

## Is your stress management strategy all it's quacked up to be?

“Make like a duck and keep paddling” is a popular bit of advice that stress management experts often recommend. In this metaphor, life refers to a body of water, while stress refers to a force that disturbs or disrupts the water’s surface. For example, a given stressor might result in ripples, waves or even a tsunami. And the duck, who might be paddling crazily to stay afloat, always appears to float serenely and gracefully atop the water, no matter the level of turbulence.



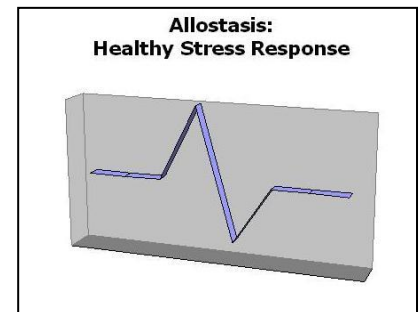
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### Sounds good, but does it work?

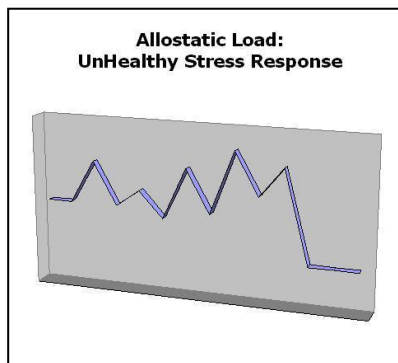
This swimming duck metaphor is certainly creative. And it seems to offer a marvelous solution, reminiscent of the mantra of “Don’t ever let ‘em see you sweat!” But is this strategy really all it’s quacked up to be? Or might it create a dangerous precedent for the unsuspecting duck--or human being--who simply keeps paddling amidst the increasingly stress-filled waters of life?

### A healthy stress response

In the best of times, a healthy stress response consists of a two-part process, consisting of “Uh-Oh!” followed by “Whew!” This gives the body a chance to shift into new level of balance and equilibrium known as allostasis. This partnership between “Uh-Oh!” and “Whew!” provides a dynamic and healing process, with a moment of recovery, letting go of the stress, or settling into a new way of being.



### Uh-Ohs in search of a Whew!



In contrast, an unhealthy stress response looks like this: “Uh-Oh! Uh-Oh! Uh-Oh! Ugh!” Without built-in recovery and occasional repair or “Whew!” periods, the system eventually collapses and breaks down. The “Ugh!” factor describes allostatic load, a condition in which the body is overwhelmed either by too many challenges or by inefficient recovery and repair.

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So now, we have the stressed-out human being who has the added stress of trying to think like a duck. Madly paddling about her increasingly busy life, she is also striving to suppress and hide her struggles. Until one day, she runs out of steam and collapses with a host of previously undetected health challenges that seem to suddenly appear as if from nowhere, but now threaten both her life and well-being.



### **Don't become a sitting duck for mismanaged stress**

It's essential to include some "Whew!" when life hands you its inevitable "Uh-Oh!":

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- Perhaps you can find a quiet space outside the stormy waters of your current life. For instance, sit out on the shore until the storm passes, so you can catch your breath and restore your energy.
- No doubt, you'll find some friends nearby whose company you can enjoy.
- You might even choose to tuck your head under your wing to keep the stress from distracting your downtime. Turn off that cell-phone so that you can truly enjoy your quiet time away from all your stress.

Now there's nothing inherently wrong with keeping a cool, calm exterior in the midst of stressful times. But maintaining a constant paddling pace amidst stormy seas is unhealthy for anyone: you, me, or the duck. Too much water in your wings will weigh you down. In this case, you might consider another popular duck-based strategy for stress management: "Let it roll off your back."



So, as you're going through life, and the waves get rough, the going gets tough, and your wings get filled with water: remember to make like a duck. Stop paddling for a moment, shake the stress from your wings, and let it all just roll off your back.

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