

# PERCEIVED STRESS SCALE

## Sheldon Cohen

The *Perceived Stress Scale* (PSS) is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is a measure of the degree to which situations in one's life are appraised as stressful. Items were designed to tap how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overloaded respondents find their lives. The scale also includes a number of direct queries about current levels of experienced stress. The PSS was designed for use in community samples with at least a junior high school education. The items are easy to understand, and the response alternatives are simple to grasp. Moreover, the questions are of a general nature and hence are relatively free of content specific to any subpopulation group. The questions in the PSS ask about feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, respondents are asked how often they felt a certain way.

**Evidence for Validity:** Higher PSS scores were associated with (for example):

- failure to quit smoking
- failure among diabetics to control blood sugar levels
- greater vulnerability to stressful life-event-elicited depressive symptoms
- more colds

**Health status relationship to PSS:** Cohen et al. (1988) show correlations with PSS and: Stress Measures, Self-Reported Health and Health Services Measures, Health Behavior Measures, Smoking Status, Help Seeking Behavior.

**Temporal Nature:** Because levels of appraised stress should be influenced by daily hassles, major events, and changes in coping resources, predictive validity of the PSS is expected to fall off rapidly after four to eight weeks.

**Scoring:** PSS scores are obtained by reversing responses (e.g., 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1 & 4 = 0) to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, & 8) and then summing across all scale items. A short 4 item scale can be made from questions 2, 4, 5 and 10 of the PSS 10 item scale.

**Norm Groups:** L. Harris Poll gathered information on 2,387 respondents in the U.S.

**Norm Table for the PSS 10 item inventory**

Category	N	Mean	S.D.
<b>Gender</b>			
Male	926	12.1	5.9
Female	1406	13.7	6.6
<b>Age</b>			
18-29	645	14.2	6.2
30-44	750	13.0	6.2
45-54	285	12.6	6.1
55-64	282	11.9	6.9
65 & older	296	12.0	6.3
<b>Race</b>			
white	1924	12.8	6.2
Hispanic	98	14.0	6.9
black	176	14.7	7.2
other minority	50	14.1	5.0

# Perceived Stress Scale

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts **during the last month**. In each case, you will be asked to indicate by circling *how often* you felt or thought a certain way.

Name \_\_\_\_\_ Date \_\_\_\_\_

Age \_\_\_\_\_ Gender (Circle): **M** **F** Other \_\_\_\_\_

**0 = Never    1 = Almost Never    2 = Sometimes    3 = Fairly Often    4 = Very Often**

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?..... **0    1    2    3    4**
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?..... **0    1    2    3    4**
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”? ..... **0    1    2    3    4**
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems?..... **0    1    2    3    4**
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way?..... **0    1    2    3    4**
6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? ..... **0    1    2    3    4**
7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life?..... **0    1    2    3    4**
8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things?..... **0    1    2    3    4**
9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control? ..... **0    1    2    3    4**
10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?..... **0    1    2    3    4**

Please feel free to use the *Perceived Stress Scale* for your research. The PSS Manual is in the process of development, please let us know if you are interested in contributing.

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### References

The PSS Scale is reprinted with permission of the American Sociological Association, from Cohen, S., Kamarck, T., and Mermelstein, R. (1983). A global measure of perceived stress. *Journal of Health and Social Behavior*, 24, 386-396.

Cohen, S. and Williamson, G. Perceived Stress in a Probability Sample of the United States. Spacapan, S. and Oskamp, S. (Eds.) *The Social Psychology of Health*. Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1988.