

# Psychology Today

## Six Myths About Stress

Dispelling common myths about stress can lead a happier, healthier life.  
Published on September 25, 2012 by Sherrie Bourg Carter, Psy.D. in High Octane Women

Misunderstandings about **stress** can lead to more of it in our lives. Here are six points offered by the [American Psychological Association](#) to help you dispel common myths about stress, and a little guidance from me to help you take positive and productive action to reduce the overall stress in your life.

### **Myth #1: Stress is the same for everyone.**

Not true. We each have a different threshold for letting things get to us and we all react to stress differently. Some people withdraw; some people experience anxiety; some lose

### **Myth #2: Stress is bad.**

Stress can be bad, but not always. In fact, in some circumstances, stress can help you survive a dangerous situation (the normal fight or flight response). Stress also can be a great motivator to getting things done. Whether stress is "good" or "bad" has more to do with the amount of stress in your life and how you manage it rather than a simple positive or negative valence.

### **Myth #3: Stress is everywhere, so you just have to live with it.**

Many aspects of today's world (a bad economy, long work hours, overscheduling, etc.) lead to increased stress for many people. But stress is not everywhere and you don't have to simply accept it. You can shape your life in such a way that you have stress-free time during your day. You also can develop effective strategies for managing those experiences in your life that you do find stressful. Prioritizing, breaking down complicated tasks into smaller, simpler projects, and effective time management strategies are just a few of the ways to reduce stress.

### **Myth #4: The most popular strategies for reducing stress are the best ones.**

This is a dangerous myth to believe because it leads people to force themselves to engage in activities that are "supposed" to relieve stress even though those strategies

may not be effective strategies for their unique lifestyle and personality. There is no one-size-fits-all stress management program. Many of my clients find yoga extremely stressful whereas others live by it as a way to reduce stress. The best stress management plan is the one that fits your unique needs and interests. If you try to force stress management routines in your life because they seem to be working so well for others, you're likely to add to your stress rather than decrease it.

**Myth #5: No symptoms, no stress.**

Not true. An absence of symptoms does not equate to an absence of stress. Over time, chronic stress will eventually cause your mind and body to start wearing out (fatigue, loss of productivity, forgetfulness, etc.). But this can take years, sometimes decades. Don't ignore the stress in your life simply because you may not be suffering at this moment. Developing healthy stress management routines early in life will go a long way in helping you get through the more challenging time when they arise.

**Myth #6: Only major symptoms of stress require attention.**

Minor symptoms of stress will eventually turn into major symptoms of stress if not effectively managed. Think of the minor signs of stress (headaches, feeling tired, etc.) as warning flags.

The most important thing to remember is that while there are many ways to reduce stress, the key to effective stress management is rarely some seven-day or 30-day program that tells you what to do to relax or how to find "balance." The key is discovering your own stress management program, one that works for you and your lifestyle, then making the commitment to incorporate it into your life. (See my article, [\*Refueling Your Engine\*](#), for more specifics on developing a unique stress management plan that will work for you.)

© 2012 Sherrie Bourg Carter, All Rights Reserved