



AMERICAN PSYCHOLOGICAL ASSOCIATION

# Stress in America

Mind/Body Health: For a Healthy Mind and Body, Talk to a Psychologist

October 24, 2007

## Stress in America

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# Introduction

## Stress in America

In September 2007, the American Psychological Association commissioned its annual nationwide survey to examine the state of stress across the country. The research measured attitudes and perceptions of stress among the general public, identifying leading sources of stress, common behaviors used to manage stress and the impact of stress on our lives.

The survey explored:

- appropriate and excessive stress levels;
- circumstances, situations and life events that cause stress;
- activities, resources and behaviors people use to deal with stress; and
- the personal costs of stress.

## Methodology

This survey was conducted online within the United States by Harris Interactive on behalf of the American Psychological Association between August 30 and September 11, 2007, among 1,848 adults (aged 18 and over). Interviews were conducted in English and Spanish. Figures for age, sex, race/ethnicity, education, region and household income were weighted where necessary to bring them in line with their actual proportions in the population. Hispanic respondents were also weighted based on language usage. Propensity score weighting was also used to adjust for respondents' propensity to be online.

With a pure probability sample of 1,848 one could say with a 95 percent probability that the overall results would have a sampling error of +/- 2 percentage points. Sampling error for data based on sub-samples would be higher and would vary. However, that does not take other sources of error into account. This online survey is not based on a probability sample and therefore no theoretical sampling error can be calculated.

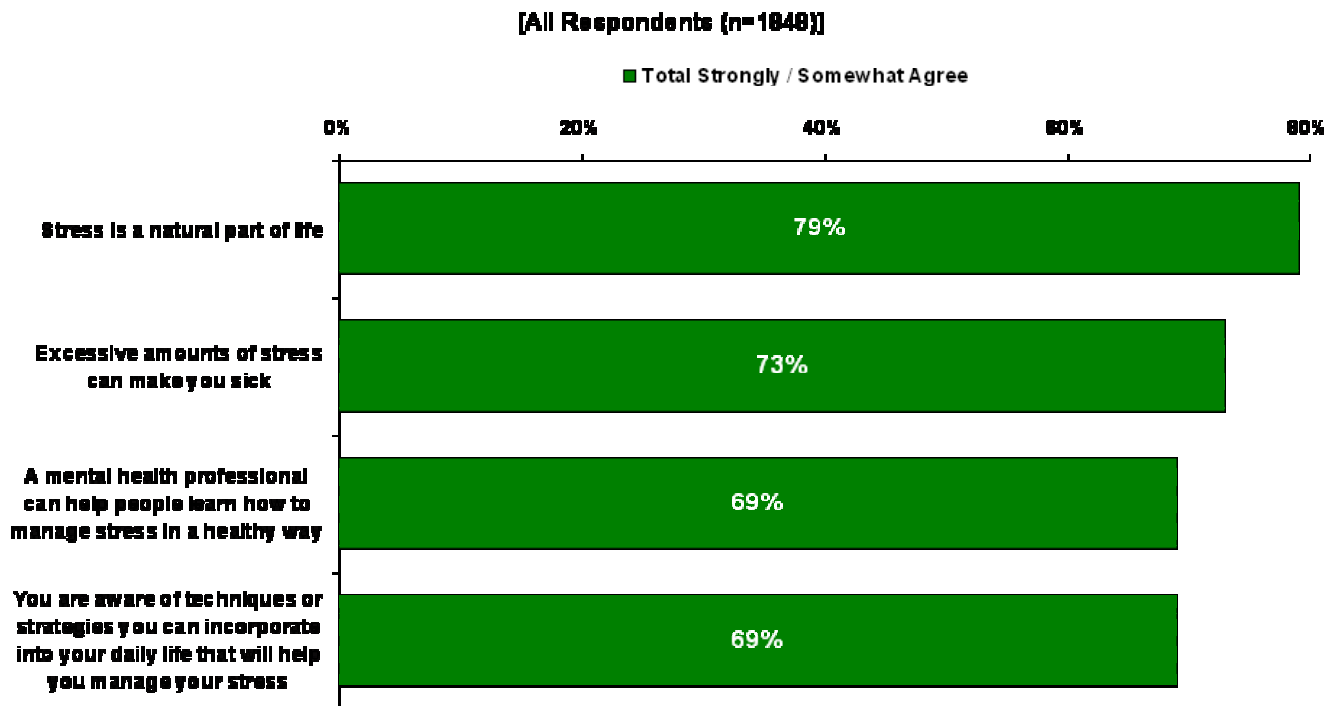
# Key Findings

## STRESS: Portrait of a National Pressure Cooker

Stress is a fact of life (agreed 79 percent of people), but according to survey responses, Americans routinely experience what they believe are higher than healthy levels of stress. One-third of people in the U.S. regularly report experiencing extreme levels of stress (32 percent), and nearly one in five (17 percent) report that they experienced their highest level of stress 15 or more days per month. Even more alarming, nearly half of Americans (48 percent) believe that their stress has increased over the past five years.

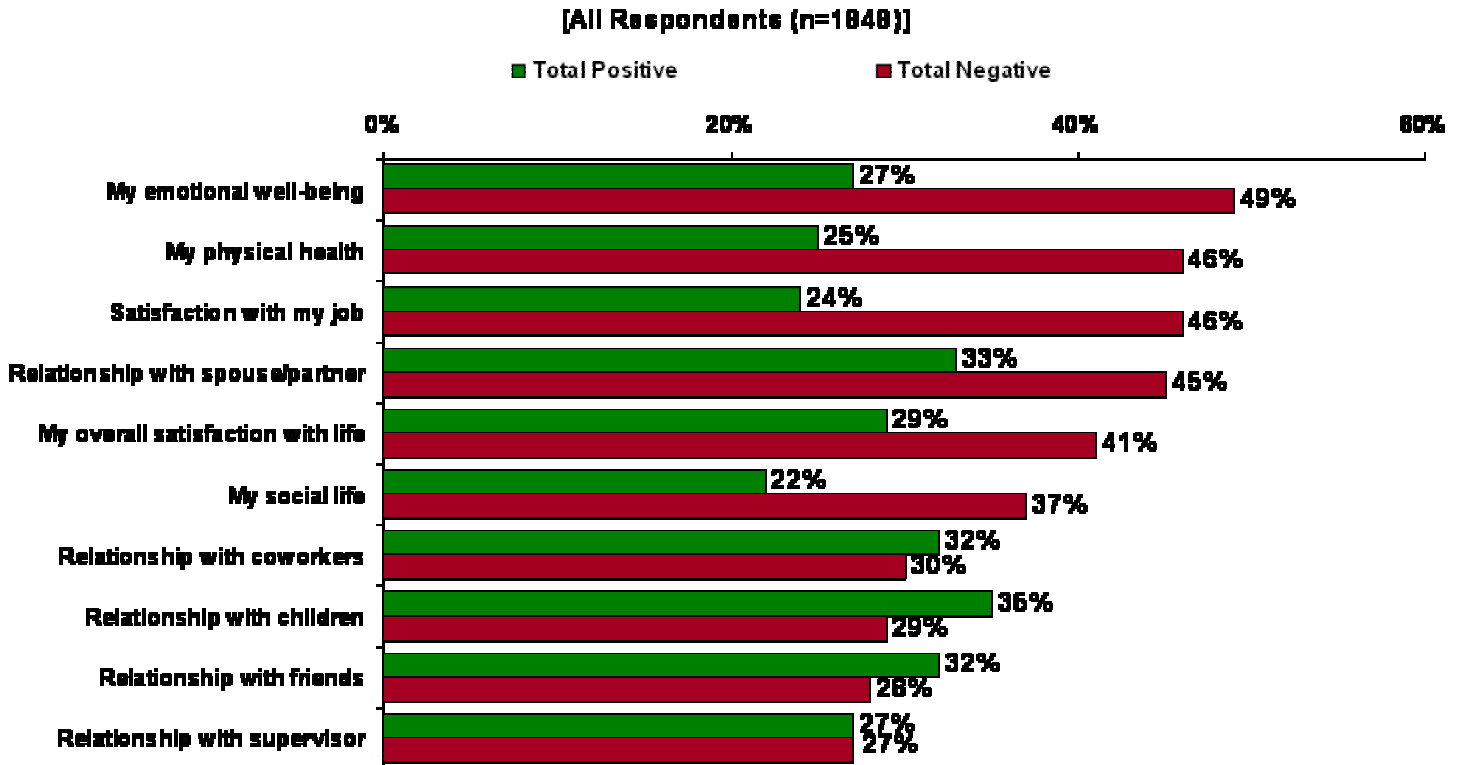
While many Americans recognize that excessive levels of stress can have an impact on physical health (73 percent agree), and half are concerned about their current stress levels (52 percent), people experiencing stress report mixed responses about their ability to manage their stress and its impact. Despite the finding that the majority of people say they manage their stress well (82 percent), nearly half report that stress has a negative impact on their emotional well-being (49 percent) and physical health (46 percent), resulting in psychological symptoms of stress such as irritability or anger (50 percent) and physical symptoms of stress such as fatigue (51 percent) and headaches (44 percent). And while 69 percent recognize that a mental health professional could aid in stress management, only 7 percent have sought professional support to help manage their stress during the past year.

