control
- Say no
- Shorten your task list



A lot of stress can simply be avoided.

- Plan ahead. Is traffic insane? Make a plan to leave earlier or take an alternate route.
- Take control. Hate waiting in line to eat lunch? Pack your lunch and eat whenever and wherever you want.
- Say no. You have a lot of demands on your time. You also have a lot of opportunities for how to spend your time. When making choices about how to spend your time, remember there is no way that you can do and have it all....it is impossible. Consider your priorities that you identified in the Time Management session. Be picky about what you choose to spend your time doing. Only commit to doing extra projects or activities that you really want to do.
- Shorten your task list. What can you realistically put off until tomorrow without any detrimental effects? Are these items really that important anyway? If they are not, consider not doing them at all.

Unimportant or Uncontrollable

- Accept
 - How can you accept things as they are and learn to live with the stress?
- Adapt
 - How can you change in order to live with the stress?



When the stress cannot be avoided or altered, try to adjust your ability to tolerate it using these two strategies.

- Accept. How can you accept things as they are and learn to live with the stress?
- Adapt. How can you change in order to live with the stress?

Accept

- Talk with someone
- Practice positive self-talk
- Learn from mistakes
- See stress as an opportunity



Sometimes the best choice is to accept things the way they are, if no amount of worry or intervention is going to change the thing that is causing your stress. Here are some ideas to help you accept the things as they are.

- Talk with someone. You may not be able to change a frustrating situation, but that doesn't mean that your feelings are not legitimate. Phone or visit a friend or family member. Write down your feelings and frustrations in a journal. You will feel better after getting things off your chest.
- Practice positive self-talk. Don't fall into the trap of bashing yourself with thoughts or words. One negative thought often leads to more. Negative thoughts and words are rarely rational and objective. Instead, be positive. Replace negative irrational thoughts with positive rational thinking. Focus on your strengths. Instead of thinking "I am horrible with money and will never get out of debt," try this: "I made a mistake with my money, but I am resilient. I will get through this."
- Learn from mistakes. Life experiences can teach you a lot, even if it is only what does not work. You cannot change mistakes that you have made in the past, but you can use the experience to make better decisions in the future.
- See stress as an opportunity. Most stress brings with it opportunity, even if it isn't

always apparent at first. Look for the opportunity behind the stress to help you get through it.

Adapt

- Adjust expectations
- Be grateful
- Use humor and laughter
- Be physically active
- Learn to relax



The perception that you can't cope is one of the greatest stressors. Adapting is a helpful method to deal with stress.

- Adjust expectations. We all have expectations about how things should be, whether conscious or subconscious. Evaluate your expectations. Redefine what it takes to be successful, clean, healthy, etc. Avoid perfectionism. Thinking you have to be perfect will only create stress, guilt, and frustration.
- Be grateful. Look around you. What is right with the world? Spend time each day finding things for which to be thankful. Record at least three things for which you are grateful before going to bed. Research shows that being grateful can greatly reduce stress. Gratitude has the potential to change everything from its ordinary state to being a gift.
- Use humor and laughter. Whether a situation is horrible or funny depends on how you look at it. Sometimes we take ourselves entirely too seriously! Create ridiculous scenarios in your head to find the humor in a situation. Allow yourself to see an atrocious day as comical and learn to laugh at the craziness of it all. Humor and laughter have a great potential to relieve stress and help you feel better.
- Be physically active. Any form of physical activity can decrease the production of stress

hormones and counteract your body's stress response. Physical activity releases endorphins and improves your mood. It can also be meditative as you focus on your body's movement. Find an activity that you enjoy and make it part of your regular routine to relieve stress and improve health.

- Learn to relax. Relaxation is a positive way to cope with stress. It is satisfying and provides peace of mind. Choose any activity that you find relaxing or that gives you pleasure. Some ideas include reading; taking a warm bath; listening to soothing music; playing games with friends; playing with your pet(s); gardening; getting a manicure, pedicure, facial, or haircut; or practicing a relaxation technique (such as deep breathing, meditation, progressive muscle relaxation, visualization, yoga, tai chi, and massage). Enjoy your relaxing activity at least 30 minutes a day.

Coping Strategies

- Choose realistic coping strategies
- Periodically evaluate effectiveness
- Replace ineffective strategies



You can't avoid all of the stress that comes in your life, and you shouldn't try to accept every hassle. Since one coping strategy will not work for every situation or source of stress in your life, it's important to develop a toolbox of coping strategies.

- Choose realistic coping strategies. Everyone is different. What works for one person might not work for another. Choose one new coping strategy to try for a set period of time, like 1 week or 1 month. Then decide whether it is helpful to you.
- Periodically evaluate effectiveness. What may work for you at one time may not always work for you. Assess your stress level and determine if your coping strategies are still doing the job.
- Replace ineffective strategies. If your coping strategy is no longer working for you, try something else.

Keep a Journal

- What caused your stress
- How you felt
- How you acted in response
- What you did to cope or feel better
- Effectiveness of coping strategy



Writing in a stress journal can help to identify stress and how you deal with it.

Every time you feel stressed, note these things in your stress journal:

- what caused your stress (if you are unsure, make a guess)
- how you felt, both physically and emotionally
- how you acted in response
- what you did to cope or feel better
- the effectiveness of the coping strategy.

Writing down your worries will help clarify them. You will be able to see patterns and common themes. Maybe it will show that you don't have that much to worry about, or it may bring overlooked problems to light. Your stress journal can help you make a plan to move forward.

Seek Professional Help

- If unable to manage stress on your own, consider seeking professional help



Everyone needs help from time to time in their lives. There is no shame in seeking professional help. It may make all the difference in the world. If life seems too chaotic and you are not able to manage stress on your own, consider seeking professional help from a physician, psychologist, psychiatrist, therapist, or religious leader. He or she can help you think about ways to reduce stress in your life.

SMART Goals

- Set a stress management goal that will help balance your life
 - S = Specific
 - M = Measurable
 - A = Achievable
 - R = Rewarding
 - T = Time-bound



Today you learned some basic information about stress so that you can understand it better. You learned how to identify and evaluate symptoms and sources of stress. Finally, you learned how to develop effective coping strategies. Using **Handout 3**, set a specific stress management goal that will help to bring your life into balance.

- **S = Specific.** Rather than say, “I will simplify my mornings,” choose something specific such as “I will set the table for breakfast before I go to bed.”
- **M = Measurable.** If your goal is measurable, it is easier to track. An example would be to say “I will relax for 30 minutes before bed each night,” rather than “I will relax more.”
- **A = Achievable.** Goals that are too lofty set you up for failure. Paying off all your debts in a year may not be achievable. It would be better to set a goal to not add further debt and to focus on paying off one debt at a time.
- **R = Rewarding.** You will be more motivated to complete goals that are personally rewarding.
- **T = Time-bound.** Set a time frame for accomplishing your goal. Don’t say “I’ll

clean out my closet when I have time.” Set a deadline instead, such as “I will spend 10 minutes per day cleaning my closet until it is done,” or “I will clean my closet on Saturday morning before lunch.”

Please Provide Feedback

Your thoughts and opinions matter! Please provide feedback to help us to improve this program.

The link below will take you to our online survey system where you can tell us how you will use this information and evaluate the program.

https://kstate.qualtrics.com/SE/?SID=SV_dd0ivzV9h3hyhUN



Acknowledgement To

- University of Idaho Extension Service
- University of Missouri Extension Service
- West Virginia State University Extension Service





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