



Life Stress Self Assessment

The Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale

In 1967, psychiatrists Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe decided to study whether or not stress contributes to illness. They surveyed more than 5,000 medical patients and asked them to say whether they had experience any of a series of 43 life events in the previous two years.

Each event, called a Life Change Unit (LCU), had a different "weight" for stress. The more events the patient added up, the higher the score. The higher the score, and the larger the weight of each event, the more likely the patient was to become ill.

People use the word "stress" to describe a wide variety of situations – from your cell phone ringing while you're talking on another phone – to the feelings associated with intense work overload, or the death of a loved-one.

But perhaps the most useful and widely accepted definition of stress (mainly attributed to Richard S. Lazarus) is this: Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that "demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize." In less formal terms, we feel stressed when we feel that "things are out of control."

Our ability to cope with the demands upon us is key to our experience of stress. For example, starting a new job might be a wholly exciting experience if everything else in your life is stable and positive. But if you start a new job when you've just moved into a new house, or your partner is ill, or you're experiencing money problems, you might find it very hard to cope.

How much of this does it take to push you "over the edge"? Not all unusual events are equally hard to deal with. For example, compare the stress of divorce with that of a change in responsibilities at work. Because of this, you need to be able to rate and measure your total stress score appropriately.

The Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS), more commonly known as the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale, was created to do just that. This tool helps us measure the stress load we carry, and think about what we should do about it.

This article looks at the Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale, and explains how you can use it to manage the stress in your life.



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The Stress Scale¹

Note all the items that apply to events you have experienced during the last year and add up their LCUs. Then take a look at what you can do about your stress level.

Life Event	LCU
1. Death of spouse	100
2. Divorce	73
3. Marital Separation	65
4. Jail Term	63
5. Death of a close family member	63
6. Personal injury or illness	53
7. Marriage	50
8. Being Fired from work	47
9. Reconciliation with spouse	45
10. Retirement	45
11. Change in health of family member	44
12. Pregnancy	40
13. Sexual difficulties	39
14. Addition of family member	39
15. Major business readjustment	39
16. Major change in financial state	38
17. Death of a close friend	37

¹ This table is taken from "The Social Readjustment Rating Scale", Thomas H. Holmes and Richard H. Rahe, **Journal of Psychosomatic Research**, Volume 11, Issue 2, August 1967, Pages 213-218, Copyright © 1967 Published by Elsevier Science Inc. All rights reserved. Permission to reproduce granted by the publisher.

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18. Changing to a different line of work	36
19. Change in frequency of arguments with spouse	35
20. Mortgage for loan or major purchase over \$ 15,000	31
21. Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan	30
22. Major change in responsibilities at work	29
23. Children leaving home	29
24. Trouble with in-laws	29
25. Outstanding personal achievement	28
26. Spouse begins or stops work	26
27. Starting or ending school	26
28. Change in living conditions	25
29. Revision of personal habits (dress, manners, associations)	24
30. Trouble with boss	23
31. Change in work hours, conditions	20
32. Change in residence	20
33. Change in school	20
34. Change in recreational activities	19
35. Change in church activities	19
36. Change in social activities	18
37. Mortgage or loan under \$15,000	17
38. Change in sleeping habits	16
39. Change in number of family gatherings	15
40. Change in eating habits	15
41. Vacation	13
42. Christmas	12
43. Minor violation of the law	11



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If your total is 0-150:

Congratulations! At the moment, your stress level is low. Your chance of illness or accident related to your stress within two years is low. Any change can lead to stress, even enjoyable activities, such as vacations or new forms of recreation. Want to see what to do to keep your stress low? Learn about methods for dealing with stress.

If your total is 150-300:

Take care of yourself now. You have borderline high stress. Your chance of accident or illness related to your stress within two years is moderate. Recommendation: To reduce your stress, try some of these methods.

If your total is over 300:

Warning: You have a high stress level. Your chance of accident or illness related to your stress during the next two years is great. Stress intervention techniques are strongly urged. Click here to learn more about stress.²

² Discovery Health. Online. <http://health.howstuffworks.com/wellness/stress-management/stress-assessment.htm>