

# Fitness and Nutrition : Stress Management Techniques

## Lesson 6 Overview

Stress is a part of day-to-day living. Everyone has it from time to time, and everyone has to deal with it. Many people become stressed due to external events. However, when you think about it, events in themselves aren't stressful. Rather, it's the way in which we interpret and react to them that makes them stressful. People differ dramatically in the types of events they interpret as stressful and the way in which they respond to such stress.

In this lesson, you'll investigate the phenomenon of stress, how stress impacts people physically and mentally, and the various techniques people can use to handle stress to their advantage.

## 6.1 Describe how stress affects the body

### Introduction to Stress Management

#### READING ASSIGNMENT

### The Good and the Bad

Stress is a natural part of our everyday lives. Believe it or not, we actually need a small amount of certain types of stress. Necessary stress is called *eustress*.

*Eustress* is a term coined by Hans Selye, who wanted to differentiate between the two types of stress. The prefix eu- means good; eustress refers to good stress.

Eustress keeps us alert and helps us face life's challenges, such as finding a new route to work or school or getting to the movies on time. Eustress can sometimes result in improved performance.

The "bad" type of stress, or *distress*, results when we physically and mentally overreact to events. Distress can cause depression, hypertension, headaches, and gastrointestinal

problems, such as diarrhea and nausea. Eating, smoking, and substance abuse issues can arise as a result of distress. To reduce distress, we need to learn to approach the events of daily life in a realistic and reasonable way.

If we view things as manageable, our bodies won't overreact or react in a negative way. Savvy business managers tell their employees, "There are no problems, just opportunities." This is the manager's way of creating eustress rather than distress. Try it sometime—it can work!



[Woman in Helmet]

*Eustress keeps us alert and helps us face everyday challenges, like getting to work on time.*

What are some of the common signs of distress? Mental symptoms of distress can include anxiety and moodiness, feeling scared or apprehensive about the present or the future, and sleeping problems. Physical signs can include teeth grinding, elevated blood pressure, headaches, loss of or increased appetite, gastrointestinal upset, back and neck pain, and a lowered resistance to disease (for example, frequent colds).

From a healthcare standpoint, distress can harm both your mental and physical health. Stress is a physical and mental response to things in the environment that cause discomfort. Anything that produces stress is called a *stressor*. For example, if you're driving down the highway with your windows open and you see a patch of grass on fire along the side of the road, you'll probably roll up your windows and increase your speed. The fire was the stressor, and rolling up the windows and increasing speed was your response to stress.

As you know, there are many sources of stress in everyday life. Some cause eustress, and some cause distress. Traffic, pressure at work, the World Series, misplacing your keys,

interpersonal relationships, taxes, homework, and a long line at the market are just some examples of circumstances that can cause stress. How you react to these stresses can affect your physical and mental health.

Hans Selye was one of the first scientists to study how the human body links stress and disease. Selye developed a three-stage reaction model to explain the relationship between stress and disease.

The first stage of the body's reaction to stress, the *alarm stage*, involves many physiologic responses, including increased heart rate and blood pressure; the release of stress hormones, such as epinephrine; and increased muscle tension. These physiologic responses can result in headaches, anxiety, and changes in eating and sleeping patterns. The alarm stage seems to make people more likely to get sick, possibly due to a depressed immune system, and to get into more accidents, possibly due to a lack of concentration.



[Woman with Headache Pain]

*The alarm stage of the stress reaction model involves many physiological responses, including headaches and increased muscle tension.*

The second stage, the *resistance stage*, is when the body tries to oppose the stress. This could also be called the “coping” phase, and it can be a positive time, depending on the stressor. For example, a promotion at work can produce eustress. This stress could result in the person acquiring more knowledge or feeling more confident. In contrast, a cut in hours at work can cause distress, with no positive outcomes.

If stress continues, the third stage, the *exhaustion stage*, kicks in. At this stage, the body

becomes very susceptible to disease, because it seems to lose its ability to respond to any new stress. All the body's systems, including the cardiorespiratory, endocrine, and immune systems, have been "stretched" to their limits in an attempt to handle stressors and are fatigued. This means that prolonged stress can lead to heart and lung disease, increase symptoms of kidney disease or diabetes, prolong a cold or flu, or make you susceptible to every infectious disease that comes through the air.

Prolonged stress can adversely affect a person's ability to learn, to make decisions, to interact with people, and to exercise. Prolonged distress is an overall bad thing, and the human body and mind aren't meant to handle it. Current studies show that at least 15 to 20 percent of North American adults may be functioning below their potential due to prolonged distress.

