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Chapter 3

Manage Your Stress

Some of the secret joys of living are not found by rushing from point A to point B, but by inventing some imaginary letters along the way.

- Douglas Pagels

When I look back on all these worries, I remember the story of the old man who said on his deathbed that he had had a lot of trouble in his life, most of which had never happened.

- Winston Churchill

Stressed Out

You are exhausted. When you get home, you drop your work bag and realize you forgot to send an e-mail to your supervisor about an upcoming project. You groan as you run downstairs to your computer. The clock says 7:03 p.m. and you feel like you haven't had a minute to yourself since this morning. As you think about your day, you realize, you haven't! It is your company's busy time so the last few days have been booked with meetings and a huge project, with a Friday deadline. You send the e-mail, make a quick sandwich for dinner, and sit back down at your computer. You are hoping to get a few more things done on the project before tomorrow morning. As you work, you receive text messages from a colleague who is working on one portion of the project. You answer her texts and think about checking Facebook but decide against it as you just have too much to do. Your status update meeting is at 9 a.m. and you want to be able to show extensive progress on the project. At 10:30 p.m., you shut your computer, go to bed, and have a hard time falling asleep because you are thinking about everything you need to finish this week.

Does this sound like someone you know? Many people today are struggling with the ability to manage time with so much work to do and personal/family lives to manage. Technology has certainly made working longer hours easier, as we are always in touch with the office. What we can tend to forget is the importance of managing our stress levels so we can function more effectively. In this situation,

having no free time during the day may work for a few days but isn't a healthy long-term solution. This chapter will discuss some types of stress, the effects of stress, and what you can do to reduce stress.

3.1 Types of Stress

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Be able to define stress and the types of stress that can impact your human relations.

Stress can be challenging to explain, because it means different things to different people. For example, going swimming might be stressful to some, but for others, it might be enjoyable. Stress affects our ability to relate to others because too much stress cause us to be irritable, which affects our communication skills. We will discuss more later on the effects of stress and human relations.

Hans SelyeThe American Institute of Stress, “Stress, Definition of Stress,” accessed February 15, 2012, <http://www.stress.org/daily-life/> defined **stress**¹ as the nonspecific response of the body to a demand for a change. In 1936, Selye researched this topic and discovered something surprising. When subjecting lab animals to acute but noxious physical and emotional stimuli—such as blaring light, loud noises, extreme heat or cold, or frustration—they all experienced the same physical symptoms of stress, such as the enlargement of the adrenal glands. He saw that these intense stresses over long periods of time caused other issues such as heart attacks, strokes, and kidney disease. His conclusion was that stress actually caused these conditions,The American Institute of Stress, “Stress, Definition of Stress,” accessed February 15, 2012, <http://www.stress.org/daily-life/> not the stimuli themselves. Today, we usually define stress as the body’s way of responding to a demand. For example, if you are stuck in traffic and are going to be late for school, this may create stress. Having two tests in one day may cause stress as you try to find time to study for both. Likewise, you can feel stress in a difficult personal relationship with a family member or a significant other. Other definitions of stress include the internal reaction to a situation that could disturb a person’s well-being.

There are four types of stress. The first type of stress is called **acute stress**². This is the most common form of stress and normally comes from demands and pressures of the past and future.American Psychological Association, “Stress: The Different Kinds,” accessed February 15, 2012, <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-kinds.aspx> This kind of stress tends to be short term. For example, suppose you have a busy day. You have to drop your niece and nephew at school, stop by the post office, go to class, take a quiz, get an oil change, pick your niece and nephew up from school, drive home through traffic, and make dinner. A busy day such as this

1. The nonspecific response of the body to a demand for a change.
2. The most common form of stress and normally comes from demands and pressures of the past and future demands.

can create stress, but it is short term, because perhaps tomorrow you are less busy or are looking forward to the weekend where you don't have as much to do. Every person experiences this kind of stress. Acute stress is a laundry list of the things we must do or a list of the things that didn't go right. For example, if your car breaks down on the way to the post office, this creates a certain amount of acute stress, but once the car is fixed there is no stress associated with it.

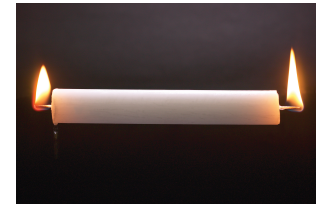
Episodic acute stress³ is a more serious form of acute stress. In this type of stress, the person feels stress on a daily basis and rarely gets relief. American Psychological Association, "Stress: The Different Kinds," accessed February 15, 2012, <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-kinds.aspx> Unlike acute stress, where there may be one or two busy, stressful days, episodic acute stress happens on a daily basis. The person who suffers from episodic acute stress feels stressed constantly with little relief. You have probably met these people. They may constantly complain about how much work they have and may be constantly late or always in a rush and may be anxious and irritable on a regular basis. Often, a person who suffers from this type of stress may have taken on too much and created self-imposed demands.

Chronic stress⁴ is the type of stress that happens month after month, year after year. This is long-term stress where people see little way out of a situation. American Psychological Association, "Stress Won't Go Away?" accessed February 15, 2012, <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/chronic-stress.aspx> Sometimes, chronic stress begins with traumatic experiences such as Post Traumatic Stress Disorder (PTSD) or childhood experiences. In others, chronic stress can occur in response to everyday stressors that are ignored or not managed well. American Psychological Association, "Understanding Chronic Stress," accessed February 15, 2012, <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/understanding-chronic-stress.aspx> For example, someone may have episodic acute stress, but over a long period of time, this can become chronic stress. With this type of stress, the person has given up looking for solutions to the stress and tends to just live with it. For example, consider a couple who is very unhappy in their relationship. While at one point in time in their relationship they may have experienced acute stress when arguing, this could have turned into episodic acute stress as the arguing occurred more frequently. Then when that type of stress was unrelieved for a long time, it became chronic stress. It becomes chronic because the couple took no steps to repair their relationship.

