



Serene Scene

Transitional Sober Living Magazine

LONG BEACH®

SERENE CENTER

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12 STEP TREK

Step #4: A Fearless and Moral Inventory of Ourselves.

12 Step Worksheet Series
Courtesy of Serene Center,
Long Beach

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IS IT LOVE OR ADDICTION?

A Powerful and
Necessary Question to Ask
Mickey Kay Troxell, MS, CATC

THE STRESS OF ADDICTION

Andrew Martin, MBA, CADC 1

THE STRESS OF ADDICTION

Andrew Martin, MBA, CADC I

Photo by Dina Marie



Andrew Martin,
MBA, CADC I



It is safe to say that everyone encounters stress on a regular basis: infants, children, adults, seniors, and especially those that are dealing with illness. Because addiction is defined as a chronic and progressive disease, it follows that someone afflicted with the disease is also under stress: in actuality an addict is most likely under severe stress.

However, stress does not come in just one form; stress can manifest itself in any number of ways within the individual. The symptoms of stress can also exhibit themselves in several ways:



Alarm

- Fight, Flight, or Freeze response
- Acceleration of heart rate and breathing
- Flushing in the face, or Paling in the face
- Tunnel vision
- Shaking



Distraction

- Not able to pay attention or concentrate
- Lack of interest in the subject matter
- Intense interest in something other than the subject
- Overwhelming emotions
- Fantasies, urges, strong thoughts



Exhaustion

- Muscle weakness
- Decreased wakefulness (somnolence)
- Decreased level of consciousness

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- High blood pressure
- Acid reflux, Gastritis, Ulcer
- Fatigue, chronic fatigue syndrome
- Sexual dysfunction
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Mental health disorders



- Over reaction
- Under reaction
- Anxiety
- Distraction from conscious thinking
- Annoyance



- Stuck, unable to change
- Lack of self-will
- Denial, aversion
- Confusion



- Backache
- Headache
- Restlessness
- Muscle spasm
- Insomnia

Certainly some of these symptoms are familiar; however, what is not as familiar are the form of stressors in our lives. Stress can manifest itself as a helpful form called eustress: eustress helps to motivate action and improve long-term functioning by providing a sense of fulfillment or other positive feeling. For example, meeting or engaging in a challenge, accomplishing a difficult physical or mental task, riding a thrilling roller coaster, or making a large purchase: these are all examples of eustress. But eustress is normally not the challenge for people in recovery; chronic stress usually is.

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Chronic stress is simply a prolonged stress response in the brain over a significant period of time, combined with the belief that nothing can be done to change the situation. Chronic stress can be achieved in many ways:



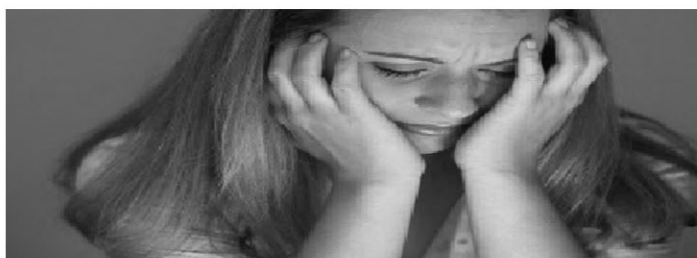
- Financial pressures
- Family and relationship influences
- Societal expectations
- Chronic pain or physical disability
- Mental disability



- Birth, death, or traumatic family event
- Accident
- Moving or other significant environmental change
- Sudden illness



- Sudden intense anxiety
- Discrete overwhelming fear
- Abrupt physiological arousal
- Fight, Flight, Freeze response



- Sadness
- Helplessness
- Hopelessness
- Low mood
- Avoid activity

Most people encounter chronic stress when multiple stressors build up in their lives. While the individual stressors do not seem unmanageable on their own, the combination of stressors can be intense. That is why it is so important to be self-aware of one's stress level on an ongoing basis: particularly for those in recovery from addiction.

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The reason it is imperative for a recovering addict to be self-aware of their stress level is because high stress combined with physical craving will most often lead to drug and alcohol use and acting-out behavior. Here is a simple gauge to measure one's stress level at any given time:

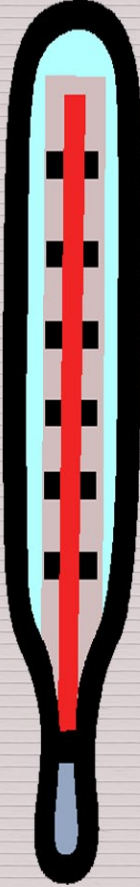
10 = Unmanageable Stress

7 = Stress is Affecting Function

5 = Noticeable Stress

3 = Ordinary Stress

0 = No Stress Whatsoever



Stress Thermometer

Periodically, throughout the day, stop for a few seconds and ask yourself how much stress you are feeling in the moment. Rate your stress from 1 to 10 on the stress thermometer. If you are above level 5, participate in a stress reduction exercise. If you are above level 7, take swift action to distress immediately. **If you are above level 9, seek the help of a clinician immediately.**

Managing stress is very individualized: what works for some people may not work for others. In most cases, managing stress involves two separate strategies working at the same time:

1 – find ways to minimize stressors in one's life, and 2 – build coping skills to manage one's stress more effectively. When the two techniques are used together, stressors will be much more manageable.