## **The 10 Commandments of Stress Management**

The 10 rules for handling stress are based on those promoted by the student wellness center at the University of North Carolina:

1. Get organized. By organizing your life, you're taking control of the way you spend time and energy.
2. Control your environment by controlling your surroundings.
3. Like yourself. Liking yourself involves giving yourself positive feedback and support.
4. Reward yourself by planning leisure activities. Such activities help you look forward to the near future.
5. Exercise a minimum of three days per week for 15 to 30 minutes. Any exercise, including walking, jogging, cycling, or swimming, is great.
6. Relax and take your mind off stress. Visualization and meditation are important when it comes to relaxation.
7. You require rest. At least seven to eight hours of rest per night is needed to remain healthy. Resting doesn't mean only sleep; it also includes breaks. It's good if you take a 10-minute break every hour during work.
8. Be aware of yourself in terms of physical health. Any signs of distress, such as headaches and insomnia, should get immediate attention.
9. Don't poison your body with drugs, cigarettes, or alcohol.
10. Enjoy yourself and don't get too caught up in your stress. Happier people tend to live

longer, feel better, and be more productive.

## **Key Points and Links**

### READING ASSIGNMENT

## **Key Points**

- Stress is a physical and mental response to things in the environment that cause discomfort.
- Stress doesn't have to be bad. Eustress motivates toward positive change.
- People react to stress in various ways, which can affect the functioning of body systems.
- Ways to manage stress include getting organized and getting enough rest.

## **Links**

- [American Psychological Association](http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-body.aspx) (www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-body.aspx)

## **Exercise: The Good and the Bad**

**Based on what you've read, answer the following questions.**

1. What's the difference between eustress and distress?
2. What happens to the body if stress continues over a long period of time?

## **Exercise Answer Key:**

### **Exercise: The Good and the Bad**

1. Eustress keeps us alert and helps us face challenges, such as finding a new route to work or school or getting to the movies on time. Eustress can sometimes actually result in improved performance. The "bad" type of stress, or distress, results when we physically and mentally overreact to events.
2. If stress continues, the third stage, the exhaustion stage, kicks in. At this stage, the body becomes very susceptible to disease, because it seems to lose its ability to respond to any new stress. All the body's systems, including the

cardiorespiratory, endocrine, and immune systems, have been “stretched” to their limits attempting to handle stressors and are fatigued. Prolonged stress can lead to heart and lung disease, increase symptoms of kidney disease or diabetes, prolong a cold or flu, or make you susceptible to every infectious disease that comes through the air. Prolonged stress can adversely affect a person’s ability to learn, make decisions, interact with people, and exercise. Prolonged distress is a bad thing, and the human body and mind aren’t meant to handle it.

## 6.2 Determine techniques for reducing stress

### Cope and Conquer

#### READING ASSIGNMENT

So how can you begin to cope with stress? The first step is to identify how you react to stress (for the remainder of this lesson, we’ll combine the terms *eustress* and *distress* into the term *stress*). Stress can cause a variety of symptoms. The following are just a few of the many symptoms associated with stress: rashes, headaches, insomnia, stiff neck, feeling overwhelmed, elevated blood pressure, grinding your teeth, chewing your hair, and so on. The following box identifies additional symptoms of stress.

Physical Symptoms of Stress			
Hypertension	Headaches	Hyperactivity	Indigestion
Diarrhea	Insomnia	Dysmenorrhea	Neck and back pain
Chronic illness	Sexual problems	Stomach upset	Hives
Ulcers	Fatigue	Rashes	Depression/anxiety
Substance abuse	Smoking	Irritable bowel syndrome	

Even if you don’t think you have any of the symptoms of stress, it’s important to ask yourself the following questions:

- Do I have trouble falling or staying asleep?
- Am I constantly worrying about the future?

- Do I have trouble finding time to have fun and enjoy myself?
- Is it common for me to feel pressured to do more things than I have time for?

The first step in handling stress is becoming aware of your reactions to stress. Remember that stress can emerge not only from negative events (such as doing poorly on a test or having an argument with a partner), but also from positive events like graduations, weddings, or holidays. The list of stressful situations could go on and on, but the questions posed earlier are some of the basic questions to ask yourself so that you can catch stress before it catches you. Recognize these as signs of stress, even from “happy” events.