3. Can be a more serious form of acute stress; the person feels stress on a daily basis and rarely gets relief.

4. This is long-term stress where people see little way out of a situation.

We tend to think of all stress as negative, but as Seyle pointed out in his early research, some types of stress can actually cause us to challenge ourselves and work at a higher level. Laura Schenck, “Eustress vs Distress,” June 26, 2011, accessed February 15, 2012, <http://www.mindfulnessmuse.com/stress-reduction/eustress-vs-distress> For example, if you want to run a marathon, at some point you may have to physically challenge yourself to keep running even when you are exhausted. This type of stress—positive stress to help us achieve at a higher level—is called **eustress**⁵. It can motivate us to reach goals. For example, we may experience eustress before a job interview. This eustress can be positive if it helps us achieve success in the interview. Some people may view positive stress as negative stress and vice versa. For example, if I were told I needed to run a marathon, this would most definitely create negative stress for me. However, for others, this might be an enjoyable experience that generates eustress.



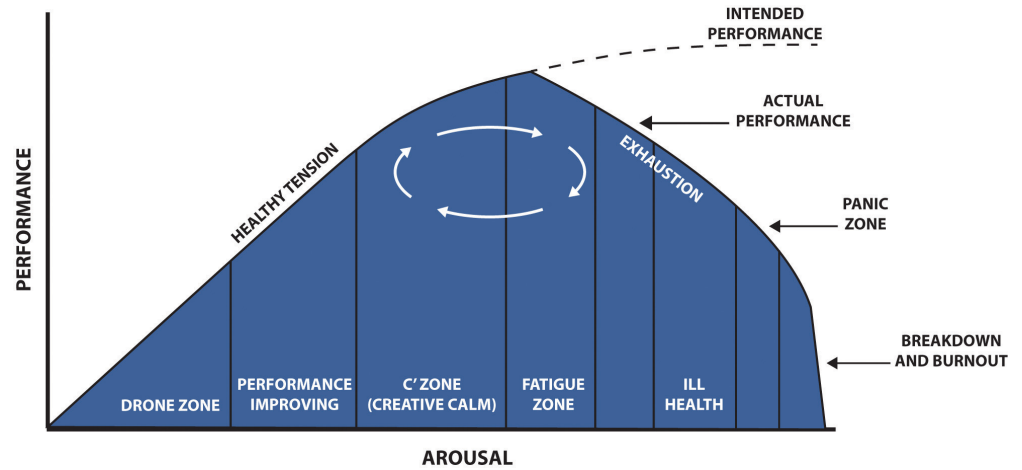
Sometimes life can make us feel as if we are burning a candle at both ends. The important thing to remember about stress is that it isn't always bad. Eustress can help us be ready for challenges.

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The Human Function Curve, originally developed by Peter Nixon, says there are different levels of stress that we may experience and our stress level affects our level of performance. He calls any state where we are awake and reacting to stimuli an arousal state, such as being at work. If we compare the amount of stress to our performance, our performance actually improves when we experience eustress. However, according to this model, there is a point where chronic stress can impede our performance. Looking at [Figure 3.1 "The Human Function Curve"](#), you can see in the drone zone, for example, that our performance is low. We may be bored and not have enough positive stress for us to perform at a higher level. In the C zone, for example, we may experience eustress, which raises our performance. However, when we reach the fatigue zone, we could be experiencing chronic stress, which impedes our performance.

5. Positive stress to help us achieve at a higher level and challenge us.

Figure 3.1 *The Human Function Curve*



As you can see, performance is actually improved with a certain amount of stress, but once that stress becomes episodic or chronic, our performance actually goes down.

Another important thing to remember about stress is that it varies from one person to another. One person may feel intense acute stress when asked to give a speech in front of the class, while someone may feel eustress if asked to give the same speech. Likewise, it may take one person much longer—and more stress than another—to reach the C zone of performance. When dealing with stress, finding the ideal stress level—the one that creates eustress and gets you ready for challenges—is the goal. Hans Selye, “The Nature of Stress,” The International Institute of Stress, accessed February 15, 2012, <http://www.icnr.com/articles/the-nature-of-stress.html>

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- *Stress* is the body's response to change. Stress is defined in many different ways and stress and the types of things that cause stress can vary from person to person. Today, we generally say that stress is the body's way of responding to a demand.
- *Acute stress* is the type of stress we experience on a day-to-day basis—for example, the stress of getting our to-do list finished or the stress of unplanned setbacks.
- When a person rarely gets relief from stress, this is called *episodic acute stress*. This type of stress usually goes on for longer periods of time with little relief.
- *Chronic stress* is characterized as long-term stress, where there is little hope for relief. These are long-term situations where the person has given up trying to find a solution.
- Not all stress is bad; some stress can actually help us to perform at a higher level and challenge us. This type of stress is called *eustress*.

EXERCISES

1. Take the quiz listed at <http://www.arc.sbc.edu/stressquiz.html> and then answer the following questions:
 - a. What was your score on the test? Do you feel this is accurate?
 - b. What are some ways you handle stress in your life? Are these methods effective? Why or why not?
2. Discuss which types of stress these situations might be:
 - a. Michael has a project due on Monday.
 - b. Tara just can't seem to like her job over the last few years.
 - c. Mika puts a lot of pressure on herself to get everything done on her to-do list every day.
 - d. Franc is nervous about his presentation in class tomorrow.
 - e. Jacob has a long list of things that are due today.
 - f. Karen has been struggling with financial issues her whole adult life.

