



BASIC INFORMATION

DESCRIPTION

Stress is the physical, mental, and emotional reactions you experience due to changes and demands in your life. The changes and demands can be large or small and each person will respond to them differently. Some people are more prone than others to stressful situations. Positive stress can be a motivator. Negative stress occurs when these changes and demands are overwhelming to you.

FREQUENT SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS

- Physical symptoms include muscle tension, headache, chest pain, upset stomach, diarrhea or constipation, racing heartbeat, cold clammy hands, fatigue, profuse sweating, rashes, rapid breathing, shaking, tics, jumpiness, changes in appetite, weakness, tiredness, and dizziness.
- Emotional reactions include anger, low self-esteem, depression, lack of interest, irritability, fear and phobic responses, difficulty concentrating, guilt, worry, agitation, anxiety, and panic.
- Behavioral reactions may lead to alcohol or drug abuse, an increase in smoking, sleep disorders, overeating, memory loss, or confusion.

CAUSES

In stressful times, the body increases the production of certain hormones. These cause changes in the heart rate, blood pressure, metabolism, and physical activity.

RISK INCREASES WITH

Common causes of stress include:

- Recent loss of a loved one (spouse, child, friend).
- Holidays, such as Christmas.
- Injuries or severe illnesses.
- Problems with work or school.
- Recent move to a new city or state.
- Sexual difficulties between you and your partner.
- Business or financial problems; buying a new home.
- Regular conflict between you and a spouse or family member, close friend, or business associate.
- Constant fatigue.
- Demands on your time and energy levels by other family members leaving little time for self-care.
- World or national events such as war or disasters.

PREVENTIVE MEASURES

- To help prevent negative stress, try to take charge of those aspects of your life that you can manage.
- Since stress cannot always be prevented, learn coping techniques to protect your mental and physical health.

EXPECTED OUTCOME

Usually resolved with time, self-treatment, or medical care.

POSSIBLE COMPLICATIONS

Chronic stress can cause problems with your work and family relationships. Stress can also lead to high blood pressure, and risk of stroke and heart attack.



DIAGNOSIS & TREATMENT

GENERAL MEASURES

- Diagnosis is often by your own or others' observation of symptoms. Sometimes medical tests may be needed to rule out medical problems that could cause the symptoms. A person may not realize they are stressed.
- Counseling may be recommended. Talking about your problems is one way of relieving stress.
- Here are some tips to help reduce stress:
 - Learn a meditation or relaxation technique and practice it regularly, daily if possible.
 - Share your feelings with a friend. You are not alone.
 - Arrange daily schedules to make them less stressful.
 - Decide what is important and has to get done and what can be put off, left undone or passed on to others.
 - Take a short time away from any stressful situation you encounter during a day. A short walk can help.
 - Learn and practice a muscle-tensing and muscle-relaxing technique. Take warm, relaxing baths.
 - Make lists of what needs to be done each day, and then cross the items off as they are completed.
 - Take time for some form of enjoyable recreation.
 - Avoid taking problems home or to bed with you. At the end of the day, take a few minutes and review the day. Let go of negative emotions. Decide about undone activities. Release mental or muscular tension.
- To learn more: National Mental Health Association, (800) 969-6642; website: www.nmha.org.

MEDICATION

If symptoms are severe, drugs may be recommended.

ACTIVITY

Exercise 20 to 30 minutes daily. It helps relieve stress.

DIET

Eat a normal, well-balanced diet. Don't skip meals.



NOTIFY OUR OFFICE IF

You or a family member has symptoms of stress.

Special notes:

More notes on the back of this page