## **STRESS TEST**

Which of the following statements do you feel apply to you? Try to figure out a stress-reduction technique for each area that applies.

1. I feel trapped all the time. I never get to do anything I like.
2. It's very hard for me to feel satisfied on a daily basis.
3. I don't really think I can trust my friends or family.
4. I'm anxious all the time.
5. I really don't look forward to parties or gatherings anymore.
6. I don't seem to get along with anyone anymore.
7. I can't handle even minor disappointments anymore.
8. I don't think I'm as good as everyone else I work with.

## **Stress Management Guidelines**



[Group of Friends]

*A good way to reduce stress is  
to surround yourself with*

*individuals whose company you enjoy.*

So now that you recognize stress, how will you handle it? You can do a number of things to manage stress. First, it's important to stay physically healthy. Keeping physically fit means exercising regularly, maintaining a healthy diet, and getting enough sleep. It's also important to recognize that no one is perfect, and, therefore, instead of trying to be perfect, aim at trying your best. You should also include fun activities in your life; you know the old adage: "All work and no play makes Jack a dull boy." Who wants to be a stressed-out, dull Jack?

The following are some stress management guidelines suggested by the Berkeley University Wellness Center:

1. **Look around.** Look for strategies that can change a situation for you and for people who make you feel more relaxed. For example, if a particular type of music helps you to relax in just about any situation, have that music available during stressful situations. If you really enjoy speaking with a particular person at work or school, take five minutes to speak with that person when you're having a "bad" day.
2. **Learn how to relax.** Meditation and breathing exercises have proven successful in reducing stress. You'll learn more about that later in this lesson.
3. **Remove yourself from the stressful environment.** If being on hold for 10 minutes is making you angrier and angrier, hang up and try again later.
4. **Don't sweat the small stuff.** Ask yourself, is this really worth getting a headache over?
5. **Set realistic goals.** If a goal is unrealistic, you might become depressed when it can't be reached. An unreachable goal might cause stress, which puts you right back where you started.
6. **Don't overwhelm yourself.** Make lists and honestly decide what you can and can't accomplish in one hour, one day, one week, one month, and one year
7. **Selectively change the way you react.** An old-time diplomat recalled that every negotiation he had with a certain ambassador began with the ambassador yelling "impossible!" If you've gotten into the habit of yelling "impossible!" reexamine your response to fellow workers, students, family members, or friends. Perhaps "possible!" could be a new addition to your vocabulary.
8. **Change the way you see things.** Is the glass truly half empty? If it is, there must be a reason why that's a good thing!



9. **Avoid extreme reactions.** Yelling and screaming and turning purple puts on a good show for other people, but it only punishes your heart and nervous system. Ever notice children after a temper tantrum? They need a nap, a snack, and a comforting toy to recover. You don't have time for the recovery, and your body is probably pretty worn out from trying to recover.
10. **Do something for others.** This gets your mind off your own troubles.
11. **Get enough sleep.** Aim for at least six to eight hours on most nights.
12. **Work off stress by exercising.** More about this later in the unit.
13. **Avoid self-medication or substance abuse.** The stressors will still be there when the substances wear off.
14. **Develop a thick skin.** The bottom line of stress management is "I won't allow myself to get upset or stressed out."
15. **Try to "use" stress.** When you can't get away from it, flow with your stress and see where it leads you or try to use it productively. "Use" your stress to take a really fast walk, clean your office or living room, dash off some overdue letters (just reread them before you send them), or treat yourself to a break time.

## STRESS REDUCTION ASSIGNMENT

One key stress management technique is to learn to relax. Consider the following on how to "schedule" your stress away.

1. **Talk it out.** If you hold everything in, you'll explode! Speak with friends, family, clergy, healthcare professionals, or people you trust to provide support and helpful feedback.
2. **Escape.** Sometimes even a five-minute walk will bring everything into perspective.
3. **Work it off.** You'd be surprised how great your desk will look after you vent your anger on your work rather than on a coworker.
4. **Yield.** If possible, give in a little to relieve some of your own stress (but only if it's appropriate).
5. **Give to others.** Get your mind off your stress by getting involved in an activity that isn't about you.
6. **One step at a time.** Rome wasn't built in a day. Take it easy, and take it one step at a time. Concentrate on what you're doing now, and the future will fall into place.
7. **Surprise!** You aren't perfect, and that's OK. Let someone else wear the superhero

cape.