3.2 Symptoms of Stress

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

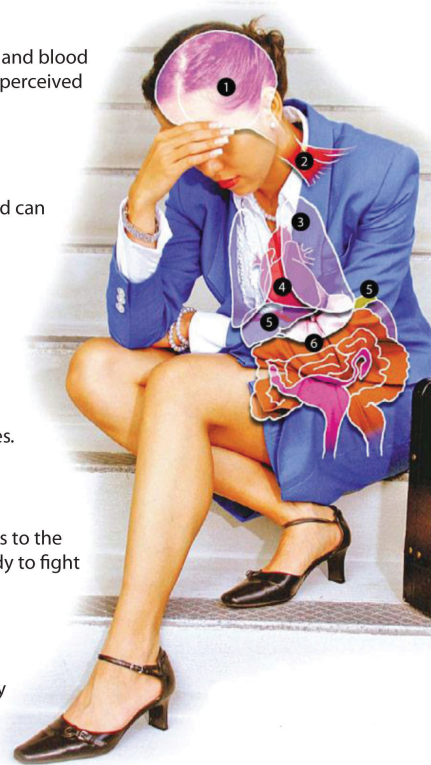
1. Be able to explain the physiological changes our body goes through when experiencing stress.
2. Identify the results when we have too much stress in our life.

Our bodies go through a number of changes when we are faced with a stressor. From prehistoric times, physical changes in our body had to occur in order to prepare us to handle the stress. For example, we needed to be able to run fast to get away from something that could hurt us or we needed the energy to obtain food. This is called the **fight or flight response**⁶. This concept was developed by Walter Cannon in the 1920s, and he believed that these reactions in the body enabled us to mobilize to deal with a stressful situation. Brian Luke Seaward, *Managing Stress: Principles and Strategies* (Jones and Bartlett Publishing), 6. More recent research has shown the addition of “freeze” to the response. This occurs when the fight or flight response didn’t work—or we were unable to react quickly enough to fight or flight, and we “play dead” or become immobilized. This response is as natural as fight or flight in our body chemistry. Consider the person attacked by a bear who plays dead and survives. The person couldn’t run (flight) and couldn’t effectively fight against the bear, so the freeze reaction (or the “do nothing,” play dead) reaction can sometimes work. We use the freeze reaction in response to stress triggers at work. For example, we can’t just leave (flight), as we typically need the job to pay our bills; it also may not be worth it to fight, so we freeze in response to the situation. Although this is an oversimplification of the body’s chemistry, it illustrates the point that the flight-fight-freeze response is actually a very prehistoric event. Today, even though our stresses may be different, our body still reacts the same way as it did in prehistoric times. To fully understand how stress impacts us, we need to understand how our bodies handles stress. When our brains initially perceive a threat, a few physiological effects, [Figure 3.2 "Physiological Effects of Stress"](#), occur within each system of our bodies.

6. Physiological reactions in the body that enable us to mobilize to deal with a stressful situation.

Figure 3.2 *Physiological Effects of Stress*

- 1 **Nervous system.** The heart may beat faster, and blood pressure rises to ready the body to fight the perceived threat.
- 2 **Musculoskeletal system.** Muscles tense and can trigger tension headaches.
- 3 **Respiratory system.** Breathing quickens.
- 4 **Cardiovascular system.** Heart rate increases.
- 5 **Endocrine system.** Signals sent from glands to the body cause a release of cortisol into the body to fight the perceived threat.
- 6 **Gastrointestinal system.** Eating habits may change, and the feeling of “butterflies” in your stomach may occur.



Physically our bodies go through various changes to prepare us for a flight or fight response.

Courtesy of The American Institute of Stress, www.stress.org.

According to a survey of the American Psychological Association, 44 percent of Americans lie awake at night because of stress. American Psychological Association, “Stress in America: Our Health at Risk,” 2011, accessed February 16, 2012, <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2011/impact.aspx> This is one example of how prolonged episodic stress can affect our personal life and our productivity at work. It is a positive thing for our body to get ready for acute stress. It prepares our body to perform at a higher level. However, long-term chronic stress or episodic acute stress can cause a variety of problems. Those problems are listed in Table 3.1 "Common Effects of Stress on Our Bodies, Moods, and Behaviors".

Table 3.1 Common Effects of Stress on Our Bodies, Moods, and Behaviors

On Your Body	On Your Mood	On Your Behavior
Headache	Anxiety	Overeating or undereating
Muscle tension or pain	Restlessness	Angry outbursts
Chest pain	Lack of motivation or focus	Drug or alcohol abuse
Fatigue	Irritability or anger	Tobacco use
Disinterest in things we normally enjoy	Sadness or depression	Social withdrawal
Stomach upset		
Sleep problems		

Source: Mayo Clinic Staff, “Stress Symptoms, Effects on Body, Feelings and Behavior,” February 19, 2011, accessed February 16, 2012, http://www.mayoclinic.com/health/stress-symptoms/SR00008_D

In the 2011 American Psychological Association Stress survey, American Psychological Association, “Stress in America: Our Health at Risk,” 2011, accessed February 16, 2012, <http://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2011/impact.aspx> 42 percent of Americans report anger as a result of stress, while 37 percent report fatigue as a result of stress. Lack of interest, motivation, and energy is reported by 35 percent of Americans. Digestion issues and changes in appetite are also reported. With these being fairly common occurrences, we can see the importance of learning how to manage stress. These symptoms can affect our ability to communicate well and be productive at work. If we do not get enough sleep, we lose interest and motivation and we are not our best at work, which can result in poor human relations with our coworkers, friends, and family. In [Section 3.3 "Sources of Stress"](#), we will look at some possible causes of stress and discuss some of the ways we can learn to better handle stress.

Why Human Relations?

