

Recognizing When It Is More than Stress

It is normal to be nervous in stressful situations. But stressors, such as the breakup of a marriage or the loss of a loved one, can make existing psychological problems worse or lead to a new problem. For example, stress often aggravates or triggers depression.

Stress is also commonly associated with anxiety disorders. People with anxiety disorders feel fearful, uneasy or distressed even when there is not an obvious reason for it. Psychotherapy, medications or both can help relieve this distress.

Generalized Anxiety Disorder

People who worry a lot and are nervous almost every day for six months or more may have generalized anxiety disorder. This is especially true if the worry seems to exceed what the situation warrants. Worries may be over money, health, work or safety issues, or they may be more general.

People with generalized anxiety disorder typically experience three or more of these symptoms:

- Difficulties concentrating
- Disturbed sleep
- Irritability
- Fatigue (even without much exertion)
- Tense muscles
- Restlessness

Job Stress

In the past 20 years, many studies have looked at the relationship between job stress and a variety of ailments. Mood and sleep disturbances, upset stomach and headache, and disturbed relationships with family and friends are examples of stress-related problems that are quick to develop and are commonly seen in these studies. These early signs of job stress are usually easy to recognize. But the effects of job stress on chronic diseases are more difficult to see because chronic diseases take a long time to develop and can be influenced by many factors other than stress. Nonetheless, evidence is rapidly accumulating to suggest that stress plays an important role in several types of chronic health problems-especially cardiovascular disease, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychological disorders.

Early Warning Signs of Job Stress

- Headache
- Sleep disturbances
- Difficulty in concentrating
- Short temper
- Upset stomach
- Job dissatisfaction
- Low morale

Job Stress and Health: What the Research Tells Us

Cardiovascular Disease

Many studies suggest that psychologically demanding jobs that allow employees little control over the work process increase the risk of cardiovascular disease.

Musculoskeletal Disorders

On the basis of research by NIOSH and many other organizations, it is widely believed that job stress increases the risk for development of back and upper- extremity musculoskeletal disorders.

Psychological Disorders

Several studies suggest that differences in rates of mental health problems (such as depression and burnout) for various occupations are due partly to differences in job stress levels. (Economic and lifestyle differences between occupations may also contribute to some of these problems.)

Workplace Injury

Although more study is needed, there is a growing concern that stressful working conditions interfere with safe work practices and set the stage for injuries at work.

Suicide, Cancer, Ulcers, and Impaired Immune Function

Some studies suggest a relationship between stressful working conditions and these health problems. However, more research is needed before firm conclusions can be drawn.

UnitedHealthcare –Care24 Services – For information and support, Care24 services offers you access to a wide range of health and well-being information-seven days a week, 24 hours a day by calling 1-888-887-4114.

Coping With Stress

Stress is a part of life. From being stuck in traffic to falling behind on paying bills, too much stress can wreak havoc on our bodies. If you have a chronic illness, even small tasks, such as making dinner or picking up the children from school, can become overwhelming. Research on how stress causes medical illness is still in its early phases. We do know though that stress can cause physical symptoms, and may increase the rate of progression of a disease. Here are some ways to reduce your stress.

Adjust your attitude. According to researchers, you can better cope with stress by focusing on three ideas: challenge, control and commitment.

Try to interpret stressful situations as challenges, not as threats.

Determine what you can control; sometimes the only thing you will be able to control in a stressful situation is the way you respond, but that's a start.

Make a commitment to be good to yourself by eating healthfully, thinking positively and maintaining relationships with people you care about.

A Complaint Free World, *"If you don't like something, change it. If you can't change it, change your attitude. Don't complain."*

Our words are powerful indicators of our thoughts, and our thoughts create our lives. When we complain, we draw to us negative experiences because we put out negative energy. Therefore, one of the most important things we can do is to learn not to complain.

Gandhi said, *"Be the change you wish to see in the world."*

You know those colored rubber bracelets representing different causes. **Have you ever seen purple?** Everyone pretty much knows what most of the colors stand for, but I had never encountered a purple bracelet before. **"It's a reminder to stop complaining."** Every time you complain, you have to move the bracelet to the other wrist. The goal is to keep it on the same wrist for 21 straight days. After that, you should be able to live pretty much complaint free.

Learn to problem solve. The key, say experts, is to think through difficult situations systematically.

- Break problems into smaller pieces to make them less overwhelming
- Focus on problems that really need your attention and leave the rest
- Know your limits
- Learn to be flexible
- Be realistic about your choices

Communicate. Keeping your troubles inside only adds to stress. Find someone safe to talk to about your worries; it will reduce stress and help you deal with practical problems. If you have a chronic medical condition, participate in a support group.

Exercise. Regular exercise reduces stress. It helps protect the cardiovascular and immune systems from the consequences of stressful events. Whether it's swimming, walking or another form of exercise, find time to do the activity on a regular basis.

Desk Exercises <http://www.intelihealth.com/IH/ih/IH/WSABH000/20813/8254.html>

Take control of your diet and your sleep. It's hard to do, but if you eat a well-balanced, nutritious diet and get a good night's sleep, you'll have more energy to cope with stress. And if you're tired and cranky, you'll be more susceptible to stress-related ailments.

Do something for others. Volunteering for a worthy cause can be a great experience. It also can help you forget about your own problems and increase your self-esteem.