

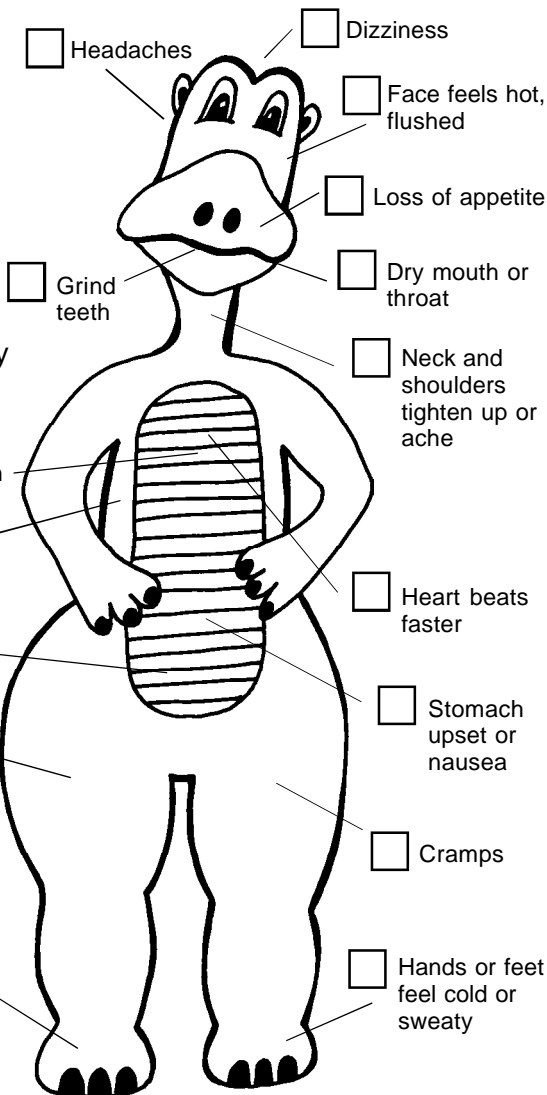
# HOW AM I?

**A booklet about stress for kids**

When I feel under a lot of stress and pressure, what happens to me? Which of the following do I notice?

Place a  beside those that happen often.

Place an  beside those that occur only sometimes.



**NDSU**  
Extension Service  
North Dakota State University

# THIS BOOKLET

can help you become aware of the effects stress has on your life and help you learn to cope with stress.

Stress is a term often associated with the rushed businessperson or the athlete who needs to make the winning shot. Many people forget that young people also experience stress. You may think stress has little to do with your life. But have you ever tried out for a team, taken a test, competed for an award or changed schools? All of these events can produce stress.

## STRESS

can be positive or negative. Positive stress pushes you to complete a task or do something. Negative stress gets in the way and puts demands on your mind and body. Learning to deal with these demands is what this booklet is all about.

Stress is your body's physical and emotional reaction to circumstances that frighten, irritate, confuse, endanger or excite you.

Stress isn't all bad; it's really very necessary in life. Your body sets its defenses and protects itself against danger. Each time your body senses danger or the unknown, your nervous system reacts by getting ready for "fight or flee." This "fight or flee" response is normal and present in living things.

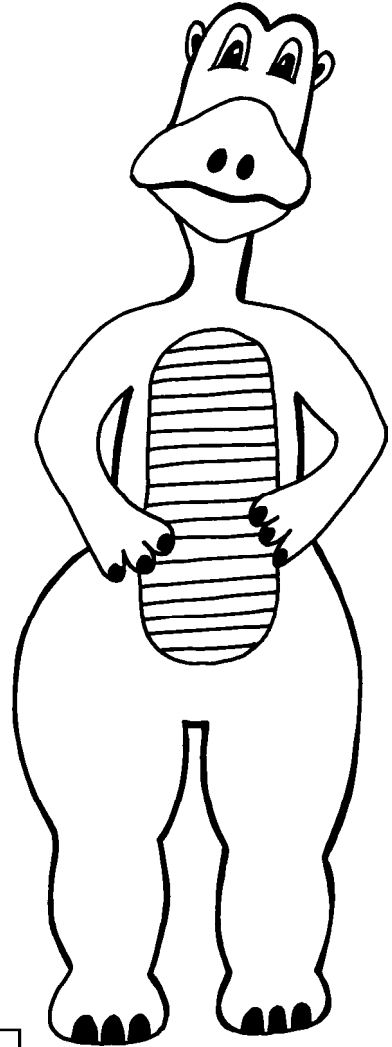
An average amount of stress can give you that extra burst of energy needed to finish the last mile of a bike ride or make you mentally more alert to pass an exam.