Stress can shut down our ability to think rationally and feel emotions. As you know from [Chapter 2 "Achieve Personal Success"](#), these two abilities are part of emotional intelligence (self-management and self-awareness). These abilities allow us to identify and then manage our emotions. When we identify our stressor and our emotion around that stressor, we can begin to make plans on how to handle it. Without the ability to identify this emotion, we are not as well equipped to handle the emotions that may come with stress. Without these stress-management skills, we can let our stress get out of control. **When stress occurs, the shutting down of our emotions doesn't allow us to make rational decisions, nor does it allow us to be emotionally available to others.** Because of this, stress can affect our ability to communicate and work effectively with people at work. People who are stressed often are impatient, poor listeners, and may lose their sense of humor. These temporary behaviors that occur when we are stressed can impact how others see us, and how well we interact with them. Also consider the effect stress may have on our ability to manage conflict. Stresshacker, "Stress and Emotional Intelligence," 2012, accessed May 31, 2012, <http://www.stresshacker.com/2010/09/eclass-5-stress-and-emotional-intelligence/> If someone is stressed about day-to-day frustrations, such as traffic, bills, workload, and to-do lists, the stress does not allow him or her to manage conflict, as emotions are in a state of confusion. This can lead to poor decision making and thus result in the inability to interact effectively with others. Everyone has stress in both their personal and professional lives. **Learning how to manage this stress is one of the first steps in making sure we are mentally prepared to nurture our relationships at work and at home.**

Flight or Fight?

[\(click to see video\)](#)

This video illustrates how our flight or fight response is similar to that of prehistoric times.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The *flight or fight response* is our body's physiological response to perceived threats. The basic physiological function is the same today as it was in prehistoric times.
- Having too much stress can cause many issues—like headaches, sleeplessness, and irritability—that can affect our human relations ability.

EXERCISE

1. Think of a time when you felt very stressed. What kinds of physiological effects occurred? How did you handle these situations?

3.3 Sources of Stress

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

1. Explain the sources of stress we can experience, both personally and professionally.

Work Stress

As we have studied so far in this chapter, we can experience a number of possible stressors. We can divide these stressors into personal stresses and work stresses. Although we divide them for purposes of ease, it is intuitive that if someone is experiencing personal stress, he or she will also experience it at work, which will result in lessened workplace performance. In fact, the American Institute of Stress estimates that workplace stress costs companies \$300 billion annually. This cost is a result of increased absenteeism, employee turnover, and higher medical and insurance costs due to stress related illness and worker productivity. The American Institute of Stress, "Stress in the Workplace," accessed February 19, 2012, <http://www.stress.org/workplace-stress/>

According to the American Institute of Stress, The American Institute of Stress, "Stress in the Workplace," accessed February 19, 2012, <http://www.stress.org/workplace-stress/> some of the common causes of workplace stress include the following:

1. **Long hours and increased demands.** The average American works forty-six hours per week. The Library Spot, "National Sleep Foundation Study," accessed February 19, 2012, <http://www.libraryspot.com/know/workweek.htm> Much of this is due to increased technology and expectations that employees will be available to answer e-mail on weekends and evenings. As a result of this added work time, employees find less time to engage in leisure and household activities such as grocery shopping and cleaning.
2. **Being treated unfairly.** Workplace issues such as harassment and bullying (both discussed in [Chapter 10 "Manage Diversity at Work"](#)) can cause people to feel stress at work. Additional issues such as feeling overlooked for promotions can also cause workplace stress. In extreme cases, perceived workplace unfairness can result in violence. For example, Matthew Beck shot and killed four supervisors in a

Connecticut lottery office because he felt he had been unfairly overlooked for a promotion. Johnathan Rabinoviz, "Lottery Personnel Shows Lottery Killer Came Back Early from Leave," *New York Times*, March 12, 1988, accessed February 19, 2012, <http://www.nytimes.com/1998/03/12/nyregion/lottery-personnel-file-shows-killer-came-back-to-work-early-from-a-leave.html?ref=matthewbeck> Many organizations offer **Employee Assistance Programs**⁷ that can offer services, such as counseling, to help deal with workplace stress and other personal issues.

3. **Little or no acknowledgment or reward.** People can feel stress when they do not feel they are being recognized for the work they do. This kind of workplace stress can cause people to become withdrawn, unmotivated, or unfocused on being productive for the organization. This type of behavior can also materialize at home with people experiencing this stress being more irritable, cranky, and moody. At work, these feelings can negatively affect our ability to relate to our coworkers and manager.
4. **Lack of control. Micromanagement**⁸ refers to excessive control of work details by a supervisor. For example, a micromanager might tell an employee specific tasks should be worked on in a given day and give specific instructions on how those tasks should be accomplished. This type of situation can create stress, as the employee feels he or she has little control of their own work.
5. **Lack of job security.** In the last quarter of 2011 (October, November, December), 266,971 employees were subjected to mass company layoffs, The Bureau of Labor Statistics, "Economic News Release: Mass Layoffs," accessed February 19, 2012, <http://www.bls.gov/news.release/mslo.nr0.htm> and for obvious reasons, this creates stress upon the workers who had to leave and for those workers who stay. Those workers who have been laid off may experience financial hardship, and the workers who haven't been laid off may need to perform extra work and can suffer from physiological issues even if their jobs were not eliminated. This phenomenon is called **layoff survivor syndrome**⁹. JoNel Aleccia, "Guilty and Stressed, Layoff Survivors Suffers, Too," MSNBC, accessed February 19, 2012, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28196734/ns/health-behavior/t/guilty-stressed-layoff-survivors-suffer-too/> Many of the stressors caused by layoffs can include increased workloads, increased anxiety, and lower morale.
6. **Office politics.** Dealing with difficult coworkers or supervisors and different personalities ([Chapter 9 "Handle Conflict and Negotiation"](#)) and communication styles ([Chapter 4 "Communicate Effectively"](#)) can create stress at work. Conflicts, disagreements, and misunderstandings are common in today's workplace, especially with the use of