Figure 1 — Attitudes toward Stress



Q511. Now, please tell me if you agree or disagree with the following statements. Do you strongly agree, somewhat agree, neither agree nor disagree, somewhat disagree or strongly disagree with this statement?

Figure 2 — Impact of Stress

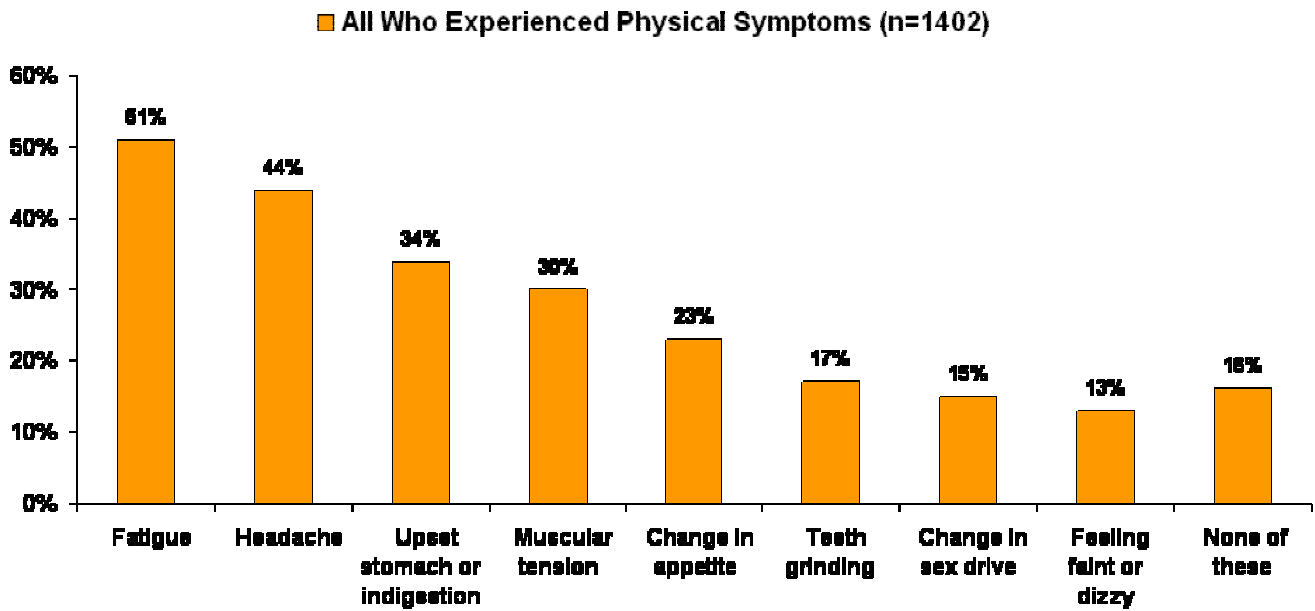


Q701. During times when you experience stress, what effect do you think your level of stress has on each of the following?

### Americans also Report that Stress Impacts their Physical and Psychological Health

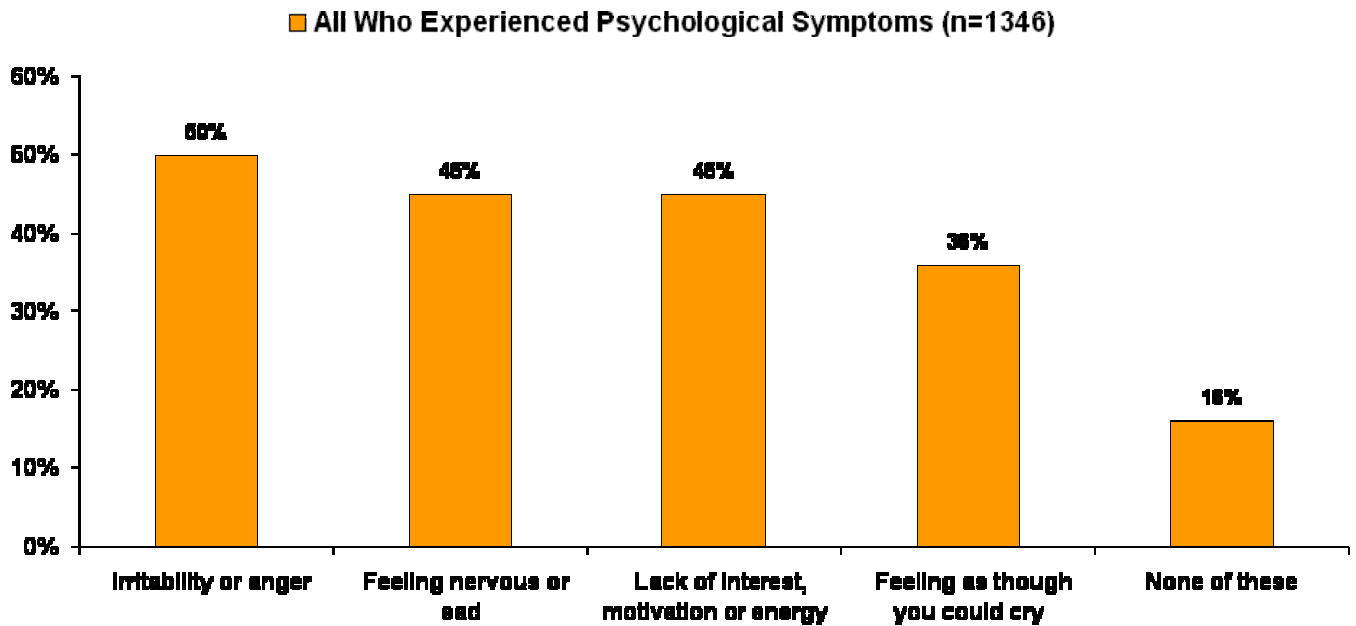
- Three-quarters (77 percent) experienced physical symptoms during the last month as a result of stress. This includes fatigue (51 percent); headache (44 percent); upset stomach (34 percent); muscle tension (30 percent); change in appetite (23 percent); teeth grinding (17 percent); change in sex drive (15 percent); and feeling dizzy (13 percent), among others.
- Nearly as many (73 percent) experienced psychological symptoms in the last month including irritability or anger (50 percent); feeling nervous (45 percent); lack of energy (45 percent); and feeling as though you could cry (36 percent).
- Half (48 percent) of adults lay awake at night during the last month because of stress and on average they report losing 21 hours of sleep per month.
- Forty-three percent overeat or eat unhealthy foods and more than one-third (36 percent) have skipped a meal because of stress during the last month.

Figure 3 – Physical Symptoms of Stress



Q810. Which of the following, if any, have you experienced in the last month as a result of stress?

