

# EQ in your PJs

Social Emotional Learning (SEL) Online with R. Keeth Matheny

## MANAGE STRESS BEFORE IT MANAGES YOU Part 1: Stress — Cause and Effects

### What Is Stress?

We have all experienced stress. We know what it can do to our mood, and how it feels in our bodies.

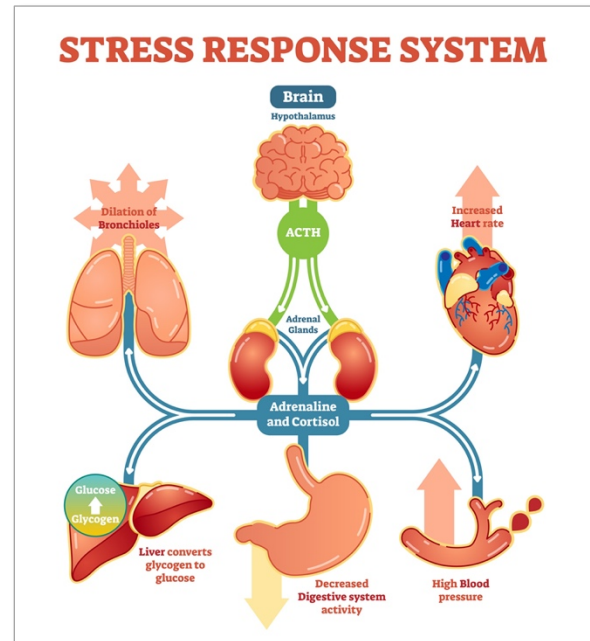
*But what exactly is stress?* Understanding what stress is — and how it affects both our mind and our physiology — is the first step in learning how to direct or reduce it.

In the most general sense, stress is a feeling of strain, pressure, or anxiety that occurs as a result of particular experiences. Such experiences are called **stressors** and they can be external (an important basketball game, a big test) or internal (negative perceptions about one's self or an interaction).

When you experience something you perceive to be a stressor, your body triggers a series of physical reactions called a **stress response**. First the hypothalamus (a part of the brain) instructs the adrenal glands to ramp up production of hormones and release adrenaline and cortisol into the bloodstream. Adrenaline and cortisol increase your heart rate, breathing rate, blood pressure, and metabolism. Blood vessels dilate — or widen — to deliver more blood to the muscles, and pupils dilate to sharpen vision. The liver releases glucose, which delivers a jolt of energy, and you sweat to cool off. All of these changes help prepare you to tackle the stressor with focus, strength, stamina, speed, and alertness.

### Is Stress Good, Bad, or Both?

When we talk or think about stress, we often cast it as negative. But stress can be both good and bad.



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In small doses the stress response allows us to address challenges with speed and dexterity. In large doses, it can have the opposite effect, and chronic, ongoing stress can cause major health problems. The key is identifying when stress is helping us and when it is hurting us.

In emergencies, the stress response will help you react quickly and effectively. For instance, a mother lion may need the fight response to defend her cubs or the flight response to help them run to safety. This is why the response is also referred to as **"fight or flight."** The stress response is also helpful in less dire situations that still require boldness and alertness, such as delivering a big speech or taking the game-winning foul shot. These small doses of stress are healthy and will help you undertake challenges. And, importantly, your nervous system will swiftly recover and return to its normal resting state.

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## MANAGE STRESS BEFORE IT MANAGES YOU Part 1: Stress — Cause and Effects, cont'd

### How does stress affect you, personally?

What adds stress to your life? List at least five things you stress or worry about:

**WORDSEARCH:** Stress triggers your body to react.

Find ten terms related to the "stress response."

(\*Words may be diagonal and/or backwards.)

ADRENALINE  
BRAIN  
CORTISOL  
GLUCOSE  
HEART  
HORMONES  
HYPOTHALAMUS  
LIVER  
LUNGS  
PUPILS



**What did you learn?** From the "EQ in your PJs" video and article, summarize how our bodies respond to stress. List at least three interesting facts:

- ✓
- ✓
- ✓

What term did Mr. Matheny use to describe an emotional response that was important in prehistoric times, but may be in less helpful in today's modern world?

**What do you think?** How is the stress response helpful and how might it be hurtful?

**What do you know?** Share with a family member(s) what you learned about stress today. Then ask: "What did you learn about stress that you didn't know before?" Write down their response(s):

**PASSWORD to EQ in your PJs Video 2:** What does the liver release during a stress response? \_\_\_\_\_  
[all small letters, no caps]