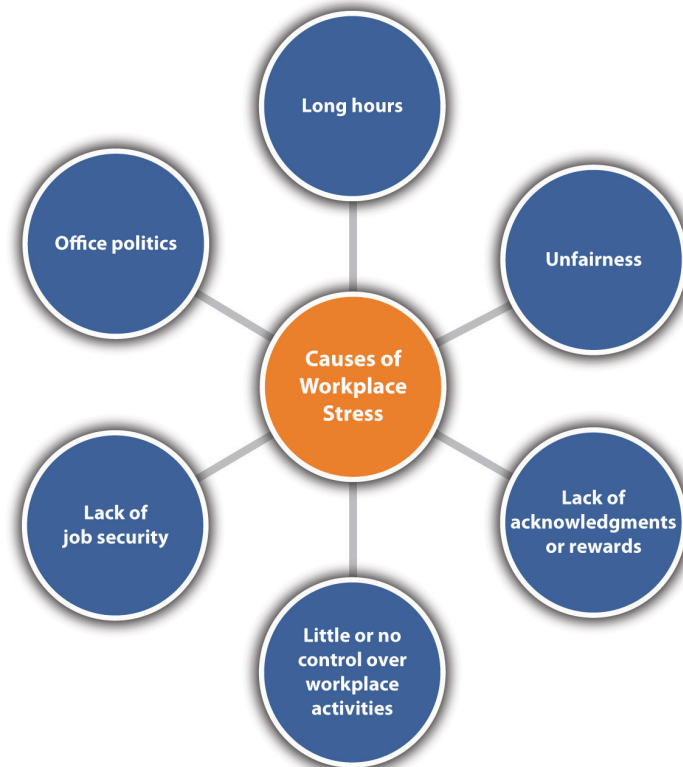
7. Programs offered by companies that provide services, such as counseling, to help deal with workplace stress and other personal issues.

8. The excessive control of work details by a supervisor.

9. The physiological issues suffered by people who stay in organizations where people around them are laid off.

technology. All of these factors, which we call office politics, can create stress, which results in lost sleep, productivity, and motivation—obviously affecting our ability to relate to others.

Figure 3.3 *Some of the Reasons Cited for Workplace Stress*

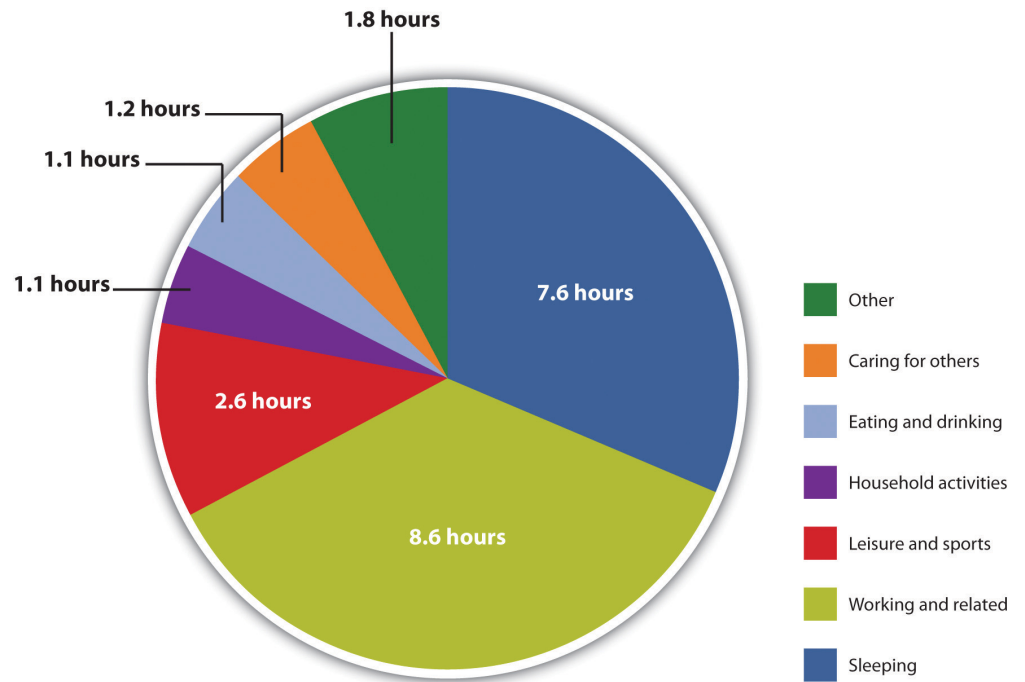


Work Stress Management

[\(click to see video\)](#)

Registered clinical psychologist Dr. Cheryl talks about some ways to manage stress at work.

Figure 3.4 Time Use on an Average Work Day for Employed Persons Ages Twenty-five to Fifty-four with Children



NOTE: Data include employed persons on days they worked, ages twenty-five to fifty-four, who lived in households with children under eighteen. Data include nonholiday weekdays and are annual averages for 2010.

Data from the Bureau of Labor Statistics shows how much time we spend at work. Since we spend more time at work than doing anything else, learning how to manage stress at work is an important part to our personal well-being and productivity.

Personal Stress

While job stress is important to consider, stresses in our personal life can cause issues in our job. In this section, we will discuss some of the major personal stressors.

1. **Everyday challenges.** Getting caught in traffic or a leaky water heater would be examples of things that cause stress in our personal lives. Luckily, most of us have the abilities to cope with these daily stresses. However, too many of these types of stressors in one day can build up and cause major issues at work or in our personal life.
2. **Personality.** Our individual personalities ([Chapter 1 "What Is Human Relations?"](#)) can impact our ability to handle stress. Research published by Meyer Freidman in the 1950s *Entrepreneurs Lounge*, "Type A Personality Traits versus Type B Personality," accessed

February 20, 2012, <http://entrepreneurslounge.org/type-a-personality-traits-vs-type-b-personality/> characterized two main personality types, type A and type B. People with a **type A personality**¹⁰ tend to be more time conscious, impatient, and preoccupied with tasks. A Type A Behavior Pattern (TABP) is characterized by impatience, aggressiveness, a sense of time urgency, and the desire to achieve recognition and advancement. People with a type A pattern may have a hyperawareness of time and, as a result, perform tasks quickly. Because of these patterns, the person with TABP may feel constantly rushed as they strive to be constantly competitive, causing stress and related health issues. Type A personalities are not viewed as a fixed trait but rather a set of predispositions that may occur in certain situations only. For example, Amiee may exhibit a type A personality at work but at home may not be as time sensitive and impatient. **Type B personalities**¹¹ are more focused on the here and now and are much more laid back. Type B personalities do not normally experience as much stress as their type A counterparts because their viewpoint on time and achievement is different.

