

First Step in Reducing Your Stress

The first step in creating a plan to manage your stress is being aware of your stress patterns. If, like many people, you have not paid attention to them, begin to track the times you feel stressed. Write down:

- The date and time of day when you feel stress.
- What may have triggered the stress. Guess, if you aren't sure.
- How you felt (emotionally and physically) and behaved (actions and thoughts) in response to the stressful situation.
- What, if anything, you did to cope with the stressful situation.
- If the method was effective – it helped reduce the stress **without** contributing other negative consequences.

Here's a sample of what a stress record might look like.

Stress Record Example				
Date/ Time	Stressful event	Reaction	Coping response	Effective
7:30	Kids not getting ready for school	Felt tightness in stomach, yelled	Had a doughnut when I got to work	No
9:30	Late for meeting with supervisor	Tight stomach, fear	Talked with Janet about it; felt better	Yes
11:00	Copier broke down again	Headache, snapped at Bill	Not sure	Not Sure

After you collect this information, look over your notes to learn how often you are feeling stressed and how well you are coping. Ask yourself:

- When are you more stressed? What was going on during those times?
- Did you notice that certain people or situations triggered your stress?
- Were your reactions related more to thoughts, like worrying, or were they more physical, like headaches?
- Which coping strategies did you use? Which work best? Which ones don't work or have effects that you don't like?

The more notes you write down, the more you can learn about your stress patterns. Tracking your stress for 1 to 2 weeks is best but even for 1 or 2 days can be helpful.

With this information, you are better able to identify which strategies to use in response to the stressors. Better yet, you may even be able to take steps to proactively transform situations before they become stressful.

