Is your lifestyle causing you stress?

The way you live your life can have a big impact on your health, well-being, and how well or poorly you handle stress. Below are lifestyle behaviors that affect stress levels. Please check the boxes that apply to you. Doing an honest assessment of how well or poorly you take care of yourself can help you manage your stress in the future.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Lifestyle Behaviors</th>
<th>Yes</th>
<th>No</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>When you are under stress, do you:</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Smoke/use tobacco</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drink a lot of coffee or caffeinated drinks (more than 2-3 cups per day)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Drink alcohol (more than recommended levels of 1-2 per day)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Overuse over-the-counter medications</td>
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<td>Overeat or under eat</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spend too much money (e.g., do you have a lot of credit card debt and have trouble making payments?)</td>
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<tr>
<td>Abuse/overuse tranquilizers or other over-the-counter medications</td>
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<td>Watch too much television (more than 3-4 hours per day)</td>
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<td>Have angry outbursts</td>
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<td>Take illegal drugs</td>
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<tr>
<td>Withdraw from people</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ignore or deny stress symptoms</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage in self-destructive relationships</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>These are negative self-care behaviors.</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>When you are under stress, do you:</td>
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<tr>
<td>Engage in physical activity at least three times a week for 30 minutes each day</td>
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<tr>
<td>Get six to eight hours of sleep every night</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain good eating habits</td>
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<td>Make time to relax</td>
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<td>Maintain a sense of humor</td>
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<tr>
<td>Play</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintain healthy rituals and routines</td>
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<tr>
<td>Be optimistic. Engage in positive thinking</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spend time with family</td>
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<tr>
<td>Spend time with friends</td>
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<tr>
<td>Make plans for the future</td>
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<tr>
<td>Figure out ways to manage stress</td>
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<td>Reward yourself for your accomplishments</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>These are positive self-care behaviors.</strong></td>
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</table>

(Source: Unknown)
Self-Care Assessment


The following worksheet for assessing self-care is not exhaustive, merely suggestive. Feel free to add areas of self-care that are relevant for you and rate yourself on how often and how well you are taking care of yourself these days.

When you are finished, look for patterns in your responses. Are you more active in some areas of self-care but ignore others? Are there items on the list that make you think, "I would never do that"? Listen to your inner responses, your internal dialogue about self-care and making yourself a priority. Take particular note of anything you would like to include more in your life.

Rate the following areas according to how well you think you are doing:
- 3 = I do this well (e.g., frequently)
- 2 = I do this OK (e.g., occasionally)
- 1 = I barely or rarely do this
- 0 = I never do this
- ? = This never occurred to me

Physical Self-Care

___ Eat regularly (e.g. breakfast, lunch, and dinner)
___ Eat healthily
___ Exercise
___ Get regular medical care for prevention
___ Get medical care when needed
___ Take time off when sick
___ Get massages
___ Dance, swim, walk, run, play sports, sing, or do some other fun physical activity
___ Take time to be sexual - with myself, with a partner
___ Get enough sleep
___ Wear clothes I like
___ Take vacations
___ Other:

Psychological Self-Care

___ Take day trips or mini-vacations
___ Make time away from telephones, email, and the Internet
___ Make time for self-reflection
___ Notice my inner experience - listen to my thoughts, beliefs, attitudes, feelings
___ Have my own personal psychotherapy
___ Write in a journal
___ Read literature that is unrelated to work
___ Do something at which I am not expert or in charge
___ Attend to minimizing stress in my life
___ Engage my intelligence in a new area, e.g., go to an art show, sports event, theatre
___ Be curious
Say no to extra responsibilities sometimes
Other:

**Emotional Self-Care**

- Spend time with others whose company I enjoy
- Stay in contact with important people in my life
- Give myself affirmations, praise myself
- Love myself
- Re-read favorite books, re-view favorite movies
- Identify comforting activities, objects, people, places and seek them out
- Allow myself to cry
- Find things that make me laugh
- Express my outrage in social action, letters, donations, marches, protests
Other:

**Spiritual Self-Care**

- Make time for reflection
- Spend time in nature
- Find a spiritual connection or community
- Be open to inspiration
- Cherish my optimism and hope
- Be aware of non-material aspects of life
- Try at times not to be in charge or the expert
- Be open to not knowing
- Identify what is meaningful to me and notice its place in my life
- Meditate
- Pray
- Sing
- Have experiences of awe
- Contribute to causes in which I believe
- Read inspirational literature or listen to inspirational talks, music
Other:

**Relationship Self-Care**

- Schedule regular dates with my partner or spouse
- Schedule regular activities with my children
- Make time to see friends
- Call, check on, or see my relatives
- Spend time with my companion animals
- Stay in contact with faraway friends
- Make time to reply to personal emails and letters; send holiday cards
- Allow others to do things for me
- Enlarge my social circle
- Ask for help when I need it
- Share a fear, hope, or secret with someone I trust
Other:
Workplace or Professional Self-Care

