Stress can be defined as the inability to cope with a real or perceived threat to a person's emotional, psychological, physical or spiritual well-being resulting in a series of physical changes and adaptations in the body.

Stress comes in different forms, there is **good stress** (eustress) which is positive and exhilarating usually accompanied by success (getting an ‘A’ on a test, winning an award, getting into college). **Bad stress** (distress) follows disappointment, failure, threats and embarrassment.

Sources of stress can be **psychological** (attitude-worrying, personality, and self esteem), **physical** (environment, nutrition, alcohol or other drugs), **Role** (role conflict, ambiguity, multiple roles) **Sociological** (economic, ethnic, cultural background).

Two ways to deal with stress: **Stress reduction**– taking action and eliminating the source of stress by making changes. **Stress management**– coping, recovery, reinterpretation, reframing thinking.

The body reacts to stress. Here are some **psychophysiological** (mind and body) **responses to stress**. Elevated heart rate, increased blood pressure, tensed muscles, increased hormones in bloodstream, increased urination, shallow breathing (instead of belly breathing). Longterm effects of stress are serious and can affect your health.

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Signs of Stress

**Physical**: Sweaty palms, Uneven or shallow breathing, Change in sleep patterns, Upset stomach, Tension headaches, Tension and muscle soreness in neck and shoulders, Change in appetite, Cold hands and feet, Generally feeling unwell

**Emotional**: Irritability, Anxiousness or nervousness, Emotional outbursts and crying, Hostile behavior, Lack of confidence, Helplessness, Decreased enthusiasm, Depression, Lack of motivation

**Behavioral**: Poor judgment, Absenteeism, Inability to concentrate, Loss of sense of humor, Postponing difficult decisions, Increased alcohol and other drug use, Increased smoking, Accident prone, Overeating, Lacing impulsively, Grinding teeth

Why should I manage my stress?

* Stress can affect you in many ways. When you are 'stressed out' you may be an unpleasant person to be around, which can affect your relationships with friends and family.

* Did you know that stress can affect your decision making? When your body is experiencing stress you tend to focus on the here and now. That means when you are making important decisions you aren't considering future consequences.

* Stress can also contribute to illness. Migraine and tension headaches, ulcers, and colds can be caused by stress. Life threatening illnesses such as stroke, coronary heart disease, and hypertension can be attributed in part to the amount of stress over time a person endures.

* Not managing your stress can get in the way of your success. The good news is there are many methods to manage stress. Which ones work for you?

Relaxation

4 methods of relaxation you can try:

- **Diaphragmatic Breathing (belly breathing)**: (Breathing to expand the lungs fully and expel 'stale' air from the lungs)
- **Imagery**: (visualizing relaxing scenes, often in nature)
- **Autogenic Training**: (a type of self-hypnosis that encourages the redirection of blood flow by imagining parts of your body feeling warm and heavy)
- **Progressive Muscular Relaxation**: (tensing and relaxing muscle groups, and focusing on the relaxation of the muscles)

If your mind can create stress it can also undo it.

- "mind over matter"
- "it’s all in your head"
- "don’t worry be happy"

Make yourself aware of stress:

- Take a couple deep breaths that inflate your belly, keep your shoulders relaxed. Notice how this makes you feel.

Strategies to Tackle your Stress

- **Learn time management**—finding balance between school life, and social life will make you feel good about using your time well.

- **Overcome procrastination**—understanding how to get started on projects early will help you from experiencing that rushed last minute feeling.

- **Find a support system**—Everyone needs someone who will listen to them. Have at least one person you can count on—parent, sibling, friend, partner, advisor or counselor.

- **Get enough sleep** every night, eat a healthy diet and exercise daily.