Type A Personality and Stress

[\(click to see video\)](#)

A humorous (and exaggerated) example of stress caused by type A personality.

1. **Work-life balance.** Everyone must manage multiple roles in their life. The roles of mother or father, boss, employee, spouse, sister, or brother have their own unique demands that can create stress at home and at work. When we have challenges at work, this can affect our roles at home and vice versa. Although many organizations promote a work-life balance and create a culture that allows people to have a “home life,” easy access to send that “one last e-mail” at 9 p.m. for work creates a blurred line between home and work. This creates an even greater need for our emotional intelligence skills (self-awareness and self-management) in that we must be aware of our emotions and handle them when they come—rather than just going about our day and plowing ahead.
2. **Life changes.** There are forty-three life changes that are characterized as creating stress. These life changes are measured on a scale called life change units, created by Thomas H. Holmes and Richard Rahe. The life changes are said to cause stress in one’s personal life. However, personality type and situational factors may affect how much a particular event affects a person. For example, suppose a major life

10. Tend to be more time conscious, impatient, and preoccupied with tasks, which can result in higher stress levels.

11. A personality type characterized as more focused on the here and now and are much more laid back than type A personality.

change such as the death of a spouse occurs. This would cause an immense amount of stress, but assume the spouse was very ill for a long period of time. In this situation, the latter could have caused stress as well. So while the scale has value in terms of determining what life changes cause the most stress, it is also important to consider the other factors around the life change, along with a person’s personal coping ability.

Figure 3.5

Life Event	Value	Life Event	Value
Death of a spouse	100	Foreclosure or mortgage or loan	30
Divorce	73	Change in responsibilities at work	29
Marital separation	65	Son or daughter leaving home	29
Jail term	63	Trouble with in-laws	29
Death of a close family member	63	Outstanding personal achievement	28
Personal injury or illness	53	Spouse begins or stops work	26
Marriage	50	Begin or end school	26
Fired at work	47	Change in living conditions	25
Marital reconciliation	45	Revision of personal habits	24
Retirement	45	Trouble with boss	23
Change in health of family member	44	Change in work hours or conditions	20
Pregnancy	40	Change in residence	20
Sex difficulties	39	Change in schools	20
Gain of new family member	39	Change in recreation	19
Business readjustment	39	Change in church activities	19
Change in financial state	38	Change in social activities	18
Death of a close friend	37	Mortgage or loan of less than \$100,000	17
Change to a different line of work	36	Change in sleeping habits	16
Change in number of arguments with spouse	35	Change in number of family get-togethers	15
Home mortgage over \$100,000	31	Change in eating habits	15

Thomas H. Holmes and Richard Rahe measured personal stress by Life Change Units. According to their research, the more “major changes” one experiences, the higher chance a person will end up with a stress-induced illness. Someone with a score of 300 or more is said to be at a high risk of illness. H. Thomas Holmes and Richard H. Rahe, “The Social Readjustment Rating Scale”, *Journal of Psychosomatic Research* 11, no. 2, (August 1967): 213–18. If you look at the events of your life over the last year, what is your score?

1. **Financial issues.** Tough economic times, combined with increasing costs of fuel and other living expenses, create great stress on individuals and families. Not having enough money to buy basic needs and lacking the ability to buy the wants we have can lead to anxiety, tension, and depression. These emotions can carry over into our work

life, resulting in lowered productivity and lowered human relations with our coworkers.

2. **Friends and family issues.** Challenges with family, in-laws, and friends create a great source of stress as well. While most of us depend on friends and family for support, tension and disagreements can cause stress.

Now that we have discussed the things that cause stress, Section 3.4 "Reducing Stress" will address some ways we can relieve stress in our lives.

Stress Quiz: How Stressed Are You? Sweet Briar College, “How Stressed Are You? Quiz,” accessed June 2, 2012, <http://www.arc.sbc.edu/stressquiz.html>

Understanding your own stress level is an emotional intelligence skill (self-awareness). Take this quiz, and rate how you typically react in each of the situations listed below.

4 = Always

3 = Frequently

2 = Sometimes

1 = Never

Enter the appropriate number in the blank for each question below, and then add up your numbers to determine your stress level.

1. _____ Do you try to do as much as possible in the least amount of time?
2. _____ Do you become impatient with delays or interruptions?
3. _____ Do you always have to win at games to enjoy yourself?
4. _____ Do you find yourself speeding up the car to beat the red light?
5. _____ Are you unlikely to ask for or indicate you need help with a problem?
6. _____ Do you constantly seek the respect and admiration of others?
7. _____ Are you overly critical of the way others do their work?
8. _____ Do you have the habit of looking at your watch or clock often?
9. _____ Do you constantly strive to better your position and achievements?
10. _____ Do you spread yourself “too thin” in terms of your time?
11. _____ Do you have the habit of doing more than one thing at a time?

12. _____ Do you frequently get angry or irritable?
13. _____ Do you have little time for hobbies or time by yourself?
14. _____ Do you have a tendency to talk quickly or hasten conversations?
15. _____ Do you consider yourself hard-driving?
16. _____ Do your friends or relatives consider you hard-driving?
17. _____ Do you have a tendency to get involved in multiple projects?
18. _____ Do you have a lot of deadlines in your work?
19. _____ Do you feel vaguely guilty if you relax and do nothing during leisure?
20. _____ Do you take on too many responsibilities?

