

FIGURE 2.3 Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

For each question, choose from the following alternatives:

0—never 1—almost never 2—sometimes 3—fairly often 4—very often

- ___ 1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?
- ___ 2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?
- ___ 3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”?
- ___ 4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?
- ___ 5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?
- ___ 6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
- ___ 7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
- ___ 8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
- ___ 9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
- ___ 10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

Figuring your PSS score:

You can determine your PSS score by following these directions:

First, reverse your scores for questions 4, 5, 7, and 8. On these four questions, change the scores like this: 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1, 4 = 0.

For all other questions, use the number you wrote down as the score.

Now add up your scores for each item to get a total.

My total score is ____.

Individual scores on the PSS can range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress.

Scores ranging from 0–13 would be considered low perceived stress.

Scores ranging from 14–26 would be considered moderate perceived stress.

Scores ranging from 27–40 would be considered high perceived stress.

Source: A Global Measure of Perceived Stress, by S. Cohen, T. Kamarck, & R. Mermelstein, in *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24(4), 1983, 385–396. Used by permission.

affect our feelings and our perceived stress. The questions in this scale ask about your feelings and thoughts over the past month. In each case, you are asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, you should treat each one as a separate question. The best approach is to answer fairly quickly. Don't try to count up the number of times you felt a certain way. Rather, indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

The Perceived Stress Scale is interesting because it considers your *perception* of what is happening in your life as most important. Consider two students, John and Dan, who had the exact same events and experiences in their lives for the past month. John is thinking, “Well, things aren't going quite how I planned, but I am learning some good lessons and things can only get better!” while Dan thinks, “Things aren't going how I planned, everything is going downhill, my life is a mess, and I'm a loser!” Depending on their perception, John's total score could put him in the low-stress category and Dan's total score could put him in the high-stress category.

Inventory of College Students' Recent Life Experiences

Another useful scale used to measure stress levels in a different way is called the Inventory of College Students' Recent Life Experiences (ICSRLE), represented in Figure 2.4. The ICSRLE was designed to identify individual exposure to sources of stress or hassles. This inventory also allows you to identify the extent to which you experienced those stressors over the past month. As its name suggests, the ICSRLE was developed uniquely for college students and, as you know, the sources of stress in a university environment can be different from other settings.

FIGURE 2.4 Inventory of College Students' Recent Life Experiences (ICSRLE)

The following is a list of experiences that many students have at some time or other. Indicate for each experience how much it has been a part of your life over the past month. Mark your answers according to the following guide:

Intensity of Experience over the Past Month	
0 = not at all part of my life	1 = only slightly part of my life 2 = distinctly part of my life 3 = very much part of my life
<input type="checkbox"/> 1. Conflicts with boyfriend's/girlfriend's/spouse's family	<input type="checkbox"/> 26. Conflict with teaching assistant(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> 2. Being let down or disappointed by friends	<input type="checkbox"/> 27. Not enough time for sleep
<input type="checkbox"/> 3. Conflict with professor(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> 28. Conflicts with your family
<input type="checkbox"/> 4. Social rejection	<input type="checkbox"/> 29. Heavy demands from extracurricular activities
<input type="checkbox"/> 5. Too many things to do at once	<input type="checkbox"/> 30. Finding courses too demanding
<input type="checkbox"/> 6. Being taken for granted	<input type="checkbox"/> 31. Conflicts with friends
<input type="checkbox"/> 7. Financial conflicts with family members	<input type="checkbox"/> 32. Hard effort to get ahead
<input type="checkbox"/> 8. Having your trust betrayed by a friend	<input type="checkbox"/> 33. Poor health of a friend
<input type="checkbox"/> 9. Separation from people you care about	<input type="checkbox"/> 34. Disliking your studies
<input type="checkbox"/> 10. Having your contributions overlooked	<input type="checkbox"/> 35. Getting "ripped off" or cheated in the purchase of services
<input type="checkbox"/> 11. Struggling to meet your own academic standards	<input type="checkbox"/> 36. Social conflicts over smoking
<input type="checkbox"/> 12. Being taken advantage of	<input type="checkbox"/> 37. Difficulties with transportation
<input type="checkbox"/> 13. Not enough leisure time	<input type="checkbox"/> 38. Disliking fellow student(s)
<input type="checkbox"/> 14. Struggling to meet the academic standards of others	<input type="checkbox"/> 39. Conflicts with boyfriend/girlfriend/spouse
<input type="checkbox"/> 15. A lot of responsibilities	<input type="checkbox"/> 40. Dissatisfaction with your ability at written expression
<input type="checkbox"/> 16. Dissatisfaction with school	<input type="checkbox"/> 41. Interruptions of your school work
<input type="checkbox"/> 17. Decisions about intimate relationship(s)	<input type="checkbox"/> 42. Social isolation
<input type="checkbox"/> 18. Not enough time to meet your obligations	<input type="checkbox"/> 43. Long waits to get service (at banks, stores, etc.)
<input type="checkbox"/> 19. Dissatisfaction with your mathematical ability	<input type="checkbox"/> 44. Being ignored
<input type="checkbox"/> 20. Important decisions about your future career	<input type="checkbox"/> 45. Dissatisfaction with your physical appearance
<input type="checkbox"/> 21. Financial burdens	<input type="checkbox"/> 46. Finding course(s) uninteresting
<input type="checkbox"/> 22. Dissatisfaction with your reading ability	<input type="checkbox"/> 47. Gossip concerning someone you care about
<input type="checkbox"/> 23. Important decisions about your education	<input type="checkbox"/> 48. Failing to get expected job
<input type="checkbox"/> 24. Loneliness	<input type="checkbox"/> 49. Dissatisfaction with your athletic skills
<input type="checkbox"/> 25. Lower grades than you hoped for	

