

Influence...

MY PERCEIVED STRESS

Définition

Perceiving stress is part of the human experience: most individuals go through stressful periods from time to time. However, some individuals tend to perceive more stress than others. In fact, these individuals can evaluate a situation and perceive it to be stressful while someone else could perceive the same situation to be ordinary.

Perceiving stress on a regular basis can have detrimental effects on one's mental and physical health, on one's self-efficacy and one's capacity to act. When a lot of situations seem to be threatening, i.e. unpredictable, uncontrollable, and distressing, and you believe you do not have the resources to face such situations, you need to act in order to preserve your health; stress is the feeling that activates this "survival mode" thought pattern.

In fact, stress has a biological component to it: it is a normal reaction that allows the body and the brain to ready itself for threats/stressors, either by fighting, fleeing, or playing dead. Therefore, it is necessary for the muscles (body) and attention (brain) to be ready, and for the respiratory and cardiovascular systems to be fast enough in order to provide the oxygen and the energy. Stress also impacts the prefrontal cortex' functioning which has a role in the elaboration and the materialization of our thoughts. Therefore it makes sense that lasting and disproportionate stress can be harmful to our physical health.



How to decrease perceived stress?

Learn how to regulate emotions:

It is important to focus on the emotions that emanate from stress since this feeling that is full of anguish and stress can be pretty costly mentally and physiologically. In fact, an effective regulation of emotions can decrease the intensity of the stress. This is doable through the implementation of strategies that focus on exteriorizing the emotions, whether through the support that people or professionals can provide or through meditation, for example.



You could:

- Talk to your family, friends, and colleagues, about your worries and the elements of your life that cause you stress in order to face it.
- Take an appointment with a professional in emotion management, luckily there are plenty of those! (psychologists specialized in CBT, sophrologists and other certified coaches). The resources available to take care of your mental health are not only reserved for people who suffer from psychiatric disorders.
- To reduce the discomfort tied to an unpleasant emotion, you could do 5 minutes of breathing exercises, or start practicing mindfulness to better process said emotions.

Cognitive reframing of thoughts:

Under the effect of acute stress, we could exaggerate the causes of said stress. Then, our evaluation of the situation is biased: we see things negatively and we no longer process information rationally. In order to manage the stress and decrease it, we need to restore a rational state of mind by redirecting our thoughts. By doing this, we are modifying our initial irrational reaction to which we've gotten used to over time.





You could:

- o Make a list of the elements that cause you distress and rank them in order of negative impact on you, in the long term. This ranking can be made on a scale from 1 to 5; you can attribute each element a score depending on the intensity of the stress it causes you and you know will keep causing you in the future. This will allow you to objectively evaluate the stressful situations you undergo and understand how short-term some experiences are.
- o Think of all the stressful situations that you were able to face in order to combat your irrational thoughts that tell you you will not be able to face a new situation you perceive to be stressful.
- o Think of situations from a new perspective. This allows you to take a step back and look at your situation globally, and to take into account new elements that you maybe did not consider before. This might sound too simple but it is very effective because we are often trapped by our representations of a situation rather than the situation itself. This is Kahneman's thinking at work which focuses here on the frames of reference we choose to perceive a situation. There are multiple frames of reference that can be adopted, such as:
Another person's point of view: "What would X think in this situation? And Y?" or "What would I think of X if they did this?"
Another environment: "Would I think the same thing if I were in another place? With other people?"
Another time: "Would I have thought the same thing 5 years ago? In 5 years?"

