

What You Need To Know About Stress and How to Manage It

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Imagine you wake up on a nice Monday morning: no sudden deadlines or meetings. You roll over on your bed, check your phone, and suddenly you see 10 messages from your boss warning you about tasks, meetings, and more! The average reaction would be nothing short of “AHHHHHH!!!!!!” Unfortunately, many of us don't have to imagine this scenario. Whether you are a high schooler, college student, or a professional in the real world, we have all been stressed for something at one point in time. Maybe you were stressed over homework, or a presentation you had to give about your business to potential customers. We tend to find ourselves stressed out without understanding its true effects on our brain and body, as well as how to deal with stress. Luckily, this blog post will have everything you need to know about stress and how to manage it!

But what is stress? Stress is essentially an emotional or physical reaction to a challenge or demand. Despite the negatives you usually hear about stress, it can actually be helpful at times: helping you submit your homework on time, preparing you to be ready to react at a very fast rate when taking a test, or even potentially saving your life with a quick maneuver in a stressful situation. Even though there are some benefits of stress (at least at the temporary level), long term stress can be negatively impactful to one's health. Below is a short list of significant problems caused by chronic stress. .

Mental Health Problems: When you are stressing out, you overwork your brain to the point where it starts to hurt. Many of us get migraines and other headaches due to overworking our brain, and stress is the main cause for these headaches to occur. Additionally, people who suffer from chronic stress are also at risk of becoming victims of Alzheimer's (a disease which causes memory loss and brain dysfunction) and depression (a disease which causes people to become very upset and unmotivated), two very notable mental illnesses which completely mess up an individual's life.

Cardiovascular Problems: Studies show that stress releases the hormone cortisol in order to respond to the tension created by stress. High levels of cortisol from stress directly relates to an increase in cholesterol, blood sugar, and blood pressure. These three effects of stress are the building blocks for heart disease, which can cause blood

clots to form in your arteries or irregular blood flow from the heart to the rest of the body and vice versa. Hypertension, which is the rise in blood pressure over a span of weeks, is proven to be caused by an individual stressing out for a long period of time, and can lead to diabetes.

Dysfunctional Immune System: When we are stressed, our bodies decrease their production of white blood cells, resulting in a poor immune system and high susceptibility to infection. To add on, stress also causes a lack of sleep, which causes the immune system to weaken even more due to poor recovery time. Furthermore, when we stress out our digestive system boosts at an alarming rate, causing us to have diarrhea or even ulcers at extreme cases, resulting in a weakened immune system yet again.

Refer to the image below for a visual representation of the negative effects caused by stress:

Stress May be the Cause of

1 HAIR LOSS
Stress disrupts hormones and can cause your hair to fall out.

2 HEADACHE
Increased emotion and muscle tension can cause tension headaches.

3 ASTHMA
Rapid breathing results from other physical symptoms of stress and can lead to an asthma attack.

4 HEART DISEASE
Two side effects of stress, high blood pressure and high cholesterol, are the main risk factors for heart disease.

5 POOR GUT HEALTH
An upset stomach, heartburn or irritable bowel syndrome can result from chronic stress.

6 WEIGHT GAIN
Cortisol levels rise under stress causing the body to store excess belly fat.

7 DIABETES
Stress can raise your blood glucose levels, increasing the risk of Type 2 diabetes.

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However, there is a way to manage your stress! Managing stress let's one keep the benefits of temporary stress while avoiding the negatives of chronic stress. This image from Harvard Health should give you a good idea on how you can combat your stress:



If you feel inclined, you can even download and print the [InfiniteSTEM Stress Management Checklist!](#) This list has everyday activities you can check off to ensure you are living the optimal lifestyle. For more information on stress and how to manage it, you can also check out my.clevelandclinic.org.

Until next time, and don't let stress get the best of you since you are better than stress!

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