Total: _____

If your score is between 20 and 30, chances are you are nonproductive or your life lacks stimulation.

A score between 31 and 50 designates a good balance in your ability to handle and control stress.

If you tallied up a score ranging between 51 and 60, your stress level is marginal and you are bordering on being excessively tense.

If your total number of points exceeds 60, you may be a candidate for heart disease and need to immediately find ways to relieve your stress.

Source: <http://www.arc.sbc.edu/stressquiz.html>

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- Workplace stress costs companies as much as \$300 billion annually. Stress experienced at work can come from higher demands, layoffs, conflicts among coworkers, or office politics.
- Many people also can experience personal stresses, which affect workers' abilities to be productive. Personal stress can come from life changes, financial issues, family and friend issues, or our personality. *Type A personalities* tend to experience more stress as a result of their high need for achievement.

EXERCISES

1. Type A personalities tend to experience more stress than their type B personality counterpart. Take this quiz online at http://cl1.psychtests.com/take_test.php?idRegTest=2986 to see what type you fall into. How do you think your personality contributes (or not) to stress?
2. Do you agree or disagree with this statement? My personality contributes to the amount of stress I have in my life. Please explain in two to four paragraphs.

3.4 Reducing Stress

LEARNING OBJECTIVE

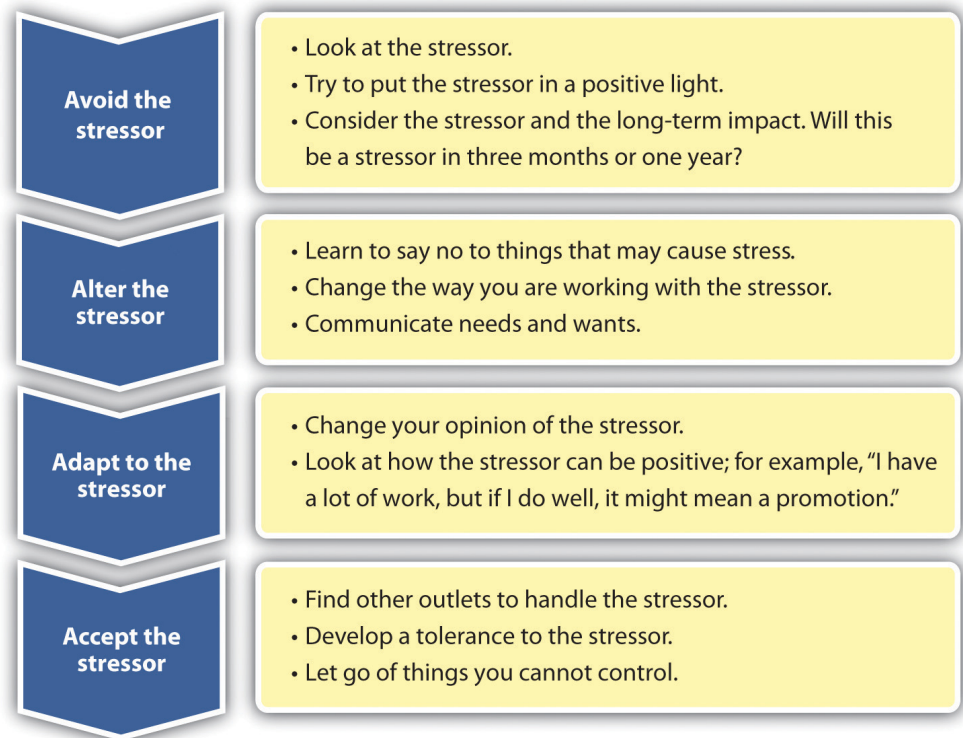
1. Explain techniques that can help us better cope with stress.

We all experience stress at one time or another. However, we can take action to assess and relieve the stress in our life. First, we do some self-analysis to determine the stressors in our life and how we handle it. This emotional intelligence skill (self-awareness) allows us to see what we need to improve upon. Then, we can apply self-management tools to help us manage the stress in our lives. The benefit of this identification and management is that it allows us to relate better to others both in our work life and personal life.

Look at your habits and emotions and really think about what is causing the stress. For example, Julie may be stressed about a project due on Friday, but the real stress may be because she procrastinated in starting the project, and now there isn't enough time to complete it. Or perhaps Gene is stressed because his personality type causes him to put too many things on his to-do list, and he isn't able to get them done. Accepting responsibility for the role we play in our own stresses can be the first step in maintaining a life with mostly positive stress!

Next, we can look at the way we currently deal with stress. For example, when Emily is feeling stressed, she smokes a pack of cigarettes and tends to have several glasses of wine at night. When she isn't stressed, she doesn't smoke and may limit herself to just one or two glasses of wine every few days. Some people smoke marijuana or use other drugs to cope with the stress of everyday life. These substances seemingly help for a period of time but prevent us from actually dealing with the stress—and doesn't help us to gain skills in self-awareness. Understanding your current coping mechanisms for stress can help you determine what works to manage stress—and what doesn't.

Figure 3.6 *The Four As for Dealing with Stress*



Once we do some self-analysis, we can use a method called the four As. The four As gives us four choices for dealing with a stressor:

1. **Avoid the stressor.** We can try to avoid situations that stress us out. If watching certain television programs causes stress, stop watching them! Spend time with people who help you relax. We can also look at saying no more often if we do not have the time necessary to complete everything we are doing.
2. **Alter the stressor.** Another option in dealing with stress is to try to alter it, if you can't avoid it. When changing a situation, you can be more assertive, manage time better, and communicate your own needs and wants better. For example, Karen can look at the things causing her stress, such as her home and school commitments; while she can't change the workload, she can examine ways to avoid a heavy workload in the future. If Karen is stressed about the amount of homework she has and the fact that she needs to clean the house, asking for help from roommates, for example, can help alter the stressor. Often this involves the ability to communicate well.
3. **Adapt to the stressor.** If you are unable to avoid or change the stressor, getting comfortable with the stressor is a way to handle it.

