

# Dealing with stress and strong emotions

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Image 1. AlessandroPhoto, Getty Images.

Stress is an extreme response to pressures, demands or dangers. It can be physical, emotional or psychological.

When you are in danger, your breathing and heartbeat quicken. These changes happen to give you a better chance of either running from or fighting against the danger. When the danger ends, your body returns to its normal state.

However, these same physical reactions can also happen when there is no real danger. Sometimes just thinking about something unpleasant is enough to make you feel stressed. For example, have you ever felt nervous about going to the dentist? This kind of stress is known as psychological stress.

Past experience can shape what you see as stressful. For example, if you were once bitten by a dog, you may feel stressed when dogs are around. However, if your experiences with dogs have all been good, being around them may make you feel happy and calm.

## Major Types Of Stress

Things that cause stress are called stressors. They can be either short-term or long-term.

A short-term stressor is a situation that lasts for a limited time. The stress it causes disappears once the situation is over. For example, you might feel a great deal of stress before an important test. However, once the test is over, you feel a sense of relief.

A long-term stressor is something that causes stress over a long period of time. For example, a lack of money can cause constant worries.



There are three common types of stress.

The first is survival stress. When you are in danger, your body prepares you to deal with the danger either by fighting it or running from it. This is commonly known as the fight-or-flight response. Your body reacts to this type of stress by sharpening your sight and hearing and increasing your breathing and heartbeat.

Environmental stress is the second type of stress. It is caused by unpleasant things you run into in daily life. For example, loud noises, bright lights, crowds and automobile traffic can all cause or increase stress. They are not dangerous, but they are stressful.

The third type of stress is internal stress. This type of stress is not caused by something outside of you. Instead, it is caused by thinking about stressful situations that happened in the past or will happen in the future. For example, many people find having to give a speech to a crowd very stressful. Just thinking about it creates stress.

### **Problems Associated With Stress**

Being stressed is a good thing when you are facing immediate danger. However, the same physical reactions that are helpful in the short term can be harmful over time.

Your body releases chemicals into your bloodstream during stressful situations to briefly increase your strength or speed. These chemicals are hard on your body. Still, in brief, dangerous situations that wear on your body are worth it.

However, these same chemicals can cause serious health problems when stress is long-term. They can lead to lack of sleep and stomach aches. They also can make your body less able to fight off disease.

### **Dealing With Psychological Stress**

The best way to deal with psychological stress is to learn to control your reactions to stressful situations. With practice, you can teach yourself how to remain calm.

Slow, deep breathing is one way to reduce stress. If you feel yourself getting stressed, stop what you are doing and focus on your breathing. Try to breathe more and more slowly. Doing this will help you feel more relaxed.

Talking about whatever is worrying you is another good way to reduce stress. Try talking to a trusted friend or family member. Stress increases when you keep your worries bottled up inside.

If you cannot reduce stress on your own, talk to a therapist or school counselor. They are trained to help you deal with stress.