

The body's response to **STRESS**

More and more patients are getting the same diagnosis from health practitioners, yet are stunned, some embarrassed, and others just plain too hardheaded to acknowledge that they may be suffering from stress.



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She is the general manager at *Natural Medicine*, a wife, mom and published poet. She is passionate about helping people achieve the best they can in life. She discovered her passion for writing at a young age, and aspires to author inspirational books. She lives her life by her slogan: 'When you touch one life, you change their world'.



You've finally taken time out of your busy month to make an appointment with your doctor. Your head feels like it's about to explode, your shoulders and neck feel like they're in constant spasm and your stomach cramps just won't let you sleep at night. You're groggy and seem to snap at everyone lately, and worst of all, you're aware of it. You're sure that you're coming down with something, but can flu symptoms last this long?

It's your turn and your doctor gives you a knowing smile, but does not say anything. 'What can I do for you today, Peter?' You explain these symptoms along with a long list of others. Your tears well up when you realise how much is really going on in your life.

'Peter, you're suffering from stress and the best remedy I can recommend is some time off.'

Does this scenario sound familiar? Our society has labelled stress, overexertion and being mentally and physically drained as weakness. Many of us have tried everything to avoid being labelled as suffering from this so-called 'new-age disease', when heeding the doctor's orders to take a bit of real relaxation, may be the one thing that could help us deal with our ever-increasing demanding loads.



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*'Pressure and stress is
the common cold of
the psyche'
– Andrew Denton*

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‘The definition of insanity: doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results.’ – Albert Einstein



Contrary to what we may want to believe, stress is fast becoming one of the most identifiable underlying causes of many illnesses and diseases.

Here’s a list of a few effects of stress found on the website of the American Institute of Stress: (www.stress.org)

PHYSICAL

- Frequent headaches, or jaw clenching
- Neck ache, back pain, muscle spasms
- Chest pains, palpitations, stomach pains or cramps
- Dry mouth, problems swallowing
- Fidgeting, feet tapping
- Frequent colds, infections, herpes sores
- Trembling of lips, hands
- Decreased sexual desire or low performance
- Rashes, itching, hives, ‘goosebumps’, frequent allergy attacks
- Weight gain, weight loss without diet
- Frequent use of over-the-counter drugs
- Increased smoking, alcohol or drug use

MENTAL/PSYCHOLOGICAL

- Difficulty concentrating, racing thoughts, forgetfulness
- Difficulty in making decisions
- Insomnia, nightmares, disturbing dreams
- Problems in communication, sharing
- Feeling overwhelmed, anxious, constant worrying about the same thing

- Increased frustration, irritability, edginess
- Excessive defensiveness or suspiciousness
- Depression, frequent or wild mood swings, feelings of loneliness, worthlessness
- Social withdrawal and isolation
- Reduced work efficiency or productivity
- Excessive gambling or impulse buying

Stress therefore does not only affect feelings of not being able to handle your workload, but encompasses and affects a range of both physical and emotional/psychological aspects of your life.

Hans Selye first defined stress as ‘the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change’. Dr John Demartini’s definition of stress is: ‘the inability to adapt to an ever-changing environment.’ How we deal with stress is what can eliminate the effect of illness on the body.

TIPS FOR DEALING WITH STRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

- Take regular breathing breaks during your day.
- Write down the seven most important things that you need to achieve during the day. Mark them off with a tick as you go through them – the feeling of accomplishment will also slow down your racing mind.
- Be realistic about what you are capable of doing.
- Learn to say ‘No’, especially if you are already overloaded

Exercise regularly, meditate and end the day with gratitude. Your situation will not change until you decide to change it. ●