

It's time to relax is when you don't have the time for it.

**THE BEST OF BITS & PIECES**

**WHICH TYPE ARE YOU?** Most of us are either Type A or Type B, with varying degrees of Type A and B. It is estimated that about 40 percent of the population is Type A and 60 percent is Type B (Paulus et al. 2000).

You will be given an opportunity to complete a personality type inventory at the end of this chapter. Like most stress inventories, this one is somewhat flawed because it does not give enough weight to individual differences. Be sure and take this into consideration when you look at your scores.

Actually, each of us is really the best judge of ourselves, and we can gradually develop an instinctive feeling that tells us whether we are running above or below the stress level that suits us best. Do you know what your normal stress endurance level is? We encourage you to examine your own behavior in relation to stress, because the key to effective stress management is recognizing when stress becomes more debilitating than stimulating.

In the following section, we will discuss some negative and debilitating techniques of coping with stress.

**Negative and Defensive Coping**

The best years of your life are the ones in which you decide your problems are your own. You do not blame them on your mother, the ecology, or the president. You realize that you control your own destiny.

ALBERT ELLIS

**Coping** refers to active efforts to master, reduce, or tolerate the demands created by stress (Weiten and Lloyd 2009). When we cope, we consciously think and make a decision to deal with the problems we face. However, we may cope in negative ways. We may drink too much, eat too much, worry too much, or even abuse medication and drugs.

Sometimes the stress, frustration, and conflict of dealing with these problems interferes with our ability to maintain a healthy self-concept. We become extremely sensitive to threats to our ego. We will do almost anything to avoid, escape, or shield ourselves from the anxieties elicited by these threats.

In order to protect our feelings of self-esteem and self-respect, we may unconsciously resort to various distortions of reality, frequently referred to as *defense mechanisms* (Freud 1936).

Defense mechanisms do not eliminate the problems that are the cause of anxiety, but they help us to hide or disguise our feelings and temporarily deal with anxiety or stress. Defense mechanisms have two primary characteristics. *First, they distort and deny reality. Second, they operate unconsciously, so that we are unaware that we are using them.* See table 8.3 for some examples of commonly used defense mechanisms.

Defense mechanisms are designed to help us escape the pain of anxiety in stressful situations. Most of us would have difficulty maintaining our mental health without resorting to such defenses. However, the trouble is that these defenses can become common patterns of behavior for reacting to problems and stress.

Do you have a habit of using any of these defense mechanisms? Think of it like this: the more aware you are of the defense mechanisms you use and why you use them, the more likely will be your attempts to face your stressful situations in an open and honest manner. It is important for you to remember that although defense mechanisms offer you short-term relief, your discomfort quickly returns. Why? Your problem has not been solved!

Speaking of problems for a moment, is there a difference in how men and women cope with problems and the normal stresses of living? Does cultural background have any influence in what events are perceived as most stressful? Let us look further at these two questions.

**Table 8.3 Examples of Commonly Used Defense Mechanisms**

DEFENSE MECHANISM	DEFINITION
Rationalization	When the explanations offered are reasonable, rational, and convincing, but not real reasons.
Projection	When we attribute our own feelings, shortcomings, or unacceptable impulses to others.
Reaction Formation	When impulses are not only repressed, they are also controlled by emphasizing the opposite behavior.
Denial	When we refuse to recognize or acknowledge a threatening situation.
Regression	When we exclude painful, unwanted or dangerous thoughts and impulses from our conscious mind.
Sublimation	When we direct our basic desires toward a socially valued activity.
Regression	When we psychologically return to a form of behavior characteristic from an earlier stage of development.
Displacement	When we redirect strong feelings from one person or object to another that seems more acceptable and less threatening.

Adapted from Pastoreno and Doyle-Portillo (2008), Nairne (2008).

**Gender, Culture, and Stress**

As we have already discussed, individuals have different levels of tolerance for stress. Some seem to thrive in situations in which others feel uncomfortably stressed. Also, some individuals actually seem to seek out stressful situations. As a result of these differences, methods of coping with stress vary accordingly.

**GENDER AND STRESS.** One of the major differences between men and women is how they cope with stress. Researchers have found that while men are more likely to fight or flee when stressed, women show a different response to stress, called *tend and befriend*, which involves nurturing and seeking social support (Taylor 2004). Also, men tend to become increasingly focused and withdrawn, while women tend to become increasingly overwhelmed and emotionally involved. These differences in coping styles can lead to friction in relationships. Review Gender and You below for a classical example of differences in coping styles.

