

PROFESSIONAL LIFE STRESS SCALE

By David Fontana

Adapted from *Managing Stress*, The British Psychological Society and Routledge Ltd., 1989

The following stress scale must be treated as a useful guide rather than as a precise instrument. Complete it quickly, and don't think too hard before responding to each question. Your first response is often the most accurate one. As with any stress scale, it isn't difficult to spot what is the 'low stress' answer to each question. Don't be tempted to give this answer if it isn't the accurate one. Nothing is at stake. You are as stressed as you are. Your score on the scale doesn't change that, one way or the other. The purpose of the scale is simply to help you clarify some of your thinking about your own life.

The Professional Life Stress Test

1. Two people who know you well are discussing you. Which of the following statements would they be most likely to use?
 - a. 'X is very together. Nothing much seems to bother him/her.'
 - b. 'X is great. But you have to be careful what you say to him/her at times.'
 - c. 'Something always seems to be going wrong with X's life.'
 - d. 'I find X very moody and unpredictable.'
 - e. 'The less I see of X the better!'

2. Are any of the following common features of your life?
 - a. Feeling you can seldom do anything right
 - b. Feelings of being hounded, trapped, or cornered
 - c. Indigestion
 - d. Poor appetite
 - e. Difficulty in getting to sleep at night
 - f. Dizzy spells or palpitations
 - g. Sweating without exertion or high air temperature
 - h. Panic feelings when in crowds or in confined spaces
 - i. Tiredness and lack of energy
 - j. Feelings of hopelessness ('what's the use of anything?')
 - k. Faintness or nausea sensations without any physical cause
 - l. Extreme irritation over small things
 - m. Inability to unwind in the evenings
 - n. Waking regularly at night or early in the mornings
 - o. Difficulty in making decisions
 - p. Inability to stop thinking about problems or the day's events
 - q. Tearfulness
 - r. Convictions that you just can't cope
 - s. Lack of enthusiasm even for cherished interests
 - t. Reluctance to meet new people and attempt new experiences
 - u. Inability to say 'no' when asked to do something
 - v. Having more responsibility than you can handle

3. Are you *more* or *less* optimistic than you used to be (or about the same)?
 - a. more
 - b. about the same
 - c. less
4. Do you enjoy *watching* sports?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
5. Can you get up late on weekends if you want to without feeling guilty?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
6. Within reasonable professional and personal limits, can you speak your mind to your boss?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
7. Can you speak your mind to your colleagues?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
8. Can you speak your mind to members of your family?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
9. Who usually seems to be responsible for making the important decisions in your life?
 - a. yourself
 - b. someone else
10. When criticized by superiors at work, are you usually:
 - a. very upset?
 - b. moderately upset?
 - c. mildly upset?
11. Do you finish the working day feeling satisfied with what you have achieved?
 - a. often
 - b. sometimes
 - c. only occasionally
12. Do you feel most of the time that you have unsettled conflicts with colleagues?
 - a. yes
 - b. no
13. Does the amount of work you have to do exceed the amount of time available?
 - a. habitually
 - b. sometimes
 - c. only very occasionally

14. Do you have a clear picture of what is expected of you professionally?
 - a. mostly
 - b. sometimes
 - c. hardly ever

15. Would you say that generally you have enough time to spend on yourself?
 - a. yes
 - b. no

16. If you want to discuss your problems with someone, can you usually find a sympathetic ear?
 - a. yes
 - b. no

17. Are you reasonably on course towards achieving your major objectives in life?
 - a. yes
 - b. no

18. Are you bored at work?
 - a. often
 - b. sometimes
 - c. very rarely

19. Do you look forward to going into work?
 - a. most days
 - b. some days
 - c. hardly ever

20. Do you feel adequately *valued* for your abilities and commitment at work?
 - a. yes
 - b. no

21. Do you feel adequately *rewarded* in terms of status and promotion for your abilities and commitment at work?
 - a. yes
 - b. no

22. Do you feel your superiors actively *hinder you* in your work? Or do they actively *help you* in your work?
 - a. hinder
 - b. help

23. If ten years ago you had been able to see yourself professionally as you are now, how would you have seen yourself?
 - a. exceeding your expectations
 - b. fulfilling your expectations
 - c. falling short of your expectations

24. If you had to rate how much you like yourself on a scale from 1 (least like) to 5 (most like), what would your rating be?
- a. 1
 - b. 2
 - c. 3
 - d. 4
 - e. 5

Key for the Professional Life Stress Test

For each question, score according to the directions that follow:

1. (a) 0, (b) 1, (c) 2, (d) 3, (e) 4
2. Score 1 for each 'yes' response
3. Score 0 for *a. more optimistic*, 1 for *b. about the same*, 2 for *c. less optimistic*
4. Score 0 for a. 'yes', 1 for b. 'no'
5. Score 0 for a. 'yes', 1 for b. 'no'
6. Score 0 for a. 'yes', 1 for b. 'no'
7. Score 0 for a. 'yes', 1 for b. 'no'
8. Score 0 for a. 'yes', 1 for b. 'no'
9. Score 0 for a. 'yourself', 1 for b. 'someone else'
10. Score 2 for a. 'very upset', 1 for b. 'moderately upset', 0 for c. 'mildly upset'
11. Score 0 for a. 'often', 1 for b. 'sometimes', 2 for c. 'only occasionally'
12. Score 0 for a. 'no', 1 for b. 'yes'
13. Score 2 for a. 'habitually', 1 for b. 'sometimes', 0 for c. 'only very occasionally'
14. Score 0 for a. 'mostly', 1 for b. 'sometimes', 2 for c. 'hardly ever'
15. Score 0 for a. 'yes', 1 for b. 'no'
16. Score 0 for a. 'yes', 1 for b. 'no'
17. Score 0 for a. 'yes', 1 for b. 'no'
18. Score 2 for a. 'often', 1 for b. 'sometimes', 0 for c. 'very rarely'
19. Score 0 for a. 'most days', 1 for b. 'some days', 2 for c. 'hardly ever'
20. Score 0 for a. 'yes', 1 for b. 'no'
21. Score 0 for a. 'yes', 1 for b. 'no'
22. Score 1 for a. 'hinder', 0 for b. 'help'
23. Score 0 for a. 'exceeding your expectations', 1 for b. 'fulfilling your expectations', 2 for c. 'falling short of your expectations'
24. Score 4 for a. '1', 3 for b. '2', 2 for c. '3', 1 for d. '4', and 0 for e. '5'

Interpreting Your Score

Keep in mind that scores on stress scales must be interpreted cautiously. There are so many variables which lie outside the scope of these scales but which influence the way in which we perceive and handle our stress, that two people with the same scores may experience themselves as under quite different levels of stress. Nevertheless, taken as no more than a guide, these scales can give us some useful information.

Score = 15. Stress isn't a problem in your life. This doesn't mean that you have insufficient stress to keep yourself occupied and fulfilled. The scale is only designed to assess undesirable responses to stress.

Score = 16-30. This is a moderate range of stress for a busy professional person. It's nevertheless well worth looking at how it can reasonably be reduced.

Score = 31-45. Stress is clearly a problem, and the need for remedial action is apparent. The longer you work under this level of stress, the harder it often is to do something about it. There is a strong case for looking carefully at your professional life.

Score = 45-60. At these levels, stress is a major problem, and something must be done without delay. You may be nearing the stage of exhaustion in the general adaptability syndrome. The pressure must be eased.