

prima

Making life simple

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ideas

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Less stress forever

* feelgood foods, time-savers and
the tips that work for you





Less *stress* forever

Take the *stress* test

Do you have too much stress in your life, or too little? Use our flow chart to help you identify whether you're so laid back you're horizontal, or so wired up you're on the verge of a breakdown...

Box 1:

You have a fulfilling work and social life and always have plenty to do. You occasionally have to work harder before a deadline – but this burst of activity gives you a buzz of excitement, and you get a real thrill out of achieving your goals.

YES
go to
Box 3

Box 3:

Your to-do list is growing, and you're occasionally missing deadlines or turning up late for appointments. Your eczema is flaring up – or you may be getting spots or IBS. Instead of giving you a buzz, your deadlines are now causing you heart palpitations and a knotted stomach. You're ratty, and craving more coffee than usual.

NO
go to
Box 2

NOT ALL STRESS IS BAD!

Stress is the primitive response that gives us our get-up-and-go. It energises the body and motivates us to succeed. Without it our ancestors would never have found the strength to run from predators, or the motivation to hunt for the family's next meal.

NO
go to
Box 3

ACUTE STRESS SYMPTOMS

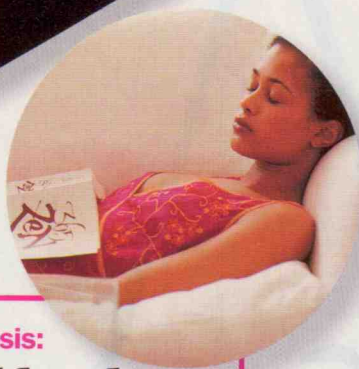
Under acute stress, you become more aggressive (your body's preparing for fight or flight). Your heart rate speeds up and blood flow to the muscles increases (so you can run faster). Skin histamine levels go up too (causing spots and eczema, if you're prone). It's your primitive way of either camouflaging yourself or warning a foe that you're ready for action. Too much stress can lead to aches and pains, spotty skin and a bad temper.

NO
go to
Box 3a

Box 2:

Your diary's empty, your to-do list non-existent, and you wonder what to do with all your spare time.

YES
go to
Box 2a



Box 2a Diagnosis:

You're too laid-back

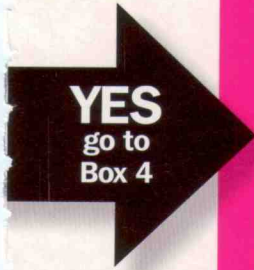
'You may genuinely love under-achieving. Or the tiniest bit of stress may make you so uncomfortable you can't bear to put yourself through it,' says stress expert Dr Malcolm VandenBurg. 'Your attitude to life could be a reaction to having had too much pressure put on you as a child, and now you have chosen to opt out. There are some laid-back types who achieve just as much as the classic work-driven adrenaline junkies – but without the stress. However, if your life is lacklustre and you have time on your hands, you could benefit from pushing yourself a bit harder. Join a club, meet new friends, or study for a new exam and see what kind of a buzz you get from it.'

Box 3a Diagnosis:

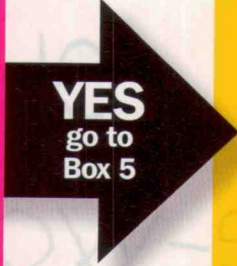
You thrive under pressure

'Your traffic lights are on green and you have a positive reaction to stress. Keep on going in the same direction, as you're doing just fine,' says Dr VandenBurg, stress expert. 'Your sympathetic nervous system is appropriately turned on and your brain's driving an increase in hormones to help you keep on doing and achieving more. Your body is geared up to run a marathon and win, and the adrenaline you're pumping out gives you that glorious sense of exhilaration. You know from experience how much stress is enjoyable, and you're keeping it at just the right level.'

How to I

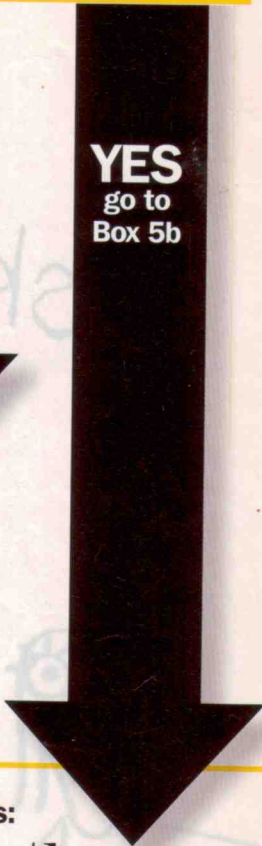


Box 4:
You're starting to dislike waking up, and dread going to work in the mornings. You're having more arguments than usual and your relationships are getting difficult. To cap it all, your back seems to be hurting so you want to take sick leave, your skin's in terrible condition, and you're getting spots and eczema in new places. You've had a run of colds, tummy pains, cold sores and ulcers. Everything seems to be going to pot.



Box 5:
Everything's going wrong – work's so bad you can't perform and want to bunk off, and relationships are breaking down. You can't sleep or eat properly, and you feel as if the whole world's against you.

CHRONIC STRESS
Chronic stress increases levels of the hormones that dampen your immune response, making you more prone to infections. Your muscles become so tense, you have permanent backache and joint pains. You can't sleep properly because you're flooded with the hormones that keep you on red alert. And you're eating badly because your body's continuing to shut down your appetite to prepare for fight or flight. Your body is begging you not to go to work – it's desperate to take time out and relax!



Box 4a Diagnosis:
You're suffering from acute stress
Your traffic lights are on amber – your body's stress response is normally quite well balanced, but goes up a gear when things get a bit tough. Stress expert Dr VandenBurg says: 'You're driving your heart a bit too hard, and may even get chest pains. You're either stinting on what you eat, or needing the loo more often as your body thinks it's preparing for a long time on the run. Your symptoms are signs that you need to take your foot off the accelerator. Get to know this feeling and react to it when it happens: take more time out for yourself, do more exercise (to burn up those stress hormones) and make sure you're eating well.'

Box 5a Diagnosis:
You're suffering from chronic stress
Your lights are on red, stress expert Dr VandenBurg warns: 'It's time to stop what you're doing and change direction. You may need to talk through your stress with a doctor or therapist; and you definitely need to say "no" a bit more, and practise relaxing.'

Box 5b Diagnosis:
You're on the verge of a nervous breakdown
Stress expert Dr VandenBurg explains: 'You need to acknowledge that your stress is out of control. It's time to reassess your life, and make major changes. Talk to someone in human resources at work, and get help from your doctor.'

BREAKING-POINT STRESS
When stress gets bad enough it can drive you to a breakdown, causing your health, work and relationships to suffer.

For more information on coping with stress, read *Positive Under Pressure* by Gael Lindenfield and Dr Malcolm VandenBurg (£6.99 from www.malcolmvandenBurg.com).

Feature: Karen Evmenett Photos: Getty Images, Alamy Images