Understanding stress

Traffic jams, crowded subways, meeting rent or the mortgage payment, troublesome teens, no time to relax, odern daily life. And any or all cause stress.



What is stress?

Stress is not an event; it is your reaction to an event. When your body responds physically and mentally to uncomfortable external incidents, you feel stressed. Stress may also be generated by thoughts, feelings or expectations about things that are real or imagined.

To put it simply, stress is the clash between demands in your life and the means you have to deal with those demands.

Understanding stress

- Stress is the natural human response to any demand in life or to anything that causes change.
- Both major and minor events can be stressful.
- Stress is not always harmful, nor is it always caused by negative factors. A strong physical attraction to another person can be stressful. The joyful birth of a child is stressful. Any outstanding personal achievement will create some stress in our lives.
- Good or bad, important or incidental, any event that requires change or adaptation to new circumstances can cause stress.

Normally, a little stress is stimulating. But too much stress runs the body down. On the other hand, too little stress can also be harmful. The sudden inactivity which follows retirement from a demanding job can be very stressful unless new interests are discovered.

The "fight or flight" response

The body's instinctual reaction to stress is know as the "Fight or Flight" response. Muscles tense and breathing becomes shallow as the body prepares for action. Adrenaline and other chemicals are pumped in to the bloodstream to increase strength and endurance.

In the past, this response was one of humanity's most important survival mechanisms. It enabled us to escape from, or to confront life-threatening situations.

In today's world, however, this response often works against us. Extra secretions of adrenaline strain the heart. And since fighting and running are rarely solutions to today's problems, we bottle up our anxiety and frustration and leave ourselves open to stress-related disorders such as ulcers, muscular pain, skin problems, and hair loss.

Consequences of stress

- On the positive side, when properly controlled, stress can be a catalyst that enables human beings to reach their full potential.
- Stress keeps us alert, vital and interested.
- Too much change and stress at once or over a prolonged period can lead to stress overload.
- Stress overload can cause negative physical and mental effects and a reduction in our ability to function normally or maintain healthy relationships.

Recognize your stress symptoms

When you are under too much stress, your body lets you know by sending out warning signs. These can be physical, emotional or behavioural.

Physical symptoms can take the form of:

- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Chest pain
- Fatigue
- Eyestrain

Some emotional signs can include:

- Depression
- Irritability
- Low self-esteem
- Anger
- Apathy

Behavioural indicators may consist of:

- Overeating or under eating
- An increase in smoking or drinking
- Forgetfulness
- Insomnia
- Careless driving

Of course these are not the only signs. There are many more. But if you have found yourself experiencing some of the previously-named symptoms with increasing frequency, you are probably becoming a victim of stress. If you would like help in getting control of the stress in your life, professional support is available or talk to your doctor.