# THOUSANDS OF YEARS AGO,

this stress response was vital for survival. Our early ancestors lived in a brutal world where sudden, unthinking responses helped them “fight or flee” dangers like saber-toothed tigers and forest fires. Today, this same body response works well when you are faced with similar stressful situations such as running from a vicious dog or avoiding being hit by a car.

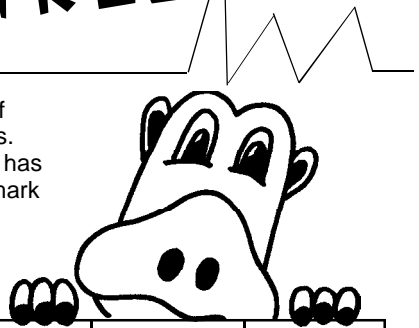
# MOST THREATS TODAY,

however, are much less obvious than saber-toothed tigers. Your threats include things such as tests, conflicts with parents and relationships with friends. Your body responds in the same chemical way it would have reacted to the saber-toothed tiger long ago—your muscles tense, your heart pounds, you breathe faster. Although your body is supercharged, there is often no direct way to “fight or flee” the situation. These long-term effects of stress can add up and do real damage to your body.



# SOURCES OF STRESS

Some stress is bad, some is good. The list of stressful situations below contains both types. Go through it, and check off each event that has happened to you within the past year. Also mark whether you felt good or bad about it.



Check only events you actually experienced

Event	This Happened to Me	The Effect It Had on Me (Good or Bad)
Doing something I was not comfortable with because of peer pressure		
Making new friends		
Being accepted by kids at school		
Fighting with a friend		
Wearing the right clothes, shoes, jackets		
Not getting along with my brothers or sisters		
Worrying about money		
Death of a close relative or family member		
Being left out		
Change in family income		
Not being good at sports, piano, dance, spelling, math		
Trying hard but still failing		

Event	This Happened to Me	The Effect It Had on Me (Good or Bad)
Parents giving me too many jobs and responsibilities		
Parents didn't listen to me		
Death of a friend or classmate		
Speaking up in class		
Having adults expect too much from me		
Joining a new after-school activity		
Changing schools		
Classmate or friend committed suicide		
Threat of violence at school		
Divorce of parents		
Parents separated		
Personal injury or illness		
Gained a new family member (baby or stepfamily member)		
Change of someone's health in my family		
Arguments with my parents		
Arguments with my brothers or sisters		
Moving		
Having trouble with a teacher		
Vacationing		

Any one of these events is probably stressful. If you checked several that made you feel bad, you may be feeling a stress overload.

# ARE THINGS SOMETIMES JUST TOO MUCH?

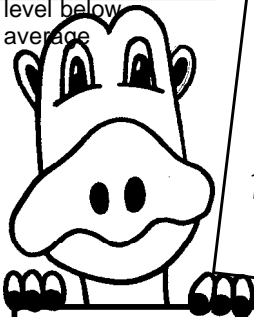
This quiz will help you explore your reactions to stress overload. There are no right or wrong answers, so read through the list and check those that apply to you. This will help you determine your level of stress.

## Score Scale

6 or more = stress level quite high

2 to 5 = stress level average

1 or 0 = stress level below average



1. I often feel tense, anxious, upset. ....
2. I have a nervous stomach. ....
3. People in my family often make me feel upset. ....
4. People at school often make me feel nervous. ....
5. I get headaches a lot. ....
6. I often have trouble sleeping. ....
7. I worry about school, even at night and on weekends. ....
8. I find myself eating a lot when I get nervous. ....
9. I have trouble concentrating on things because I'm worrying about something else. ....
10. I consider drugs, smoking or drinking to relax. ....
11. I have a lot of things that have to be done by certain times at school or at home. ....
12. I have trouble finding time to relax. ....
13. When I do have time to relax, I can't relax because I feel guilty that I'm not doing my homework or other chores. ....

## REACTIONS TO STRESS

Common reactions to stress include:

- |                            |                              |
|----------------------------|------------------------------|
| Crying                     | Boredom                      |
| Depression                 | Unable to concentrate        |
| Restlessness, fidgeting    | Sleep or go to bed to escape |
| Feeling tired or exhausted | Unable to sleep              |
| Withdrawing from people    | Irritable or moody           |
| Aggression                 |                              |

# FEELINGS RELATED TO STRESS

Describe a time when you felt...

