



GOT G.A.S.?

So, when was the last time you got G.A.S.? I'll bet it wasn't all that long ago!! Take a look at a "typical" day:



The alarm didn't go off...

He left the toilet seat up again...

She burned the toast...

Your grade-schooler forgot to mention school pictures are

It's a "bad hair" day...

It's raining and there are no parking spaces close to the building...

Your computer locked up (THREE times!)...

Your root canal is scheduled for tomorrow morning...

You misplaced the remote...

You're to get your flu shot this weekend...

AND the PRT is this weekend too...

Your unit OIC is going to give you your EVAL/FITREP (and you had forgotten to submit your brag sheet!)...

You misplaced your keys...



OK, so maybe it isn't a "typical" day. Any one of these events, however, could give you G.A.S. No, this type of G.A.S. is not a petroleum product nor is it a flatulent condition! G.A.S. is your body's response to stress General Adaptation Sndrome.

Human beings can NOT live without stress. Believe it or now, stress is what keeps us going. Remember the last time you got promoted? It was exciting!! But, wait a minute.. . it was also scary, wasn't it? With the extra stripe or that new crow comes more responsibility and new duties! This "pleasant" type of stress is called eustress. Now, remember that close call at the intersection last week? Your traffic light turned green and you started to drive out into the intersection **HOLD IT!** That car is not going to stop!!!! Slam on the brakes!! **WHEW**, that was close! This type of "unpleasant" stress is called distress. Believe it or not, both eustress and distress can give you G.A.S.

G.A.S., the acronym for **G**eneral **A**daptation **S**yndrome, is divided into three stages.

- ◆ **ALARM**
- ◆ **RESISTANCE**
- ◆ **EXHAUSTION**

G.A.S. begins with the **ALARM** stage. This is where the autonomic nervous system takes over (the sympathetic branch, to be precise). Remember that close call in the intersection? How did you feel?

- ◆ You probably started to sweat
- ◆ Your blood vessels constricted in your skeletal muscles and brain
- ◆ Your skeletal muscles contracted
- ◆ Your heart raced and pounded
- ◆ Your bronchi dilated to take in more oxygen
- ◆ Your mouth got dry
- ◆ Digestion stopped
- ◆ You may have gotten goose bumps
- ◆ Your pupils dilated and your hearing became more acute
- ◆ Your intestinal muscles and your bladder muscles may have even relaxed

These are automatic reactions. We have no control over these reactions. It is our “fight-or flight” reaction, our survival mechanism.

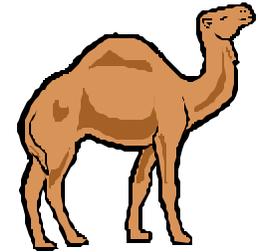
The second stage is the **RESISTANCE** stage. Once the stressful event is over, another part of your autonomic nervous system (the parasympathetic branch) tries to bring the body back to “normal.” Since your body is determined to stay in balance, it lowers the heart rate, slows the breathing, and reverses everything that happened in the alarm stage. This second stage allows you to get on with everyday life once again, usually within a few minutes or hours.



The final stage, **EXHAUSTION**, is what happens if the body is ~ allowed to come back to normal. If you experience stressors over and over again without allowing your body to recuperate, you never get out of the alarm stage. Your energy stores are depleted. You experience severe fatigue, distorted perceptions, disorganized thinking, and in some cases, if the stressors are severe enough and constant, death can occur.

We live in a day and age where “stress” is a part of our everyday life. Modern research on stress is finding that our numerous “small” daily stressors (“I can’t find my keys!”) may be more detrimental to our overall health than the large stressors (“I lost my job.”) that occur only occasionally. The fight-or-flight reaction (G.A.S.) was meant for life or death situations. In our modern, fast-paced society,

the alarm reaction may be triggered by such “trivial” things as opening a piece of mail or spilling a glass of milk. Remember, it was a “straw that broke the camel’s back!”



Many health problems may be attributed to stress!

- ◆ Cardiovascular Disease: high blood pressure, heart attack, stroke.
- ◆ Immune System Disturbance: colds, infections, cancer.
- ◆ Allergic Response: asthma, eczema, allergies.
- ◆ Emotional Responses: headaches, migraines, diarrhea, irritable bowe syndrome.
- ◆ Sleep Disorders: fatigue, insomnia.
- ◆ Chronic Diseases: genital herpes, multiple sclerosis, HIV.
- ◆ Emotional/Psychological Problems: depression, panic attacks, post-traumatic stress syndrome.
- ◆ Injuries: forgetfulness, carelessness, repetitive strain injuries.
- ◆ Endocrine Effects: menstrual irregularities, impotence.

OK . . .OK... so we can’t live *with* stress and we can’t live *without* stress.

HOW we handle stress is **VERY** important! How can we avoid getting **G.A.S.**?

- ◆ *Social Support*—*talk* about your experiences and frustrations with friends and family, it helps your well-being.
- ◆ *Exercise*—*it’s* a great stress-reducer.
- ◆ *Nutrition*—*eat* a well-balanced diet, high in fresh fruits, veggies, and whole grains.
- ◆ *Time management*—*be* realistic about what you can do and can’t do.
- ◆ *Relaxation*—*take* time for yourself. Try using progressive relaxation, imagery, or meditation.
- ◆ *Worry Constructively*—*most* of the things we worry about never come to pass.
- ◆ *Moderate Expectations*—*be* realistic about what you can change and what you can’t change.

- ◆ *Monitor Self-Talk*—be positive and gentle when you talk to yourself. You start to believe what you hear over and over again (both negative and positive).
- ◆ *Live in the Present*—let go of the past. Don't beat yourself up over what happened
- ◆ *Seinper Gumby*—go with the flow.
- ◆ above all. . . *Cultivate a Sense of Humor*—laugh at yourself, laugh at the world.

If you would like more information about stress management, visit the Navy Environmental Health Center at <http://www-nehc.med.navy.mil/hp/index.htm>.

Just for the health of it, the next time you run into a stressful situation ask yourself if you GOT **G.A.S.**, smile, and let it pass.

Submitted from LCDR Maureen Casetta, N.C., USNR