8. **Give the other person a break.** You can't get rid of your own stress by stressing someone else out. Then you'll be stressed and feel guilty.
9. **Schedule some fun.** Be certain to include something for you on your "to do" list. You deserve it!

## Breathe!



[Smiling Woman]

*An optimistic outlook reduces stress.*

As you've seen in previous lessons, sufficient oxygen is very important to the body's wellbeing. During stressful situations, our bodies tend to tense up. Breathing becomes shallow, with less oxygen being brought in and less carbon dioxide being pumped out. Excessive stress leaves you in an unhealthy state.

Breathing is one of the main body functions affected by stress. When stressed, most people forget the natural habit of full breathing, which is required for maintaining proper physical and mental health. Proper breathing is essential for life and for cleansing the body. Learning how to breathe properly in stressful situations will help you to handle the stress. With enough oxygen, your overall mental and physical health will improve.

- Breathing exercises are a helpful way to settle the body and the mind.
- Breathing exercises can help you to be calm and at ease.
- Proper breathing can result in a heightened sense of awareness, which can help you to make logical decisions.
- Breathing exercises can be helpful in reducing anger, anxiety, depression, fatigue, irritability, muscular tension, and stress.

The following are some common breathing exercises:

- **Deep, relaxed breathing.** Sit in a comfortable position with your back straight and your shoulders relaxed. Take a deep breath in through your nose, filling your lungs with air. Exhale through the nose, pushing all the air out using your abdominal muscles. Take as much time with each inhale and exhale as you need. Never hold your breath.
- **Relaxing sigh.** Sighing and yawning are signs that your body isn't getting enough oxygen and is trying to bring some in. A sigh releases a bit of tension and can be very relaxing. Sit in a relaxed position with your arms at your side or resting in your lap. Sigh deeply several times. Repeat until you feel relaxed.
- **Clenched fist.** This exercise will stimulate your breathing and your circulatory and nervous systems. Visualize your stomach as a clenching and unclenching fist. Breathe in to clench the stomach and breathe out to unclench the stomach.
- **Imaginative breathing.** This exercise combines the relaxing benefits of deep, relaxed breathing with mental visualizations. As you breathe deeply, bring images of things that relax you to mind.

Follow these breathing techniques and see how good you feel.

1. Sit or lie down in a comfortable position. At first, you might want to do this in a quiet area. After you've practiced awhile, you can do this exercise anywhere.
2. Close your eyes. Inhale to the count of four and exhale to the count of four. Maintain relaxed, slow breathing.
3. After several inhales and exhales, combine breathing with stretching. For example, stretch your arms to the side as you inhale and bring them back to your body as you exhale.
4. Try this at first for three minutes. You can do this for as long as you need to feel relaxed.

Don't save breathing techniques just for times of stress. Any breathing technique can and should be practiced every day. Practicing these techniques will not only provide relief during stressful situations, but will also help you be more energized and more relaxed throughout the day.

## Key Points and Links

### READING ASSIGNMENT

## Key Points

- Stress can cause a variety of symptoms, including headaches, insomnia, depression, and indigestion. A number of different stress management techniques are available.
- The first step in handling stress is to be aware of it.
- Breathing is one of the main body functions affected by stress.

## Links

- [Mind Power](http://www.learnmindpower.com/using_mindpower/visualization/) (www.learnmindpower.com/using\_mindpower/visualization/)

### Exercise: Stress Management Guidelines

Based on what you've read, answer the following questions.

1. What's the first step in handling stress?
2. List eight strategies for managing stress.
3. What are some physical symptoms of stress?

### Exercise Answer Key:

#### Exercise: Stress Management Guidelines

1. The first step is becoming aware of your reactions to stress. Stress can emerge from both negative and positive events.
2. Any eight of the following:
  - Speak to a person you enjoy talking to
  - Listen to music that relaxes you
  - Take yourself out of the stressful situation
  - Ask yourself if it's really that important
  - Set realistic goals
  - Don't overwhelm yourself with tasks
  - Learn to change the way you react
  - Learn to change your outlook
  - Avoid extreme reactions
  - Do something for others

- Get enough rest
  - Exercise
  - Avoid self-medicating or drugs
  - Develop a thick skin
  - Use stress productively
3. Trouble falling and staying asleep; worrying about the future; trouble finding time to have fun and enjoy oneself; pressure to do too many things

## 6.3 Explain how visualization and exercise can prevent and reduce stress

### Visualization, Exercise, and Diet

#### READING ASSIGNMENT

#### You're in a Calm, Green Meadow



[Palm Trees and Chairs on the Beach]

*You can reduce stress by visualizing a calming scene or favorite object.*

With *visualization*, also called *guided imagery*, you use your imagination to handle stress. You use a mental “file” of calming images when you’re in stressful situations. It enables you to physically and mentally relieve stress by making the world “go away” for a while.

