

Helping Your Patients with Stress

The Challenge: Most clinicians are aware of the interactions between stress and health. Integrative Health (IH) providers are ideally positioned to incorporate an assessment of stress into their clinical practices. However, many also find that assessing the level of stress in the clinical encounter is difficult, and so, is often overlooked. A review of CHP clinical records from 2012 demonstrated only 41/110 (37%) of providers inquired about stress during their initial visit with a new patient.

The focus of this CHP Clinical Advisory is to provide useful information and tools to incorporate evaluation of psychosocial stress into a holistic appraisal of a patient's health. It is not intended to guide clinicians to provide stress management but only to alert both the clinician and patient that stress is an important health issue that should be addressed and incorporated into the clinical record.

The role of stress as we now know it is beyond question regarding its effects on human health. Centuries of healers have noted the link between stress and disease. Ancient Chinese characters that equate to the notion of stress, (i.e. "crisis") combine "Danger" with "Opportunity." Hippocrates is said to have written that "disease was not only pathos (suffering), but also ponos (toil), as the body fought to restore normalcy."ⁱ

CRISIS



However it was only in the 1930's that the idea of stress as a health issue emerged largely due to the work of Hans Selye. He proposed the "general adaptation syndrome (GAS)" which evolved from his animal experimental work which demonstrated that physical stress (cold, starvation, pain) produced similar physiological effects.

Selye himself and extensive subsequent research have demonstrated that stress itself is not necessarily a negative factor on health. The stress of physical activity for instance increases capacity and the stress of an infection can promote immunity. The acute psychosocial stress of a job loss may open up new and unexpected opportunities. It is when patients experience stress that negatively affects their health that their health care providers must be aware of the presence of stress and the complex inter-relationships among health, disease and the general adaptation syndrome, aka stress.

Obstacles: Many clinicians are reluctant to discuss stress with their patients. Most have a lack of confidence in evaluating the level of a patient's stress. Patients themselves may not be aware of the contribution of stress to their health and many conventional clinicians are uncomfortable with patients' distress.ⁱⁱ

The Evidence: The evidence on the health effects of stress is monumental. It is clear that stressful life events and the stress of acute and chronic disease are a major burden in terms of health care costs and lost productivity. The Global Burden of Disease Survey estimated that mental health conditions including stress-related disorders will be a leading cause of disability by 2020.ⁱⁱⁱ However it is also clear that most conventional primary care encounters fail to incorporate stress management in clinical evaluation and care planning.^{iv}

But it is also clear that patients respond favorably to a holistic approach that incorporates physical, mental and spiritual aspects of health in patient assessment and care planning.^v Providers of Integrative Health (IH) generally endorse a clinical philosophy that encompasses a holistic perspective. Incorporating and documenting an appropriate stress assessment in the clinical record can demonstrate improved quality of care delivered to patients.

Here's How You Can Help: The easiest and most efficient way to assess stress levels is simply to ask patients directly. Including one or more questions about stress on your patient intake form is an easy start. Example: What is your stress level? __Minimal __Low __Medium __High

More complete stress assessments are readily available on line. Enclosed are some examples.

Indications of stress level also appear in various aspects of patient assessment such as the type of work performed, family and social relationships, major or minor illness in the patient or family, sleep habits, caffeine consumption, tobacco/alcohol use, prescription or recreational drugs diet, and exercise habits.

Having a good stress assessment can guide care planning and help frame anticipated outcomes for both the clinician and patient. Highly stressed patients are likely to respond to treatment interventions much differently than those with lower stress. Helping patients understand the effects of stress on health, both good and bad, can facilitate self-efficacy and improve clinical outcomes. Direct stress management interventions may be indicated and, if necessary, prompt a referral.

ⁱ By: Rosch P. Hans Selye: Birth of Stress Accessed 8/10/16 at <http://www.stress.org/about/hans-selye-birth-of-stress/>

ⁱⁱ Robinson W, et al. Technician, Friend, Detective, and Healer: Family Physicians' Responses to Emotional Distress. *J Fam Pract*. 2001 October;50(10):864-870.

