

TYPES OF STRESS

Physical, Mental, Emotional, and Environmental

Definition of Stress

Stress can be defined as the degree to which you feel overwhelmed or unable to cope as a result of pressures that are unmanageable.



YOU
ARE NOT
Alone

Symptoms of Stress

Physical: illness, trouble sleeping, tension, fatigue, headaches, digestion issues, skin rashes, changes in energy levels

Mental: racing or negative thoughts, constant worry, changes in interests or desires, difficulty concentrating

Emotional: fear, grief, sadness, irritability

Behavioral: avoidance, social withdrawal, seeking reassurance, and excessive checking.

Environmental: mood and physical health can be negatively affected by environmental stressors such as noise, crowding, extreme temperatures, messiness, or change of normal scenery



Organ Systems Involved in Stress Response



Nervous system: Chronic stress can lead to continuous activation of the nervous system and the fight or flight response. This signals the body to release excess stress hormones (adrenaline and cortisol), as a means of preparing the body to “fight off a threat”. This process can potentially affect all other body systems. Due to the trigger of physical reactions, chronic stress causes wear-and-tear and long-term drain on the body.



Endocrine system: During times of stress, more stress hormones (cortisol and adrenaline) are produced, which can lead to inflammation in the body and decreased immune system abilities. This can lead to the development of chronic fatigue, depression, and metabolic disorders, such as, diabetes and obesity.



Cardiovascular system: Stress can contribute to inflammation of the circulatory system and increased cholesterol levels in the blood. This leads to narrowing of the blood vessels, which causes the heart muscle to beat faster and work harder to get blood to the other organs. Chronic stress can result in an increased risk of developing hypertension (high blood pressure), stroke, and heart attack.



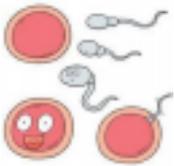
Respiratory system: Stress can cause the airways to narrow, which can cause symptoms of shortness of breath and rapid breathing (hyperventilation). Acute stress can trigger panic attacks and asthma attacks.



Musculoskeletal system: During times of stress, muscles become tense. Chronic muscle tension in the shoulders, neck and head is associated with tension-type headaches, migraines, and low back pain.



Gastrointestinal system: Stress can affect the gut, leading to pain, discomfort, and bloating. Chronic stress can cause an increase or decrease in appetite, lead to diarrhea or constipation, and if stress is severe, vomiting can occur. Stress also increases the risk for gut disease or dysfunction, and for those who have chronic bowel disorders, such as, inflammatory bowel disease or irritable bowel syndrome, their disorders may become less manageable.



Male Reproductive: Chronic stress can affect testosterone production in males causing a decrease in sex drive and potentially erectile dysfunction. Chronic stress can also lead to a decrease in sperm production and sperm maturation.



Female Reproductive: High levels of stress in females can be associated with absent or irregular menstrual cycles, reduced sexual desire, and the inability to conceive. It may also negatively impact the health of a pregnancy and the postpartum adjustment period.

Tips to De-stress

- **Make sleep a priority.** Get into a routine of waking up and going to bed at the same time every day.
- **Be physical.** Plan on getting 30 minutes of activity or exercise every day. Chemicals released by the body during exercise relieve stress by improving moods and acting as natural pain killers.
- **Eat well.** Nourish your body with foods that support your health. Fruits, vegetables, and whole grains provide your body with long-lasting energy.
- **Drink plenty of water.**
- **Limit alcohol and caffeine intake.** Both can worsen anxiety and trigger panic attacks.
- **Reach out to family and friends.** Social support can give you a sense of belonging and self-worth.
- **Find an environment that compliments your health.** Make this place your safe space to take care of your spiritual being.
- **Take care of yourself.** Recognize when you're not okay and when you may need to reach out for help.
- **Develop coping strategies.** Try meditating, yoga or deep breathing exercises in times of high stress.



Aimee R. & Beth P. 2021

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