To practice visualization, you need to grab 15 to 20 minutes for yourself in a quiet place. You should try to practice visualization twice a day. You may want to watch visualization videos or visit a relaxation specialist. The following is a basic visualization procedure:

1. Select a calm image from your mental file to focus on. The image shouldn't have an emotional meaning. Some of the images that people have selected are sunrises and sunsets, oceans or lakes, sailboats, a favorite pattern on a rug or piece of clothing, trees, seashells, and clouds.
2. Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Begin deep, relaxed breathing. Focus on your chosen image. Let your body totally relax.
3. Concentrate on your image. You shouldn't be thinking about anything but your image. Your world has become your image.
4. It will take some concentration, but after a while, you'll be able to focus on your image for up to 20 minutes. End your visualization session by clasping your hands together and saying to yourself, "I am alert and ready."

If you initially have problems relaxing, you might want to practice progressive muscle relaxation. If you would like to learn more about progressive muscle relaxation, you can view a yoga video or attend a yoga class. This type of muscle relaxation is regularly practiced at the end of each yoga session.



["Woman]

*Progressive muscle relaxation  
is regularly practiced at the end  
of yoga sessions.*

Ready to relax? Try the following progressive muscle relaxation technique. You'll need a quiet place where you can lie down and stay comfortably warm:

1. Lie down so you're comfortable. Begin and maintain deep, relaxing breathing.
2. Start with your toes. Wiggle them, tense them, and relax them. Repeat this until your toes are relaxed.
3. Rotate your feet in small circles. Tense them and relax them.

4. Tense the muscles of your lower legs and relax them. Repeat until they're relaxed.
5. Tense and relax the muscles of your upper legs, then your buttocks, your abdomen, your sternum and ribcage, your shoulders, and your arms.
6. Place your hands, flattened, on your stomach. Take several deep breaths and feel the muscles of your stomach relax.
7. Place your hands, flattened, on your upper chest. Take several deep breaths until you feel your chest relax.
8. Tighten and relax the muscles of your face, including your jaw and eyes.
9. Your entire body should feel relaxed and loose. Continue to relax and breathe for as long as you like.

If you would prefer to meditate, use the visualization steps provided but use a word or sound, called a “mantra,” instead of an image. You can say your mantra out loud or think it, but your world, during meditation, should be your mantra.

## **Exercise Is Good, Too!**

Regular exercise has been found to be effective in maintaining physical and mental fitness, which will help you to fight off stress. You know that regular exercise helps your body to work more efficiently. This is very helpful when you're “under attack” from stress. Improved cardiovascular function due to exercise increases oxygen supplies throughout your body and helps to lower blood cholesterol and triglyceride levels. All of this, of course, means less chance of developing heart conditions, strokes, or high blood pressure when having to deal with stress.

Mentally, exercise provides an outlet for negative emotions, such as frustration, anger, and irritability. This helps to promote a positive mood and outlook. Exercise improves mood by producing positive biochemical changes in the body and brain. Regular exercise reduces the amount of adrenal hormones your body releases in response to stress. Also, with exercise, your body releases greater amounts of *endorphins*, the powerful, pain-relieving, mood-elevating chemicals in the brain. Stressed-out, sedentary people often lack these neurochemicals. The “runner's high” is a result of increased endorphins in the body. Exercise will keep your body functioning properly. It will help you to feel relaxed and refreshed and will promote deep, restful sleep, all of which are great weapons for the war on stress.

People who work out know that problems seem less important when they're walking, swimming, running, cycling, or are involved in any kind of physical activity. Besides the mental benefits, physical exercise uses up excess adrenaline. Another beneficial effect is that most people don't worry when they're exercising. It's too difficult to concentrate on why your boss is such a jerk when you're concentrating on walking that extra quarter mile!

You don't need to have a really vigorous workout to handle stress. A nice constant exercise program can be beneficial in improving your overall outlook. Make exercise something enjoyable, such as dancing, if you like. Doing something you enjoy will likely encourage you to keep on doing it.