Figure 4 – Psychological Symptoms of Stress

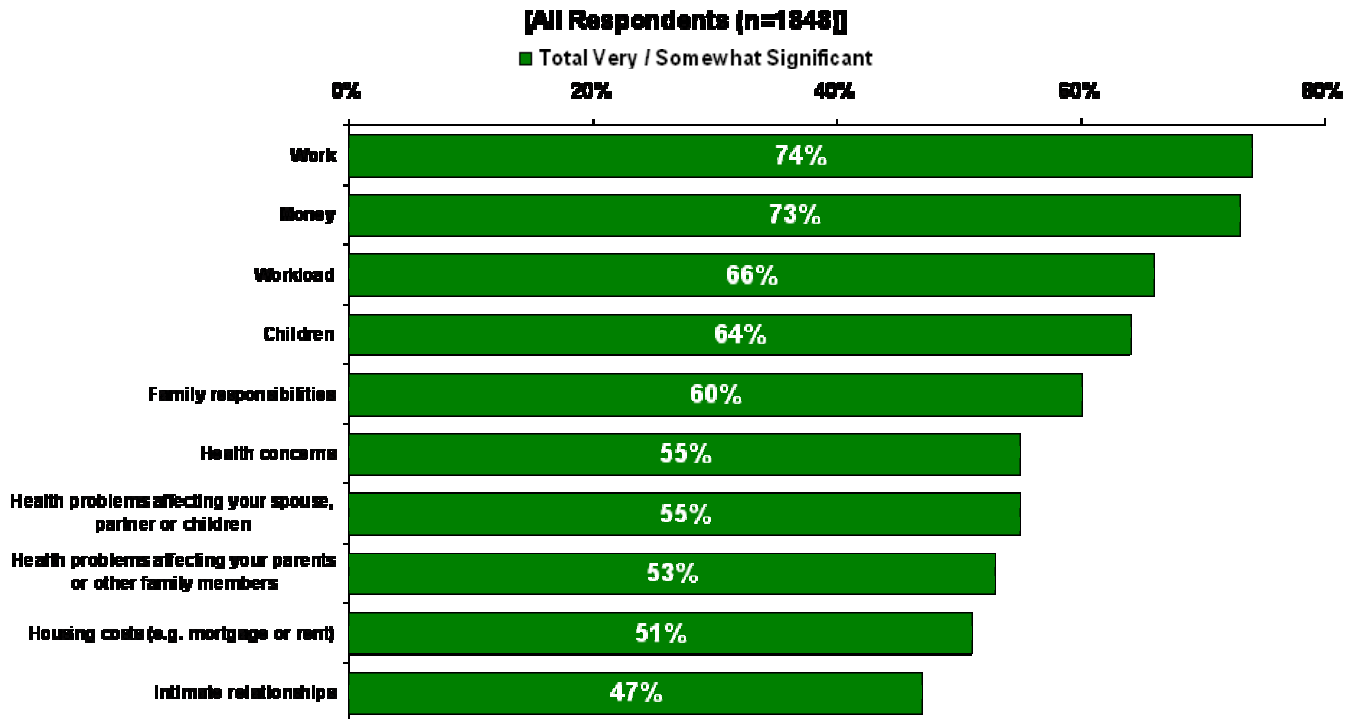


Q810. Which of the following, if any, have you experienced in the last month as a result of stress?

## Americans More Stressed Over Work and Money in 2007; Housing Costs an Added Stressor

Work (74 percent) and money (73 percent) are on the rise as stressors (compared with 59 percent for each in 2006<sup>1</sup>), and half of Americans (51 percent) specifically identify housing costs, such as rent or mortgage payments, as significant sources of stress, particularly on the East and West Coasts. Sixty-one percent in the West and 55 percent in the East (compared to 47 percent in the Midwest and 43 percent in the South) reported housing costs as a very or somewhat significant source of stress.

Figure 5 — Significant Sources of Stress



Q626. I am going to read you a list of things people say cause stress in their lives. For each one, please tell me if it is a very significant source, a somewhat significant source, not a very significant source, or not at all a significant source of stress in your life.

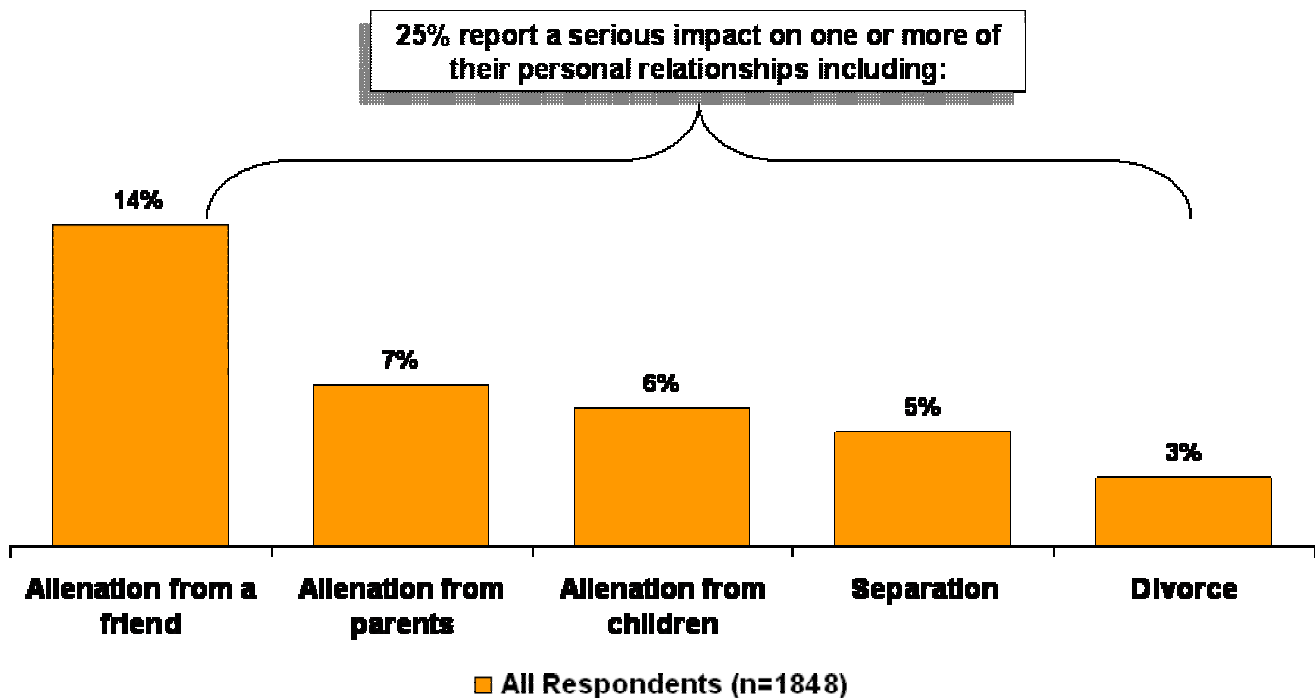
<sup>1</sup> 2006 American Psychological Association Survey, APA Stress and Mind/Body Health

## Stress Damaging to Personal Relationships

Half of all Americans report that stress has a negative impact on both their personal and professional lives. About one-third of adults experience stress as a result of managing work and family responsibilities and 35 percent cite jobs interfering with their family or personal time as a significant source of stress. Fifteen percent report that work demands interfere with family responsibilities at least several times a month.

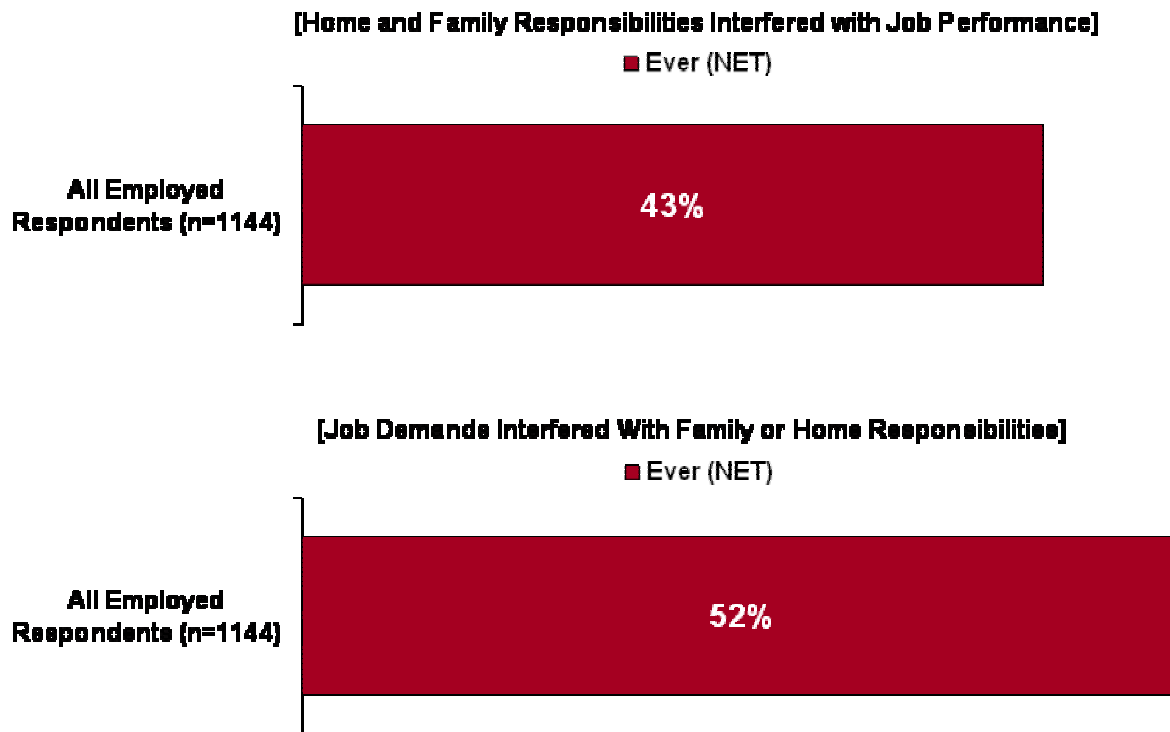
- Half (54 percent) report that, during the last month, they have fought or argued with someone close to them: spouse or partner (32 percent); children (15 percent); parents (12 percent); friends (11 percent); co-worker (7 percent); or supervisor (5 percent).
- Roughly half report that stress has a negative impact on their relationship with their spouse or partner (45 percent) and their satisfaction with their jobs (46 percent).
- One in four (25 percent) report that during the last five years their personal relationships have suffered because of stress (e.g., alienation from friend or family member, divorce or separation). Eight percent report a divorce or separation due in part to stress.

