

My Stress Diary

Become More Aware and Find Solutions to Stress

This is a fictitious scenario to demonstrate how to use a Stress Diary, and other related resources. It gives examples of when and why stress might occur, and tips on how to begin to manage it.

Read this scenario alongside the Stress Diary Worked Example. Then, use the blank template to create your own Stress Diary.



“The headaches are getting worse and my tiredness levels are increasing. The job is starting to get on top of me. I’m stressed out. It’s time to take action.

“My first instinct is to pour a glass of chardonnay as soon as I get home, and to start trawling the web for another job. But, instead of drowning my sorrows and dusting off my résumé, I decide to talk to a co-worker about my problems.

“I reel off a string of complaints about my workplace, and my life in general, before mentioning that I’m feeling anxious and worried. After a lot of empathic nodding, my friend mentions Mind Tools, and points me in the direction of the [Stress Diaries article](#).

“I read the page and see that it contains a link to a journal template that I can download and fill in. The idea of recording stressful incidents and how I respond to them, in the hope of finding a solution, has a logic that appeals to me.

“In a nutshell, I have to write down difficult events as they occur, note how they affect me and my work, what I think the causes are, and how I think I handle each situation.”

“Anxious, angry,
confused...”

Keeping the Journal

“After a few false starts, by day three I get into the swing of writing things down. And, by the end of the second week of keeping my Stress Diary, I begin to see a pattern emerging.

“I’m swamped with work... my boss is a pain... the commute is a nightmare... the suppliers I work with are always missing their deadlines.

“Sometimes, I can deal with situations and move on. But at other times, I get angry and frustrated, and I feel like a failure.

“For instance, my journal entry for June 6 begins, ‘Boss cancels scheduled meeting.’ It’s not the worst start to the day, but I note my mood is ‘anxious.’ My ability to work is affected and I write ‘nervous’ and ‘tight stomach,’ to describe my symptoms. However, I log that I am able to ‘deal with it.’

“Then I make a note of a call from my boss, who brings forward the deadline on a report that I’m preparing. I feel distracted from my present task because now I’m starting to think about the report instead. My stress levels start to rise and my negativity kicks in, too. I describe my mood as ‘worried’ and I note down my physical symptoms of ‘hot and clammy palms.’

“At about noon, the office printer breaks down. My mood turns to anger, and my stress level reaches eight (out of 10!). My pulse is racing. I don’t deal with the situation very well. In fact, I end up shouting at a colleague.

“I make three more entries in my journal before the day ends. First, a freelancer fails to deliver his design for a brochure on time. Then, I check the train times app to discover that my journey home will be delayed by an hour. I write that my stress level has hit nine, while my happiness rating has dipped to four.

“To cap it all off, another project lands on my desk. At this point, my head starts to ache and I seriously start to doubt my ability to do this job at all. I shut down my computer and head to the rail station, or, more accurately, to the bar next door...”

“My pulse
is racing.”

Analyzing the Results

“By looking back over my Stress Diary entries, I build a picture of what triggers my stress. I notice the recurrence of certain events, and a familiar pattern of emotional and physical responses to them.

“My tendency to think negative thoughts is there in black and white. They tend to occur when I am given extra work to do, and make me afraid that I’m not going to cope, that I’m going to fail at the task.

“This suggests that I’m not managing my time as well as I could be. Fortunately, Mind Tools has [resources](#) to help in this area.

“My frustration with, and sometimes anger at, suppliers also highlights that I may have issues with the way I manage both people and projects.

“And my long-distance commute features regularly as a source of anxiety. It scores one of the highest stress ratings of my day.

“In the column ‘Fundamental Cause of the Event,’ the word ‘boss’ appears frequently. So, clearly, my working relationships are worth looking into.

Finding a Solution

“Once I have this information, I formulate a strategy to address some of the problems facing me.

Included in the Mind Tools Stress Management menu is a Bite-Sized Training™ workbook called [Stress Busters](#), which I try.

“It focuses on three types of strategy for dealing with stress:

- **Action-oriented.** With these strategies you take action that, in time, will help you to take more control over your life. Essentially, you do what you can to reduce or eliminate the sources of stress so there’s less to deal with.
- **Emotionally oriented.** These psychological strategies are designed to strengthen emotional responses to stress. They help to disrupt negative thinking and nurture positivity.
- **Acceptance-oriented.** These strategies help you to deal with stress when you have no power to change or influence the source of the stress.

“I relate some of my issues to these strategies. For instance, it is apparent that my problems with freelancers are something that I have a degree of control over, either through the people I choose to work with or through the processes that I put in place for them to follow.”

“ I could, perhaps, make an action-oriented strategy to help to reduce some of my stress in this area. I could meet with the freelancers and explain to them some of the problems that I am encountering.

“The aim would be to re-establish the requirements for delivering work to me, particularly the importance of meeting deadlines.

“[Effective scheduling](#), [prioritization](#) and [delegating](#) are also areas to focus on. Chances are, I would feel more in control if I examined how I work and tackled problems more objectively.

“My negative thinking issues, which center on my workload and my boss, fall into the emotionally oriented strategy category. Mind Tools has resources that focus on rational and [positive thinking](#) strategies, for instance.

“It is clear that stress relating to my daily travel could be addressed by employing an acceptance-oriented strategy. I can’t change the train network, but I can put some strategies into place for dealing with the situation.

“I could find productive or enjoyable activities to do when I am on [my commute](#), such as listening to Expert Interviews from Mind Tools, watching a movie, or chatting with other passengers.

“I also learn that [meditation](#) and [physical relaxation techniques](#) will become part of my armory in the battle against stress.

“I return to the Stress Busters resource and look deeper into the strategies that I can use to tackle the causes of my stress.

“My mission, now, is to put them into action. ”

Warning:

Stress can cause severe health problems and, in extreme cases, death. While these stress management techniques have been shown to have a positive effect on reducing stress, they are for guidance only, and readers should take the advice of suitably qualified health professionals if they have any concerns over stress-related illnesses or if stress is causing significant or persistent unhappiness. Health professionals should also be consulted before any major change in diet or levels of exercise.

Stress Diary Worked Example

- For more information about using a Stress Diary, visit www.mindtools.com/stress-diaries.

Date and Time	Most Recent Stressful Event Experienced	How Happy Do You Feel Now? (Scale 0–10)	Your Current Mood	How Effectively Are You Working Now? (0–10)	Fundamental Cause of the Event	How Stressed Do You Feel Now? (Scale 0–10)	Physical Symptoms During Stressful Event	How Well Did You Handle the Event?
June 6 9.15 a.m.	Boss cancels scheduled meeting	6	Slightly anxious	8	Boss	3	Nervous Tight stomach	OK – can deal with it
10.40 a.m.	Boss brings forward project deadline	6	Worried/Useless	6	Boss	7	Hot/Sweaty palms	Poor – can't cope
12 noon	Office printer breaks down	5	Angry	5	I.T.	8	Raised pulse	Poor – shouted at I.T. guy
2.15 p.m.	Freelancer fails to deliver on time	4	Frustrated	6	Freelance/Me!	6	Hot/Sweaty	Poor – vented anger
4.30 p.m.	Train delays – I'll be late home again!	3	Angry	4	Trains	9	Dizzy	Not good Shut down computer
5.35 p.m.	Another project lands on my desk	3	V. worried I'm no good	2	Boss	9	Headache Sick	Poor – two drinks at station

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