

A Cause of Ill Health

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Stress is the most common cause of ill health in our society and probably underlies as much as 70 percent of all visits to family doctors.

Stress can be categorized into two types: the first is good stress (called “eustress”) that promotes excitement and positive feelings. The second type is bad stress (“distress”) that results in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger, and depression, which in turn can lead to health problems.

Becoming stressed is a process that usually builds. Being aware of the signs that suggest the process has begun helps us in treating stress early. Our objective is not to eliminate stress but to learn how to manage it. Having an optimal level of stress motivates us without overwhelming us.

Recognizing Stress

The following indicators may provide early warning signs of too much stress:

- Chronic fatigue, including exhaustion, tiredness, and a sense of being physically run down
- Insomnia and depression
- Changes in appetite that cause weight loss or gain
- Poor concentration and/or poor memory retention
- Feelings of helplessness
- Shortness of breath and/or frequent headaches
- Ulcers
- High blood pressure
- Anger or the easy loss of control for no specific reason
- Upset stomach and gastrointestinal disturbances
- Suspiciousness

If you are noticing several of the above symptoms, it’s the time to reduce your stress and/or improve your ability to manage it.

Stress Management Strategies

The following tips will help you maintain a healthier lifestyle and will prepare you to cope with the stress of everyday living.

- Identify events that cause you distress, and determine how your body responds when they occur.
- Reduce the intensity of your emotional reactions to stress.
- Eat well-balanced, nutritious meals along with more whole grains, nuts, fruits, and vegetables. Assess your current diet and make improvements.
- Exercise three to four times a week for cardiovascular fitness. Exercise burns up adrenaline and produces helpful chemicals and positive feelings.
- Reduce your toxic intake: avoid nicotine, excessive caffeine, and other stimulants. These substances contribute to stress susceptibility.
- Develop some mutually supportive friendships and relationships. Loneliness is a big ally of stress, and off-loading and sharing worries is very important.

- Better time management helps in controlling stress. Learn to set priorities, use a “to do” list of tasks, reduce the generation of clutter, and become more organized.

Note that if stress is causing serious health effects, you should consult a doctor.