

# Can We Become Addicted To Stress?

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Overflowing inboxes and endless to-do lists prevent many of us from taking time to stop and smell the flowers. Given the choice, though, would we? Turns out **some experts believe we can actually become addicted to stress.**

## Now I'm Worried — The Need-to-Know

[In 2011](#), Americans rated their personal stress levels an average of 5.2 out of 10. And 22 percent admitted to being under extreme stress on a regular basis. Gulp!

Stress can be physical, like what we subject our muscles to at the gym. And then there's the kind that's in our heads — that *OMG I'm so overwhelmed right now* feeling. While psychological stress has some definite downsides (chronic freak-outs may increase our risk for cancer and [other diseases](#)), take a moment to exhale. In [moderate amounts](#), stress can [boost our focus](#), energy, and even our [powers of intuition](#).

Still, in some cases, stress does more than light a productivity-boosting fire under our butts. Both emotional and physical stress activate our central nervous system, causing a “natural high,” says Concordia University neuroscientist and addiction researcher [Jim Pfaus](#). **“By activating our arousal and attention systems,” Pfaus says, “stressors can also wake up the neural circuitry underlying wanting and craving — just like drugs do.”**

**This may be why, experts believe, some of us come to like stress a little *too* much.**

## Gimme, Gimme More? — The Answer/Debate

[Type A](#) and [Type D](#) personalities — or people prone to competitiveness, anxiety, and depression — may be most likely to get a high from stressful situations, says stress management specialist [Debbie Mandel](#). Stress addicts, Mandel says, “may also be **using endless to-do lists to avoid less-easy-to-itemize problems — feelings of inadequacy, family conflicts, or other unresolved personal issues.**”

Some stress addicts have difficulty listening to others, concentrating, and even sleeping because they can't put tomorrow's agenda out of their minds, explains Mandel. Others tend to use exaggerated vocabulary — *craazy busy right now, workload's insane!!* And some begin to feel anxious at the mere thought of slowing down their schedule.

But psychologist and addiction researcher [Stanton Peele](#) cautions against labeling anyone a stress addict. “Only when that pursuit of stress has a significant negative impact on your life could it qualify as addiction,” he said, adding that many people are able to effectively manage — and in fact thrive under — high stress conditions. (Think: Olympic athletes or President Obama.)

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## The De-Stress Plan:

For budding stress addicts or for those who just, well, feel overwhelmed, here are some tips to [dial down that anxiety](#).

- **Seek professional help** if you're verging on [burnout](#). (Not only can hashing it out with a therapist take a load off your mind. Some studies suggest it also [boosts physical fitness](#)!)
- **Do something creative.** Mandel recommends carving out a once-weekly time *not* to think about tomorrow's agenda by painting, cooking, writing, dancing, or anything else that'll take you off the clock temporarily.
- **Take it outside.** Numerous studies show spending time in nature improves [general well-being](#), lowers [anxiety, stress](#) and [depression](#), and even boosts self-confidence. Especially [for women](#). (As it turns out, most addiction recovery centers offer [outdoor-immersion programs](#).)
- **Calm down quickly.** If you *really* don't have time for any of the above, these [40 tricks to chill take five minutes or less](#).

Some of us may seek out stress a bit more excessively than others and struggle to just relax. It takes skill to handle hectic agendas and long lists of responsibilities — without losing sleep or feeling frazzled. So try these tips and try not to freak out!

Source: <http://greatist.com/happiness/can-we-become-addicted-stress>