

Too much stress is harmful; relaxation relieves

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Stress can mean different things to different people. Stress is often defined as a mismatch between the demands placed on us and the way we view our ability to cope with these demands. Stress can have either a negative or a positive impact on our lives.

Stress can be positive when it motivates us, and gives us the energy and adrenaline (a hormone that is secreted from the adrenal medulla gland when a person experiences surprise, shock, fear, excitement; it speeds up the heartbeat and raises blood pressure) to get things done which are important to us. It can be negative, however, when we constantly feel pressurised, overwhelmed or traumatic by excessive demands.

Stress can be caused by anything that makes us tense, angry, frustrated or unhappy. Often factors that stress some people can give other people excitement. Therefore, sometimes one person's stress may be another person's pleasure.

In fact, a certain amount of stress is actually good for us. Many people deliberately create mild stress in their lives to overcome periods of dull routine. However, too much stress affects our health and our well-being.

In this modern fast-paced life that we all lead nowadays, almost everyone is under some sort of

stress. However, only a few ever respond to stress by developing physical or emotional illness. Physical symptoms of stress may sometimes result from an individual's inability to properly meet up to the demands.

It is true that we would all become extremely bored if nothing exciting or eventful ever happened to us in our lives. However, too much change, too quickly, can be a major cause of stress. Remember that stress can be triggered off by things that we think of as pleasant events, such as getting married, suddenly winning money or having a baby. More obviously stress is also triggered by unpleasant events such as a losing a job, having an accident or the illness of someone in the family.

We can sometimes notice the immediate effects of stress. Often we are not aware of the harmful impact of long-term stress. Our behaviour may gradually change and we can over-eat and drink caffeine.

Stress usually does not come 'out of the blue'. You may get a clue about stress levels from considering the phase of life you are in. In the late teens, many major decisions have to be made for the first time. In mid-life, responsibilities are often heaviest and most dramatic. In the old age, there may be illness, deaths in the family and economical problems to cope with.

Warning signs of stress

The effect of stress on our health can vary considerably from person to person. Most of us, however, have our own usual stress response. This might be headaches, or outbreak of eczema or diarrhoea. Usually the first signs of stress are changes in our emotional life or behaviour.

Emotional reactions



to stress

The most important changes to watch out for are increases in tension, moodiness and irritability. Feeling under pressure, unable to relax, and feeling mentally drained are all forms of emotional reactions. Other tell-tale signs are feelings of frustration, aggression, and being

unable to take decisions, fear of social failure, lacking in the ability to feel pleasure or enjoyment, fear of imminent fainting, exhaustion or even death.

Physical reactions to stress

In ancient time, when our ancestors led the dangerous life in the caves, we had automatic physical

reactions to strong emotions which were designed to protect us. The usual reaction was 'fight or flight'. Physical reactions include muscle tension, rapid pulse beat, fast and shallow breathing, dilated pupil, change in appetite, a sick feeling in the stomach or 'butterflies' in the stomach, 'pins and needles' in hands or feet, headache, frequent urge of micturition, constipation or diarrhoea, constant restlessness and fidgeting.

The link between stress and heart disease

Heart and stroke -- is well documented. Feeling stressed increases the production of certain hormones in the circulation. An excess of these hormones continuously and over time, can damage the arteries and heart muscle and lead to the development of high blood pressure. Also when life becomes pressurised, there is often a tendency to smoke more cigarettes, drink more caffeine and take less exercise, which can contribute to the diseases of heart.

We are as sick as our secrets

Physical activity produces the body's own 'happy' hormones or antidepressants called endorphins. These give that feel-good factor we all experience after exercise. Another way to cope with stress, is to talk to some one you really trust. Learn to accept what you cannot change. Get enough sleep and rest to recharge you. Take one thing at a time and manage your time better. Plan ahead and learn to say no to your discomfort. Develop a hobby, eat variety of healthy foods, cut down on fat and salt and learn to relax.

Rigid inflexible thinking and

behaviour is a prime source of stress, whereas laughter can uncork the pressure and release built up tension. Try to establish your own comfort zone. This can be a person (friend, colleague), a place (beach, park) or routine ritual (a long bath, a particular walk). So much valuable time is lost turning things over and over in our minds. An effective way to stop this worrisome events is to set aside a particular time each day to deal with those things.

To cope with stress, we must work off stress

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