

# 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?

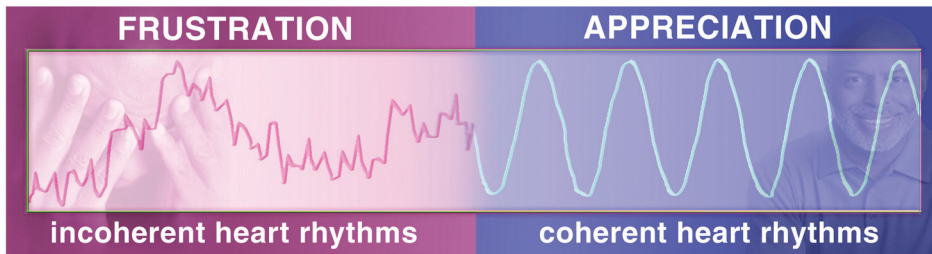
The first step is to understand how stress works. It's not the events or situations that do the harm, but rather how you respond to those events. More precisely, it's how you feel about them that determines whether you are stressed.

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/depleting 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/renewing 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 the Quick Coherence steps 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.** Focus your attention in the area of the heart. Imagine your breath is flowing in and out of your heart or chest area, breathing a little slower and deeper than usual.

*Suggestion: Inhale 5 seconds, exhale 5 seconds (or whatever rhythm is comfortable).*

**Step 2.** Make a sincere attempt to experience a regenerative feeling such as appreciation or care for someone or something in your life.

*Suggestion: Try to re-experience the feeling you have for someone you love, a pet, a special place, an accomplishment, etc., or focus on a feeling of calm or ease.*

Once you have become familiar with these two steps, use the quick steps:

- 1. Heart-Focused Breathing**
- 2. Activate a positive or renewing feeling**