

# Stress Mindset Self-Check

Stress is your body and brain's response when you believe something you care about is at stake. Your stress mindset can be a critical factor in your ability to use it as a tool to optimize your performance on mission essential tasks (MET), well-being, health, and growth.

This self-check asks key questions to help you reflect on your general beliefs about stress and how you tend to react to it. After you take the survey once, you might want to take it again and focus on specific types of stressors involving work performance, your partner, family, or health. Your answers will help you target the different strategies below to help you optimize stress. Keep in mind this is an opportunity to help you reflect on your approach to stress and decide where you might want to change course of action.

## General beliefs about stress

The effects of stress in most cases are \_\_\_\_\_.

- Negative and should be avoided
- Positive and should be utilized

Experiencing stress in most cases \_\_\_\_\_.

- Inhibits my learning and growth
- Facilitates my learning and growth

Experiencing stress in most cases \_\_\_\_\_.

- Depletes my health and vitality
- Boosts my health and vitality

Experiencing stress in most cases \_\_\_\_\_.

- Hurts my performance and productivity
- Improves my performance and productivity

## How stress impacts your performance and resilience

When I notice the physical responses of stress (such as increased heart rate, sweating, or shaky hands or legs), I'm more likely to interpret it as \_\_\_\_\_.

- "I'm about to lose control"
- "This is my body giving me the energy I need to perform"

When under a lot of stress, I'm more likely to \_\_\_\_\_.

- Get distracted by negative thoughts or stuck focusing on things I can't control
- Reflect on what's most important to me in the situation and take purposeful action to bring about my goal or value

When I'm starting to feel overwhelmed by stress, I usually \_\_\_\_\_.

- Try to escape and distract myself with social media, TV, alcohol, food, etc.
- Use a strategy like tactical breathing, exercise, or mindfulness to center myself and regain focus on the task at hand

## How stress impacts your relationships and well-being

When under a lot of stress, I'm more likely to \_\_\_\_\_.

- Isolate myself
- Reach out to others for help or go out of my way to help others

When under a lot of stress, and someone comes to me to share unrelated good news, I'm more likely to \_\_\_\_\_.

- Give them partial attention or dismiss them to get back to what I'm focused on
- Stop what I'm doing and give my full attention to share in their joy

When under a lot of stress, I'm more likely to \_\_\_\_\_.

- Turn down meaningful opportunities that enable me to live out my values
- Accept and be energized by meaningful opportunities that enable me to live out my values

## How to optimize stress!

If you checked off the second box for most of your answers, then you likely have a “stress is helpful” mindset! Those who believe stress is helpful are better able to use it to improve their performance, health, and growth compared to those who believe stress is harmful. If you checked off the first box for most of your responses, you likely have a “stress is harmful” mindset. The good news is, you now have the opportunity to improve your performance, health, and growth by developing a “stress is helpful” mindset using the resources below.

## General beliefs about stress



Learn the science behind the benefits of stress and how your stress response system works by reading HPRC's article on how to [make stress good for you](#). In addition, it provides many strategies to help you optimize stress. Many of the tools listed below are also discussed in this extensive article.



Download HPRC's “[Create a ‘Stress helps me’ Mindset](#)” worksheet to help you examine past experiences where stress helped you optimize performance, live your values, grow from adversity, etc. This activity will also help you solidify a “stress can help me” mindset and is even more effective when you discuss your experiences in pairs or small groups.



HPRC's article on the [5 benefits of post-traumatic growth \(PTG\)](#) explores how the stress response system helps you to grow from trauma and adversity. It also includes self-reflection questions to help you determine if you or others have experienced PTG. To learn even more about PTG, read HPRC's article on [3 myths and facts about post-traumatic stress \(PTS\) and PTG](#).

## How stress impacts your performance and resilience



Identify the best ways to channel your stress to perform MET and bring your best self with tips from HPRC's article on the [individual zone of optimal functioning \(IZOF\)](#) or your stress "sweet spot." You'll also discover strategies like [mindfulness meditation](#), [tactical breathing](#), and [progressive muscle relaxation](#) to help you to calm your stress response system down if you or others are on overdrive.



HPRC's "[stress optimization daily reminder](#)" is a tool you can use each day to set your stress response system up for success to live out your values, accomplish goals, strengthen your relationships, and overcome adversity. **Tip:** Print out or save this infographic as a background on your phone or laptop to help you daily optimize stress.



HPRC's "[Productive Thinking 101](#)" worksheet is a downloadable resource that includes a self-check to help you analyze if your thoughts are helpful or harmful. It also provides a list of strategies to help you reframe your thoughts to [think more optimistically](#) and enhance your performance and resilience.



Use HPRC's "[Optimize Your Self-Talk](#)" worksheet to help you grab control of your heat-of-the-moment thoughts and make them productive to get you to your stress sweet spot. At times you might have self-talk that says, "You can't do this—you don't have what it takes" or "There's no hope." This can put your stress response system into overdrive and undermine your ability to perform. To activate your relaxation response system, you can practice motivational self-talk by challenging counterproductive thoughts with evidence: "I know I can do this because I've been training 5 days a week" or "This is my opportunity to turn this around." You can also use instructional self-talk to focus your energy by stating step-by-step what you need to do: "What I need to focus on now is see the target...straighten my elbows...lock onto target...and fire."

## How stress impacts your relationships and well-being



Are you taking advantage of the opportunity when someone comes to you to share good news? Use HPRC's "[Active Constructive Responding \(ACR\)](#)" worksheet to help you identify key strategies to be an "Excitement Magnifier." Effectively using ACR can be a powerful, positive emotional boost and relationship-strengthening experience to optimize your stress and enhance your well-being.



A regular gratitude practice can buffer against being overwhelmed by stress and make you and others more likely to reach out to provide help as well as ask for help, which can be critical to optimize stress. Download HPRC's "[Leader Guide: Starting a Gratitude Practice](#)" to help you learn how you and others can help optimize stress, build relationships, and enhance your well-being by regularly using HPRC's [gratitude calendar](#).



HPRC's article on [values-based living](#) can help you become more aware of your values, which has been shown to help optimize stress response. Then use HPRC tools like the "[PERMA to-do list](#)" or "[Signature Strengths](#)" worksheet to set goals and help put your values into action in your day-to-day.