



1108 Airport Blvd., Ste. C  
P.O. Box 17841  
Pensacola, Florida 32522

Phone: (850) 478-8107  
Fax: (850) 478-0451

Website: [www.lsnflorida.org](http://www.lsnflorida.org)

Email: [questions@thelupussupportnetwork.org](mailto:questions@thelupussupportnetwork.org)  
Executive Dir.: [wanda@thelupussupportnetwork.org](mailto:wanda@thelupussupportnetwork.org)  
Admin. Asst.: [anna@thelupussupportnetwork.org](mailto:anna@thelupussupportnetwork.org)

**This brochure is copyrighted through the Lupus Support Network, Inc. and cannot be reproduced without written permission.**

## LUPUS SUPPORT NETWORK

Date: May 2005

### Stress Management



In this workbook, you will learn about what stress is, what it can do to you if it is left unchecked, and how you can manage it more effectively in your life. There are 33 pages in this workbook. Please proceed at a pace that is comfortable for you.

There are some interactive activities throughout this workbook that ask for your responses. Each of these activities is optional, and none of your responses will be transmitted over the internet. These activities are solely for your self-evaluation. It is recommended that you record your responses for your own reference as you proceed. This information will help you identify where you can make changes and take action towards reducing stress in your life.

## Stress Management... Next Steps

Throughout this workbook we have discussed the nature of stress, its negative effects, what makes us vulnerable, and how we can manage it better. It is now up to you to take necessary steps to help manage stress in your life. You might find you need to make some important, perhaps difficult decisions towards taking good care of yourself.

It is recommended that you review this information today, and review it again on a regular basis so you can evaluate how well you are doing.

***Thanks for your participation!***

***Good luck with managing stress!***

## Relaxation Exercise: Visualization

Visualization is a nice way of giving our minds and bodies a "mini vacation." It involves using imagery to fully immerse ourselves in a pleasant scene, noticing the sights, sounds, smells, and tactile sensations.

**Re-create a Favorite Calm Scene.** Take a deep breath. As you let it out, let your eyes close. Focus for a few moments on your breath gently coming in and going out. When you are comfortable, imagine snuggling down in a warm bed, or lying on a beach at a favorite lake, or taking a luxurious warm bath. Or, visualize another scene that is calming and peaceful for you. Notice the sounds, the smells, and other details of the surroundings as if you were actually there. Maintain the feelings of calm throughout the exercise and even afterwards in your other activities.

**Create a Feeling: Calm, Serene.** One woman helped rid herself of migraine headaches by recalling a serene grandmother. When everyone else seemed to be frantic, or when life became hectic, the grandmother remained calm. So several times a day the woman visualized her serene grandmother, and it made her feel more serene herself.

The subject of *stress* has become a common topic of conversation. We often hear friends, classmates, coworkers, and family members talk about the problems they have in managing the stresses of everyday living. We say we feel "burned out," stressed out, overwhelmed, angry, irritable, depressed, anxious, and on the verge of "losing it."

**Stress can be defined as our mental, physical, emotional, and behavioral reactions to any perceived demands or threats.**



## The "Fight or Flight" Response

When pressures seem threatening to us, our bodies react quickly to supply protection by "turning on the juices" and preparing to take action. This physiological reaction is known as the "fight or flight" response.

In the days of the cavemen, the fight or flight response was key to their survival. When faced with a threatening tiger, for instance, a caveman had two main choices. He could fight the tiger or he could run away. Either way, his body had to prepare quickly to respond. The caveman's heart began to race, his breathing rate increased, his pupils dilated, his muscles became tense, and his mind processed information rapidly. This natural response to danger helped the cavemen to protect himself and to survive.



## Relaxation Exercise: Deep Breathing

When we feel stressed, it is common for our rate of breathing to increase. We also tend to breath in a shallow manner, more highly in our chest. A deep breathing exercise allows us to take fuller, slower breaths that reflect a true relaxed state.

**Deep Breath.** Slowly take a deep breath. Hold it for a count of four. Then, gently let it all out, letting tensions go as you exhale. Our breathing becomes shallow as we become tense. A deep breath can help more oxygen enter our system, literally breathing more life into ourselves.