Creating your own coping mechanisms for the stress and learning to handle it can be an effective way to handle the stress. For example, we can try looking at stressful situations in a positive light, consider how important the stressor is in the long run, and adjust our standards of perfectionism.

4. **Accept the stressor.** Some stressors are unavoidable. We all have to go to work and manage our home life. So, learning to handle the things we cannot change by forgiving, developing tolerances, and letting go of those things we cannot control is also a way to deal with a stressor. For example, if your mother-in-law's yearly visits and criticisms cause stress, obviously you are not able to avoid or alter the stress, but you can adapt to it and accept it. Since we cannot control another person, accepting the stressor and finding ways of dealing with it can help minimize some negative effects of the stress we may experience.

When your roommate borrowed your car without asking, you need to pick up a friend from the airport, and you have friends coming over for dinner—all on the same night, finding a way to reduce stress is important. Reducing stress for every person is going to be different. Being able to recognize what helps you personally reduce stress is an important part to a healthy work and home life. For example, exercising may be a great stress reducer for Duana, but for Lisa, finding time to exercise might cause more stress than the actual exercise helps!

Researchers have found the following activities cut stress significantly: Elizabeth Sboboda, "Feeling Frazzled? 8 Ways to Decrease Stress," MSNBC, February 15, 2009, accessed February 22, 2012, <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/28719686/ns/health-behavior/t/feeling-frazzled-ways-decrease-stress/>

- Meditating
- Listening to music
- Getting enough sleep
- Drinking black tea
- Spending time with a funny friend
- Pampering, such as a massage
- Doing something spiritual
- Chewing gum

Other ways to reduce stress might include the following: Jenny Kovacs Stamos, "Blissing Out," WebMD, accessed February 22, 2012, <http://www.webmd.com/balance/stress-management/features/blissing-out-10-relaxation-techniques-reduce-stress-spot>

- Exercising
- Developing good time management skills
- Eating a healthy diet
- Organization such as keeping workspace organized
- Picturing yourself relaxed
- Breathing deeply
- Social interaction such as spending time with family and friends
- Positive thinking

As this chapter has addressed, stress can be a positive motivator in our lives, but too much stress can create human relations issues, productivity, and other serious health issues. By practicing self-awareness and then self-management, we can begin to realize those things that cause us stress and deal with them in a healthier manner.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

- The four As of stress reduction can help us reduce stress. They include: avoid, alter, adapt, and accept. By using the four As to determine the best approach to deal with a certain stressor, we can begin to have a more positive outlook on the stressor and learn to handle it better.
- There are a variety of things we can do to reduce stress. Exercise, a healthy diet, meditation, music, and social interaction can help reduce stress. Also, getting better at time management and organization can help reduce our stress.

EXERCISE

1. Of the ways to handle stress listed in this chapter, which ones do you already integrate in your life? Do you engage in other methods not listed here? Share your ideas for stress reduction in small groups.

3.5 Chapter Summary and Case

CHAPTER SUMMARY

- *Stress* is defined as the body's response to change. Stress is defined in many different ways and stress and the types of things that cause stress can vary from person to person. Today, we generally say that stress is the body's way of responding to a demand.
- *Acute stress* is the type of stress we experience on a day-to-day basis, for example, the stress of finishing our to-do list or the stress of unplanned setbacks.
- When a person rarely gets relief from stress, this is called *episodic acute stress*. This type of stress usually goes on for longer periods of time with little relief.
- *Chronic stress* is characterized as long-term stress, where there is little hope for relief. These are long-term situations where the person has given up trying to find a solution.
- Not all stress is bad; some stress can actually help us to perform at a higher level and challenge us. This type of stress is called *eustress*.
- The *flight or fight response* is our body's physiological response to perceived threats. The basic physiological function is the same today as it was in prehistoric times.
- Having too much stress can cause many issues—such as headaches, sleeplessness, and irritability—that can affect our human relations ability.
- Workplace stress costs companies as much as \$300 billion annually. Stress experienced at work can come from higher demands, layoffs, conflicts among coworkers, or office politics.
- Many people also experience personal stresses, which affect their ability to be productive at work. Personal stress can come from life changes, financial issues, family and friend issues, or our personality. *Type A personalities* tend to experience more stress as a result of their high need for achievement.
- The four As of stress reduction can help us reduce stress. They include avoid, alter, adapt, and accept. By using the four As to determine the best approach to deal with a certain stressor, we can begin to have a more positive outlook on the stressor and learn to handle it better.
- There are a variety of things we can do to reduce stress. Exercise, a healthy diet, meditation, music, and social interaction can help reduce stress. Also, getting better at time management and organization can help reduce the stress we feel.

CHAPTER CASE

Mandy feels like she can't deal with the stress anymore. First, her mother moved into her house for two months because of major home renovations. Mandy feels like her mother is constantly critical of the way she keeps her house and handles her life. While Mandy knows helping her mom for the next couple of months is the right thing to do, she can't help being annoyed. Mandy is also having trouble at her job. Her job in the medical lab is usually fun, but the organization laid off three workers recently and Mandy finds her workload has been too much to handle. It is the hospital's busy time, too, so Mandy often works late to get the work done. On top of all that, Mandy had lent her best friend, Sylvia, \$200 last month for rent, and Sylvia hasn't paid it back. Mandy not only needs the money but also feels that Sylvia was disrespectful when Mandy asked for the money back. Mandy is afraid this will affect their ten-year friendship.

1. Identify Mandy's stressors.
2. What type of stress is Mandy experiencing?
3. Using the four As model, how can Mandy go through the process to resolve her stress? Discuss in detail Mandy's options.