Scoring the ICSRLE

Add your total points: ____

Your score on the ICSRLE can range from 0 to 147. Higher scores indicate higher levels of exposure to hassles. From your results, focus on two key outcomes:

1. Determine your current level of stress by adding your score for each hassle and getting a total.
2. Discover which hassles play a greater part in your life. Items that you rated "3" indicate that those stressors are more of an issue for you.

Source: The Inventory of College Students Recent Life Experiences: A Decontaminated Hassles Scale for a Special Population," by P. M. Kohn, K. Lafreniere, & M. Gurevich, *Journal of Behavioral Medicine*, 13(6), 1990, 619-630. Used by permission.

Ardell Wellness Stress Test

Don Ardell developed a stress assessment that is unique in its holistic approach to stress. In Chapter 1 you learned about the importance of incorporating all dimensions of health in your understanding of stress. The Ardell Wellness Stress Test, represented in Figure 2.5, incorporates physical, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, and social aspects of health for a balanced assessment. While this assessment is not as scientific as others, it provides useful information in putting together your current stress status puzzle. Your personal perception of satisfaction in factors related to body, mind, and spirit greatly impacts your quality of life.

When you have completed the Ardell Wellness Stress Test, look back and identify which items relate more to physical health, intellectual health, emotional health, spiritual health, or social health. Do you detect any patterns? For instance, are more areas of disappointment

FIGURE 2.5 Adapted Ardell Wellness Stress Test for College Students

This assessment is based on your personal perception of satisfaction. Rate your satisfaction with each of the following items by using this scale:

+3 = Ecstatic +2 = Very happy +1 = Mildly happy 0 = Indifferent
-1 = Mildly disappointed -2 = Very disappointed -3 = Completely dismayed

- ___ 1. Choice of college
- ___ 2. Choice of major, area of study
- ___ 3. Marital or relationship status
- ___ 4. Friendships
- ___ 5. Capacity to have fun
- ___ 6. Amount of fun experienced in the last month
- ___ 7. Financial prospects
- ___ 8. Current ability to meet expenses
- ___ 9. Spirituality
- ___ 10. Level of self-esteem
- ___ 11. Prospects for having impact on those who know you and possibly others
- ___ 12. Sex life
- ___ 13. Body—how it looks and performs
- ___ 14. Relationship with family
- ___ 15. Happiness with current living situation
- ___ 16. Learned stress management capacities
- ___ 17. Nutrition, health, and fitness choices
- ___ 18. Life skills and knowledge of issues and facts related to your studies or future career
- ___ 19. Ability to recover from disappointment, hurts, setbacks, and tragedies
- ___ 20. Confidence that you currently are, or will be in the future, reasonably close to your highest potential
- ___ 21. Achievement of a rounded or balanced quality in your life
- ___ 22. Sense that life for you is on an upward curve, getting better and fuller all the time
- ___ 23. Level of participation in issues and concerns beyond your immediate interest
- ___ 24. Role in some kind of network of friends, relatives, and/or others about whom you care deeply and who reciprocate that commitment to you.
- ___ 25. Emotional acceptance of the changes the passage of time brings

TOTAL ___

Interpretation

- +51 to +75 You are a self-actualized person, nearly immune from the ravages of stress. There are few, if any, challenges likely to distract you from a sense of near total well-being.
- +25 to +50 You have mastered the wellness approach to life and have the capacity to deal creatively and efficiently with events and circumstances.
- +1 to +24 You are a wellness-oriented person, with an ability to prosper as a whole person, but you should give a bit more attention to optimal health concepts and skill building.
- 0 to -24 You are a candidate for additional training in how to deal with stress. A sudden increase in potentially negative events and circumstances could cause a severe emotional setback.
- 25 to -50 You are a candidate for counseling. You are either too pessimistic or have severe problems in dealing with stress.
- 51 to -75 You are a candidate for major psychological care with virtually no capacity for coping with life's problems.

Source: From *High Level Wellness: An Alternative to Doctors, Drugs, and Disease*, by Don Ardell (Berkeley, CA: Ten Speed Press, 1986). Used by permission.

related to physical health than to social health? Again, for holistic health seek a balance in all dimensions of health.

