

# Effect of Stress and Our Perception of Self on Mood

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Some things that cause you stress come from the outside. Things happen, and you have to react. Other “stressors” are internal. They come from the ways you conceptualize your world and yourself, or some are rooted in changes in your physiology. Some stressors have a temporary effect, and others have lasting impact. We can see this in the following examples:

- Someone from your child’s school calls and tells you that your child had a bad day.
- You can simply handle this event, or you can make yourself feel down about it.
- You are decorating your house for an upcoming party, and you discover that the plumbing in your guest bathroom isn’t functioning properly.
- You have a deadline at work, and your computer’s hard disk crashes.
- You are experiencing conflict over whether you should stay in a long-term, somewhat comfortable relationship with someone you are no longer passionate about.
- You notice that you are reacting to others in an impatient manner, and you are experiencing “crying jags” when watching a comedy on TV, just before you “get your period.”
- Your doctor suspects that you may be becoming diabetic or you have just found out that your headaches are migraines.

All of these stressors can evoke depression or anxiety. How you interpret these occurrences, conflicts, and changes determines the degree to which you become depressed or anxious.

Negative self regard can lead to both depression and anxiety. We develop our sense of ourselves, or our “self concepts,” from feedback from important people in our childhood environments. When these people (parents, teachers, older siblings, etc.) are critical of us, make unrealistic demands, or abuse us in any way, we may develop the notion that we are not OK. Then everything that happens around us tends to validate this idea we have of ourselves. If you regard yourself in a negative manner, that is, you think that you are limited, unintelligent, unattractive, weak, etc., you have a tendency not to act self-confidently. This can create a cycle that is sometimes referred to as the “self-fulfilling prophecy.” You don’t even try to become chair of the committee, and if you do, you act so tentatively that others don’t choose you, and that just proves what you already know

about yourself—that you are somehow undesirable. Positive self regard, on the other hand, includes knowing and accepting your limitations as well as your strengths. You behave proactively, working toward achievable goals that you have set for yourself. Looking at yourself positively has important implications for avoiding the debilitating effects of depression and anxiety.

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