Figure 6 — Impact of Stress on Relationships



Q710. During the last five years, have any of your personal relationships suffered in the following ways due to the stress you were feeling?

Figure 7 — Balancing Work and Home



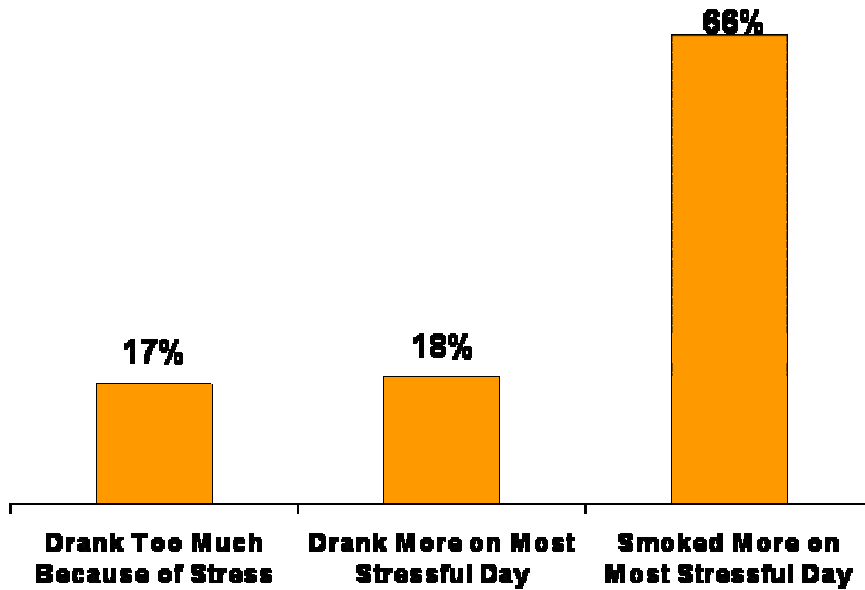
Q921. For each of the statements below, please indicate how often each of the following has happened to you during the past 3 months.

## Stress Affects How Often Americans Engage in Unhealthy Behaviors

Americans rely on a variety of stress management techniques, and not all of them are particularly healthy. While stress has an impact on how much Americans eat, sleep, smoke and drink, individuals are also engaging in healthy behaviors to manage their stress. Half (50 percent) say they exercise or walk to manage stress, yet sedentary activities — such as listening to music (54 percent) and reading (52 percent) — top the list of activities that people engage in to manage their stress in healthy ways. This indicates that while individuals consider themselves to be managing their stress well (82 percent), further education may be useful to help people make more proactive choices for managing their stress.

- Two-thirds of smokers (66 percent) report that they would smoke more when they are stressed.
- 17 percent of people who drink report that they drank too much during the last week because of stress.
- Half of adults (48 percent) lay awake at night during the last month because of stress.
- Nearly half (43 percent) overate or ate unhealthy foods and more than one-third (36 percent) skipped a meal because of stress during the last month.

**Figure 8 — Drinking and Smoking to Manage Stress**

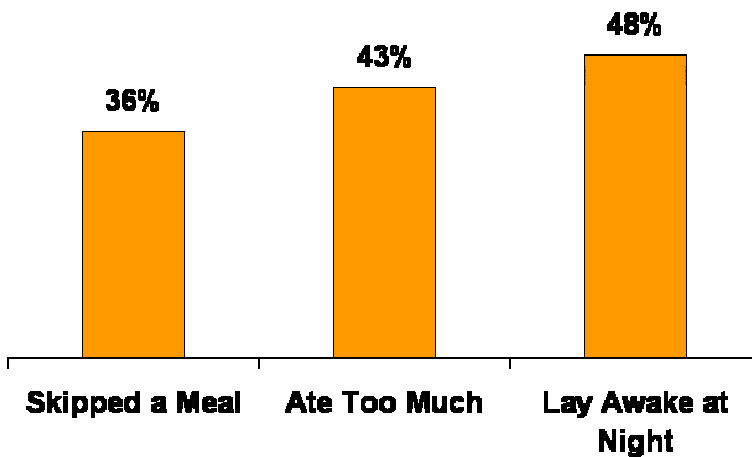


Q725. During the last week, how many cigarettes did you smoke on your most stressful day?

Q750. During the last week, how many drinks did you have on your most stressful day?

Q760. During the last week, how many days would you say that you drank too much because you were feeling stressed?

**Figure 9 — Impact of Stress on Sleep and Eating Habits**

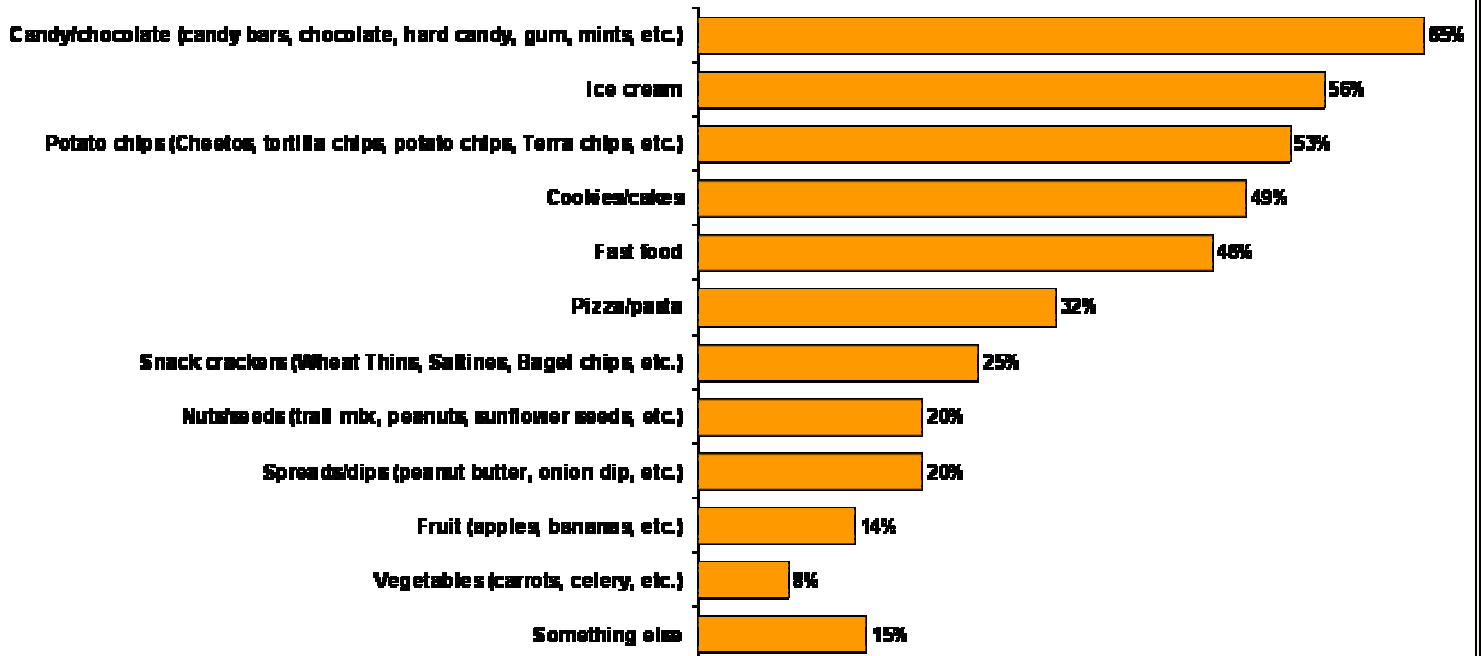


Q770. During the last month, did you ever lay awake at night because you were feeling stressed?

Q785. During the last month, did you ever eat too much or eat unhealthy foods because you were feeling stressed?

**Figure 10 — Impact of Stress on Eating Habits**

■ All Who Eat Too Much or Bad Foods (n=772)



Q795. During the last month, on the days you ate too much or ate unhealthy foods because you were feeling stressed, what kind of foods did you eat?

