The Ardell Wellness Self-Assessment

My first book, "High Level Wellness: An Alternative to Doctors, Drugs and Disease" (Rodale, 1977), contained a chapter on stress. In it was a short stress test or self-assessment. Nearly 35 years have passed since I wrote this and devised a scoring system for interpreting it. The exercise was intended to give a sense of the range of factors that can be potential stressors. Too many stress factors not managed well can cause health and other troubles ranging from misery to ruin. My stress test, a self-assessment tool, is a self-report instrument intended for personal insights. It is not, of course, a test in any technical sense. Unlike a true test, it is not validated against a criterion or otherwise in accord with standards for scientific rigor.

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Many books have been written about the phenomenon of stress. It is a popular term in our culture and receives much attention in varied worksite health promotion programs. Among humans, there are major individual differences in how people respond to and manage stressors at different times under varied circumstances. What stresses you might delight me and vice-versa. People thrive with and also suffer from stress in their lives. Any test that raises awareness and thus helps fewer suffer and more thrive seems a good thing.

My little wellness stress test is a consciousness-raising, self-assessment life satisfaction survey. I want to assist readers embark upon or add to their wellness mindsets and lifestyles. To do that, it helps to evaluate a number of important life areas. I want everyone to enjoy the process of mastering stress factors as much as possible. Stress can be serious when present to excess. Anyone working with an individual in a wellness setting might consider the self-assessment and interpretation that follows as an aide, useful for exploring issues and concerns in greater depth toward the goal of positive resolutions.

The old 1977 Ardell Wellness Stress Test remains popular to this day, particularly at university wellness centers and health promotion courses. In addition, I still receive requests for permission to reproduce the test in books and brochures. So, it seems time for an update. After all, what are the chances that the events and circumstances of the 70's are still stressing people today? However, I should recognize that most of the factors listed then are generic, not dated to an era (e.g., job and career stresses). Thus, most of the original test questions should still apply, especially after a little touch-up to account for my having learned a thing or two in the intervening decades. I'd at least like to think I know more in 2018 about REAL wellness than I did in 1976 while writing "High Level Wellness: An Alternative to Doctors, Drugs and Disease." That fact in itself invited this update.

The "Ardell Wellness Stress Test" then and now incorporates physical, mental, emotional, "spiritual" (i.e., meaning and purpose) and social aspects of health. This is one reason many users report finding the test useful - it offers a balanced assessment of varied stress sources. In this updated version, I retain that broad scope. I also retain the scoring system. I recommend that you print this test in order to allow marking answers or number ratings to each of the 25 topic areas. As in the original version, I'm offering a six-point scale, plus a neutral choice that indicates no positive or negative emotions associated with the item.

Here is the rating scale to apply as you read and consider each factor in the 25 question assessment. Simply rate your satisfaction in degrees positive or negative for each item.

Enter "+3" if your situation, that is, your satisfaction with how your life is currently going regarding the category listed, is "exuberant to ecstatic" - as good or positive as it could reasonably be expected or hoped for.

Enter "+2" if your satisfaction level in the category is "very happy to quite pleased."

Enter "+1" if your satisfaction is "OK to mildly satisfying."

Enter "0" if your most accurate sense is "not sure" to "no problem."

Enter "+1" if the most accurate response seems to be "mildly disappointed" to "not quite right."

Enter "-2" if the most best answer is "very disappointed" to "quite unhappy about this."

Enter "-3" if your feeling about the issue at hand is "I'm on the road to Nowhere" to "I think I'm about to go over a cliff."
With this scoring system, enter a number to the left of each factor regarding how much positive or negative stress it engenders. When you have completed all 25, please add your score and read my assessment of your stress situation. After that, of course, a REAL wellness mindset/lifestyle is highly recommended, no matter how high (good) or low (time to reorganize) your score on this stress assessment might be.

1. Choice of profession or career
2. Present job or capacity to make a satisfactory living
3. Marital or partner status
4. Primary relationships (family and best friends)
5. Ability to have fun and the extent to which you experience good times regularly
6. Amount of recent occasions when you felt exuberant, filled with a sense that "life is good"
7. Financial situation and future prospects
8. Sense of who you are and how evolving (self-respect and confidence)
9. Meaning and purpose in life (includes "spirituality")
10. Level of self-worth and estimation of how others view you
11. Prospects for having impact on those who know you and possibly others
12. Sex life
13. Body, how it looks and performs
14. Home life, including range of interests and passions
15. Life skills and education - awareness of issues and facts unrelated to your job or profession
16. Capacities for dealing with change, crises, setbacks and all manner of unexpected situations
17. Nutritional knowledge, attitudes and consumption patterns
18. Ability to recover from disappointments, hurts and tragedies
19. Potentials
20. A range of interests and a balanced quality in your life
21. Sense that life for you is on an upward curve, getting better and fuller all the time
22. Level of participation in issues and concerns beyond your immediate interests
23. Choices about parenting and styles/principles for the guidance of children
24. Role with network of friends, relatives and/or others
25. Emotional acceptance of the inescapable reality of aging, decline and death