**Breathing Tensions Away.** Become aware of your feet and legs. As you take in a slow, deep breath, imagine pulling all the tensions in them up into your lungs and expelling these tensions as you gently exhale. Then, with a second deep breath, breathe all the tensions in your trunk, hands and arms and expel them with a gentle exhalation. Then, finish off by collecting all those in your shoulders, neck, and head. With practice, you might be able to collect tensions in your entire body in one deep inhalation and expel them. If you have special tensions in one particular spot, devote one full breath to that spot.

**Equalized Breathing.** Breathe in to a count of four and out to a count of four ("thousand 1, thousand 2, thousand 3, thousand 4"). Do that four or five times. With tenseness, our breathing can become irregular. Slowing down and equalizing our inhalations and exhalations is calming.

## Relaxation Exercises

Speaking of "learning to relax," the remaining few pages of this workshop will address relaxation skills you can use to help yourself reduce stress. It is highly recommended that you approach learning these exercises as *skills that need to be practiced and developed over time*, rather than as something you can do once in a while. Without practice, these exercises may not be as effective for you at the time you need them most!

Relaxation techniques can help reduce emotional and physical sensations of stress, as well as the worry or stressful thoughts that may accompany them. If you can learn to relax your breathing and reduce your muscle tension, your mind will follow. Conversely, if you can learn to ease stressful thoughts and worry, your body will relax as well.

While there are numerous types of relaxation exercises, we will explore two of them here:

- **Deep Breathing:** When we feel stressed, it is common for our rate of breathing to increase. We also tend to breathe in a shallow manner, more highly in our chest. A deep breathing exercise allows us to take fuller, slower breaths that reflect a true relaxed state.
- **Visualization:** Visualization is a nice way of giving our minds and bodies a "mini vacation." It involves using imagery to fully immerse ourselves in a pleasant scene, noticing the sights, sounds, smells, and tactile sensations.

## The Stress Response: An Example

A more contemporary example of a situation that invokes the stress response for many people is public speaking. This may not be a life and death situation, but many of us perceive this situation as somewhat threatening. If you find public speaking to be stressful, you might notice certain physical, behavioral, mental, and emotional responses when you have to speak in front of a group of people.

**Physically**, your heart might race, your hands become clammy or sweaty, you shake, your breathing becomes rapid and shallow, your jaw tightens, and you might become light-headed.

**Behaviorally**, you might stutter, look down, or avoid eye contact with the audience.

**Cognitively** or mentally, your mind may go blank, or alternatively your thoughts might race wildly. You might have thoughts about making a mistake or looking ridiculous in front of your peers.

**Emotionally**, you might feel very anxious or fearful.

## What Seems Stressful to You?

There are many different situations that are related to our feeling stressed. Check all of the following that apply to you.

- |   |  |   |
|---|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work/Job                   | <input type="checkbox"/> Finances        | <input type="checkbox"/> Mental health          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> School                     | <input type="checkbox"/> Grief/Loss      | <input type="checkbox"/> Spiritual/             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship with partner  | <input type="checkbox"/> Appearance      | Religious issues                                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship with family   | <input type="checkbox"/> Self-esteem     | <input type="checkbox"/> Major/Career direction |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Relationship with friend/s | <input type="checkbox"/> Physical health | <input type="checkbox"/> Natural disaster       |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Childcare                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Legal matters   | <input type="checkbox"/> Trauma                 |
|   |  | <input type="checkbox"/> Attitudes, thoughts    |

What else seems stressful to you? Write them in below.

- |                         |                         |
|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| 1. <input type="text"/> | 2. <input type="text"/> |
| 3. <input type="text"/> | 4. <input type="text"/> |
| 5. <input type="text"/> | 6. <input type="text"/> |

better prepared to manage stress and accomplish our tasks in the long run.

**7. Learn to say "no."** Learn to pick and choose which things you will say "yes" to and which things you will not. Protect yourself by not allowing yourself to take on every request or opportunity that comes your way. It is okay to decline a request for a favor. Saying "no" does not mean you are bad, self-centered, or uncaring. Learn skills of assertiveness so that you can feel more confident and have effective ways of saying "no."

**8. Get regular exercise.** Exercising regularly can help relieve some symptoms of depression and stress, and help us to maintain our health. Exercise can build confidence, self-esteem, and self-image. It is also a great way to take time for yourself, blow off steam, and release physical tension.

**9. Get a hobby, do something different.** For a balanced lifestyle, play is as important as work. Leisure activities and hobbies can be very enjoyable and inspiring, and they can offer an added sense of accomplishment to our lives. For ideas on new hobbies, browse through a bookstore or a crafts store, surf the internet, look up local organizations, see what classes or courses are available in your community or from a nearby college or university. Don't quickly dismiss new opportunities.