Shame

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Nervous/Anxious

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Guilt

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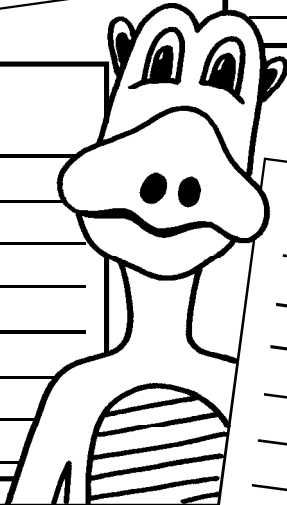
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Fear

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Jealousy/Envy

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# STRESS SAFETY VALVES

Sometimes a break or a change from a stressful situation helps you to return refreshed and ready to handle a problem. Everyone needs to have a stress safety valve—a way to relax or take a break from a stressful situation.

## Stress safety valves can include:

- Spend some time alone.
- Take a walk.
- Listen to music.
- Talk or play with little kids.
- Care for your pet.
- Work on your favorite hobby or start a new one.
- Sing with a group of people.
- Bake or cook something special.
- Play a musical instrument.
- Jog, dance, play basketball or join in some physical activity you enjoy.
- Watch the sun rise or set, or watch the night sky.
- Play just for fun instead of to win.
- Smile at someone.
- Tackle one task at a time. Make a list of what you want to do and then start with the first task.
- Talk to someone who listens or someone who will help you explore your alternatives.

What are your stress safety valves now?

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Think of three more stress safety valves that you can use.

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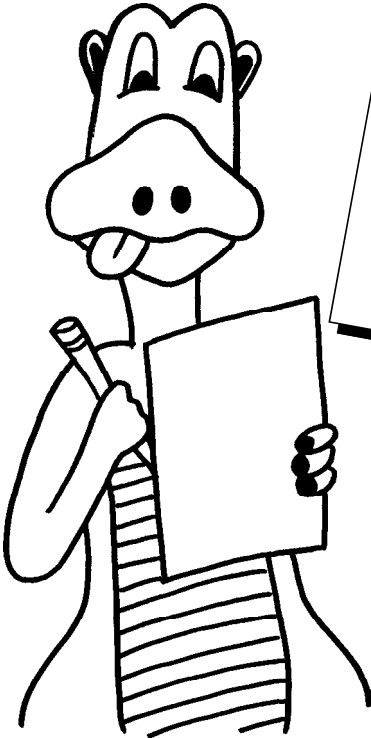
# ACTIVITIES TO RELIEVE STRESS

When you feel stressed and don't want to talk it out or walk it out, consider the following paper options.

## The Letter

If you are angry with someone or hurt or frustrated, write that person a letter. You don't have to send it. Writing down your thoughts and feelings will help get them off your chest and clear your head to think of solutions and other positive ways to tackle problems the next time you encounter them. If you do choose to send a copy of the letter, make sure it offers positive solutions, not blame or threats.

*Dear Diary*  
This is another way to keep track of your thoughts and feelings without sharing them with the other person. Using a diary or journal to figure out emotions and solutions can be very positive and private. P.S. Be sure to share the solutions you come up with to improve the situation for everyone involved.



# ACTIVITIES TO RELIEVE STRESS

## Fold It

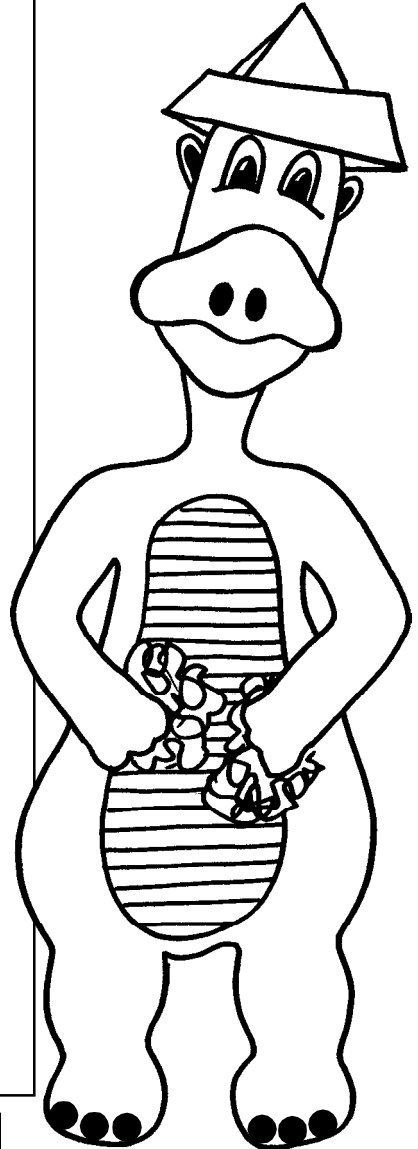
Make a hat, a paper ship or a whole outfit. Rip paper into strips just to shred or paper mache'. Check out a book on origami and really put your frustrations to work folding and creating. People feel better when they have a skill to share that is different than anyone else's.