ⁱⁱⁱ Kalia M. Assessing the Economic Impact of Stress—The Modern Day Hidden Epidemic. *Metabolism*, Vol 51, No 6, Suppl 1 (June), 2002: pp 49-53. Accessed 8/12/16 at http://www.getoutoflinenow.com/pdf_files/The%20Global%20Impact%20of%20Stress.pdf

^{iv} Nerurkar A, Bitton A, Davis RB, Phillips RS, Yeh G. When Physicians Counsel About Stress: Results of a National Study. *JAMA Intern Med*. 2013;173(1):76-77. doi:10.1001/2013.jamainternmed.480.

^v Ricjardson J. What patients expect from complementary therapy: A qualitative study. *Am J Public Health*. 2004 June; 94(6): 1049-1053.



Stress Questionnaire

Because everyone reacts to stress in his or her own way, no one stress test can give you a complete diagnosis of your stress levels. This stress test is intended to give you an **overview** only. Please see a Stress Management Consultant for a more in depth analysis.

Answer **all** the questions but just tick one box that applies to you, either yes or no. Answer yes, *even if only part of a question applies to you*. Take your time, but please be completely honest with your answers:

		Yes	No
1	I frequently bring work home at night		
2	Not enough hours in the day to do all the things that I must do		
3	I deny or ignore problems in the hope that they will go away		
4	I do the jobs myself to ensure they are done properly		
5	I underestimate how long it takes to do things		
6	I feel that there are too many deadlines in my work / life that are difficult to meet		
7	My self confidence / self esteem is lower than I would like it to be		
8	I frequently have guilty feelings if I relax and do nothing		
9	I find myself thinking about problems even when I am supposed to be relaxing		
10	I feel fatigued or tired even when I wake after an adequate sleep		
11	I often nod or finish other peoples sentences for them when they speak slowly		
12	I have a tendency to eat, talk, walk and drive quickly		
13	My appetite has changed, have either a desire to binge or have a loss of appetite / may skip meals		
14	I feel irritated or angry if the car or traffic in front seems to be going too slowly/ I become very frustrated at having to wait in a queue		
15	If something or someone really annoys me I will bottle up my feelings		
16	When I play sport or games, I really try to win whoever I play		
17	I experience mood swings, difficulty making decisions, concentration and memory is impaired		
18	I find fault and criticize others rather than praising, even if it is deserved		
19	I seem to be listening even though I am preoccupied with my own thoughts		
20	My sex drive is lower, can experience changes to menstrual cycle		
21	I find myself grinding my teeth		
22	Increase in muscular aches and pains especially in the neck, head, lower back, shoulders		
23	I am unable to perform tasks as well as I used to, my judgment is clouded or not as good as it was		
24	I find I have a greater dependency on alcohol, caffeine, nicotine or drugs		
25	I find that I don't have time for many interests / hobbies outside of work		
A yes answer score = 1 (one), and a no answer score = 0 (zero).		TOTALS	



Stress Questionnaire

Your score:

Most of us can manage varying amounts of pressure without feeling stressed. However too much or excessive pressure, often created by our own thinking patterns and life experiences, can overstretch our ability to cope and then stress is experienced.

4 points or less: You are least likely to suffer from stress-related illness.

5 - 13 points: You are more likely to experience stress related ill health either mental, physical or both. You would benefit from stress management / counseling or advice to help in the identified areas.

14 points or more: You are the most prone to stress showing a great many traits or characteristics that are creating un-healthy behaviours. This means that you are also more likely to experience stress & stress-related illness e.g. diabetes, irritable bowel, migraine, back and neck pain, high blood pressure, heart disease/strokes, mental ill health (depression, anxiety & stress). It is important to seek professional help or stress management counseling. Consult your medical practitioner.