**10. Slow down.** Know your limits and cut down on the number of things you try to do each day, particularly if you do not have enough time for them or for yourself. Be realistic about what you can accomplish effectively each day. Also, monitor your pace. Rushing through things can lead to mistakes or poor performance. Take the time you need to do a good job. Poorly done tasks can lead to added stress.

**11. Laugh, use humor.** Do something fun and enjoyable such as seeing a funny movie, laughing with friends, reading a humorous book, or going to a comedy show.

**12. Learn to relax.** Learn some relaxation exercises such as those discussed later on in this workshop. Develop a regular relaxation routine. Try yoga, meditation, or some simple quiet time. Relaxation techniques are skills that need to be developed with patience and practice so that we can use them effectively during difficult times of stress later on.

## Suggestions for Reducing Stress

**1. Find a support system.** Find someone to talk to about your feelings and experiences. Speak to friends, family, a teacher, a minister, or a counselor. Sometimes we just need to "vent" or get something "off our chest." Expressing our feelings can be relieving, we can feel supported by others, and it can help us work out our problems.

**2. Change your attitude.** Find other ways to think about stressful situations. "Life is 10% what happens to us, and 90% how we react to it. Talk to yourself positively. Remember, "I can handle it, " "this will be over soon," or "I have handled difficult things before, and I can do it again." Also, practice acceptance. We need to learn to accept things we cannot change without trying to exert more control over them.

**3. Be realistic.** Set practical goals for dealing with situations and solving problems. Develop realistic expectations of yourself and others. Setting our expectations or goals high may seem like a useful way to push ourselves and get things done, but we may also set ourselves up for disappointment and continued stress. Find the courage to recognize your limits

**4. Get organized and take charge.** Being unorganized or engaging in poor planning often leads to frustrating or crisis situations, which most always leads to feeling stressed. Plan your time, make a schedule, establish your priorities. Do this regularly until it becomes a productive habit. Take responsibility for your life. Be proactive. Problem solve and look for solutions rather than worry.

**5. Take breaks, give yourself "me time."** Learn that taking time to yourself for rejuvenation and relaxation is just as important as giving time to other activities. At minimum, take short breaks during your busy day. You might purposely schedule time in your day planner just for yourself so that you can recharge for all the other things you need to do. Learn your "red flags" for stress, and be willing to take time to do something about it.

**6. Take good care of yourself.** Eat properly, get regular rest, keep a routine. Allow yourself to do something you enjoy each day. Paradoxically, the time we need to take care of ourselves the most, when we are stressed, is the time we do it the least. When we feel overwhelmed we tend to eat poorly, sleep less, stop exercising, and generally push ourselves harder. This can tax the immune system and cause us to become ill more easily. If we take good care of ourselves to begin with, we will be

## Stress is a Normal Part of Life

Experiencing some amount of stress in our lives is protective and adaptive. Our responses to stress help our minds and bodies to prepare for difficult challenges, and to react appropriately in a time of crisis. In fact, a certain amount of stress is necessary to help us perform at our best. Stress adds flavor, challenge and opportunity to life. Without stress, life could become quite dull and unexciting.



## Not All Stress is "Bad"

There are two types of stress...

**Distress** is a continuous experience of feeling overwhelmed, oppressed, and behind in our responsibilities. It is the all encompassing sense of being imposed upon by difficulties with no light at the end of the tunnel. Examples of distress include financial difficulties, conflicts in relationships, excessive obligations, managing a chronic illness, or experiencing a trauma.

**Eustress** is the other form of stress that is positive and beneficial. We may feel challenged, but the sources of the stress are opportunities that are meaningful to us. Eustress helps provide us with energy and motivation to meet our responsibilities and achieve our goals. Examples of eustress include graduating from college, getting married, receiving a promotion, or changing jobs.

## Suggestions for Reducing Stress

**12. Learn to relax.** Learn some relaxation exercises such as those discussed later on in this workshop. Develop a regular relaxation routine. Try yoga, meditation, or some simple quiet time. Relaxation techniques are skills that need to be developed with patience and practice so that we can use them effectively during difficult times of stress later on.