**Table 1 — What Motivates Changes in Behavior?**

Desire to feel better	60 percent
Desire to reduce amount of stress in my life	45 percent
Desire to improve self-image or self-esteem	41 percent
Encouragement from my spouse/partner	38 percent
Doctor recommendation	38 percent
Desire to look better	37 percent
Being diagnosed with a chronic condition	35 percent
Understanding how my behavior may increase my chances of developing a chronic illness	27 percent
Encouragement from a child	18 percent
Death of a family member or friend due to chronic condition	16 percent

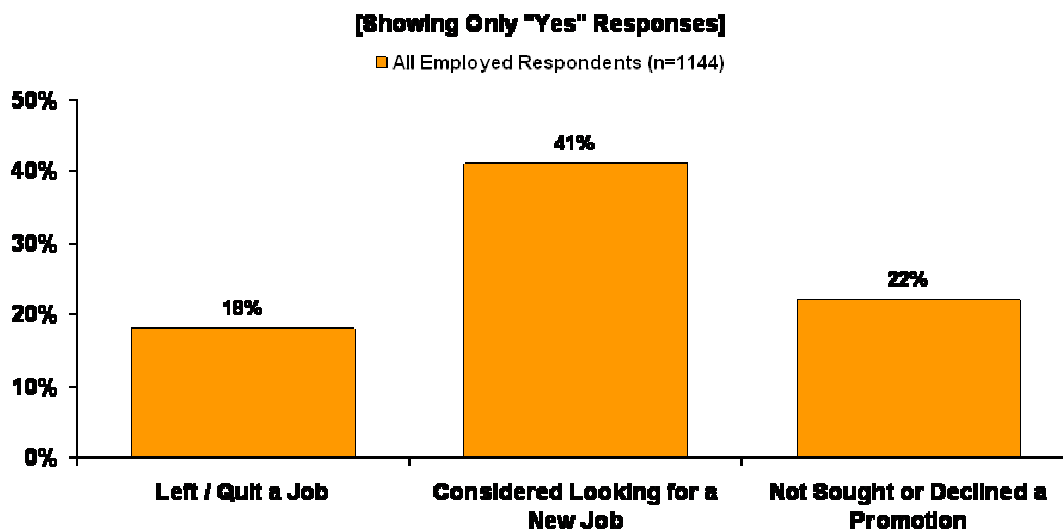
Q1100. Which of the following reasons would motivate you to modify or change unhealthy behaviors?

## 2007 Snapshot of Stress in America

### **WORKPLACE: Stress at work affects career decisions and results in lost productivity.**

- Half of employees (52 percent) report that they have considered or made a decision about their career such as looking for a new job, declining a promotion or leaving a job based on workplace stress.
- More than half of employees (55 percent) said they were less productive at work as a result of stress.
- 40 percent of employees report that they do not use all their allotted vacation time annually.
- Employed Americans report that the leading sources of stress at work are low salaries (44 percent); heavy work load (41 percent); lack of opportunities for advancement (40 percent); uncertain job expectations (40 percent); and long hours (39 percent).

**Figure 11 — Impact of Stress on Job Retention**

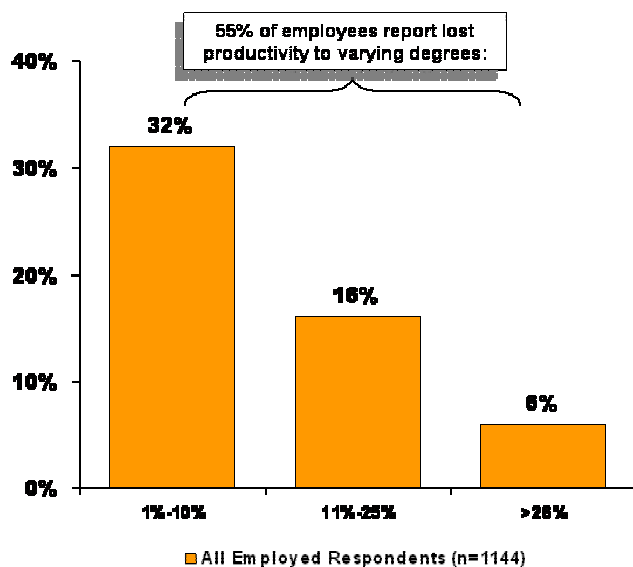


Q930. In the last five years, have you ever left a job because it was too stressful?

Q935. Have you ever considered looking for a new job because your job is too stressful?

Q940. Have you ever not sought or declined a new job or promotion because you thought the job would be too stressful?

**Figure 12 — Lost Workplace Productivity (Proportion of Employees Vs. Percentage of Lost Productivity)**

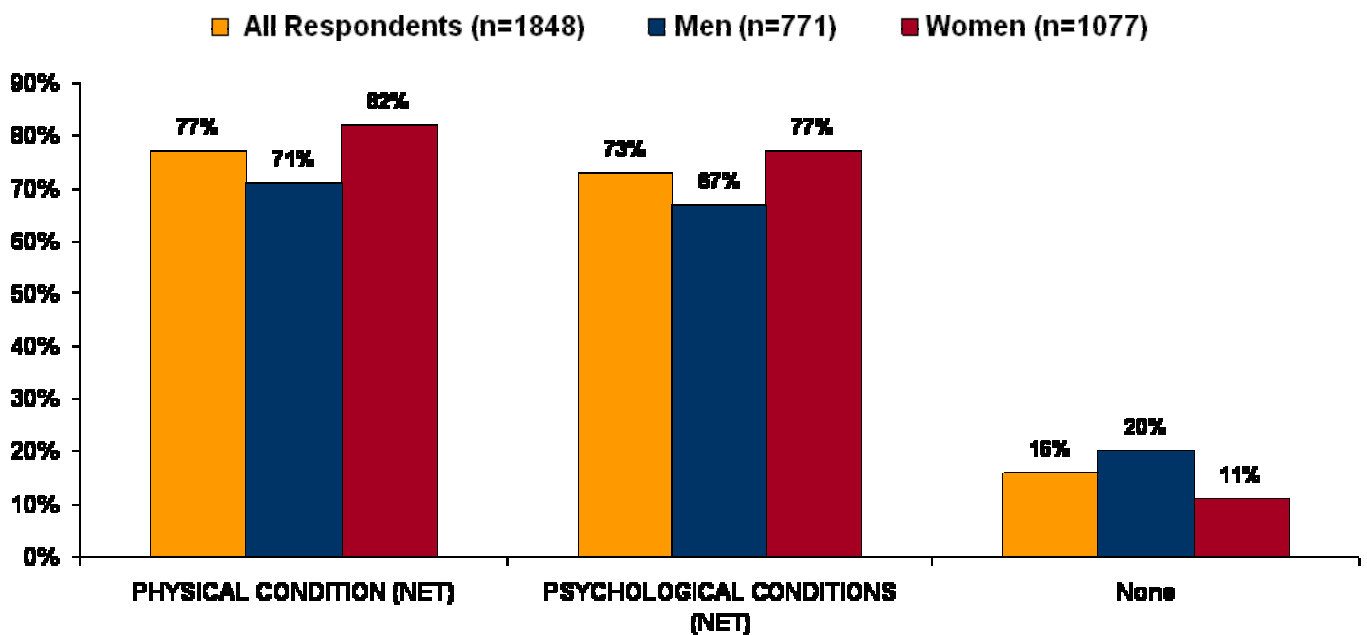


Q945. Looking at the past month, what percentage of your work productivity while you were still at work was lost due to stress?

**GENDER: Women experience more stress than men, report more physical symptoms of stress and are more likely to think they manage their stress poorly.**

- Women (35 percent) are more likely to report experiencing extreme stress than men (28 percent) and are more concerned with their levels of stress (54 percent vs. 50 percent); report that their stress levels have increased over the past five years (50 percent vs. 46 percent); and consider themselves to manage their stress poorly (19 percent vs. 17 percent).
- Women react to stress differently than men and are more likely than men (82 percent vs. 71 percent) to have experienced a physical symptom of stress in the last month. In general, women are more likely to report sleep problems, overeating, skipping meals and using prescription medications as a result of stress.
- 24 percent of women who lose sleep report a loss of more than an hour of sleep every night (vs. 16 percent of men) and lay awake at night one day more per month than men (8 nights vs. 7 nights).

