Stress is defined as “the inability to cope with a perceived (real or imagined) threat to one’s mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being which results in a series of physiological responses and adaptations” (Chopra, 2000; Dossey, 2004). Check out the information below to find out about what stress is and how it impacts you.

The Stress Response

The Stress Response is when the body prepares itself to either fight or flee from a perceived threat. The Stress Response (more traditionally known as the fight-or-flight response) is composed of four stages (described below).

- **Stage 1**: Stimuli from one or more of the five senses are sent to the brain.
- **Stage 2**: The brain deciphers the stimulus as either a threat or a non-threat.
- **Stage 3**: The body stays activated or aroused until the threat is over.
- **Stage 4**: The body returns to homeostasis, a stage of physiological calmness, once the threat is gone.
The Stress Response is hypothesized to have originally developed to prepare us to fight or flee from a perceived physical threat, such as a bear attack. However, while physical threats still exist in today’s culture, the Stress Response becomes activated in all types of threats (mental, emotional, physical, and spiritual).

**Good vs. Bad Stress**

The Stress Response is a natural reaction in your body. Experiencing some stress helps the function of several organs and can serve as positive motivation. Good stress, or eustress, arises in a situation that people find motivating or inspiring like falling in love or meeting your favorite movie star. Negative stress, or distress, typically occur either in short intense bursts such as when one prepares for an exam, or prolonged periods of time (hours, days, weeks, months, etc.).

The optimal level of stress is the midpoint, right before eustress turns into distress, as demonstrated in the image below ([Managing Stress in Emergency Medical Services, 1999](#)).

![Stress Response Diagram](https://stress-rx.com)

**Stress’ Impact**

When your body prepares to either fight or flee from a perceived threat a series of physiological mechanisms take place.

[Click here to see how stress affects your body’s physical health](#)

**Prolonged Stress’ Impact**

When stress occurs due to a mental or emotional threat (such as an exam) the physiological changes mentioned above are not expended physically. Without proper care to return to homeostasis, you may be at a higher risk of experiencing long-term stress. When your body is exposed to prolonged and chronic stress and unable to return to homeostasis, there is a greater likelihood of negative impacts on your academics and wellbeing.
If you are struggling with prolonged stress symptoms please schedule an appointment to speak with the wellness advisor. The office is located at 200 Harrison Ave, 4th floor. Please call 617-636-2700 to schedule an appointment.

Adapted with permission from the University of Chicago, Health Promotions and Wellness