## Suggestions for Reducing Stress

**10. Slow down.** Know your limits and cut down on the number of things you try to do each day, particularly if you do not have enough time for them or for yourself. Be realistic about what you can accomplish effectively each day. Also, monitor your pace. Rushing through things can lead to mistakes or poor performance. Take the time you need to do a good job. Poorly done tasks can lead to added stress.



**11. Laugh, use humor.** Do something fun and enjoyable such as seeing a funny movie, laughing with friends, reading a humorous book, or going to a comedy show.

## What Can Lead to Stress?

Stress generally comes from four main areas...

**Environmental factors** such as excessive noise, bad weather or natural disasters, busy traffic, pollution, problems with roommates or neighbors

**Social factors** including deadlines, financial problems, group projects, disagreements, demands on time and attention, dating, balancing work and school, loss of a loved one, conflicts with family

**Physiological factors** such as adolescence, illness, accidents, lack of exercise, poor nutrition, alcohol or drug use/abuse, sleep disturbances, muscle tension, headaches, upset stomach

**Thoughts**, including our perception of events, expecting too much from others, making decisions, having a pessimistic attitude, expecting problem-free living, worrying, being perfectionistic, being competitive, being self-critical, making assumptions

## How Can Stress Affect Us?

Too much continued stress can seriously affect our physical and mental well being. It can interfere with our normal daily activities, diminish our self-esteem, impair relationships, and decrease work and academic effectiveness. Stress can lead to self-blame, self-doubt, feeling burned out, or becoming clinically anxious or depressed.

Here are some important facts about stress:

- 43% of adults experienced adverse health effects from stress
- 75-90% of visits to a physician's office are for stress-related conditions and complaints
- Stress has been linked to the 6 leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide
- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) has declared stress a hazard of the workplace
- In the workplace, stress may be related to lost hours due to absenteeism, reduced productivity, and worker's compensation benefits. This costs the American industry more than \$300 billion annually.



Source: [The Stress Solution](#) by Lyle H. Miller, Ph.D., and Alma Dell Smith, PhD.

## Suggestions for Reducing Stress

**9. Get a hobby, do something different.** For a balanced lifestyle, play is as important as work. Leisure activities and hobbies can be very enjoyable and inspiring, and they can offer an added sense of accomplishment to our lives. For ideas on new hobbies, browse through a bookstore or a crafts store, surf the internet, look up local organizations, see what classes or courses are available in your community or from a nearby college or university. Don't quickly dismiss new opportunities.



## Suggestions for Reducing Stress

**7. Learn to say "no."** Learn to pick and choose which things you will say "yes" to and which things you will not. Protect yourself by not allowing yourself to take on every request or opportunity that comes your way. It is okay to decline a request for a favor. Saying "no" does not mean you are bad, self-centered, or uncaring. Learn skills of assertiveness so that you can feel more confident and have effective ways of saying "no."



**8. Get regular exercise.** Exercising regularly can help relieve some symptoms of depression and stress, and help us to maintain our health. Exercise can build confidence, self-esteem, and self-image. It is also a great way to take time for yourself, blow off steam, and release physical tension.



## Vulnerability to Stress

Certain aspects of our habits, our lifestyles, and our environments can make each of us more or less vulnerable to the negative effects of stress. How vulnerable are YOU to stress?

For each of the following 20 items on the next page, rate how much of the time each applies to you.

## Six Important Signs of Stress

1. **MUSCLE TENSION BRACING HABITS** -- Tension in the face, neck and back is a very common indicator of stress. Another common indicator is jaw clenching which can lead to headaches, jawbone damage and teeth grinding. Shoulder, neck and back tension is very fatiguing and can be quite painful.
2. **HYPER-VIGILANT, AGGRESSIVE OVER-REACTIVITY** -- Attitudes and personality play a huge role in how stress affects you. Unrealistically high expectations and the struggle against time and other people to achieve superficial success is a serious problem. Consider setting reasonable goals and focus on quality not quantity as your measure of success. Take action to resolve conflicts and overcome obstacles.
3. **TENACIOUS BULLDOG MENTALITY** -- Knowing which battles to fight and when to let go serves as a critical survival skill.
4. **DISRUPTED BREATHING PATTERNS** -- A nice way of saying that you may be holding your breath or restricting the natural breath pattern. Every time you hear someone give a "Big Sigh of Relief," stress an indication that during the previous 5-10 seconds the stress of the situation has caused restricting or holding the breath in . . . perhaps in anticipation of some great happening or minor disaster.