## Draw It Out

If you enjoy drawing when you're feeling relaxed, keep the markers handy and draw when you're feeling stressed. Perhaps you can draw the blues right out of you.

## Crumple It Up

Feeling really unmotivated? Crumple up some newspaper, one page at a time. As you crumple, think about something you worry about then throw the worry at a trash can or other acceptable target. Be sure to clean up the room when you're through or you'll have something else to worry about.



# QUICK RELAXATION IDEAS

## Whole Body Tension

1. Tense all the muscles in your whole body. Hold that tension as long as you can without feeling pain.
2. Slowly release the tension and feel it leave your body little by little.
3. Repeat three times.
4. Describe how this feels.

## Counting 10 Breaths Back

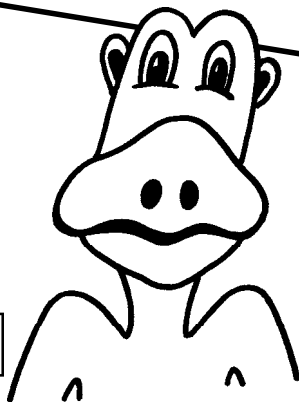
1. Allow yourself to feel calm and relaxed. Count each breath slowly from 10 to one.
2. With each count, allow yourself to feel more relaxed.
3. With each breath out, allow the tension to leave your body.

## Shoulder Shrug

1. Try to raise your shoulders up to your ears.
2. Hold for the count of four, then drop your shoulders back to normal position.
3. Repeat as often as necessary until you feel relaxed.
4. Change this by rotating your shoulders back, down and around—first one way, then the other, then both shoulders at the same time.

## Alternate Nostril Breathing

1. Block your left nostril with one hand and inhale deeply through your right nostril for five seconds.
2. Block both nostrils, holding your breath for five seconds.
3. Repeat, beginning this time by breathing through the left nostril.



# WHERE TO GO FOR HELP



Fill in the phone numbers important to you.

Home \_\_\_\_\_

Parent's work \_\_\_\_\_

School \_\_\_\_\_

Teacher \_\_\_\_\_

Principal \_\_\_\_\_

Counselor \_\_\_\_\_

Minister/Clergy \_\_\_\_\_

Mental Health HELP-LINE (800) 472-2911

County Social Services \_\_\_\_\_

Local Hotline \_\_\_\_\_

Emergency help \_\_\_\_\_

Anorexia and Bulimia Information (800) 472-2911

Drugs and Alcohol Habilitat Hotline (800) 872-2525

Heartview Foundation \_\_\_\_\_

(chemical dependency) (800) 554-2000

Multipurpose (Covenant House) (800) 999-9999

Poison Center (800) 732-2200

Prevention Resource Center (800) 642-6744

Protection & Advocacy Project (800) 472-2670

(24-hour emergency) (800) 642-6694

Runaway Hotline (800) 621-4000

Suicide Prevention & \_\_\_\_\_

Survivors of Suicide (800) 472-2911



# WORK IT OUT!

Complete the following sentences. As you write, remember that everyone has these feelings. Feelings are not good or bad or right or wrong. They may be pleasant and unpleasant, but that's normal.

I feel happy when \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I become angry when \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I am sad when \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I feel lonely when \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I become frustrated when \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

I hate it when \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

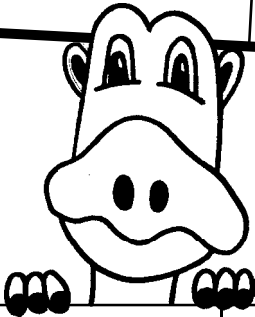
I get anxious when \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

# WORK IT OUT!

## EXAMPLE

<b>Situation</b>	My sister didn't come out of the bathroom.
<b>How did I react?</b>	Pounded on the door and yelled, "Get out!"
<b>How did I feel?</b>	Angry
<b>What happened because of my actions?</b>	My parents grounded me.
<b>What could I try next time?</b>	Get up earlier. Ask. Schedule for turns. Shower the night before. Blow dry my hair in my bedroom.



<b>Situation</b>	
<b>How did I react?</b>	
<b>How did I feel?</b>	
<b>What happened because of my actions?</b>	
<b>What could I try next time?</b>	

**Sean Brotherson**  
Family Science Specialist

**REFERENCE:**

Chase, C. (1981). "The Stress Connection." Cooperative Extension Service, Michigan State University, National 4-H Council.

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