

(Health and Wellness) What is stress: Stages, symptoms and treatments

Written by Brandi Patterson-Phillips
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Stress is a very interesting and complex concept. Many people know what stress is by concept (not definition), but do not realize the potential negative effects it can have on the body. Negative stress, if not dealt with properly can lead to multiple negative symptoms and ultimately disease.

According to Webster's Dictionary, stress is defined as a "physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation."

About.com listed four different types of stress: Eustress (fun and exciting stress), acute stress (short-term stress, either positive or negative), episodic acute stress (a way of life; drama queens), or chronic stress (stress related to everyday activity, such as a bad marriage or a terrible job). For this article we will discuss the effects of negative stress.

According to www.lesstress.net, our body responds to stressful situations by initiating 1400 different activities, which include, but are not limited to, dumping a variety of chemicals in the body. According to this website, individuals undergo, three stages when adapting to negative stress.

The first stage is the stage of stress alarm reaction, also called the fight or flight stage. In this initial stage, our bodies become more alert and develop a sudden strength to deal with whatever is presented to us as a stressor. In this stage your body is pumping adrenaline and your heart, lungs, brain, nervous system and muscles are all stimulated by the release of hormones.

As reported by www.lesstress.com, the stage of stress resistance is the second stage. In this stage, the body's functions return to almost normal. Heart rate and other body functions are normalized, but the body is still ready and alert. During this stage, cortisol and thyroxin are released to speed up the repair of the body's tissues that were damaged during the fight or flight stage.

The third and final stage of negative stress is the stage of stress exhaustion. This stage is the most dangerous, and if not handled and dealt with properly can lead to burnout. Anger and anxiety are just a few of the many emotions that can lead to stress-related burnout.

When burnout occurs, it can lead to such disorders as depression, insecurity, mental illness, chemical dependency, diabetes, hair loss, heart disease, hyperthyroidism, obesity, obsessive-compulsive/anxiety disorders, sexual dysfunction, infertility, constipation, muscle pain and weakness, tooth and gum disease, ulcers, memory loss, decreased productivity at home and work, sleep and skin disorders and possibly cancer. About.com reports that 90% of doctor's visits are for symptoms that are related to stress.

Many things can cause stress such as financial problems, relationship changes, major life cycle changes, being overly busy, family and friends, as well as work and career duties and expectations.

Stress does not have to be something that we live with, but rather something we can learn to deal with, so that we can alleviate the extra pressures and anxieties from our lives.

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We all experience stressful situations at some point in our lives and with adequate information and resources, we can effectively deal with stress so that it does not have a negative effect on the rest of our lives or the lives of those closest to us.

If you think you are suffering from stress, please consult someone you can trust or a health professional that will help you deal with your concerns before they lead to mental, emotional or physical burnout.

Brandi Patterson Phillips is a freelance health and wellness reporter with an extensive background in mental and physical health training and education. She is also a Life Skills Coach, fitness trainer and professional dancer. She is currently studying for her M.B.A. at St. Mary's University in Minneapolis. Brandi currently teaches @ Creative Arts High School in St. Paul, MN, Summit Early Learning Center in Minneapolis, and is president of the Minnesota Fit Club for Women. Please direct all health and wellness questions to bodybybrandiva@gmail.com. Answers will be chosen to appear in subsequent Insight News editions.

10 Recession-Proof Stress Relievers that Cost Little or Nothing

- Stretch/Yoga - calms the mind body and spirit, improves circulation, releases tension, tones the body!
- Warm Bubble Bath or Shower - relaxes the muscles, creates quiet time for yourself (don't forget the oils and candles)!
- Journaling - gets important issues off your chest, releasing it into the universe!
- Walk or Run - helps you "Breathe, Stretch, Shake, Let it Go"!
- Meditate - creates mental focus, blocking out negativity, by focusing your mind on positive things that make you happy!
- Get a Massage - releases muscle tension, just ask a friend or loved one, or child for this service!
- Dance - to your favorite song, getting your blood flowing and releasing stress and tension!
- Talk - talk it out to someone you trust! Let it Go!
- Listen to Music - with a positive message that leads to reduced stress!
- Count - backward from 10. Slowly, Slowly and repeat!