- Take a break during the workday (e.g., lunch)
- Take time to chat with co-workers
- Make quiet time to complete tasks
- Identify projects or tasks that are exciting and rewarding
- Set limits with clients and colleagues
- Balance my caseload so that no one day or part of a day is “too much”
- Arrange work space so it is comfortable and comforting
- Get regular supervision or consultation
- Negotiate for my needs (benefits, pay raise)
- Have a peer support group
- (If relevant) Develop a non-trauma area of professional interest

Overall Balance

- Strive for balance within my work-life and work day
- Strive for balance among work, family, relationships, play, and rest

Other Areas of Self-Care that are Relevant to You

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Body</th>
<th>Head</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Practice</td>
<td>Current Practice</td>
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</table>

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Mind</th>
<th>Emotions</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>New Practice</td>
<td>Current Practice</td>
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My Maintenance Self-care Worksheet

Identify two strategies that you would like to begin to incorporate as part of your ongoing maintenance self-care—pay particular attention to domains that you have not been addressing in the past. On the last page identify barriers that might interfere with ongoing self-care.

Review the Self-care Assessment that you just completed, which includes what you are doing now for self-care. On this maintenance self-
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>WORK</th>
<th>OTHER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NEW PRACTICE</td>
<td>CURRENT PRACTICE</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**My Maintenance Self-Care Worksheet**
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>What I will do instead</th>
<th>I would like to use less or not at all</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Negative coping strategies</td>
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My Maintenance Self-Care Worksheet

(adapted by Sherry Reser, LCSW and Lisa D. Butler, PhD from materials provided by Sandra A. Lope, LCSW, ACSW, University of Houston Graduate School of Social Work)
**Emergency Self-Care Worksheet**

*Why do I need to do this?* It is very hard to think of what to do for yourself when things get tough. It is best to have a plan ready for when you need it.

*What should be in it?* You need to consider 3 general areas: what to do, what to think, and what to avoid.

1. **Make a list of what you can do when you are upset that will be good for you.**

   a. What will help me relax? ____________________________________________

      For example,
      - Breathing, Muscle relaxation, Music
      - Reading for fun, watching a movie
      - Exercising, Taking a walk

   b. What do I like to do when I’m in a good mood? __________________________

      - List all the things you like to do so you remember what they are when you need to think of something to do.

   c. What can I do that will help me throughout the day? ________________________

      For example,
      - Avoid too much caffeine if feeling anxious
      - Remember to breathe
      - Watch my thoughts
      - Stay in the moment

   d. Other: What else do YOU need to do that is specific to YOU? ________________________
2. **Make a list of people you can contact if you need support or distraction.**

   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

   For example, your best friend, other friends, sibling, parent, grandparent, other relative, therapist, priest/minister/rabbi/imam, etc.

   a. **Divide the list of people into categories by asking yourself the following questions:**
      - Who can I call if I am feeling depressed or anxious?
      - Who can I call if I am lonely?
      - Who will come over to be with me if I need company?
      - Who will listen?
      - Who will encourage me to get out of the house and do something fun?
      - Who will remind me to follow my self-care plan?
      - Other:

3. **Next, make a list of positive things to say to yourself when you are giving yourself a hard time.**

   ________________________________________________________________
   ________________________________________________________________

   **Examples of negative self-talk:**
   - “I got a B- on the paper; that proves that I shouldn’t be in graduate school.” CHANGE to: “That is a good grade. I will work on getting a better one.”
   - “I do not understand research methods, I am so dumb.” CHANGE to: “A lot of students are having a problem with this course. Maybe we should start a study group to help each other.”
   - “I can’t get all this work done. I should just drop out.” CHANGE to: “I will develop a schedule so that I can get this all done.” “I can check with other students for ideas.” “I can get some feedback from the professors that might help me do the assignments.”

   You get it. Try to think about what you would say to a client with the same struggles and apply it to yourself.
4. Next, make a list of who and what to avoid when you are having a hard time.

Examples of people to avoid:

- My boy(girl)friend broke up with me. I will not call my sister as she always hated him. She’ll be happy he’s gone.
- I didn’t get my assignment in on time and I’m worried about my grade. I will not call my dad. He is a stickler for doing things in advance so that they are never late. He’ll just give me a hard time.
- I am discouraged about my grades. I won’t call my best friend because she’ll just tell me not to worry about it and to quit school if it’s such a hassle.

You get this too. Not everyone can be supportive or helpful with every situation. Go to the ones who can be supportive about the specific issue you are dealing with.

Examples of things to avoid:

- I should not stay in the house all day.
- I should not stay in bed all day.
- I should open the shades and let the light in.
- I should not listen to sad music.
- I should not drink too much alcohol.
- Other:
  Again, you get it.

5. Write this plan on a 3x5” card. Keep it in your purse/wallet (and on your phone if you can). Look at it often. Add any good ideas to it whenever you can. Use it!

(Prepared by Elaine S. Rinfrette, PhD, LCSW-R)