## Suggestions for Reducing Stress

**5. Take breaks, give yourself "me time."** Learn that taking time to yourself for rejuvenation and relaxation is just as important as giving time to other activities. At minimum, take short breaks during your busy day. You might purposely schedule time in your day planner just for yourself so that you can recharge for all the other things you need to do. Learn your "red flags" for stress, and be willing to take time to do something about it.



**6. Take good care of yourself.** Eat properly, get regular rest, keep a routine. Allow yourself to do something you enjoy each day. Paradoxically, the time we need to take care of ourselves the most, when we are stressed, is the time we do it the least. When we feel overwhelmed we tend to eat poorly, sleep less, stop exercising, and generally push ourselves harder. This can tax the immune system and cause us to become ill more easily. If we take good care of ourselves to begin with, we will be better prepared to manage stress and accomplish our tasks in the long run.

## Suggestions for Reducing Stress

**3. Be realistic.** Set practical goals for dealing with situations and solving problems. Develop realistic expectations of yourself and others. Setting our expectations or goals high may seem like a useful way to push ourselves and get things done, but we may also set ourselves up for disappointment and continued stress. Find the courage to recognize your limits



**4. Get organized and take charge.** Being unorganized or engaging in poor planning often leads to frustration or crisis situations, which most always leads to feeling stressed. Plan your time, make a schedule, establish your priorities. Do this regularly until it becomes a productive habit. Take responsibility for your life. Be proactive. Problem solve and look for solutions rather than worry.

## Six Important Signs of Stress (continued)

Other people may "hyperventilate." Listen and watch closely for these signs of distress in disrupted breathing habits.

5. **COLD, SWEATY HANDS**-- when you shake hands with people in a greeting or farewell, you have a very direct indication of that person's emotional state at that moment. Hands should be warm and dry when in a comfortable, relaxed state. (When you crawl out of bed in the morning, check you hands and note how comfortably warm and dry they can be). If the other person's hand feels cold and/or damp when you shake hands, then you probably are a great deal more "at ease" than he or she is.
6. **NEGATIVE SELF-TALK** --This Is just a nice way of saying, "You have been stinking thinking again, dummy!" These are self-defeating statements about how bad I'm going to do or how things never seem to work out right. They can cause serious physical disruption in your body if you allow them to ruminate obsessively In your mind. For chronic worry, use the following **REALITY TEST**: "If you can live with the worst possible outcome, then it is not worth worrying about."

- |   |
|---|
|   |
| 1. I eat at least one hot, balanced meal a day.                                     |
| 2. I get 7-8 hours of sleep, at least 4 nights a week.                              |
| 3. I give and receive affection regularly.  |
| 4. I have at least 1 relative within 50 miles on whom I can rely.                   |
| 5. I exercise to the point of perspiration at least twice a week.                   |
| 6. I smoke less than half a pack of cigarettes a day (non-smokers = almost always). |
|   |
| 7. I drink fewer than 5 alcoholic drinks a week. (non-drinkers = almost always).    |
| 8. I am the appropriate weight for my height.                                       |
| 9. I have an income adequate to meet my basic needs.                                |
| 10. I get strength from my religious/spiritual beliefs.                             |
| 11. I regularly attend club or social activities.                                   |
| 12. I have a network of friends and acquaintances.                                  |
| 13. I have at least 1 friend in whom I confide about personal matters.              |
| 14. I am in good health (including eyesight, hearing, teeth, etc.).                 |

## Suggestions for Reducing Stress

**1. Find a support system.** Find someone to talk to about your feelings and experiences. Speak to friends, family, a teacher, a minister, or a counselor. Sometimes we just need to "vent" or get something "off our chest." Expressing our feelings can be relieving, we can feel supported by others, and it can help us work out our problems.



**2. Change your attitude.** Find other ways to think about stressful situations. "Life is 10% what happens to us, and 90% how we react to it." Talk to yourself positively. Remember, "I can handle it," "this will be over soon," or "I have handled difficult things before, and I can do it again." Also, practice acceptance. We need to learn to accept things we cannot change without trying to exert more control over them.



### Calculate Your Score

To calculate your score give yourself the following:

Almost Always = 0

Usually = 1

Sometimes = 2

Almost Never = 3

Never = 4

Total the numbers to calculate your score.

