

What is stress and what can I do about it?

What is stress?

Stress is a term used to describe the wear and tear the body experiences in reaction to everyday tensions and pressures. Change, illness, injury, or career and lifestyle changes, are common causes of stress. However, it's the pressure and tension we feel in response to the little everyday hassles—like rush hour traffic, waiting in line, and too many emails—that do the most damage.

Stress is the body and the mind's response to any pressure that disrupts its normal balance. It occurs when our perception of events doesn't meet our expectations and we are unable to manage our reaction. As a response, stress expresses itself as resistance, tension, strain or frustration that throws off our physiological and psychological equilibrium, keeping us out of sync. If our equilibrium is disturbed for long, the stress can become disabling.

Stress is often misunderstood. We look at outside events as the source of stress, but in fact stress is really caused by our emotional reactions to events. The stress we experience in today's world often goes unnoticed. Many people have simply adapted to stress in an unhealthy way, resigned to thinking it's "just the way it is".

What can I do about it?

The first step is to understand how stress works. It's not the events or situations that do the harm. It's how you respond to those events. More precisely, it's how

you feel about them that determines whether you become stressed or not.

Emotions, or feelings, have a powerful impact on the human body. Emotions like frustration, insecurity, and depressing feelings are stressful and inhibit optimal health. Positive emotions like appreciation, care, and love not only feel good, they also promote health, performance, and well-being.

Research has shown when you learn how to intentionally shift to a positive emotion, heart rhythms immediately change. A shift in heart rhythms may not seem important but in fact it creates a favorable cascade of neutral, hormonal, and biochemical events that benefit the entire body. The stress-reducing effects are both immediate and long lasting.

How stressed are you?

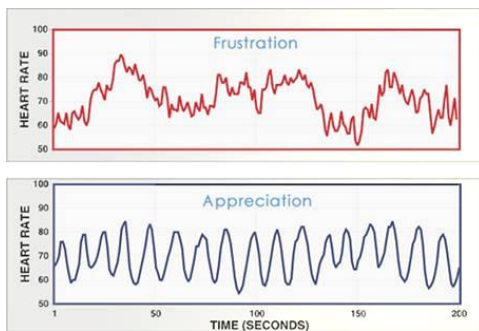
Everyone responds to stress differently. Take this quick test to see if there are areas in your life where you are experiencing stress:

- *I feel overly tired or fatigued.*
- *I often am nervous, anxious, or depressed.*
- *I feel driven, hyperactive, and restless.*
- *I tend to make snap decisions but with errors.*
- *I have sleep problems.*
- *I have repeated headaches or minor aches and pains.*
- *I worry about job security, financial obligations, or relationships.*

How does the emWave PC work?

It's like a mirror of your emotional state, and this real-time feedback enables you to more effectively manage your levels of stress and negative emotions.

When you're stressed, your body is out of sync. Typical negative emotions we feel when stressed—like anger, frustration, anxiety, and worry—lead to increased disorder in the heart's rhythms and in the nervous system. In contrast, positive emotions like joy, appreciation, care, and kindness create harmony in the heart's rhythms and the nervous system. Other bodily systems sync up to this rhythm which scientists call coherence. Because coherence leads to more mental clarity, creativity, and better problem solving abilities, it's easier to find solutions and better ways of handling the stressful situation—and, feel better.



Frequently Asked Questions

Some people seem to thrive on stress and think stress is good because it motivates us. What are your thoughts on this?

Stress can be a motivator, up to a point. Without challenges we wouldn't grow, learn new things or reach beyond our limits and comfort zones. However, studies have clearly shown that at a certain point—long before most people

realize it—stress begins to diminish our performance and negatively impact our health. Statistics clearly show that chronic stress—not the everyday stress associated with motivating us to meet a challenge—has become highly prevalent throughout the world.

When using the emWave PC program how will I know it's working?

As you learn how to become more coherent you'll feel better right away. That's because when you're stressed, your body is out of sync. Typical negative emotions we feel when stressed lead to increased disorder and we can certainly feel that. In contrast, positive emotions create harmony in the heart's rhythms and the nervous system and when that happens, it's easy to tell the difference. You can feel the stress going away, being replaced with a more calm and clear state.

Immediate Benefits of emWave

You will learn how to intentionally shift to a positive emotional state and will be able to see the changes in your heart rhythms immediately on the computer screen. These shifts in your heart rhythms create a favorable cascade of neural, hormonal and biochemical events that benefit the entire body and mind. Blood pressure drops. Stress hormones plummet. The immune system pumps up. Anti-aging hormones increase. You gain clarity, calmness, and control. The effects are both immediate and long lasting.

If you would like to make an appointment to learn how to use the emWave program, please call Western Carolina's Counseling & Psychological Services Center. (828)227-7469.

Handout materials developed from <http://www.heartmath.com/>