

Recognizing stress in your life

It's important to identify the events in your life that trigger your stress symptoms. Your ability to manage and prevent stress is built on your awareness of your stress symptoms and the events that fuel those symptoms.

Over the next few days, take a closer look at the stressful activities in your life. Keep track of the symptoms that helped you identify a stressful situation and the trigger that caused it.

After you've monitored your stress for several days, review the situation. Think about the coping strategies you used. Were there techniques that could have helped you better manage or eliminate the stressful situation?

Try to be prepared for the next time you encounter these or other stress causing situations.



In a recent stressful situation, how did you react? Answer True (T) or False (F)

1. I ignored the fact that something was bothering me and tried to carry on as usual.	T	F
2. I made sure that I had information on how to manage this stressful situation.	T	F
3. I refused to admit that anything was bothering me, and I tried not to notice that I was experiencing signs of stress such as an increase in heart rate, muscle tightness, and hurried behaviour.	T	F
4. I used alcohol, smoking, or other substances as a way of relieving my stress.	T	F
5. I made a plan and followed it, one step at a time.	T	F
6. Every so often I took time to relax and forget about my stress. I read, listened to music, watched a film or rested.	T	F
7. I looked at the humorous side of the situation, or I gave my support and understanding to people around me who were also under stress.	T	F
8. I took time to remind myself of the important things in life. I received the goals for my personal life and the priorities of my work.	T	F
9. I took out my anger and frustration on my friends and family.	T	F
10. I kept thinking that I was helpless to deal with this situation.	T	F
11. I didn't let anyone know what was really bothering me, even though there were people available who would have been supportive or helpful.	T	F
12. I started exercising or doing a hobby, so that I could enjoy myself for a while.	T	F

Compare your answers to those on the inside pages to find out if your coping strategies are 'Stress Fit'.

For more information

about stress coping strategies or heart health ask your health care professional where you can obtain stress management services, or contact your local office of the Heart and Stroke Foundation.

Thanks to the millions of Canadians who put their heart into supporting our vital work.

Because of you, the Foundation has helped reduce the mortality rate from heart disease and stroke by 70% over the past 50 years. Sadly, still one in three Canadian deaths are due to heart disease and stroke every year – and millions remain at risk.

More answers are needed to facilitate further medical advances, effect social change and provide public and professional health education that save lives – today and for generations to come.

The Heart and Stroke Foundation web site offers a wealth of information and tools to help you and your family prevent and manage heart disease and stroke. Find:

- Delicious heart-healthy recipes
- Tips to get and stay active for life
- Current heart disease and stroke patient information
- Breaking news on Foundation funded research
- Free newsletters, Heart&Stroke He@lthline and He@lthline for Parents
- How to get involved and make a difference in your community



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Heart&Stroke

STRESS TEST

How fit are you when it comes to managing stress?



Are you “stress fit”?

Find out by taking the 5-minute stress test

We all experience stress in our daily lives. Stressful situations may be as dramatic as a major change in our life, such as the death of a family member or serious problems at work, or as common as being caught in a traffic jam or having a computer break down.

At different times, and for different people, stress can manifest itself in a number of ways. You may actually experience physical symptoms such as a pounding heart, headaches or muscle tension. You may feel depressed or angry. Even your behaviour may change.

It's important to know what situations or tasks trigger your stress symptoms and how you commonly deal with these situations in your life.

Complete our 5-minute stress test

Think back over the last few weeks or months to a situation in your life that caused you stress. It could be a major change or an every-day hassle. Imagine yourself in that situation and then read the statements that follow. Each describes a possible ‘stress-coping’ strategy.

Answer True or False to whether or not you reacted in this way. Then compare your answers to those that follow this quiz.

Remember, this is not a scientific test. It's a guide you can use to see how your stress management is affecting your life.



The best coping strategies to keep ‘Stress Fit’

If you've answered in the same manner as below, you're already practicing some ‘Stress Fit’ strategies. If not, you may want to review the situations and consider alternative strategies that may help you live a healthier, more enjoyable life.

Remember, there is not single stress coping skill that will effectively help you manage your stress in all situations or all of the time. The best approach to stress management is developing a flexible set of techniques that works for you as an individual.

1. **F** – The first step to managing stress is acknowledging the need for change. Take some quiet time to try to identify the source of your stress. Continuing to deny a stressful situation can have serious long term effects on your heart health.
2. **T** – Once you've identified what causes stress in your life, it's important to find information on how to develop new skills or improve already existing ones. A certified professional can help.
3. **F** – A number of problems – an increase in heart rate and blood pressure, muscle tension, poor concentration, irritability, and sleep problems – can all be symptoms of excessive stress in your life. Don't ignore these signs – they're your body's way of telling you something's wrong. See your doctor or stress management specialist.
4. **F** – You may feel that alcohol, smoking or other substances may numb your stress and help you deal with a difficult situation. But any relief is only temporary, and this behaviour can only lead to additional problems for your physical and emotional health.
5. **T** – Setting some priorities and being flexible about things that aren't critical can help you adapt to a particularly stressful time. Learn to manage your time and set realistic deadlines. This should be part of your overall stress management plan.
6. **T** – Realize that there are equally rewarding sources of satisfaction available to you. You may want to look for inspiration in art, literature, philosophy or religion. Or simply spend time on the activities you enjoy.
7. **T** – Stressful situations often present an opportunity for you to grow in your positive emotions and attitudes. These can include the ability to see the humour in your situation, to trust in your convictions, and to develop more confidence in the people close to you.
8. **T** – Sometimes it may be necessary to re-examine your life goals to see if they still effectively reflect what you want out of your life or career. If they don't, maybe it's time to re-assess your goals and priorities.
9. **F** – When you're under pressure or stress you may be more irritable with the people closest to you. There are more positive ways of letting out the emotional and physical tension contributing to stress. Try to avoid situations that are bound to be stressful, exercise to reduce tension or temporarily remove yourself from a situation.
10. **F** – At times stress can lead to feelings of anxiety or helplessness. It's important to break the cycle of negative thoughts by looking for ways to reduce stress or cushion how much it disrupts your life.
11. **F** – Talking to others can give you a fresh perspective on a stressful situation. Plus, friends and family can provide valuable moral support when you need to feel good about yourself.
12. **T** – Sometimes it's important to get some emotional distance from your daily hassles. Take on an activity that lets you temporarily forget what's going on. Enjoy yourself.

12 quick tips for dealing with stress

Follow the "**G-E-T S-T-R-E-S-S F-I-T**" plan for a healthier, more enjoyable life. Here are 12 easy-to-remember tips on how you can bring stress fitness into your life. Keep them handy and review them often.

Give yourself a break. Go for a walk; get a good night's sleep: get away from it all.

Eat a healthy diet.

Talk it out.

Spend time with family and friends.

Take a course, for fun or self improvement.

Relax... with a good book, a great movie or your favorite music.

Exercise: walk, jog, swim, dance, go to the gym.

Set priorities.

Schedule your time.

Find alternative sources of satisfaction.

Increase your awareness of what causes you stress.

Take action! Address the person or situation that's causing your stress. And, if you're still not sure how to manage, talk to your health care professional or contact the Heart and Stroke Foundation for more information (1-888-HSF-INFO).

For more information on managing stress, visit our Web site at www.heartandstroke.ca/healthyliving.

