

Definitions and Concepts for AQA Psychology A-level

Option 2: Stress

Acute stress: Stress that occurs in response to an immediate or short-term stressor.

ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormone): A hormone released by the pituitary gland that stimulates the adrenal cortex to release cortisol.

Adrenaline: A hormone released by the adrenal medulla during acute stress that increases physiological arousal and prepares the body for action.

Autonomic nervous system (ANS): The part of the nervous system that controls involuntary bodily functions, including heart rate and digestion.

Beta blockers: Medication that reduces the effects of adrenaline and noradrenaline on the body, including their effects on heart rate.

Biofeedback: A technique that provides real-time information about physiological processes so a person can learn to control their responses to stress.

Cardiovascular disorders: Conditions affecting the heart and blood vessels, such as coronary heart disease.

Chronic stress: Stress that persists over a prolonged period because of an ongoing stressor.

Cognitive appraisal: The process of evaluating a situation and deciding whether it is stressful and whether one has the resources to cope with it.

Cortisol: A hormone released by the adrenal cortex that helps maintain the body's energy supply during prolonged stress.

Corticotropin-releasing hormone (CRH): A hormone released by the hypothalamus that stimulates the pituitary gland to release ACTH.

Daily hassles: Frequent, relatively minor sources of stress, such as arguments, deadlines, traffic and everyday financial problems.

This work by [PMT Education](https://www.pmt.education) is licensed under [CC BY-NC-ND 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc-nd/4.0/)





Diseases of adaptation: Illnesses that may develop following prolonged stress, such as cardiovascular disease and hypertension.

Emotion-focused coping: A strategy for managing the emotional response to a stressor rather than directly changing the source of stress.

Emotional support: Support that provides comfort, empathy, concern, and reassurance to help an individual manage emotional distress.

Esteem support: Support that builds an individual's confidence, self-worth, and belief in their ability to cope with a stressor.

Fight-or-flight response: The body's immediate response to a perceived threat, preparing a person to confront the threat or escape from it.

General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS): Selye's (1950) model of the body's response to stress, consisting of three stages: alarm reaction, resistance and exhaustion.

Hardiness: A personality characteristic associated with better coping with stress, consisting of commitment, challenge and control.

Hassles and Uplifts Scale: A questionnaire measuring people's experiences of everyday irritations and positive events.

Hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis: A physiological system involved in prolonged stress, in which the hypothalamus signals the pituitary gland, which then stimulates the adrenal cortex to release cortisol.

Hypertension: Persistently high blood pressure, which can be associated with prolonged stress.

Immunosuppression: Reduced functioning of the immune system, making the body less effective at fighting infection and disease.

Instrumental support: Practical help with a problem, such as lending money or completing a task.

Job demand-control model: Karasek's (1979) model proposing that workplace stress depends partly on the demands of a job and the amount of control an employee has over their work.

Job control: The degree of autonomy or decision-making power an employee has over their work activities; low job control is associated with increased stress.





Life changes: Major life events, positive or negative, that require physical or psychological adjustment and may cause stress.

Negative feedback: A regulatory process in which rising cortisol levels reduce the release of CRH and ACTH, helping to limit the HPA stress response.

Natural killer (NK) cells: Immune cells that help identify and destroy infected or abnormal cells.

Noradrenaline: A hormone released by the adrenal medulla during acute stress that contributes to increased physiological arousal.

Parasympathetic nervous system: The branch of the autonomic nervous system that helps the body return to its resting state after a threat has passed.

Personality type A: A personality pattern associated with competitiveness, impatience, time urgency and a strong drive to achieve.

Personality type B: A personality pattern associated with being more relaxed, patient and less competitive than type A.

Personality type C: A personality pattern described as non-assertive, inclined to suppress emotions and likely to avoid conflict.

Pituitary gland: An endocrine gland that releases ACTH in response to CRH, stimulating cortisol release from the adrenal cortex.

Schedule of Recent Experiences (SRE): A measure used in research to record stressful life events experienced over a recent period.

Secondary appraisal: The stage of cognitive appraisal in which a person evaluates their ability and resources to cope with a situation.

Skin conductance response (SCR): A measure of physiological arousal based on changes in the skin's electrical conductance.

Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS): A scale developed by **Holmes and Rahe (1967)** that assigns scores to major life events according to the adjustment they require.

Stress: A physical and psychological response to demands or pressures perceived as challenging or threatening.

Stress inoculation training (SIT): **Meichenbaum's (1985)** cognitive-behavioural approach to stress management, which teaches people to identify stressors, develop coping skills and practise applying them.





Sympathetic nervous system: The branch of the autonomic nervous system that activates the body's acute stress response.

Sympathomedullary pathway (SAM): The pathway activated during acute stress that involves the sympathetic nervous system and the release of adrenaline and noradrenaline from the adrenal medulla.

Tend-and-befriend response: A gender-differentiated coping response proposed by Taylor et al. in females, driven by oxytocin, involving nurturing offspring (tending) and seeking social support (befriending) during stress.

T-killer cells: Immune cells involved in identifying and destroying infected or abnormal cells.

Vasoconstriction: Narrowing of blood vessels, which helps redirect blood towards muscles during the acute stress response.

Workload: The amount of work, effort, or time required of an employee, where high workload can act as a major source of workplace stress.

