

Assess yourself

What's Your Stress Level?

1 The Student Stress Scale

The Student Stress Scale represents an adaptation of Holmes and Rahe's Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS). The SRRS has been modified for college students and provides a rough indication of stress levels and health consequences. In the scale, each event is given a score that represents the amount of readjustment a person must make as a result of the life change. To determine your stress score, check each event that you have experienced in the past 12 months, and then sum the number of points corresponding to each event.



1. Death of a close family member	_____	100
2. Death of a close friend	_____	73
3. Divorce between parents	_____	65
4. Jail term	_____	63
5. Major personal injury or illness	_____	63
6. Marriage	_____	58
7. Firing from a job	_____	50
8. Failure in an important course	_____	47
9. Change in health of a family member	_____	45
10. Pregnancy	_____	45
11. Sex problems	_____	44
12. Serious argument with close friend	_____	40
13. Change in financial status	_____	39
14. Change of major	_____	39
15. Trouble with parents	_____	39
16. New girlfriend or boyfriend	_____	37
17. Increase in workload at school	_____	37
18. Outstanding personal achievement	_____	36
19. First quarter/semester in school	_____	36
20. Change in living conditions	_____	31
21. Serious argument with an instructor	_____	30
22. Lower grades than expected	_____	29
23. Change in sleeping habits	_____	29
24. Change in social activities	_____	29
25. Change in eating habits	_____	28
26. Chronic car trouble	_____	26
27. Change in number of family gatherings	_____	26
28. Too many missed classes	_____	25
29. Change of college	_____	24
30. Dropping of more than one class	_____	23
31. Minor traffic violations	_____	20

Total: _____

Scoring Part 1

If your score is 300 or higher, you may be at high risk for developing a stress-related illness. If your score is between 150 and 300, you have approximately a 50-50 chance of experiencing a serious health problem within the next 2 years. If your score is below 150, you have a 1 in 3 chance of experiencing a serious health change in the next few years.

Source: Adapted from T. Holmes and R. H. Rahe, "The Social Readjustment Scale," *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 11, no. 2 (1967): 213-18. Copyright © 1967 Elsevier, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Elsevier.

2 How Do You Respond to Stress?

Read the following scenarios and choose the response that you would most likely have to these stressful events.

1. You've been waiting 20 minutes for a table in a crowded restaurant, and the hostess seats a group that arrived after you.
 - a. You yell, "Hey! I was here first" in an irritated voice to the hostess.
 - b. You say, "Excuse me" in a polite voice and inform the other group or the hostess that you were there first.
 - c. You walk out of the restaurant in disgust. Obviously the hostess was willfully ignoring you.
2. You come home to find the kitchen looking like a disaster area and your spouse/roommate lounging in front of the TV.
 - a. You pick a fight about how your spouse/roommate never does anything and always expects you to clean up after him or her.
 - b. You sit down next to your spouse/roommate and ask if he or she would take a 5-minute break from the TV show to help you clean.
 - c. You don't say anything but instead tense up and angrily start cleaning the kitchen, making as much noise as possible.
3. You have to present a paper in front of your class, and you are anxious about doing a good job.
 - a. You get flustered during the presentation and snap at your fellow classmates when they ask questions about your topic.
 - b. You ask a friend to help you practice the presentation ahead of time so you can feel confident going into class.

- c. You lose sleep worrying about the presentation, and afterward you spend the rest of the day reliving all the mistakes you made.
- 4. Your partner is seen out with another person and appears to be acting quite close to the person.
 - a. You immediately assume your partner is cheating on you. Infuriated, you launch into a stream of accusations the next time you are together.
 - b. The next time you see your partner, you calmly mention your concerns and describe your feelings, giving him or her a chance to explain the situation.
 - c. You decide your partner no longer cares about you and spend the evening reproaching yourself for being so unlovable.
- 5. You aren't able to study as much as you'd like for an exam, and when you get it back, you find that you did horribly.
 - a. You angrily bad-mouth your professor to your friends and anyone else who will listen.
 - b. You make an appointment to talk with the professor and determine what you can do to improve on the next exam.
 - c. You decide you're just crummy at the subject and don't even bother studying at all the next time.



Analyzing Part 2

If you chose mostly “a” responses, you are probably a hot reactor who responds to mildly stressful situations with a fight-or-flight adrenaline rush. Before you honk or make obscene gestures at the guy who cuts you off in traffic, remember that the only thing you’ll hasten by reacting is a decline in health. Look at ways to change your perceptions and cope more effectively.

If you chose mostly “b” responses, you are probably a cool reactor who tends to roll with the punches when a situation becomes stressful. This usually indicates a good level of coping; overall, you will suffer fewer health consequences when stressed. The key here is that you really are not stressed, and you really are calm and unworried about the situation—not just behaving as though you were.

If you chose mostly “c” responses, you have intense reactions to stress that you are prone to directing inward. This can negatively affect your health just as much as being explosive. To change your approach to stress, work on ways of building your senses of self-efficacy and self-esteem. Changing the way you think about yourself and others can help you approach stress in a more balanced and productive way.

YOUR PLAN FOR CHANGE

The **Assess yourself** activity gave you the chance to look at your stress levels and identify particular situations in your life that cause stress. Now that you are aware of these patterns, you can change behaviors that lead to increased stress.

Today, you can:

- Practice one new stress-management technique. For example, you could spend 10 minutes doing a deep-breathing exercise or find a good spot on campus to meditate.
- Buy a journal and write down stressful events or symptoms of stress that you experience. Try to focus on intense emotional experiences and explore how they affect you.

Within the next 2 weeks, you can:

- Attend a class or workshop in yoga, tai chi, qigong, meditation, or some other stress-relieving activity. Look for beginner classes offered on campus or in your community.
- Make a list of the papers, projects, and tests that you have over the coming semester and create a schedule for them. Break projects and term papers into small, manageable tasks, and try to be realistic about how much time you’ll need to get these tasks done.

PLAN

By the end of the semester, you can:

- Keep track of the money you spend and where it goes. Establish a budget and follow it for at least a month.
- Find some form of exercise you can do regularly. You may consider joining a gym or just arranging regular “walk dates” or pickup basketball games with your friends. Try to exercise at least 30 minutes every day. (See Chapter 11 for more information about physical fitness.)