

# Stress: Causes, Symptoms and management

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## Abstract :

*Stress is our body's way of responding to any kind of demand or threat. The stress response is the body's way of protecting you. When working properly, it helps you stay focused, energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save your life-giving you extra strength to defend yourself. Stress can also help you rise to meet challenges. It's what keeps you on your toes during a presentation at work, sharpens your concentration when you're attempting the game-winning free throw, or drives you to study for an exam when you'd rather be watching T.V. But beyond a certain point, stress stops being helpful and starts causing major damage to your health, mood, productivity, relationships and your quality of life. If we frequently find our self feeling frizzed and overwhelmed. It's time to take action to bring our nervous system back into balance. We can't completely eliminate stress from our life, but we can control how much it affects us. Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body's relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the polar opposite of the stress response. When practiced regularly, these activities can reduce our everyday stress levels and boost feelings of joy and serenity. They also increase our ability to stay calm and collected under pressure.*

**Keywords :** Cognitive Symptoms, Emotional Symptoms, Psychological symptoms, Physical symptoms, Behavioral Symptoms, Stress Management and relief.

## Introduction

Stress describes a person's physical or emotional response to the demands or pressures of daily life. Common causes of stress include work, money, relationships and illness. Significant events like the Covid-19 pandemic and the Christchurch earthquakes can also increase stress and anxiety.

Symptoms may include irritability, difficulty sleeping or relaxing, headaches, and muscle tension. Stress management approaches include lifestyle changes, relaxation and mindfulness and counseling.

### **Causes of modern day stress -**

Stress can be a positive thing-helping an individual to grow, develop, be stimulated and take action. However, if stress exceeds a person's ability to cope it can impact on their mental and physical health in a range of ways.

In the days of the caveman, stress often came in the form of physical threats that required individuals to react quickly and decisively. The body helped out by releasing a surge of 'stress' hormones (notably adrenaline and cortisol) to accelerate the heart rate, raise blood pressure, increase blood glucose(sugar) levels, and enhance the brain's use of glucose. This stress response meant that the caveman was instantly ready to respond to danger.

Modern-day stressors are more likely to be psychological in origin and prolonged in nature(eg. Work-related stress, financial worries, inter-personal relationships, chronic illnesses). But they can still set off your body's stress response and, over time, can have a range of negative impacts on the body's systems-brain, cardiovascular, immune, digestive, musculoskeletal, and so on.

### **Common external causes of stress include:**

- ❖ Major life changes
- ❖ Work of school
- ❖ Relationship difficulties
- ❖ Financial Problems

### **Common Internal causes of stress include:**

- ❖ Pessimism
- ❖ Inability to accept uncertainty
- ❖ Rigid thinking, lack of flexibility
- ❖ Negative self-talk

People deal with stress in different ways and the ability to deal with stress changes throughout life. Those who have developed effective strategies to deal with day-to-day stressors are less likely to develop physical and psychological symptoms.

## Signs, symptoms, and diagnosis -

Stress is the body's reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response. The body reacts to these changes with physical, mental and emotional responses. Stress is a normal part of life. Stress we feel in our environment, our body and our thoughts. Even positive life changes such as promotion, the birth of a child produce stress. The most dangerous thing about stress is how easily it can creep up on you. You get used to it. It starts to feel familiar, even normal. You don't notice how much it's affecting you, even as it takes a heavy toll. That's why it's important to be aware of the common warning signs and symptoms of stress overload. Stress that is not controlled and continues for a long period of time can cause a number of cognitive, psychological, emotions and physical symptoms.

### **Cognitive Symptoms:**

- ❖ Thinking and Memory problems
- ❖ Inability to concentrate
- ❖ Poor Judgment
- ❖ Seeing only the negative

### **Emotional Symptoms:**

- ❖ Depression or general unhappiness
- ❖ Anxiety and agitation
- ❖ Moodiness, irritability, or anger
- ❖ Feeling overwhelmed

### **Psychological symptoms of stress can include:**

- ❖ Sleep disturbances
- ❖ Difficulty concentrating
- ❖ Lack of confidence
- ❖ Depression
- ❖ Difficulty relaxing

### **Physical symptoms of stress can include:**

- ❖ Muscle tension in neck, face or shoulders and general aches and pains.
- ❖ Dizziness or a general feeling of 'being out of it'.
- ❖ Low energy
- ❖ Headaches aches and pains
- ❖ Nervous twitches or muscle spasms

- ❖ Nausea, dizziness
- ❖ Chest pain, rapid heart rate
- ❖ Loss of sex drive, Decreased sexual functions
- ❖ Frequent colds or flu, Cold and sweaty palms
- ❖ Racing heart, Shortness of breath or difficulty breathing

### **Behavioral Symptoms:**

- ❖ Eating more or less
- ❖ Sleeping too much or too little
- ❖ Withdrawing from others
- ❖ Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities

Long term, uncontrolled stress is associated with the development of a number of medical conditions. Primarily these occur as the result of biochemical imbalances that can weaken the immune system and over-stimulate the part of the nervous system that regulates heart rate, blood pressure, and digestion.