Student Stress Scale

The Student Stress Scale (Figure 2.6) is an adaptation specifically for college-age students of the Life Events Scale developed by Holmes and Rahe.¹ This classic stress assessment was designed to predict the likelihood of disease and illness following exposure to various stressful life events and the extent to which the change impacted the individual. In the assessment,

each life event is given a score indicating the amount of readjustment a person has to make as a result of the change. Events that are potentially both positive and negative are included, based on the premise that the adaptation to change is the contributing factor to disease and illness. Some studies have found that people with serious illnesses tend to have higher scores on similar assessments.²

This scale indicates that change in one's life requires effort to adapt and subsequent effort to regain stability. Stress is a natural by-product of adapting and then regaining internal homeostasis, or balance. Note that this assessment considers only the events that occur, not individual perceptions of these events in life. Students frequently point out, for example, that changing colleges or getting a new boyfriend or girlfriend can be stress-relieving depending on the circumstances. Change, however, does require adaptation. The value assigned to each life event can be interpreted as representing the amount of energy it takes to cope with any given change. Thus, the value in the Student Stress Scale is in increasing your awareness of potential stress-producing events and helping you understand the connection between change and health. Ultimately, your individual perception of the event has to be taken into account.

Stress Vulnerability Factors

Do you think some people are just more vulnerable to the effects of stressors than others? Assessing your vulnerability to stress is another important aspect in understanding your stress experience. Vulnerability has to do with a factor, or set of factors, that increases a person's susceptibility to stress. People with low vulnerability need to experience more stress before they become distressed, whereas people with high vulnerability need much less stress to reach their tipping point to distress. So what causes the differences in people's vulnerability? What makes one person more vulnerable than another? Researchers have determined a number of factors that impact vulnerability, including:

- **Genetics**—Evidence from family studies, particularly studies involving twins, seems to show a strong genetic element. One aspect of a person's vulnerability is related to his or her genetic makeup. However, this is not the whole story.
- **Coping style**—Some methods of coping with life's difficulties seem to be more effective than others. People who use effective coping skills seem to deal with stress better than those who do not. This can include everything from managing your time and money adequately to learning how to breathe. You will be learning many of these effective coping strategies.
- **Thinking style**—How people think about themselves or the world around them seems to make a major difference to their level of vulnerability to stress. This is more than simply being optimistic or pessimistic. As you will learn in Chapter 6, there are certain thinking methods that help people to cope better than others.
- **Environment**—The way that people deal with stress and the options they have are often related to their environment. This can include anything from a cluttered house to constant noise. In Chapter 14 you will learn how you can create a healthy environment to reduce your vulnerability to stress.
- **Social skills**—The more integrated people are in society and the more social support they experience, the less vulnerable they are to stress. The better a person's social skills, the easier it is for him or her to give and receive help. People with more supportive relationships tend to do better in times of crisis.³

The Stress Vulnerability Questionnaire will help you evaluate some of the physical, mental, emotional, spiritual, and social



TIME TIP

"I wish my mother had shared this tip with me when I was much younger. Her tip: GET A PLANNER! These days, my mom gets me a planner as a Christmas stocking stuffer. It is the best thing that I have ever gotten and it helps me to keep organized. I also use Post-it® notes; I make lists on them on Monday and then I cross things off as I go along. It's worked great for me in prioritizing and organizing my crazy schedule."

—Abbie M.

FIGURE 2.6 Student Stress Scale

For each event that occurred in your life within the past year, record the corresponding score. If an event occurred more than once, multiply the score for that event by the number of times the event occurred and record that score. Total all the scores.

Life Event	Mean Value
1. Death of a close family member	100
2. Death of a close friend	73
3. Divorce of parents	65
4. Jail term	63
5. Major personal injury or illness	63
6. Marriage	58
7. Getting fired from a job	50
8. Failing an important course	47
9. Change in the health of a family member	45
10. Pregnancy	45
11. Sex problems	44
12. Serious argument with a close friend	40
13. Change in financial status	39
14. Change of academic major	39
15. Trouble with parents	39
16. New girlfriend or boyfriend	37
17. Increase in workload at school	37
18. Outstanding personal achievement	36
19. First quarter/semester in college	36
20. Change in living conditions	31
21. Serious argument with an instructor	30
22. Getting lower grades than expected	29
23. Change in sleeping habits	29
24. Change in social activities	29
25. Change in eating habits	28
26. Chronic car trouble	26
27. Change in number of family get-togethers	26
28. Too many missed classes	25
29. Changing colleges	24
30. Dropping more than one class	23
31. Minor traffic violations	20
Total Stress Score	
Score Interpretation:	
Researchers determined that if your total score is:	
300 or more—statistically you stand an almost 80 percent chance of getting sick in the near future.	
150 to 299—you have a 50/50 chance of experiencing a serious health change within two years.	
149 or less—you have about a 30 percent chance of a serious health change.	

Source: *Health Awareness Through Discovery* by Kathleen Mullen and Gerald, Costello, Minneapolis: Burgess Publishing Company, 1981.