

Stress

The word stress has gotten a bad rap in our society. At first glance, this negative connotation is well deserved. In the most recent American College Health Association survey administered at Messiah College, 54% of students reported “more than average” or “tremendous” stress. Furthermore, 26% of students said that stress has negatively affected their academic performance. Obviously, students are not the only individuals who experience stress. A recent article published on healthline.com mentioned that stress related illnesses result in over \$300 billion of medical expenses annually. This leaves us asking a few questions:

1. What is stress?
2. Is all stress bad?
3. Is there anything I can do alleviate stress?

What is stress?

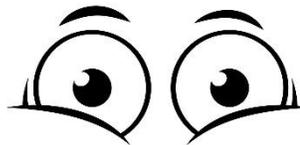
Stress is your body’s natural reaction, its stress response, to a perceived or real threat.

Your body prepares to “fight” the threat, or take “flight” away from the threat.

The stress response triggers a number of physiological reactions.



Your Body’s Stress Response

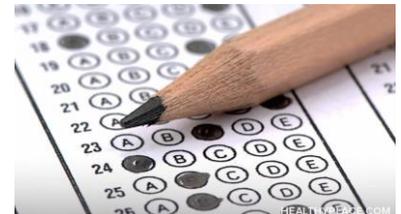


The stress response leads to an increase in heart rate, blood pressure, blood flow to the muscles, breathing rate, and dilation of the pupils, an increase in blood glucose (fuel), and more!

Is all stress bad?

Based on the above symptoms stress is amazing if you need to take flight or fight! Remember, we are fearfully and wonderfully made!

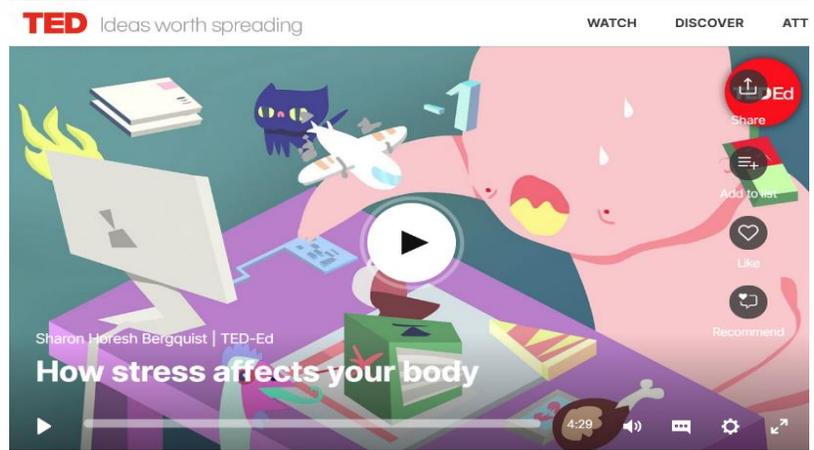
Stress can become an issue when it turns chronic, or a regular response, to all sorts of stimuli – especially when the stimuli do not present an immediate life or death threat.



Public speaking, test taking, and getting stuck in traffic all can lead to a stress response, but in most cases there is no actual danger.

When the Stress Response Becomes Chronic

Negative stress can happen when we treat non-threatening situations similar to threatening ones. Our bodies respond to taking a test or getting stuck in traffic like we are being chased by a grizzly bear. If it happens once in a while, this reaction is not an issue. Things get dicey when our bodies trigger the stress response over and over again. The video to the right explains how this is less than ideal.



Practical Steps: What to do when your body is reacting to a situation like there is a grizzly bear chasing you?

The 5-4-3-2-1 Coping Technique

Ease your state of mind in stressful moments.

Acknowledge **5** things that you can see around you.



Acknowledge **4** things that you can touch around you.



Acknowledge **3** things that you can hear around you.



Acknowledge **1** thing that you can taste around you.

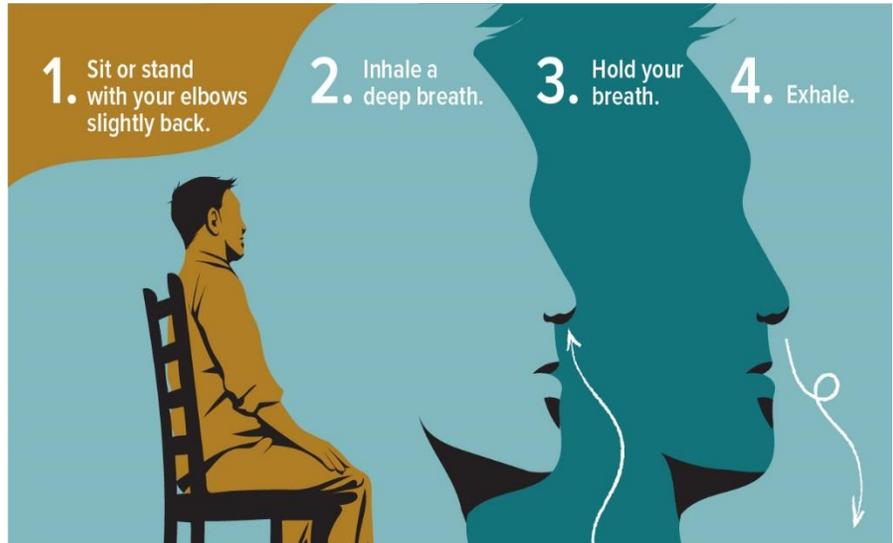


Acknowledge **2** things that you can smell around you.



Focus on what is around you. What can you see, touch, hear, smell, and/or taste? As we focus on these things, our body is distracted from the stress response. Areas of your brain unrelated to stress become engaged, and the areas that control stress calm down.

Breathe deeply! Taking a couple of seconds to realize your body is reacting to a non-threatening situation, like taking a test, the same way it would react to a threatening one, like running away from a bear, and take some deep breaths. Focus on feeling the air fill and leave your body.



Join us Wednesday (January 15th) from 4-6p, outside the fitness center, to make your own stress ball for free!