Medical conditions that can occur as a result of chronic(long-term) stress include

- ❖ Heart palpitations
- ❖ Hyperventilation
- ❖ Gastrointestinal problems, Worsening skin conditions(eg: dermatitis/eczema)
- ❖ High blood pressure
- ❖ Recurrent colds and flu (influenza)

### **Stress affects health**

The human body is designed to experience stress and react to it. Stress can be positive, keeping us alert, motivated, and ready to avoid danger. Stress becomes negative when a person faces continuous challenges without relief or relaxation between stressors. As a result, the person becomes overworked, and stress-related tension builds. The body's autonomic nervous system has a built-in stress response that causes physiological changes to allow the body to combat stressful situations. This stress response, also known as the "fight or flight response", is activated in case of an emergency. However, this response can become chronically activated during prolonged activation of the stress response. Prolonged activation of the stress response causes wear and tear on the body-both physically and emotionally.

Stress that continues without relief can lead to a condition called distress-a negative stress reaction. Distress can disturb the body's internal balance or equilibrium, leading to

physical symptoms such as headaches, an upset stomach, elevated blood pressure, chest pain, sexual dysfunction, and problems sleeping.

Emotional problems can also result from distress. These problems include depression, panic attacks, or other forms of anxiety and worry. Research suggests that stress also can bring on or worsen certain symptoms or diseases. Stress is linked to 6 of the leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver and suicide.

### **Managing Stress**

There are many ways that you can help your mind and body adapt and become more resilient to the negative impacts of stresses. Exercise, dietary changes, relaxation, stress management courses, counseling and medications can all play a role in managing, relieving or coping with stress.

### **Get regular Exercise and Diet**

The food we eat can improve or worsen our mood and affect our ability to cope with life's stressors. Eating a diet full of processed and convenience food, refined carbohydrates, and sugary snacks can worsen symptoms of stress, while a diet rich in fresh fruit and vegetables, high-quality protein, and omega-3 fatty acids, can help to better cope with life's ups and downs. Regular exercise can lift our mood and serve as a distraction from worries, allowing us to breakout of the cycle of negative thoughts that feed stress. Rhythmic exercise such as walking, running, swimming, and dancing are particularly effective, especially if we exercise mindfully. Exercise helps to release built up tension and increases fitness. This, in turn, increases the body's ability to deal with stress and helps to avoid the damage to our health that prolonged stress can cause. Exercise should be undertaken at least three times a week to be of most benefit.

### **Counseling**

Discussing-concerns with an impartial person may assist with recognizing stressors and deciding upon strategies to deal with them. This could be a professional therapist or a trusted family member, friend or colleagues. Often the process of discussing a concern is enough to reduce the stress it is causing. Getting help should not be seen as a sign of weakness. knowing when to ask for help may be one of the changes necessary to deal with stress more appropriately.

### **Meditation-**

In severe cases of stress, medication may be prescribed to treat some of the symptoms. Medication should only be considered as a short-term treatment and should be strictly monitored by the prescribing doctor

### **Involve other people-**

The simple act of talking face-to-face with another human can trigger hormones that relieve stress when you're feeling agitated or insecure. Even just a brief exchange of kind words or a friendly look from another human being can help calm and soothe our nervous system. So, spend time with people who improve our mood and don't let our responsibilities keep us from having a social life. If we don't have any close relationships or our relationships are the source of our stress, make it a priority to build stronger and more satisfying connections.

Talk to your spouse, children, parents, friends, and coworkers. Let them know you are working to reduce the amount of stress you deal with, and ask them for help when you need it. They can also help you identify stressful situations before they've become too much for you.

### **Be an optimist**

When you're worried or feel your stress level rising. Try to surround yourself with positive thoughts and experiences. Listen to music, watch a funny video, or call a friend who makes you laugh.

Meet negativity with a positive reaction. A positive attitude will keep you from slipping back into feeling overwhelmed.

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