

DO YOU KNOW WHAT IS CAUSING YOUR STRESS?

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We all know what stress feels like. Awful! Some of us have figured out a few things that help us temporarily relieve our stress, but that doesn't stop it from returning. Why? If we really understand stress, we are in a better position to manage our stress effectively. So let's look at what stress is.

Every time our mind perceives danger, or a threat or a challenge to **anything** that is important to us, we automatically respond with a powerful reaction called the **FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE**. The response is instantaneous and involves our entire body. I am sure you recognize the rush of adrenalin, the butterflies in the stomach, the tightness in your throat, the tense muscles. The Fight or Flight Response produces a lot of energy, quickly, so you can deal with the danger. **If** you can use that energy in some way, (e.g., by fighting with the danger or running away from it) then your body quickly returns to normal. You are beautifully designed to do just that. The difficulty comes when we perceive a threat and there is no outlet for the energy. There is nobody you can fight with and no where you can run. The Fight or Flight Response stays "on" and all the energy builds up inside. **THAT** is what we are experiencing when we feel stress. This can happen many times in a day and we can end up feeling very stressed.

Once you know that this is what causes stress there are two ways to deal with it. The first is learning how to shut the Fight or Flight off, without having to beat somebody up or running away. The second is becoming more aware of, and then changing the perceptions that trigger the response, so there are fewer times you are stressed. The first treats the symptoms of stress and the second deals directly with the cause. Learning about both gives you very powerful tools for managing the stress in your life.

*Debbie Homewood is a counsellor who deals with stress and uses **biofeedback**, a powerful tool for monitoring the Fight or Flight Response.*