To make the most out of your exercise routine, be certain to get enough rest. We know, easier said than done! However, sleeping is a way for your body to recharge.

## **Stress Diet**

The stress diet *shouldn't* involve standing in front of the refrigerator and eating all of the ice cream. Both stress and exercise use up a lot of nutrients, fluid, and energy. This means that you need to maintain a healthy, balanced diet. You might want to check back into previous lessons to review some of the guidelines for healthy eating and behavior modification. When your body is getting the nutrients and fluids it needs, it has the fuel to fend off stress, disease, and other daily challenges.

People respond differently to stress. Some people can't stop eating, whereas others can't even stand the sight or thought of food when they're stressed. Some people tend to gravitate to creamy, warm comfort foods or junk food, such as cheeseburgers or chips, when they're stressed. This could have an evolutionary explanation. Fat is higher in calories than carbohydrates or proteins. In caveman times, when you didn't know where your next meal was coming from, it made sense to eat as many fatty foods as you could find. More fat means more energy. More energy meant that our ancestors were up to the challenges, or stresses, of their environment. It takes a lot of calories to chase a saber-toothed tiger out of a cave!

Unfortunately, our stresses are more cerebral nowadays. Even though high-fat foods might seem to be a comfort during stressful times, it's better in the long run to bite into a nice, juicy, crisp fresh apple than a fast-food burger.





[Woman Holding Apple and  
Hamburger]

*Making wise food choices can  
reduce stress.*

Although it's very important to eat a diet that includes all the vitamins and minerals you need to keep you healthy, vitamin and mineral supplements aren't a "quick fix" when you aren't eating right. No nutritional supplements really take the place of, say, a glass of orange juice or slices of fresh tomatoes and onions. Nor has it ever been proven that vitamin or mineral supplements actually fight stress or calm nerves. "But," you say, "I feel better when I take vitamins." There could be two explanations for this: either you've been neglecting your diet and have had a deficient intake of a particular nutrient or, more likely, it's all in your head! The brain is a very powerful organ. If you believe that nutritional supplements will help you to handle stress, then they probably will—but so would a head of lettuce, if you believed it!

The moral of the story is that you should eat foods that are well-balanced and that you enjoy, drink enough fluids, exercise regularly, remember to breathe, and get enough sleep so that you'll be able to handle stress in a way that won't cause disruptions to your body or mind.

## **QUICK TIPS FOR STRESS REDUCTION**

Here are five fast stress-reduction tips. Feel free to print these and tape them in different parts of your house or in your car or at your work.

1. **General stress reduction.** As life becomes more demanding, you need to consider ways to reduce stress. Don't procrastinate. If you have a project or paper to complete, get started on it right away. To do your best job, you need to spend a lot of time on it.

Remember, Rome wasn't built in a day. Don't work long hours without rest. Ideally, you should sleep seven to eight hours a night to function properly. Stress is reduced by exercise, so make sure you take time to exercise.

2. **HALT = Hungry, Angry, Lonely, and Tired.** We all get overly stressed. How many times have you heard someone say, "I'm so STRESSED OUT!" A technique for pinpointing the cause of stress is a simple little word—HALT. Not only is the word "HALT" good advice by itself, but it can also remind you of some good questions to ask yourself.

**H = Hunger.** Am I too hungry? Did I eat today?

**A = Anger.** Am I angry? If so, I need to handle my anger appropriately.

**L = Loneliness.** Am I feeling alone? Who among us hasn't experienced that feeling at one time or another? The choices to combat loneliness are vast if one chooses to explore them.

**T = Tired.** Am I too tired? How much sleep am I really getting? Maybe I should get to bed a little earlier tonight no matter what.

The next time you don't feel your best, tell yourself to "HALT" and try to determine if you're HUNGRY, ANGRY, LONELY, or TIRED.

3. **Take down the fence: self-imposed barriers.** Have you ever thought about the influence of the person you see in the mirror? It takes a mature person to honestly evaluate him- or herself. It takes a strong person to recognize self-imposed barriers and to do something about them. Some of us have told ourselves or others that we aren't good people. It then becomes easy to quit trying. While this is an understandable coping response, we have to be willing to reassess ourselves. Cast aside those behaviors that make life unnecessarily harder and that limit your potential. Start today!
4. **Visualization and relaxation.** When the pressure seems to be getting to you, don't

reach for the aspirin. Try one of the following instant stress relievers:

- Take six deep breaths.
- Visit the beach or another pleasant place through your imagination. Visualize the scene in detail.
- Hug someone. Four hugs every day will do a lot to calm you down.
- Change your scene. Walk to the window, watch the birds, take a stroll down the hall. Go outside and breathe deeply for two minutes.
- Exercising and stretching will improve your mind. Jog up the staircase.
- Find something or someone who will make you laugh. Stress can often come from taking yourself or your task too seriously.
- Ask yourself the worst possible thing that could happen if you make a mistake or miss a deadline.
- Change your focus. Think about your life and focus on what you'll do this weekend or this evening.

