

Life Change Units: Can Change Really Make Me Sick?

Researchers found that 93% of health problems (infections, allergies, bone and muscle injuries, and psychosomatic illness) affected patients who, during the previous year, had been exposed to events with LCU values totalling 150 or more.

Although a minor life change on its own was not enough to constitute a serious stressor, the cumulative impact of many events could be considered a crisis. The greater the numbers of LCUs, the greater the risk of illness.

Of those exposed to:

- Mild crisis (150 – 199 LCUs) – 37% reported illness
- Moderate crisis (200 – 299 LCUs) – 51% reported illness
- Major crisis (more than 300 LCUs) – 79% reported illness.

Am I at Risk?

Of course, we are all unique individuals and so vary in the way we handle change, as well as in our personal interpretation of the change event. Personal characteristics can also modify the impact of the life changes on our health. Many people have illnesses that do not seem to be preceded by identifiable stressors, and others undergo stress but do not seem to get sick!

Assess Your Stress

Below is a sample of life change events and their respective number of Life Change Units (LCUs), as applicable to adults. Add up your total number of LCU's and assess your risk of illness. A full and comprehensive table can be found in the full article on my website.

Divorce	73
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Change in number of family reunions	15
Change in eating habits	15
Vacation	13
Christmas	12

Non-adults may also become susceptible to stress-related illness through experiencing positive or negative life changes. A sample of events and their corresponding LCUs is given below. The full list can be found on my website.

Getting married	95
Acquiring a visible deformity	80
Fathering a child	70
Breaking up with boyfriend or girlfriend	53
Beginning to date	51
Suspension from school	50
Birth of a brother or sister	50

The Life Change Model



Change And Your Health

Most of us know that an event need not be of crisis proportions to cause stress. Sometimes seemingly small, everyday events cause stress - and very often this event is some sort of a *change* in our lives.

Observing this led researchers to study the fact that *any* life change, even positive changes, can have a detrimental impact on health. The *life-change model* assumes that *all* changes in a person's life – large or small, desirable or undesirable – can act as stressors, and that the accumulation of several small changes can be as powerful as one major change.

To measure the impact of life changes, two researchers (Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe) devised the Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS), also known as the *Holmes and Rahe Stress Scale*. In this scale, the number of "Life Change Units" (LCUs) that apply to events in the past year of an individual's life are added. The life change units are in essence *stress potential values*. That is, they give an indication of how stressed the individual is likely to be, and directly related to that, how many health problems they are likely to experience.

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Mild crisis (150 – 199 LCUs) – 37% reported illness

Moderate crisis (200 – 299 LCUs) – 51% reported illness

Major crisis (more than 300 LCUs) – 79% reported illness.

Clearly, change in our lives *can* be considered stressful, and stressful life events *do* play some part in producing physical and psychological illness for many people.

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The Social Re-adjustment Rating Scale

Using the Social Readjustment Rating Scale as a guide, assess your own levels of stress and the likelihood of falling ill. Tick all the *change* events which have happened to you in the past year and add up your score.

Life event	Life change units	√
Death of a spouse	100	
Divorce	73	
Marital separation	65	
Imprisonment	63	
Death of a close family member	63	
Personal injury or illness	53	
Marriage	50	
Dismissal from work	47	
Marital reconciliation	45	
Retirement	45	
Change in health of family member	44	
Pregnancy	40	
Sexual difficulties	39	
Gain a new family member	39	
Business readjustment	39	
Change in financial state	38	
Death of a close friend	37	
Change to different line of work	36	
Change in frequency of arguments	35	
Major mortgage	32	
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30	
Change in responsibilities at work	29	
Child leaving home	29	
Trouble with in-laws	29	
Outstanding personal achievement	28	
Spouse starts or stops work	26	
Begin or end school	26	
Change in living conditions	25	
Revision of personal habits	24	
Trouble with boss	23	
Change in working hours or conditions	20	
Change in residence	20	
Change in schools	20	
Change in recreation	19	
Change in church activities	19	
Change in social activities	18	
Minor mortgage or loan	17	
Change in sleeping habits	16	
Change in number of family reunions	15	
Change in eating habits	15	
Vacation	13	
Christmas	12	
Minor violation of law	11	

Score of 300+: At strong risk of illness.

Score of 150-299: Risk of illness is moderate (reduced by 30% from the above risk).

Score of less than 150: Only slight risk of illness.

Non-adults

A modified scale has also been developed for non-adults. Similar to the adult scale, stress points for life events in the past year are added and compared to the rough estimate of how stress affects health.

Life Event	Life Change Units	√
Death of parent	100	
Unplanned pregnancy/abortion	100	
Getting married	95	
Divorce of parents	90	
Acquiring a visible deformity	80	
Fathering a child	70	
Jail sentence of parent for over one year	70	
Marital separation of parents	69	
Death of a brother or sister	68	
Change in acceptance by peers	67	
Unplanned pregnancy of sister	64	
Discovery of being an adopted child	63	
Marriage of parent to stepparent	63	
Death of a close friend	63	
Having a visible congenital deformity	62	
Serious illness requiring hospitalization	58	
Failure of a grade in school	56	
Not making an extracurricular activity	55	
Hospitalization of a parent	55	
Jail sentence of parent for over 30 days	53	
Breaking up with boyfriend or girlfriend	53	
Beginning to date	51	
Suspension from school	50	
Becoming involved with drugs or alcohol	50	
Birth of a brother or sister	50	
Increase in arguments between parents	47	
Loss of job by parent	46	
Outstanding personal achievement	46	
Change in parent's financial status	45	
Accepted at college of choice	43	
Being a senior in high school	42	
Hospitalization of a sibling	41	
Increased absence of parent from home	38	
Brother or sister leaving home	37	
Addition of third adult to family	34	
Becoming a fully- fledged member of a church	31	
Decrease in arguments between parents	27	
Decrease in arguments with parents	26	
Mother or father beginning work	26	

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Score of less than 150: Slight risk of illness.