

THE IMPACT OF STRESS AND THE BASICS OF HEART COHERENCE



What is stress?

Stress is a term used to describe the wear and tear the body experiences in reaction to everyday tensions and pressures. Change, illness, injury or career and lifestyle changes are common causes of stress. It's how we respond, however, to the emotional pressure and tension we feel from the little everyday hassles – rush-hour traffic, waiting in line and too many e-mails – that do the most damage.

How does stress affect health?

Stress affects people physically, mentally and emotionally. According to the American Institute of Stress, up to 90% of all health problems are related to stress. Too much stress can contribute to and agitate many health problems, including heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, depression and sleep disorders.

How stressed are you?

Everyone responds to stress differently. Take this quick test to see if you are experiencing stress. The items you check will reveal how much stress is affecting your life.

- I feel overly tired or fatigued.
- I often am nervous, anxious or depressed.
- I have sleep problems.
- I have repeated headaches or minor aches and pains.
- I worry about my job, finances, relationships.

What can I do about it?

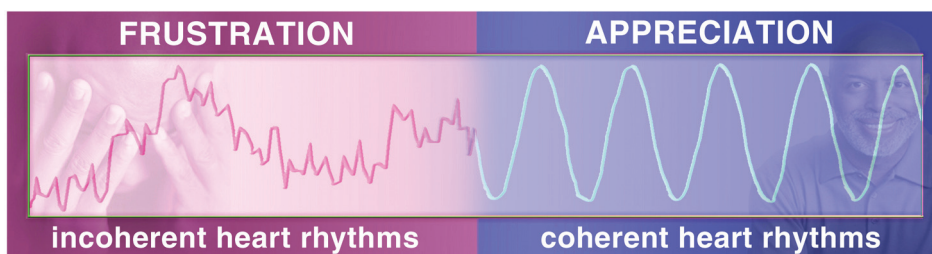
The first step is to understand how stress works. It's not the events or situations that do the harm, but rather how you respond to those events. More precisely, it's how you feel about them that determines whether you are stressed.

Emotions, or feelings have a powerful impact on the human body. Positive emotions like appreciation, care and love not only feel good, they are good for you. They help your body's systems synchronize and work better, as a well-tuned car. Research at the Institute of HeartMath has shown that when you intentionally shift to a positive emotion, heart rhythms immediately change. This shift in heart rhythms creates a favorable cascade of neural, hormonal and biochemical events that benefit the entire body. The effects are both immediate and long lasting.

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How does it work?

When you're stressed, your body is out of sync. Negative emotions we feel when stressed such as anger, frustration, anxiety and worry lead to increased disorder in heart rhythms and the nervous system. In contrast, positive emotions like joy, appreciation, care and kindness create harmony in heart rhythms and the nervous system. Other bodily systems sync up to this rhythm, a process scientists call coherence. Because coherence leads to more mental clarity, creativity and better problem-solving abilities, it's easier to find solutions and better ways of handling stressful situations.



How can I create and practice physiological coherence?

The HeartMath® System introduces you to a powerful tool to help you increase physiological coherence. Use the Quick Coherence® Technique in your daily life to reduce the effects of stress and the emWave® technology to enhance your coherence practice.

The Quick Coherence® Technique

The Quick Coherence Technique is an easy way to interrupt the stress response and quickly bring your system into coherence. Practice this tool four or five times a day, every day for a minimum of three weeks. Use it as a quick stress manager prior to or during challenging events or situations. Good times to practice Quick Coherence are first thing in the morning, before going to sleep at night and break time in the middle of the day, but you can use it anytime you want to rebalance or get an energy boost.

The Steps

Step 1 - Heart Focus

Focus your attention to the area around your heart.

Step 2 - Heart Breathing

Breathe deeply but normally and feel as if your breath is coming in and going out through your heart area.

Step 3 - Heart Feeling

Activate a positive feeling such as appreciation or care, perhaps recall a fun time when you felt good inside, and try to reexperience it.

Once you have completed the steps, you can ask yourself, "How could I handle this in a better way?" With practice, you'll find you have more intuitive choices or options for what you can do next – even in the middle of a challenging or high-pressure situation.