Tips to help improve your score

Review the questions that you scored yes:

- See if you can reduce, change or modify this trait.
- Start with the ones that are easiest & most likely to be successful for you.
- Only expect small changes to start with, it takes daily practice to make any change.
- Support from friends, family/colleagues will make the process easier and more enjoyable.
- Professional help is always available & your GP is a good place to start.

To find a stress management consultant in your area go to www.isma.org.uk and click on 'Find a Stress Management Consultant'

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Patient Stress Questionnaire*

Name: _____

Date: _____ Birthdate: _____

Over the **last two weeks**, how often have you been bothered by any of the following problems?

(please circle your answer & **check the boxes that apply to you**)

	Not at all	Several days	More than half the days	Nearly Every day	
1. Little interest or pleasure in doing things	0	1	2	3	
2. Feeling down, depressed, or hopeless	0	1	2	3	
3. ☐ Trouble falling or staying asleep, or ☐ sleeping too much	0	1	2	3	
4. Feeling tired or having little energy	0	1	2	3	
5. ☐ Poor appetite or ☐ overeating	0	1	2	3	
6. Feeling bad about yourself or that you are a failure or have let yourself or your family down	0	1	2	3	
7. Trouble concentrating on things, such as reading the newspaper or watching television	0	1	2	3	
8. ☐ Moving or speaking so slowly that other people could have noticed, or ☐ the opposite - being so fidgety or restless that you've been moving around a lot more than usual	0	1	2	3	
9. ☐ Thoughts that you would be better off dead, or ☐ hurting yourself in some way	0	1	2	3	Total
(10)	add columns:				

1. Feeling nervous, anxious or on edge	0	1	2	3	
2. Not being able to stop or control worrying	0	1	2	3	
3. Worrying too much about different things	0	1	2	3	
4. Trouble relaxing	0	1	2	3	
5. Being so restless that it is hard to sit still	0	1	2	3	
6. Becoming easily annoyed or irritable	0	1	2	3	
7. Feeling afraid as if something awful might happen	0	1	2	3	Total
(8)	add columns:				

*adapted from PhQ 9, GAD7, PC-PTSD and AUDIT 1/24/11

Provider: _____

Please also complete back side →

Are you currently in any physical pain?	No	Yes
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In your life, have you ever had any experience that was so frightening, horrible, or upsetting that, **in the past month**, you:

1. Have had nightmares about it or thought about it when you did not want to?	No	Yes
2. Tried hard not to think about it or went out of your way to avoid situations that reminded you of it?	No	Yes
3. Were constantly on guard, watchful, or easily startled?	No	Yes
4. Felt numb or detached from others, activities, or your surroundings?	No	Yes

(3)

Drinking alcohol can affect your health. This is especially important if you take certain medications. We want to help you stay healthy and lower your risk for the problems that can be caused by drinking.

These questions are about your drinking habits. We've listed the serving size of one drink below.

Please circle your answer

	0	1	2	3	4
How often do you have one drink containing alcohol?	Never	Monthly or less	2-4 times a month	2-3 times a week	4+ times per week
How many drinks containing alcohol do you have on a typical day when you are drinking?	1 or 2	3 or 4	5 or 6	7 to 9	10 or more
How often do you have four or more drinks on one occasion?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
How often during the last year have you.....					
...found that you were not able to stop drinking once you had started?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
...failed to do what was normally expected from you because of drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
...needed a first drink in the morning to get yourself going after heavy drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
...had a feeling of guilt or remorse after drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
...been unable to remember what happened the night before because you had been drinking?	Never	Less than monthly	Monthly	Weekly	Daily or almost daily
	0		2		4
Have you or someone else been injured as a result of your drinking?	No	Yes, but not in the last year			Yes, during the last year
Has a relative, friend, doctor or other health worker been concerned about your drinking or suggested you cut down?	No	Yes, but not in the last year			Yes, during the last year

(8)

Standard serving of one drink:

12 ounces of beer or wine cooler
1.5 ounces of 80 proof liquor
5 ounces of wine
4 ounces of brandy, liqueur or aperitif



Total:

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