**Figure 13 — Affect of Stress on Health**



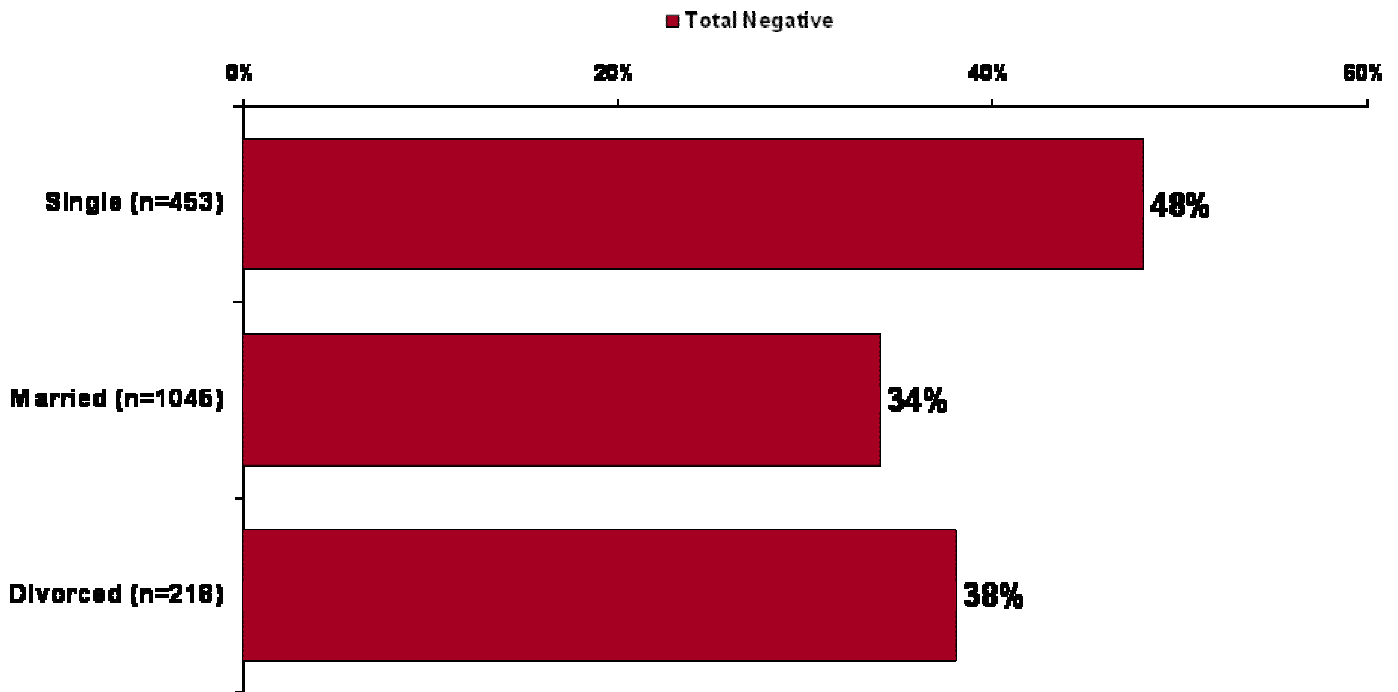
Q810. Which of the following, if any, have you experienced in the last month as a result of stress?

**MARITAL STATUS: Single people report more extreme stress, which negatively impacts their social lives, but stress also takes a toll on marriages and personal relationships.**

- A higher percentage of singles (48 percent) than married couples (34 percent) and divorced individuals (38 percent) say that stress has a negative impact on their social lives.
- Married people (58 percent) were more likely to fight or argue with their family members when stressed than singles (32 percent) or divorced individuals (24 percent).
- Single people were most likely to report that on their highest stress days their stress was in the extreme category (59 percent vs. 52 percent of married and 48 percent of divorced.)

**Figure 14 — Impact of Stress on Social Life by Marital Status**

**[All Respondents (n=1646)]**

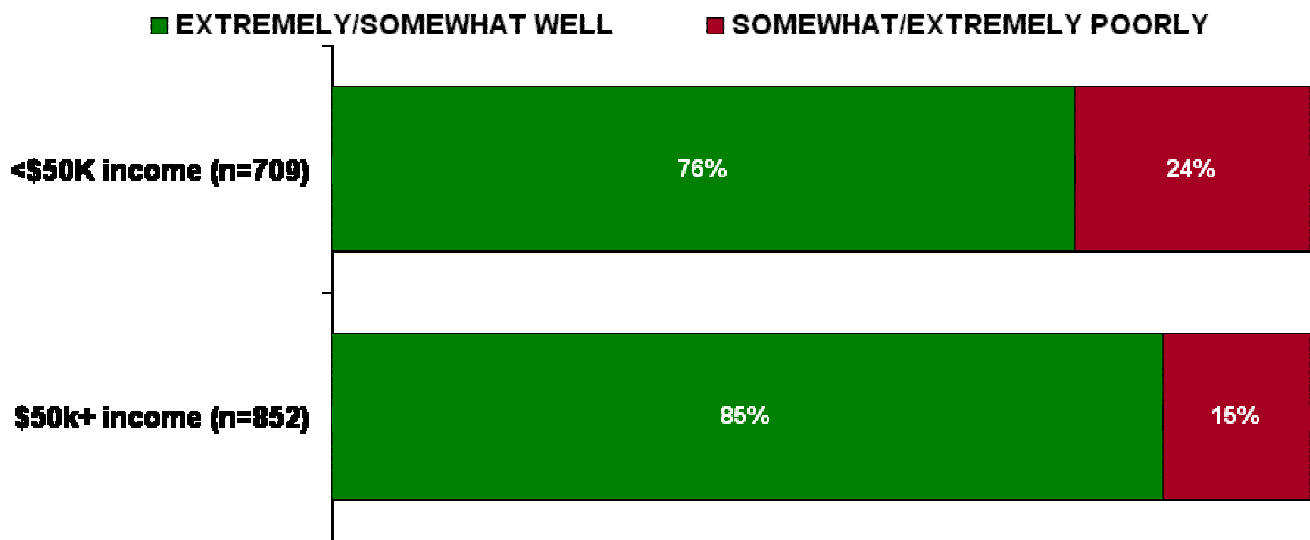


Q701. During times when you experience stress, what effect do you think your level of stress has on each of the following?

**INCOME: Those with lower incomes manage their stress in less effective ways and are more likely to report physical and psychological symptoms of stress.**

- 24 percent of those with less than \$50K in household income report that they manage their stress poorly compared to 15 percent among those with \$50K or more in household income.
- Lower income adults are more likely to report both physical (80 percent vs. 74 percent) and psychological (77 percent vs. 68 percent) symptoms of stress including: irritability or anger (54 percent in the lower income group vs. 46 percent in the higher income group); feeling nervous or sad (50 percent in the lower income group vs. 42 percent in the higher income group); lack of motivation or energy (51 percent in the lower income group vs. 40 percent in the higher income group); and feeling as though you could cry (43 percent in the lower income group and 30 percent in the higher income group).
- 41 percent of salaried workers are stressed by their work interfering during their personal or family time and in fact report that their work has interfered with their ability to fulfill their family or home responsibilities at some point in the past three months (59 percent of salaried vs. 48 percent of hourly workers).

**Figure 15 — Stress Management by Income**

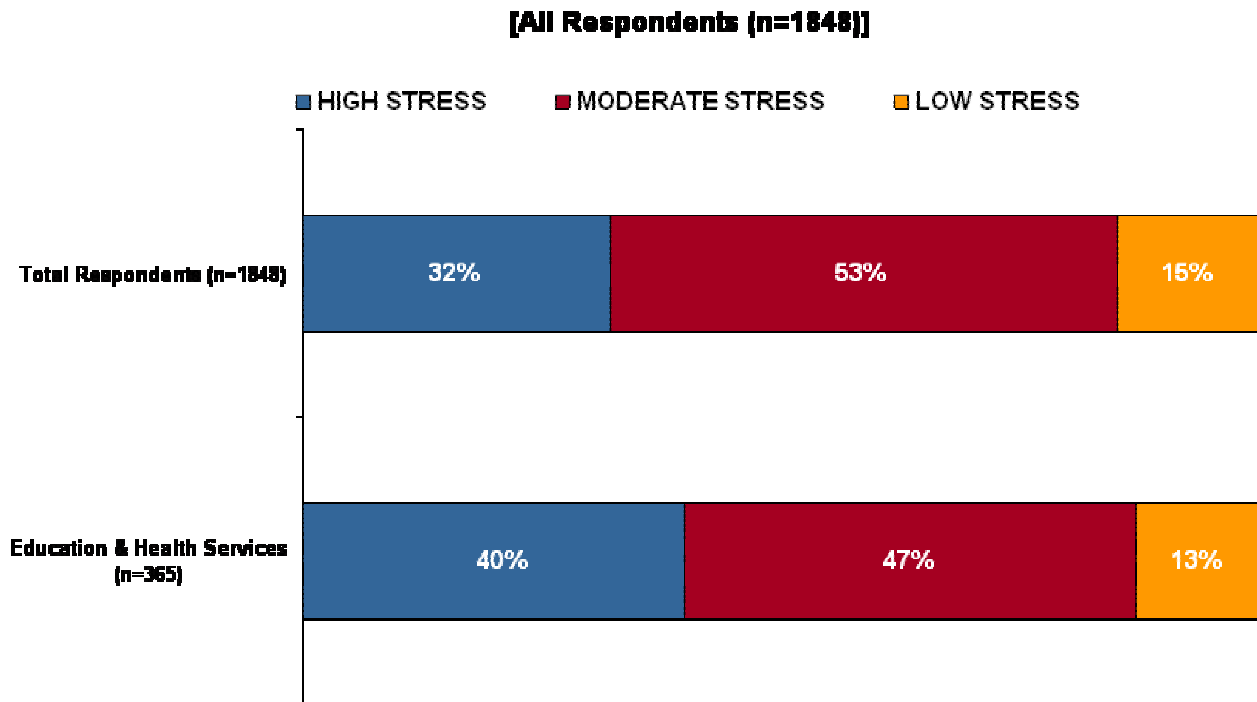


Q600. During the past month how well do you think you managed your stress?

