

HANDOUT 17-2

Susceptibility to Stress (SUS)

How susceptible you are to stress depends upon a mix of your health behaviors, life-style, and resources for coping with stress. This test will help you determine your level of susceptibility and the factors that contribute to it. Fill in 1 (ALMOST ALWAYS) to 5 (NEVER) according to how much of the time an item is true of you.

- _____ 1. I eat at least one hot, balanced meal a day.
- _____ 2. I get 7-8 hours sleep at least 4 nights a week.
- _____ 3. I give and receive affection regularly.
- _____ 4. I have at least one relative within 50 miles on whom I can rely.
- _____ 5. I exercise to the point of perspiration at least twice a week.
- _____ 6. I avoid tobacco use (cigarettes, pipe, cigars, snuff, chewing tobacco).
- _____ 7. I consume fewer than 5 alcoholic drinks per week.
- _____ 8. I am the appropriate weight for my height.
- _____ 9. I have an income adequate to meet basic expenses.
- _____ 10. I get strength from my religious beliefs.
- _____ 11. I regularly attend club or social activities.
- _____ 12. I have a network of friends and acquaintances.
- _____ 13. I have one or more friends to confide in about personal matters.
- _____ 14. I am in good health (including eyesight, hearing, teeth).
- _____ 15. I am able to speak openly about my feelings when angry or worried.
- _____ 16. I have regular conversations with the people I live with about domestic problems (e.g., chores, money, and daily living issues).
- _____ 17. I do something for fun at least once a week.
- _____ 18. I am able to organize my time effectively.
- _____ 19. I drink fewer than 3 cups of coffee (or tea or cola drinks) per day.
- _____ 20. I take quiet time for myself during the day.
- _____ 21. I have an optimistic outlook on life.

Source: "Susceptibility to Stress" scale from the *Stress Audit*, version 5.0-OS developed by Lyle H. Miller and Alma Dell Smith. Copyright © 1987, 1994 Biobehavioral Institute of Boston, Brookline, MA 02146. Reprinted with permission.

HANDOUT 17-3

Responses to Stress

Indicate how often each of the following happens to you, either when you are experiencing stress or following exposure to a significant stressor. Use the following scale.

- 0 = never
 1 = once or twice a year
 2 = every few months
 3 = every few weeks
 4 = once or more each week
 5 = daily

Cardiovascular symptoms

- _____ Heart pounding
 _____ Heart racing or beating erratically
 _____ Cold, sweaty hands
 _____ Headaches (throbbing pain)
 _____ Subtotal

Respiratory symptoms

- _____ Rapid, erratic, or shallow breathing
 _____ Shortness of breath
 _____ Asthma attack
 _____ Difficulty in speaking because of poor breathing control
 _____ Subtotal

Gastrointestinal symptoms

- _____ Upset stomach, nausea, or vomiting
 _____ Constipation
 _____ Diarrhea
 _____ Sharp abdominal pains
 _____ Subtotal

Muscular symptoms

- _____ Headaches (steady pain)
 _____ Back or shoulder pains
 _____ Muscle tremors or hands shaking
 _____ Arthritis
 _____ Subtotal

Skin symptoms

- _____ Acne
 _____ Dandruff
 _____ Perspiration
 _____ Excessive dryness of skin or hair
 _____ Subtotal

Immunity symptoms

- _____ Allergy flare-up
 _____ Catching colds
 _____ Catching the flu
 _____ Skin rash
 _____ Subtotal

Metabolic symptoms

- _____ Increased appetite
 _____ Increased craving for tobacco or sweets
 _____ Thoughts racing or difficulty sleeping
 _____ Feelings of crawling anxiety or nervousness
 _____ Subtotal

_____ Overall symptomatic total (add all seven subtotals)

Source: Allen, R., & Hyde, D. (1980). *Investigations in stress control*. Minneapolis: Burgess. Reprinted by permission of Macmillan Publishing Company from *Investigations in stress control* by R. Allen & D. Hyde. Copyright 1980 by Macmillan Publishing Company.

Stress and Stressors

Classroom Exercise: Vulnerability to Stress

You can introduce the topic of stress with Handout 17-2, a test developed by psychologists Lyle Miller and Alma Dell Smith of Boston University Medical Center. It is designed to measure susceptibility to stress and the factors that contribute to it. To obtain their total scores, students should add the numbers they placed in front of the twenty-one items, and subtract 21. Any number over 32 indicates a susceptibility to stress. A total score between 52 and 77 suggests serious susceptibility, and over 77 means extreme susceptibility.

Classroom Exercise: Stress Symptoms

Handout 17-3, designed by Roger Allen and David Hyde, provides a good introduction to the nature of stress and the broad range of physical responses to it. Stress can arouse and motivate us to conquer problems. When it is severe or prolonged, however, it may cause mental and physical harm.

The survey in the handout is self-scoring. Total scores between 0 and 35 indicate a low level of physical stress symptoms and little danger to long-term physical health. Scores between 36 and 75 are judged to be average and are associated with an increased likelihood of psychophysiological illness. However, there may be no immediate threat to physical health. Scores between 76 and 140 suggest excessive physical stress symptoms; respondents with such high scores should probably take deliberate action to reduce their level of stress and thus to ward off the possibility of psychophysiological disorder.

Allen, R., & Hyde, D. (1980). *Investigations in stress control*. Minneapolis, MN: Burgess Publishing Co.