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## Good stress? <sup>[1]</sup>

To Alice,

Is there such a thing as GOOD stress?

signed,  
frustrated

### Answer

Dear frustrated,

Stress is often referred to colloquially in only negative terms, but it can be both "good" and "bad." Eustress, sometimes called constructive stress, is a common response that helps people meet the demands of life. Distress, sometimes called destructive stress, on the other hand, may cause psychological suffering but is possible to manage through a variety of techniques. Regardless of the type of stress, the brain detects a threat from an external stimulus — whether that's a difficult exam or an angry dog — and activates a stress response, enabling a surge of hormones designed to increase heart rate and blood pressure. Once the threat is gone, the heart rate, blood pressure, and hormones return to their previous state, calming the body down. In terms of evolution, this "fight or flight" (and sometimes "freeze") response serves as a protective survival tactic in all animals, with the brain signaling other parts of the body to act. Keep on reading for the ins and outs of what eustress and distress are and how to manage them!

Eustress refers to stress that people are able to manage and pushes individuals to keep working to accomplish goals they've set. For example, practicing for a performance may be considered a form of eustress — the desire to perform as well as possible motivates people to work harder, resulting in better outcomes. In addition, eustress hormones have been found to improve memory and cognition. Not only that, when paired with an immune response through medical processes like surgery or vaccination, eustress helps boost the body's immune system.

On the other hand, distress, may lead to negative psychological and physical health effects. To reduce the likelihood of experiencing these negative impacts, one option is to actively shifting one's mindset to see stressors as motivators rather than obstacles. This allows stress to become a positive rather than negative mental force, promoting healthy resilience. This practice is based

in cognitive behavioral therapy, a well-recognized psychological technique and includes thinking of an event that seems stressful and finding other ways of looking at it. For example, rather than a track star thinking of their last meet as a daunting test of their skill, they may try to consider it as a moment to show off how hard they've worked. Practicing this cognitive technique enables individuals to better cope with stressful events over time.

When stress feels overwhelming and these reframing strategies don't work, it may be helpful to find other ways to manage it. Relaxing by listening to music, practicing meditation, being physically active, or spending time with friends helps limit stress levels over time. These are just some stress management techniques, and some work better than others; it's all about finding what works for you. People who experience overwhelming or stress that inhibits their typical daily functioning may want to seek support from a mental health professional or health promotion specialist for additional tactics that may work for them individually. For more information on stress and how to cope with it, check out the [Stress & Anxiety](#) [2] category in the *Go Ask Alice!* [Emotional Health](#) [3] archives.

Try some of these stress management techniques, and maybe your next letter will be signed, "Hopeful," "Exhilarated," or "Up for the challenge."

Alice!

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