**PROFESSION: Those working in the education and health services industries experience higher than average levels of stress.**

- Four in 10 employees in these industries report experiencing extreme levels of stress during the last month (compared with 32 percent across industries).
- More than half of employees in these industries (57 percent) are concerned about their stress levels.
- Employees in these industries are among the most likely to report that low salaries (52 percent), workload (49 percent) and unrealistic job expectations (38 percent) are significant sources of stress at work.

**Figure 16 — Evaluation of Stress by Profession**

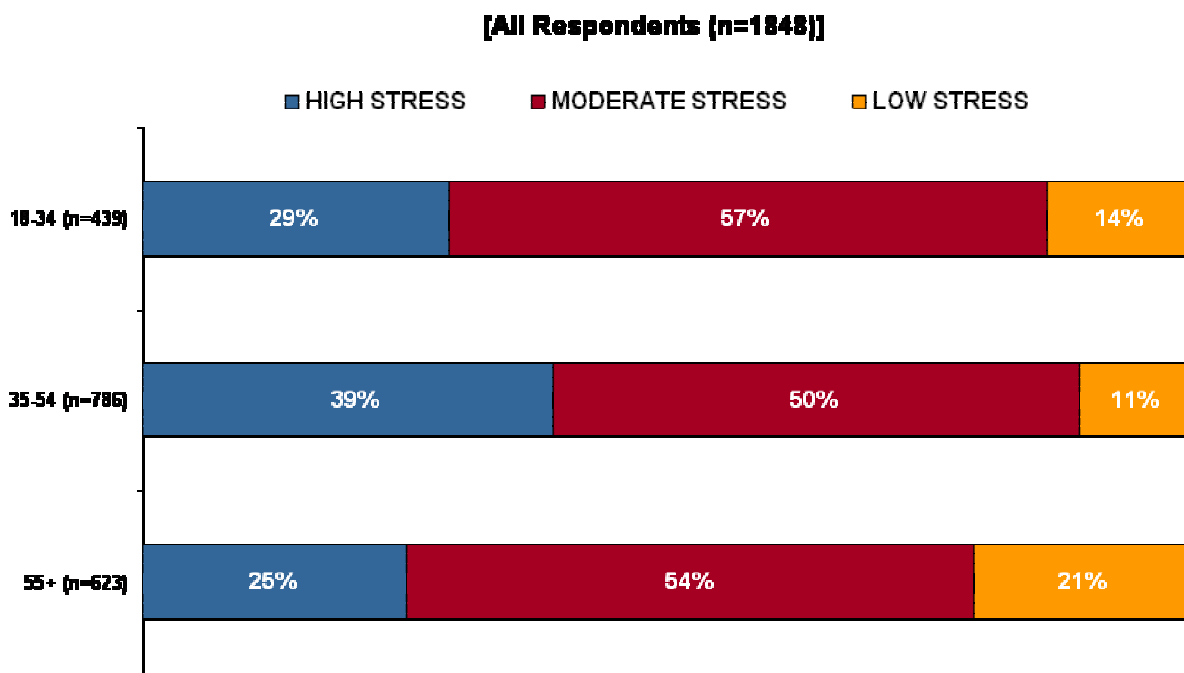


Q605/Q610. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means you have little or no stress and 10 means you have a great deal of stress, [how would you rate your average level of stress during the past month] [what would you consider a healthy level of stress]?

**AGE: The sandwich generation (ages 35-54) is the most stressed, but young people are experiencing the most negative consequences of stress.**

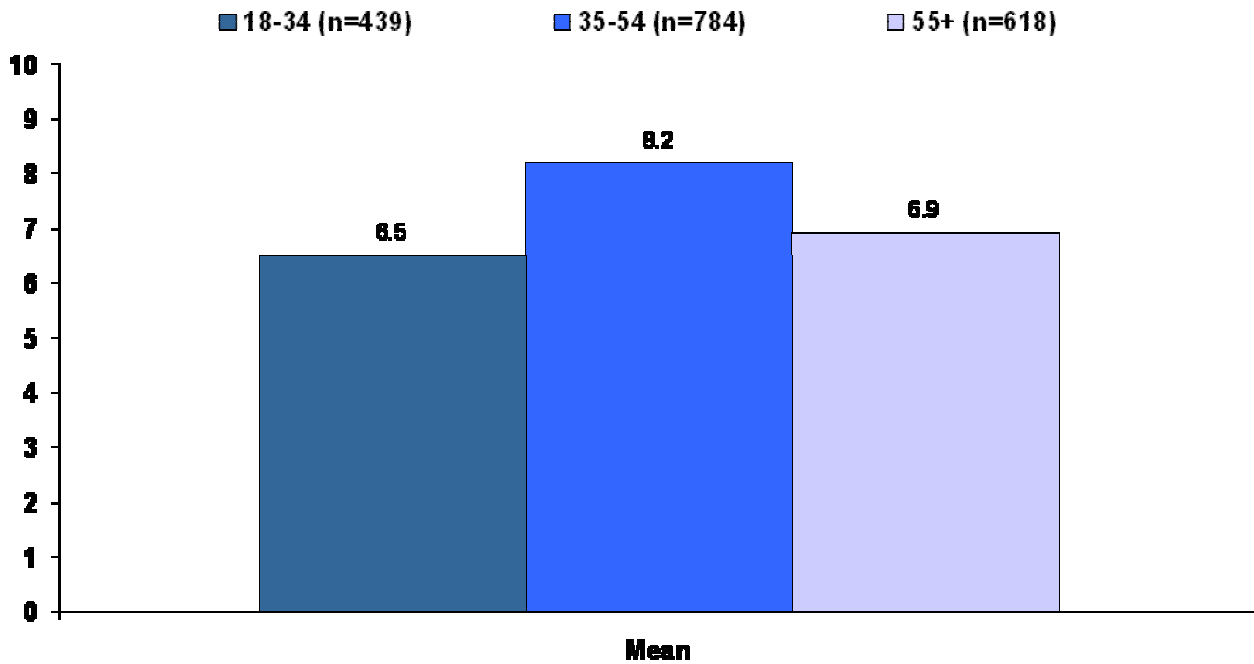
- Nearly two-in-five Americans 35-54 years old report extreme levels of stress (39 percent vs. 29 percent of 18-34 year olds and 25 percent of 55+), and experience their highest level of stress for 8.2 days of each month, compared to 6.5 days for 18-34 year-olds and 6.9 days for those over 55.
- Americans between 35 and 54 years of age say their stress negatively impacts others, specifically their relationships, which are a top stressor for this group (relationships with family, children and spouses or partners as a source of stress — 80 percent of 18-34 year-olds and 83 percent of 34-54 year-olds vs. 73 percent of 55+). In addition, work or workload (83 percent of 18-34 year-olds and 81 percent of 35-54 year-olds vs. 69 percent of 55+) and money and housing costs (80 percent of 18-34 year-olds and 81 percent of 35-54 year-olds vs. 64 percent of 55+) are sources of stress.
- Young people are more affected by unhealthy stress management behaviors, such as smoking, losing sleep and skipping meals, with nearly three out of four individuals reporting that they smoked more cigarettes on their most stressful day (73 percent vs. 68 percent of 35-54 year-olds and 57 percent of 55+). More than half report they lay awake at night because of stress (52 percent vs. 49 percent of 35-54 year-olds and 44 percent of 55+), and nearly half report that they skipped a meal because of stress (42 percent vs. 38 percent of 35-54 year-olds and 28 percent of 55+).