Without understanding their differences, Mary and Tom will grow further apart. When a man has problems, or is under stress and cannot find a solution, he copes by doing something else to disengage his mind from the problems of the day, like reading the newspaper, playing a game,



When Tom comes home, he wants to relax and unwind by quietly reading the newspaper. He is stressed by the unsolved problems of his day and finds relief through forgetting them.

His wife, Mary, also wants to relax from her stressful day. She, however, wants to find relief by talking about the problems of her day. The tension slowly building between them gradually becomes resentment.

Tom secretly thinks Mary talks too much, while Mary feels ignored. How do you deal with the problems of your day?

Evaluate this list in relationship to your own life and add any other behavioral changes you may experience that are not included here. This list can help you recognize imbalance and disharmony within and without, and that recognition is necessary if you are to effect a positive change for yourself.

Now that you know how to recognize physiological and behavioral effects of stress, is there anything else you need to be aware of?

## Personality Types

Are you a stress seeker or a stress avoider? How do you perform under pressure? Is it possible to respond to the normal pressures and stress of life with vitality, meaning, and joy? What kind of lifestyle do you prefer to live: rushed, relaxed, or somewhere in between?

Research has indicated that there are basically three personality types in relation to stress, with each type differing in their abilities to effectively handle stress. These types are *Type A*, *Type B*, and a combination of *Type A* and *Type B*. What behavioral characteristics do these types have?

**TYPE A.** There has been a tremendous amount of research directed toward determining the correlation between heart disease and emotional stress. Among the findings is evidence that there is an association between coronary artery and heart disease and a complex of emotional reactions which have been designated *Type A Behavioral Pattern* (Friedman and Rosenman 1962). These researchers found that almost all of their cardiac patients had in common a competitive, aggressive, ambitious, and stressful lifestyle.

Research on the link between *Type A* behavior and coronary disease indicates that the lethal core of the *Type A* personality is not time urgency. Attention is focusing on *hostility and anger-prone tendencies*, which fuel an aggressive, reactive temperament (Smith and Ruiz 2002; Ray 2007).

Here are some other characteristics of the *Type A* behavioral pattern (Kleinke 2002):

- A drive to succeed, coupled with impatience, irritability, and aggressiveness
- Trouble relaxing and is restless
- Perfectionist and seeks results now
- Feelings of pressure even when relaxed
- A constant clock watcher
- Ignores fatigue while doing strenuous work
- Thrives on stress; his or her work is never done
- Only happy with a vigorous, fast-paced lifestyle
- Time pressures frequently create frustration and sometimes hostility
- May appear nervous, scattered, and hyper
- Eats fast, walks fast, and talks fast

Furthermore, Dr. James Blumenthal (1999), professor of medical psychology at Duke University Medical Center, suggests that *Type A* people have a strong need to control events in their lives, including the behavior of people around them. Dr. Blumenthal also indicates that one reason *Type A* people

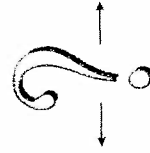
suffer so much from life stress is they have difficulty accepting what they can and cannot control.

**TYPE B.** This behavior pattern (Friedman and Rosenman 1962) is the opposite of the *Type A*. *Type B* people are seldom hurried by the need to be involved in an ever-increasing series of activities in a continually increasing amount of time. Here are some other characteristics of *Type B* people (Kleinke 2002):

- Serious but easy going
- Patient and relaxed
- Enjoys leisure and opportunities to experiment and reflect
- Prefers a peaceful, steady, quiet, and generally tranquil lifestyle
- Not easily irritated
- Are less competitive than *A*s
- Slower paced; feels no need to hurry
- May appear lethargic, sluggish, and bored
- Is a stress avoider; may avoid new challenges
- Speaks slowly, walks slowly, eats slowly
- Sometimes lacks the excitement, enthusiasm, and dynamism needed to perform at peak levels under pressure

*Type B* people may have a tremendous drive, but they may not take the risks necessary for big rewards. When they do take the risks, their drive is coupled with time to ponder leisurely and weigh alternatives. It may sound like *Type B* people do not have a lot of stresses. However, if they are in a *Type A* environment that requires a great deal of structure, this can be very stressful to them.

Are you ...



racehorse



a pug

or somewhere in between?  
What kind of lifestyle do you prefer to live: rushed, relaxed, or a balance between the two?



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How do you perform under pressure?

One striking thing we have discovered is that there are two main types of human beings: "racehorses" and "turtles."

HANS SELYE