THE STRESS OF ADDICTION

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Minimizing stress in one's life is the result of either avoiding the stressors, or altering the stressful situation. Here are some suggestions on how to do each:

Avoiding Stressors	Altering Stressful Situations
<p>Influence your surroundings by avoiding places or things that are stressful. Be creative in finding alternatives in dealing with those places or things. Have fun trying new ways of handling your surroundings such that the stressors are minimized. Example: the coffee line is always out the door at 8:00AM and it makes you stress about being late for work. Bring your own coffee to work, or leave 10 minutes sooner, or find another coffee shop.</p>	<p>Change your behaviors if you notice they are creating stress within the environment. Often times a simple change in behavior will completely alleviate a stressful situation. If you are being too serious, lighten up a bit and see what happens. If you are being too intrusive, try quieting down a bit. Likewise, if someone is behaving in an unacceptable fashion, ask them in a respectful and loving way to change their behavior.</p>
<p>Influence your interpersonal interactions by avoiding people that are stressful. Be creative in dealing with people that are stressful. Have fun interacting with people in different ways that are less stressful for you. Example: deal with a stressful coworker by standing up when they enter the room to speak with you.</p>	<p>Stop taking other people's inventory and pay attention to your own. By overanalyzing other people's thoughts and behaviors you will begin to counter-transfer those annoyances onto yourself. Additionally, you will become less self-aware of your own behaviors in the process.</p>
<p>If you are too busy juggling too many projects and tasks, feel free to say no to additional projects and tasks. By taking on too much, all of your efforts will suffer.</p>	<p>Communicate effectively by being open, honest and direct. Also, use feedback to clarify your understanding of the conversation, and ask for feedback if you are not receiving any.</p>
<p>Prioritize the projects and tasks that you need to take care of. Categorize them into four quadrants: 1-Urgent & Important, 2-Urgent & Unimportant, 3-Not Urgent & Important, 4-Not Urgent & Not Important. Throw away all the quadrant 4 items, schedule the quadrant 3 items, group together the quadrant 2 items and do them all at once, and immediately take care of the quadrant 1 items.</p>	<p>Take action on stressful items if your inaction is causing more stress than simply taking care of the item would cause. It can be easy to psych yourself out when it comes to an unfamiliar task, or a task that is simply not very fun or interesting. Instead of allowing the stress to fester, just take care of the task at hand.</p>
<p>Influence your thought process by avoiding negative news and stories that do not have anything to do with you. Stop listening to inflammatory news, stop paying attention to gossip, and do not engage in anxiety ridden films and books. Allow your mind to calm down.</p>	<p>Be open about your limits with people, places and things in advance. If you communicate your stressors early on, people are much more likely to accommodate your needs without feeling as if they are being unfairly put out.</p>

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Building coping skills to manage one’s stressors more effectively is the result of acceptance or adaptation. Here are some suggestions on how to do each:

Accepting Situations	Adapting to Situations and Expectations
Forgiveness is one of the most powerful abilities you have. By forgiving someone you are empowering yourself to let go of anger, frustration, resentment and negative energy.	Seek progress, not perfection. Your expectations can be your own worst enemy when it comes to building excessive stress. Know that you are doing the best you can with what you have at the time.
Talking to someone about what’s stressing you is a terrific way to reduce the power of the stressor. The act of communicating and connecting with another human being will give you the gift of freeing yourself from the circular thinking associated with many stressors.	Try to view the stressful situation from another point of view. Imagine you are someone else and think of how they might view the same situation. Often a different point of view will cause your mind to adapt a new perspective.
Affirming your actions will help you to appreciate yourself despite the stress you encounter. The fact is you take care of yourself and your tasks to the best of your ability at the time. When you self-affirm that you are taking care of business as best you can, you empower yourself to think freely.	Recite the serenity prayer and pay attention to what it says. “God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.”
Behave in a happy and joyous spirit, even if your mood is down. By acting happy, you will lift your mood and others will affirm your mood too. Acting happy is a win-win scenario.	Interrupt your negative thoughts and/or your cyclical thoughts before they gain momentum and power. If you stop the thoughts early, they will not cause as much stress.
Use your stress as a motivator. Turn stress into eustress by interpreting the symptoms of your stress as a reason to get things done and create another accomplishment for yourself. Once the task is done, reward yourself with a break or a small treat.	Use laughter and humor to diffuse otherwise stressful situations. View the stressful situation with amazement, audacity, ridiculousness, and frivolity. In most cases, remember that situations are not as important as you make them out to be.

There are other common sense stress reduction techniques that work very well for momentary stress caused by circumstances that cannot be avoided. These techniques can also work to mildly lower stress levels throughout the day. The most common techniques are deep breathing, mindfulness meditation, exercising, and stretching.

Seek out the techniques that work best and stick with them. Remember that stress is primarily a function of one’s own mind, so take responsibility and take action. **SS**