

# Crisis Overload

*Mindpower*  
*Find Strength Through Crisis*  
*Page 80 and 81*

There is no magic formula for a stress-free life. You can aim to keep stress at a minimum by having a low-stress job, leading a healthy lifestyle, and making sure that you set enough time aside for relaxation; what you cannot do, however, is avoid bereavement, domestic crises, or a number of other events that are simply a part of life. How stressed are you? Do you feel you are going through a rough patch, with one crisis after another? If so, your stress level could be dangerously high. More worryingly, if you have had several stressful events in succession, it can certainly affect your health and your ability to relax. In addition, if you become accustomed to the feeling of living “on the edge”, and are used to having at least one crisis on your hands, you may not realize just how much you need a break – or how great a toll the stress may be taking on you. Use the stress-assessment scale on the right to determine whether your stress level is too high and if changes need to be made.

## **Adapting to change**

All change, including positive change, is stressful because we have to adjust mentally, physically, and emotionally, and the loss of what is familiar tends to make us feel insecure in some ways. The more momentous and painful an event is, the more we must make an effort to cope with it.

It is also true, however, that the degree of stress we suffer is dependent on our attitudes and expectations. For example, one person might react to becoming unemployed with bitterness and feelings of being a failure, while another might see it as an opportunity to change direction and build a new life based on what he or she really wants.

During the 1960s, doctors Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe examined the hospital records of 5,000 patients, and discovered that significant life events – both good and bad – had occurred in the months preceding the patients’ illnesses. From this research, they developed a scale that measures the degree of stress associated with these events.

## **Check your stress level**

Using the adaptation of the Holmes and Rahe life-event scale shown here, tick the number of difficult or important events that you have experienced in the last two years. Then grade each event you ticked on a sliding scale from 1 to 10, with 1 indicating that the event hardly affected you, and 10 that it affected you a great deal. Add up all your number ratings to arrive at a final total, then read the conclusions in the far-right column.

## Life events

1. Death of a spouse or partner
2. Divorce or end of a relationship
3. Separation from a loved one
4. Imprisonment
5. Death of a close family member
6. Serious injury or illness
7. Getting married
8. Unemployment or being dismissed
9. Relationship problems (or reconciliation)
10. Retirement
11. Illness of a close family member
12. Pregnancy
13. Sexual problems
14. Birth of a new baby
15. Change in your financial situation
16. Death of a close friend
17. Change in the nature of your work
18. Start of a new relationship
19. Arguing more – or less – often with your partner
20. Increased / new bank loan or mortgage
21. Financial difficulties
22. New responsibilities at work
23. A child starting school
24. A son or daughter leaving home
25. Problems with relatives or close friends
26. Disputes with neighbours
27. Achieving an important personal goal
28. Partner starting or stopping work
29. Starting or leaving school or college
30. Change in living conditions (e.g. taking care of an ailing parent in your home)
31. Change in sleeping habits
32. Problems with employer or colleagues
33. Change in working hours or conditions
34. Moving house
35. Changing school / place of study
36. Taking up a new sport or hobby
37. Change in religious or spiritual life (e.g. going to church more frequently or less often, or losing or gaining faith)
38. Change in your social life
39. Serious legal problems
40. Change in the frequency of family get-togethers
41. Change in your eating habits (e.g. starting a diet, cutting out particular foods)
42. Going on holiday
43. Having family members visit
44. Minor trouble with the law (e.g. parking offences)

## How did you score?

- **1-30:** Indicates that the last two years of your life have been remarkably stress-free.
- **31-55:** Low to moderate level of stress.
- **56-80:** Medium to high level of stress.
- **81 or more:** Indicates a very high level of stress, you need to reduce your stress load.

The higher your score, the greater the possibility of stress overload, which might make you more vulnerable to illness and disease, depression, and even mental breakdown.

## Reducing Stress

If your score is high (81 or more) – and especially if you have felt stressed for a long time – it is a good idea for you to have a break and get away from it all. As well as helping you wind down and relax, it allows you to take a fresh look at your life, and to consider ways in which you might reduce or be less adversely affected by any stress in your life. Don't choose a complicated trip that demands a great deal of planning.

If you have experienced several major stressful events within the last two years, it is probably wise not to introduce any additional change into your life, such as moving house or changing your job, unless it is unavoidable or if sticking with the status quo will cause you even greater stress.

Finally, consider whether you can learn anything from your score: Are there events you could have foreseen or prepared for? This might help you avoid destructive behaviour patterns and contribute to better stress-management techniques. Several articles in this book will help, such as “Learn to Relax,” pages 120-121, and “Releasing Tension,” pages 122-123. If things look bleak, turn to “Asking for Help”, pages 132-133

### *Life at the sharp end*

*Having too many stressful events can overwhelm you, making you feel that life is always fraught and laden with hazards, with no hope of respite.*