



## Stress Test

By Dr. Linda Hancock

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Dr. Hancock has written a regular weekly column entitled “All Psyched Up” for newspapers in two Canadian provinces for more than a dozen years. Over the years, her readers and clients have said that they have benefited from her common-sense solutions, wisdom, and sense of humour. Dr. Linda Hancock, the author of “Life is An Adventure...every step of the way” and “Open for Business Success” is a Registered Psychologist who has a private practice in Medicine Hat. She can be reached at 403-529-6877 or through email [office@drlindahancock.com](mailto:office@drlindahancock.com)

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Have you ever been booked for a stress test? The procedure involves doing exercise in a way that your heart pumps harder and harder while medical personnel monitor your breathing, blood pressure and heart rhythm. This is an accepted scientific method that will help to assess any heart problems that may need to be treated.

Stress tests for psychological issues unfortunately, usually require an individual's self-awareness or observation by others who are close to them. There might be significant problems coping with daily life, unhealthy habits, overwhelm or lack of strategies to revolve problems and improve

Have you ever removed paint from a door in an old house? The process takes time and effort. First you have to put on gloves because the gel that you apply to lift the paint is toxic. It smells horrible and after it bubbles up, you need to use a scraper to begin removing it

Surprise! Underneath you might find that there is a layer of green paint that you hadn't guessed was there. Next you might find pink, or blue or a number of other layers. With persistence, you will finally get down to the original wood. And it will be worth it.

Stress can be like the layers of paint on the door. Often our true personalities are covered with layer after layer of stress and hurt that are never dealt with. On the outside, we might look presentable, but all the layers prevent us from realize the freedom and beauty of our true selves.

Over the years I have had media training and attended many crises situations. I know that one of the things that is always said during a press release is "Counsellors are on site to help the people being affected". What most don't understand is that those counsellors are only there for a brief period of time. Their task is not to strip down all the layers that each person presents with. The goal is to help to strip off the crisis layer.

Now, not all stress is bad. Gravity is a form of stress that allows us to stay grounded. Some stress motivates us to do things that we might otherwise ignore.

The stress that I am referring to is stress that harms us or slows us down. Here are some thoughts to ponder:

1. Do you take on stress that isn't necessary? Perhaps you are too busy solving everyone else's problems that you don't have time for yourself. Maybe your expectations are too high.
2. Do you have self-care strategies that you use every day? These include getting enough rest, nutrition, exercise and laughter.
3. Do you have old issues that you haven't been able to resolve? Perhaps you would benefit from talking with a psychologist who is trained to help others to problem-solve.

This week, take a piece of paper and draw two vertical lines to form three columns. Label each column with a heading "Good stress", "Unnecessary stress" and "Toxic Stress that I need to address".

Then start filling in the columns. You are on your way for awareness is the first step to healing.

Once you have this done, it is time to take action!

Oh, and don't procrastinate about this as it will just add another layer of stress to your life!