**Figure 17 — Evaluation of Stress by Age**



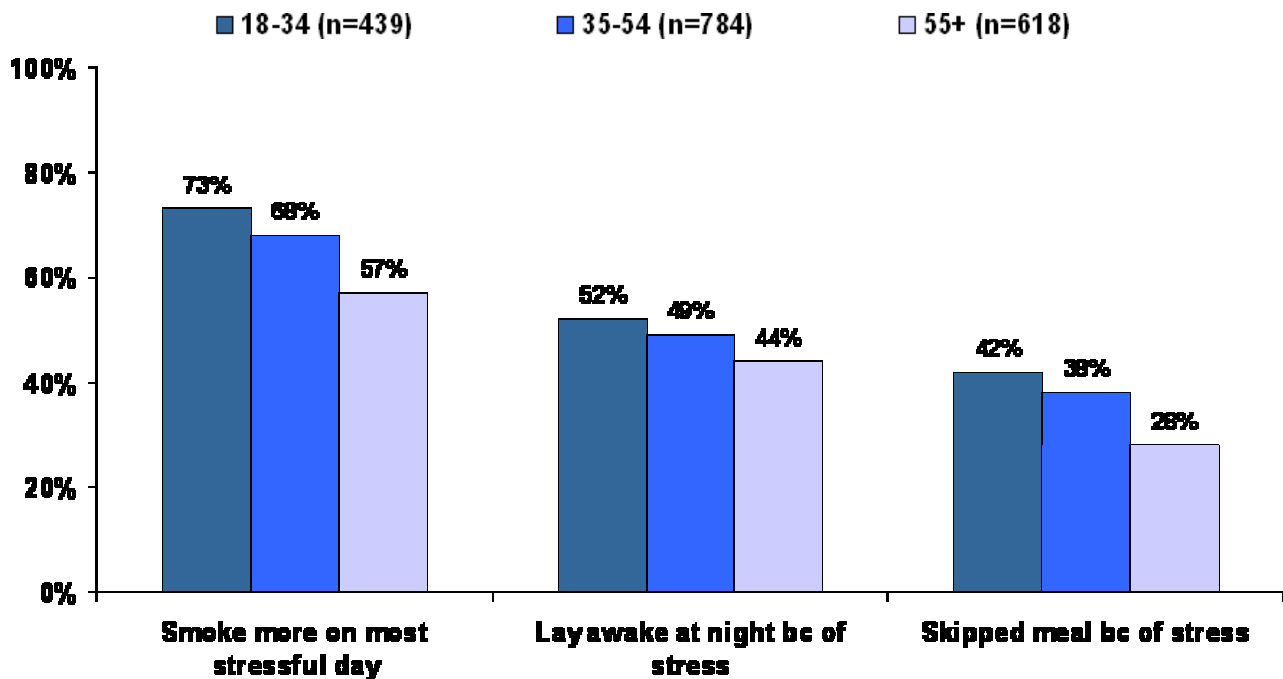
Q605/Q610. On a scale of 1 to 10 where 1 means you have little or no stress and 10 means you have a great deal of stress, how would you rate your average level of stress during the past month?

**Figure 18 — Number of High-Stress Days by Age**



Q640. In the past month, on how many days did you experience your highest level of stress, even if it was only for part of the day?

**Figure 19 — Unhealthy Stress Management Behaviors by Age**



Q725. During the last week, how many cigarettes did you smoke on your most stressful day?

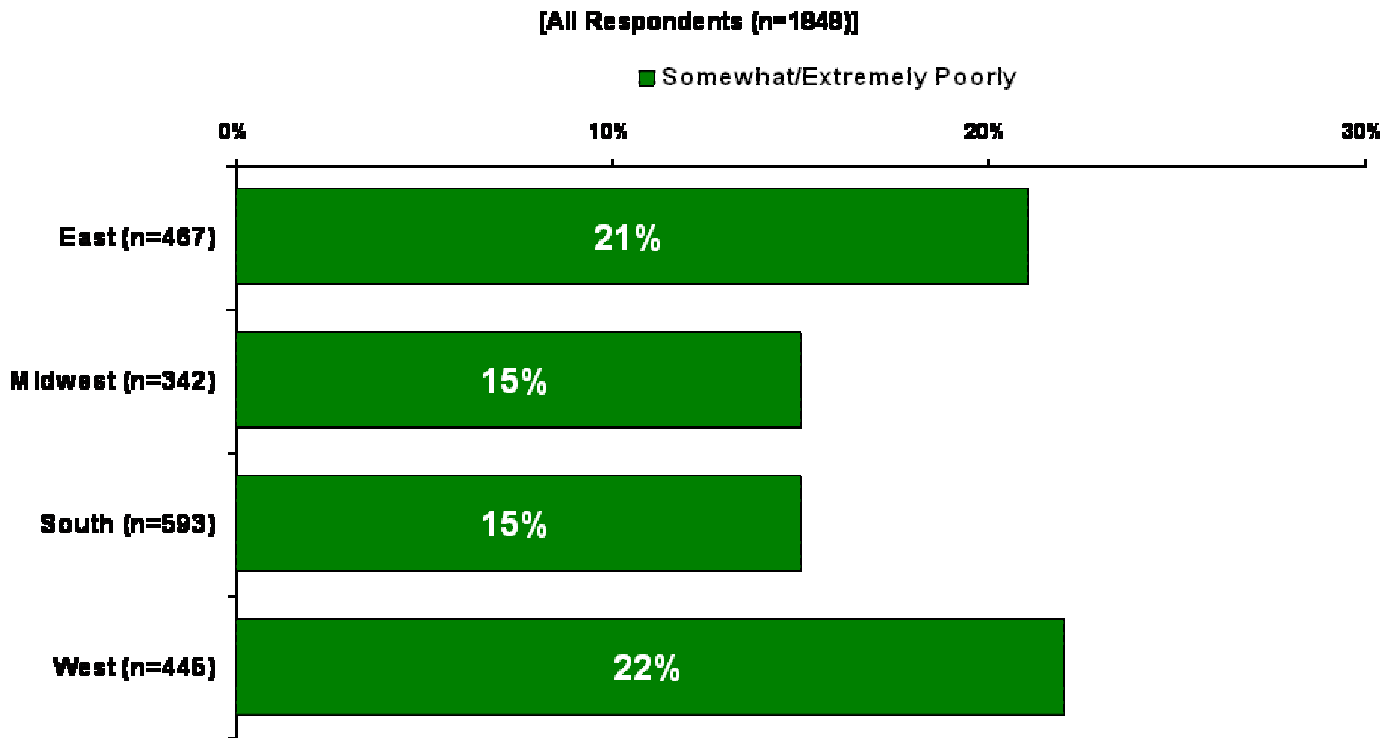
Q770. During the last month, did you ever lay awake at night because you were feeling stressed?

Q800. During the last month, did you ever skip a meal because you were under stress?

**REGION: People living in the East and West more likely to manage their stress in less effective ways and report more physical symptoms of stress.**

- People living in the West and East Coast regions are more likely to report that they managed their stress poorly in the past month (22 percent and 21 percent, vs. 15 percent in the Midwest and South) and that their stress has increased in the past five years (56 percent in the West vs. range of 45 percent-46 percent in other areas).
- Adults in the West are more likely to report physical symptoms of stress, including headache (53 percent in the West vs. 39 percent-42 percent in other regions); upset stomach (41 percent vs. 30 percent-32 percent); tightness in chest (21 percent vs. 12 percent-15 percent); and faintness or dizziness (18 percent vs. 10 percent-12 percent).
- A significantly higher percentage of people living in the East and West find it difficult to balance work and family life than people living in the Midwest and South (39 percent and 36 percent vs. 29 percent and 25 percent).
- People living in the East are most likely to consider various aspects of work as sources of stress — low salaries (52 percent vs. range: 35 percent-45 percent); heavy workload (53 percent vs. range: 33 percent-43 percent); lack of growth opportunities (49 percent vs. range: 36 percent-40 percent); long hours (51 percent vs. range: 32 percent-39 percent); lack of participation in decision-making (42 percent vs. range: 29 percent-30 percent); and inflexible hours (31 percent vs. range: 13 percent-27 percent).

**Figure 20 — Stress Management by Region**



Q600. During the past month how well do you think you managed your stress?

**PARENTS: Young and school-aged children are a major source of stress.**

- Parents of young and school-aged children are more likely than parents of teens to report that work interfering with their personal time is a *very* significant source of stress (18 percent and 12 percent vs. 2 percent).
- Those with school-aged children are more likely to report that work had interfered with their ability to fulfill their family responsibilities (67 percent vs. 65 percent of parents of young and 63 percent of parents of teenage children).
- For parents of young and school-aged children, intimate relationships are a source of stress (54 percent and 57 percent vs. 38 percent of those with teenage children), and these parents are more likely than parents of teenagers to report arguing with a spouse or partner (52 percent young and 53 percent school-aged vs. 35 percent teenagers).

**Figure 21 — Stress and Parents**

