

# Perceived Stress Scale

A more precise measure of personal stress can be determined by using a variety of instruments that have been designed to help measure individual stress levels. The first of these is called the Perceived Stress Scale.

# Understanding the Perceived Stress Scale

The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is a classic stress assessment instrument. The tool, while originally developed in 1983, remains a popular choice for helping us understand how different situations affect our feelings and our perceived stress.

The questions in this scale ask about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, you will be asked to indicate how often you felt or thought a certain way. Although some of the questions are similar, there are differences between them and you should treat each one as a separate question.

[illegible]

# How to Complete the Assessment

The best approach is to answer fairly quickly. That is, don't try to count up the number of times you felt a particular way; rather indicate the alternative that seems like a reasonable estimate.

## Rating Scale

For each question choose from the following alternatives:

- 0 - never
- 1 - almost never
- 2 - sometimes
- 3 - fairly often
- 4 - very often

## Response Format

_____	_____	_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

# PSS Questions 1-5

1

In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?

2

In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?

3

In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and stressed?

4

In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?

5

In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?

# PSS Questions 6-10

- 1 In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?
- 2 In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?
- 3 In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?
- 4 In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that happened that were outside of your control?
- 5 In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?

# Figuring Your PSS Score

You can determine your PSS score by following these directions:

- First, reverse your scores for questions 4, 5, 7, and 8. On these 4 questions, change the scores like this: 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1, 4 = 0.
- Now add up your scores for each item to get a total.
- Individual scores on the PSS can range from 0 to 40 with higher scores indicating higher perceived stress.

My total score is \_\_\_\_\_.



# Interpreting Your PSS Score

## Low Stress

Scores ranging from 0-13 would be considered low stress.

## Moderate Stress

Scores ranging from 14-26 would be considered moderate stress.

## High Stress

Scores ranging from 27-40 would be considered high perceived stress.



# The Importance of Perception

The Perceived Stress Scale is interesting and important because your perception of what is happening in your life is most important. Consider the idea that two individuals could have the exact same events and experiences in their lives for the past month. Depending on their perception, total score could put one of those individuals in the low stress category and the total score could put the second person in the high stress category.



## Same Situation, Different Perceptions

Two people can experience identical circumstances yet perceive their stress levels very differently.



## The Power of Perception

Your perception of events, not just the events themselves, determines your stress level.



# Recommended Strategies Based on Your Score

Once you've calculated your PSS score, you can use the following strategies tailored to your stress level. These recommendations are designed to help you manage your stress effectively based on its severity.

1

## Low Stress (0-13)

Your stress levels appear manageable. To maintain this positive state:

- Continue practicing mindfulness and relaxation techniques
- Maintain your social connections and support systems
- Focus on preventative self-care like regular exercise and quality sleep
- Monitor your stress levels periodically to catch any increases early

2

## Moderate Stress (14-26)

You're experiencing a significant amount of stress that requires attention:

- Identify specific stressors in your life and develop targeted coping strategies
- Incorporate daily stress-reduction practices like meditation or deep breathing
- Consider setting boundaries around work and personal commitments
- Prioritize physical activity and proper nutrition to support your nervous system

3

## High Stress (27-40)

Your stress levels are concerning and warrant immediate action:

- Consider seeking professional support from a therapist or counselor
- Evaluate necessary life changes to reduce overwhelming responsibilities
- Implement structured daily stress management routines
- Focus on increasing quality sleep and restorative activities
- Practice self-compassion and acknowledge your challenges

Remember that these strategies should be personalized to your unique situation. What works for one person may not work for another, reflecting the same principle of perception that influences how we experience stress in the first place.