5. **Make a list.** When the pressure and stress of life begins to build and you can't imagine how you can possibly accomplish everything you need to do, make a list. Include everything that needs to be done on the list, including homework, work assignments, grocery shopping, laundry, and even partying. Then make a weekly schedule. Fit all of your tasks within the weekly schedule. This will help you to be more organized, less overwhelmed, and remember everything you need to do. You'll find that there's indeed time to fit everything in. When you've completed one of the tasks on your list, cross it off. Crossing everything off the list can result in a feeling of accomplishment. It's also a great way to see how much you actually do during the day and pat yourself on the back for a job well done.

## Key Points and Links

### READING ASSIGNMENT

## Key Points

- You can use your imagination to handle stress through a process called visualization.
- Regular exercise is also a good way to maintain physical and mental fitness.

## Links

- [Stress Calming Stretching Workout](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxsQr7YOq7o) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=fxsQr7YOq7o)
- [Yoga Pilates Relaxing Workout](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBgD7N_7K7w) (www.youtube.com/watch?v=jBgD7N\_7K7w)

### Exercise: Visualization and Stress

Based on what you've read, answer the following questions.

1. What exercises can help reduce stress?
2. Can nutritional supplements help to reduce stress? Explain.
3. Describe a basic visualization process.

### Exercise Answer Key:

#### Exercise: Visualization and Stress

1. Walking, swimming, running, cycling, or any physical pursuit can help reduce stress. Physical exercise uses up excess adrenaline. Exercise has another beneficial effect. Most people, when exercising, don't worry. You can do something enjoyable, such as dancing, as exercise. Doing something enjoyable will mean that you'll keep on doing it.
2. Although it's very important to eat a diet that includes all the vitamins and minerals you need to keep you healthy, vitamin and mineral supplements aren't a quick fix when you aren't eating right. No nutritional supplements really take the place of a glass of orange juice or slices of fresh fruit. Nor has it ever been proven that vitamin or mineral supplements will fight stress or calm nerves.
3. Select a calming image. Sit or lie in a comfortable position. Begin deep, relaxed breathing. Focus on your chosen image. Let your body totally relax. Concentrate on your image. Your world has become your image. End your visualization session by clasping your hands together and saying to yourself, "I'm alert and ready."

## Lesson 6 Review

### Self-Check

1. Which stage of stress involves many physiologic responses, including increased heart rate and blood pressure; the release of stress hormones, such as epinephrine; and increased muscle tension?
  - a. Resistance stage
  - b. Eustress stage
  - c. Alarm stage
  - d. Exhaustion stage
2. Which stage of stress causes the body to become susceptible to disease, because it seems to lose its ability to respond to any new stress?
  - a. Eustress stage
  - b. Exhaustion stage
  - c. Resistance stage
  - d. Alarm stage
3. During which one of the following stages of stress does the body try to oppose the stress?
  - a. Resistance stage
  - b. Eustress stage
  - c. Alarm stage
  - d. Exhaustion stage
4. Which one of the following stress management guidelines suggests making lists and honestly decide what you can and can't accomplish in one hour, one day, one week, one month, and one year?
  - a. Set realistic goals
  - b. Don't overwhelm yourself
  - c. Don't sweat the small stuff
  - d. Change the way you see things
5. Which one of the following stress management guidelines suggests meditation and breathing exercises have proven successful in reducing stress?
  - a. Set realistic goals
  - b. Learn how to relax
  - c. Don't sweat the small stuff
  - d. Don't overwhelm yourself

6. Which one of the following breathing exercises will stimulate your breathing and your circulatory and nervous systems?
- Deep, relaxed breathing
  - Relaxing sigh
  - Imaginative breathing
  - Clenched fist
7. Which one of the following uses a mental “file” of calming images when you’re in stressful situations?
- Productive imagery
  - Collective imagery
  - Alternative imagery
  - Guided imagery
8. Which one of the following are powerful, pain-relieving, mood-elevating chemicals in the brain?
- Dopamine
  - Endorphins
  - Noradrenaline
  - Serotonin
9. Which one of the following is a technique for pinpointing the cause of stress?
- HAUL
  - HOPE
  - HOLD
  - HALT
10. Which one of the following does the "H" stand for in the technique for pinpointing the cause of stress?
- Hold
  - Hope
  - Harm
  - Hunger