Please add the plus number and subtract the minus numbers. **Write the total in this space:** ______
Ardell Wellness Stress Test Interpretation

+ 60 to + 75: You are in a very good place overall, and unlikely to be significantly troubled by stressors on a consistent basis. You have a lot of positive factors in your life which, more than any stress management technique (e.g., deep breathing, meditation and so on), will render you largely immune from the adverse effects of negative emotions in dealing with what life serves up. There are few challenges likely to untrack you from a continuing sense of near wellbeing so long as your satisfaction level remains as high as indicated in this assessment.

+ 36 to + 59: You are doing well, much better than most. You should find the information available about the wellness concept attractive and consistent with your movement toward effective and healthy living. You already have a well-tuned capacity to deal creatively and efficiently with events and circumstances. Additional advances should come easily for you. All good wishes in moving forward while learning new skills, particularly in areas of critical thinking, the experience of exuberant living, physical fitness and expanding your personal freedoms and choices.

+ 20 to + 35: You have a well-founded appreciation for the importance of lifestyle choices in affecting the quality of your life. You know the value of personal responsibility, a supportive environment and the cumulative positive effects of little changes, over time. In the months to come, invest additional energies in learning ways to strengthen certain areas. You can boost your satisfactions while reducing your stressors.

0 to +19: You can clearly benefit from a modest investment in learning ways to reduce stress and increase pleasures. A flurry of negative circumstances could spark emotional setbacks. Take steps now to avoid slowing your steady progression toward mastery of good living and self-efficacy.

0 to -19: Stress of a daily nature that interferes will good living seems to be a problem - and it deserves your attention. Stress of a consistent negative nature will jeopardize your motivation to choose wisely and sustain energy levels needed for good health and an enjoyable life. You are a candidate for counseling. You are either too pessimistic or have severe problems in dealing with stress.

-20 to – 37: There is almost surely too much stress to support exuberant living, with generous instances of pleasure and joy, positive excitement for fun things to do and delights in diversions and purposes. Consider a wide range of ways to boost your happiness quotient.

-38 to – 75: Oh my goodness. What do you do for a living - are you North Korean Supreme Leader Kim Jong-un, ruling dictator of the Hermit Kingdom? Something, lots of things, must be done to lighten the load, to eliminate much of the stress load from your life. Let's look on the bright side for a moment - you are still alive, you managed to complete the test without suffering a cardiac event and you probably have a sense of humor, more or less. But seriously, if you truly are as stressed as this little consciousness-raising set of questions would indicate, it's time for a chat with a wellness professional. I recommend that you start now to look after yourself with more loving attention.

The single best way to deal with negative stress is to prevent it in the first place. Too late for that. Next, take the surest path to stress reduction - find ways to enjoy life daily. It also helps to find work that challenges and allows expression of your talents. In addition, find a cause or project or two that gives added meaning. Service to others is also a proven way of improving your own situation. All that uplifts and inspires tends to diminish anxiety, stress and fears. Do whatever you can to boost your experience of little joys and delights. There are many paths to increased happiness. Few have offered a better, more succinct formula for happiness than Robert Green Ingersoll (1833 - 1899), the great 19th century orator of the golden age of freethought. Ingersoll believed happiness was a great virtue. Many today are familiar with his words on the subject: "The place to be happy is here, the time to be happy is now and the way to be happy is to make others so."

Thanks for taking the self-assessment test.

All best wishes. Be well.

Donald B. Ardell, Ph.D. wrote "High Level Wellness: An Alternative to Doctors, Drugs and Disease," the 1977 Rodale book that helped launch the wellness movement. Don has written more than a dozen books since including "Die Healthy." "Aging Beyond Belief" and, most recently, "REAL Wellness. In this book, Don describes how reason, exuberance, athleticism and liberty are foundation elements for a high quality of life. This stress test is from REAL Wellness, though an simpler version was in "High Level Wellness." Don publishes the weekly ARDELL WELLNESS REPORT (approximately 782 editions since 1984). Don's latest is "Not Dead Yet: World Triathlon Champions 75 + Offer 56 Tips for Thriving and Flourishing in Later Life." For more, visit www.donardell.com.