

# Stress Diary/Journal

## Identifying the Causes of Short-Term Stress

Stress Diaries are important for understanding the causes of short-term stress in your life. They also give you an important insight into how you react to stress, and help you to identify the level of stress at which you prefer to operate.

The idea behind Stress Diaries is that, on a regular basis, you record information about the stresses you are experiencing, so that you can analyze these stresses and then manage them.

This is important because often these stresses flit in and out of our minds without getting the attention and focus that they deserve.

As well as helping you capture and analyze the most common sources of stress in your life, Stress Diaries help you to understand:

- The causes of stress in more detail;
- The levels of stress at which you operate most effectively; and
- How you react to stress, and whether your reactions are appropriate and useful.

Stress Diaries, therefore, give you the important information that you need to manage stress.

## How to Use the Tool

Stress Diaries are useful in that they gather information regularly and routinely, over a period of time. This helps you to separate the common, routine stresses from those that only occur occasionally. They establish a pattern that you can analyze to extract the information that you need.

If you have any difficulty remembering to do this, set an alarm to remind you to make your next diary entry.

Also make an entry in your diary after each incident that is stressful enough for you to feel that it is significant.

Every time you make an entry, record the following information:

- Date and Time of Event
- What caused your stress (make a guess if you are not sure)?
- What was the fundamental cause of the event?
- How happy do you feel now on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being extremely unhappy and 10 being euphorically happy)?
- How stressed do you feel now on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being utterly relaxed and 10 being unbearably stressed)?
- Describe how you felt both physically and emotionally at the time of the event that stressed you
- How did you act in response to the stress?
- How are you currently dealing with the stressor and is it effective (i.e., what did you do to make yourself feel better)?

You may also want to note:

- How stressed you feel now, again on a subjective scale of 0 to 10. As before, 0 here would be the most relaxed you have ever been, while 10 would show the greatest stress you have ever experienced.
- The symptom you felt (e.g. “butterflies in your stomach”, anger, headache, raised pulse rate, sweaty palms, etc.).
- How well you handled the event: Did your reaction help solve the problem, or did it inflame it?

You will reap the real benefits of having a stress diary in the first few weeks. After this, the benefit you get will reduce each additional day. If, however, your lifestyle changes, or you begin to suffer from stress again in the future, then it may be worth using the diary approach again. You will probably find that the stresses you face have changed. If this is the case, then keeping a diary again will help you to develop a different approach to deal with them.

Analyze the diary at the end of this period.

## Analyzing the Diary

Analyze the diary in the following ways:

- First, look at the different stresses you experienced during the time you kept your diary. List the types of stress that you experienced by frequency, with the most frequent stresses at the top of the list.
- Next, prepare a second list with the most unpleasant stresses at the top of the list and the least unpleasant at the bottom.
- Looking at your lists of stresses, those at the top of each list are the most important for you to learn to control.
- Working through the stresses, look at your assessments of their underlying causes, and your appraisal of how well you handled the stressful event. Do these show you areas where you handled stress poorly, and could improve your stress management skills? If so, list these.
- Next, look through your diary at the situations that cause you stress. List these.
- Finally, look at how you felt when you were under stress. Look at how it affected your happiness and your effectiveness, understand how you behaved, and think about how you felt.

Having analyzed your diary, you should fully understand what the most important and frequent sources of stress are in your life. You should appreciate the levels of stress at which you are happiest. You should also know the sort of situations that cause you stress so that you can prepare for them and manage them well.

As well as this, you should now understand how you react to stress, and the symptoms that you show when you are stressed. When you experience these symptoms in the future, this should be a trigger for you to use appropriate stress management techniques.

# Summary

Stress Diaries help you to get a good understanding of the routine, short-term stresses that you experience in your life. They help you to identify the most important, and most frequent, stresses that you experience, so that you can concentrate your efforts on these. They also help you to identify areas where you need to improve your stress management skills, and help you to understand the levels of stress at which you are happiest, and most effective.

To keep a stress diary, make a regular diary entry with the headings above. For example, you may do this every hour. Also make entries after stressful events.

Analyze the diary to identify the most frequent and most serious stresses that you experience. Use it also to identify areas where you can improve your management of stress.

## Stress Diary / Journal (template)

The Stress Diary/Journal can help you identify the regular stressors in your life and the way you deal with them. Each time you feel stressed, keep track of it in your journal. As you keep a daily log, you will begin to see patterns and common themes

### Directions:

1. **When you hand in your journal, it must be typed, double spaced, with no less than 12 point font.**
2. **Make sure that all pages are stapled together.**
3. **Use a dictionary if you are uncertain of the spelling of words.**
4. **Get someone else to read your work BEFORE you hand it in...**
5. **You must have a minimum of 10 events recorded. All parts of the recorded information must be included or the entry will not be counted.**
6. **ALL journals must be brought with you and handed in on the day of the exam. Any exams not handed in on the day of the exam will NOT be accepted and you will receive a score of zero for the exercise.**

### Record the following for each event: (headings)

Date and Time of Event

What caused your stress (make a guess if you are not sure)?

What was the fundamental cause of the event?

How happy do you feel now on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being extremely unhappy and 10 being euphorically happy)?

How stressed do you feel now on a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being utterly relaxed and 10 being unbearably stressed)?

Describe how you felt both physiologically and emotionally at the time of the event that stressed you

How did you act in response to the stress?

How are you currently dealing with the stressor and is it effective (i.e., what did you do to make yourself feel better)?