### **Self-Check Answer Key**

1. Alarm stage

Explanation: The first stage of the body’s reaction to stress, the alarm stage, involves

many physiologic responses, including increased heart rate and blood pressure; the release of stress hormones, such as epinephrine; and increased muscle tension.

Reference: Section 6.1

## 2. Exhaustion stage

Explanation: If stress continues, the third stage, the exhaustion stage, kicks in. At this stage, the body becomes very susceptible to disease, because it seems to lose its ability to respond to any new stress.

Reference: Section 6.1

## 3. Resistance stage

Explanation: The second stage, the resistance stage, is when the body tries to oppose the stress. This could also be called the “coping” phase, and it can be a positive time, depending on the stressor.

Reference: Section 6.1

## 4. Don't overwhelm yourself

Explanation: **Don't overwhelm yourself** involves making lists and honestly decide what you can and can't accomplish in one hour, one day, one week, one month, and one year.

Reference: Section 6.2

## 5. Learn how to relax

Explanation: **Learn how to relax** through meditation and breathing exercises have proven successful in reducing stress. You'll learn more about that later in this unit.

Reference: Section 6.2

## 6. Clenched fist

Explanation: **Clenched fist**. This exercise will stimulate your breathing and your circulatory and nervous systems. Visualize your stomach as a clenching and unclenching fist. Breathe in to clench the stomach and breathe out to unclench the stomach.

Reference: Section 6.2

## 7. Guided imagery

Explanation: With visualization, also called guided imagery, you use your imagination to handle stress. You use a mental “file” of calming images when you’re in stressful situations.

Reference: Section 6.3

## 8. Endorphins

Explanation: With exercise your body releases greater amounts of endorphins, the powerful, pain-relieving, mood-elevating chemicals in the brain.

Reference: Section 6.3

## 9. HALT

Explanation: A technique for pinpointing the cause of stress is a simple little word—HALT.

Reference: Section 6.3

## 10. Hunger

Explanation: H = HUNGER. Am I too hungry? Did I eat today?

Reference: Section 6.3

## Flash Cards

### 1. Term: Eustress

**Definition:** Good stress

### 2. Term: Distress

**Definition:** When we physically and mentally overreact to events

### 3. Term: Alarm Stage

**Definition:** The first stage of the body’s reaction to stress that involves many physiologic responses, such as increased heart rate, increased blood pressure, increased muscle tension, and the release of stress hormones, such as epinephrine

### 4. Term: Resistance Stage



**Definition:** The second stage of the body's reaction to stress when the body tries to oppose the stress

**5. Term:** Exhaustion Stage

**Definition:** The third stage of the body's reaction to stress when the body becomes very susceptible to disease, because it seems to lose its ability to respond to any new stress

**6. Term:** Breathing

**Definition:** One of the main body functions affected by stress

**7. Term:** Visualization

**Definition:** A mental "file" of calming images

**8. Term:** Stress Diet

**Definition:** The way people's diet is affected by stress; some people can't stop eating, whereas others can't even stand the sight or thought of food when they're stressed

**Exercise**

**1. Review Exercise: Stress Test**

**For each of the following statements, give yourself points for how often the statement is true. When you're done, count your points.**

- **All the Time—2 points**
- **Sometimes—1 point**
- **Never—0 points**

1. I work at what I like.
2. I enjoy work/school.
3. I prepare early for stressful meetings/events.
4. I participate in group activities I like.
5. I have a good support network of friends and family.
6. I can easily relax when I want to.
7. I can easily express my thoughts.

## **Exercise Answer Key:**

### **Review Exercise: Stress Test**

How many points did you get?

- **10–14:** Excellent! You control your stress well, and stress shouldn't interfere with your physical health.
- **6–9:** Good, but you're letting stress get to you. Think about your answers and see how you can change your lifestyle or stress management style.
- **3–5:** Good grief! Time for a timeout! You need to be aware the stress could start affecting your health.
- **0–2:** You need to take charge RIGHT NOW! Reduce your physical health risks by reducing the stress in your life.