

## Ten Things You Should Know About Stress

**#1 Stress is good for you.** Stress should go up and down and some stress every day is healthy; it builds resilience. What is evil for your body is DISTRESS, which is a chronic stress overload from continuous, over the top, stress.

**#2 School stress levels may be getting worse.** Let's start with kids. Over 20% of adolescents nationwide (ages 11-17) have some type of a stress disorder (depression, reactive attachment disorder, learned helplessness, bipolar, etc.) Top 3 kids stressors are 1) school academic pressures 2) family pressure and 3) bullying (kidshealth.org). Among kids from poverty, 60-95% have chronic stress.

**#3 Chronic stress hurts student achievement.** It is well known that chronic stress contributes to over half of all school absences (Johnston-Brooks, et al. 1998). The ways to reduce this in the classroom include: a) more physical activity, yoga or stretching, b) greater sense of control, including decision-making and responsibility, and c) improved coping skills. (Share everyday incidents with your students and let them suggest how they would solve the problem.)

**#4 Chronic stress reduces neurogenesis,** the production of new brain cells. (DiBellis, et al. 2001). This contributes to impaired attention, learning and memory (Lupien, et al., 2001). Three ways to boost neurogenesis are exercise, new learning and positive social contact.

**#5 Chronic stress has gender differences.** This plays out in academic performance and internal distress (Pomerantz, Eva M.; Altermatt, Ellen Rydell; Saxon, Jill L.). We know that girls outperform boys in school, but paradoxically, girls are also *more vulnerable* to internal distress (depression, anxiety, etc.) than are boys.

**#6 Chronic stress levels can be reset in your body,** like a thermostat. Homeostasis only happens sometimes. PTSD and depression are good examples of an "allostatic load" or adjusted stress thermostat, meaning a "new normal." The longer you are in any physiological state (e.g. depression, anger, happiness), the more stable that state becomes. It may even become the "default state" that you revert to over and over. That's why, if you become depressed, you should get help immediately.

**#7 Chronic stress can lead to weight gain.** Study after study (see references below) connects chronic stress with a reduced self-regulatory ability. In other words, the more stressed you get (especially chronic stress), the harder it is to regulate your weight. Why? Your brain constantly is sending you the message to "prepare for dealing with stress" by eating more. Our DNA says load up on fats, carbs and sugars under stress. Why? Those are all sources of energy. Lower your stress and your capacity to lose the weight gets better.

**#8 Chronic stress is more likely in kids from poverty.** These kids are most likely to be anxious, scattered, angry or even despondent. All of those are symptoms of a stress disorder. You cannot teach kids with stress disorders the same way as you would kids with a healthy brain. Obviously, [Teaching with Poverty in Mind](#) (Jensen) is a good resource.

**#9 Chronic stress is the number one aging accelerant.** If you feel stressed ALL of the time, it's good to wake up and "smell the roses." Start getting your life back; chronic stress will kill you. I believe my stepmother died of chronic stress, even though "stroke" was the official cause of death.

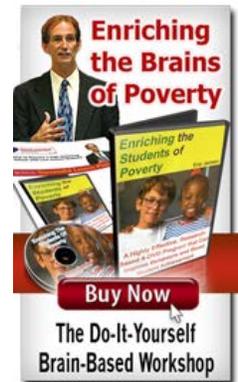
**#10 There is no stress “out there” in the world.** Your job is not stressful (take ownership: *you stress you out*) and if you feel that your job’s the problem, you’ll always be miserable. Kids don’t stress you out (take ownership: *you stress you out*). Other staff or administrators don’t stress you out (take ownership: *you stress you out*).

Once you “get it” that stress is your mind/body’s reaction to a perception (not reality), then you have a chance to shift your perceptions and turn your life around. Those who lead a low stress life are not “lucky” or “better” than you. They have simply, over time, acquired the life skills needed to make that part of their life work better. You can, too. Keep reading.

### Practical Applications

Let’s “flesh out” what we can do to better manage our own stress and distress. Here are ten things you can do to reclaim your life. You don’t have to move to a tropical island to have less stress. What does need to happen is to understand how to run your own brain. These everyday strategies are free. You just have to make them so important, that you’ll commit to a healthy, functioning mind and body every day of your life.

I am so sold on these suggestions, I probably do 80% or more of them every single week of my life.



1. **Take Action (get control)**—When you take action on your stress, you feel better!
2. **Write it Down for Later**—Anything you write down, gets “off-loaded” from your brain and stress goes down.
3. **1 Week Rule**—This one’s my favorite; when you feel stressed over an event, person or circumstance, ask yourself, “Will this still matter a week from now?” If it won’t matter a week from now (like burnt toast!), then stop stressing over it.
4. **Redirect Your Attention to something else**—What you feed with your attention is what consumes resources.
5. **Burn off Energy (Play/Exercise/Hug)**—While hugs are always good for lowering stress, add exercise to the mix, and you’ll live longer.
6. **Reframe the Experience**—Provide a new perspective and the stressor may go away (“She’s young, she’ll learn.” Or, “He just doesn’t know how to show affection.”)
7. **Let it Go**—Drop the matter from your attention and move on.
8. **Relax/Meditate/Sleep**—our brain, at your age, needs 6-8 hours of sleep a night. If you’re not getting that, you’re more susceptible to stress.
9. **Eat healthy**—Chronic stress consumes resources, so better nutrition can help your body cope better. Omega 3 oils, simple carbohydrates (just less of them), more proteins, fruits and vegetables will strengthen your immune system.

10. And in your school and classroom: **Teach coping skills**—Provide students with an increasing sense of control over their daily lives. The good news is that chronic stress can be reduced.

You can get your life back. But, it will take a concerted effort, as if your life depends on it (which it does). My own stress is usually pretty low, whether I'm home or traveling. This is a choice; you're not, and I'm not, a victim. Claim your life this school year and promise yourself to take better care of YOU. Please, for yourself, your family and the kids you work with, take charge of your stress levels and choose health and vitality. You'll be glad you did.

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**Your partner in learning,**



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**CITATIONS:**

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