You received a score of

What your score means:

0 - 10	indicates you have excellent resistance to the vulnerability of stress
11 - 29	little vulnerability to stress
30 - 49	some vulnerability to stress
50 - 74	serious vulnerability
75 - 80	extreme vulnerability

Source: University of California, Berkeley Wellness Letter, August, 1985. Scale Developers: Lyle Miller, Ph.D. and Alma Dell Smith, Ph.D. of Boston University Medical Center.

### Some Stress Warning Signals (continued)

#### Emotional Symptoms

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> bothered by unimportant things | <input type="checkbox"/> crying easily           |
| <input type="checkbox"/> nervousness, anxiety           | <input type="checkbox"/> overwhelming pressure   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> boredom                        | <input type="checkbox"/> anger                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> edginess                       | <input type="checkbox"/> loneliness              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> irritable                      | <input type="checkbox"/> unhappiness, depression |
| <input type="checkbox"/> feeling "burned out"           | <input type="checkbox"/> "moodiness"             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> feeling powerless              | <input type="checkbox"/> feeling helpless        |

## Some Stress Warning Signals

Here is a list of some, but not all, possible reactions to stress. Check all of the symptoms you experience when you feel stressed. Notice that symptoms of stress can affect us physically, behaviorally, emotionally, and cognitively. You can learn to recognize these symptoms or signals in yourself before stress gets too far out of hand. When you recognize your unique signals, that's the time to take action... ideas for which are coming up!

### Physical Symptoms

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> headaches        | <input type="checkbox"/> back pain             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> indigestion      | <input type="checkbox"/> tight neck, shoulders |
| <input type="checkbox"/> stomach aches    | <input type="checkbox"/> racing heart          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sweaty palms     | <input type="checkbox"/> shallow breathing     |
| <input type="checkbox"/> cold hands, feet | <input type="checkbox"/> restlessness          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> dizziness        | <input type="checkbox"/> ringing in the ears   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> easily fatigued  | <input type="checkbox"/> constipation          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> muscle tension   | <input type="checkbox"/> diarrhea              |

### Behavioral Symptoms

- |  |  |
|--|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> excess smoking                  | <input type="checkbox"/> driving too fast          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> bossiness                       | <input type="checkbox"/> grinding of teeth         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> eating too little or too much   | <input type="checkbox"/> overuse of alcohol        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> critical attitude of others     | <input type="checkbox"/> inability to finish tasks |
| <input type="checkbox"/> short-tempered                  | <input type="checkbox"/> nail biting               |
| <input type="checkbox"/> procrastination                 | <input type="checkbox"/> fidgety                   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> sleeping too much or too little |  |

## Why Do We "Stress Out"?

Essentially, we stress out for two main reasons...

1. We *perceive* a situation as dangerous, difficult, or painful.
2. We don't believe we have the *resources* to cope.

## Our Perceptions = How Stressed We Feel

We often identify specific events, people, or situations that seem to make us feel stressed. It's as if these things automatically cause us feel stressed out. In reality, it's how we perceive an event, the meaning we give to it, that leads us to feel stressed or not stressed about it.

***The interesting thing about stress is that it begins with our own perceptions of things!***

Have you ever noticed that some people can feel quite stressed out about a particular event while others don't seem to be bothered by it at all? For instance, if three of your friends all get a poor grade on a test, you might notice some different reactions. One friend may seem mildly annoyed for an hour or so. Another friend doesn't seem to be bothered at all. The third friend, however, might become quite alarmed by this poor grade. She can't get it off her mind, she vows to study three times as hard next time, she can't concentrate on her other work, and she might even find it difficult to fall asleep that evening. She might become increasingly concerned about all the grades she'll make this semester, and wonder whether her GPA will suffer.

In a case such as this, a poor grade on a test *means* something different for each of your friends. The same situation has happened to all three, but each person feels more or less stressed about it because of what it means to him or her.

## Some Stress Warning Signals

What are your "red flags," or warning signs, that stress is creeping into your life? We pay a lot of attention to things in the outer world that are related to stress such as financial difficulties, conflicts in relationships, and overwhelming responsibilities. We tend NOT to pay enough attention to our inner worlds, the signals that stress is starting to take its toll on us. Interestingly, we are often quite good at ignoring those internal signals and pushing ourselves even harder. If we keep pushing ourselves, eventually something inside of us will send "red flags," or warning signs that stress is becoming a problem.

Take a look at the following page of stress symptoms and check off all the ones that you experience when you feel stressed out.

