

Just Stress, You Guess?

What really is Stress? Stress is your body's response to any kind of demand or threat. When you sense danger—whether it's real or imagined—your body kicks into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the “stress response.” It is your body's way of protecting you.

In a medical context stress is a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. Stresses can come from the outside environment or social situations, or inside from illness or a medical procedure.

When your body detects stress, a small region in the base of the brain reacts by making the body produce certain hormones. These increased levels of hormones interfere with learning and memory, lower your ability to fight off disease, decrease bone strength, and can increase blood pressure, cholesterol and heart disease.

According to American Psychological Association (APA), there are **3** different types stress:

1. Acute stress - The most common form of stress. It comes from demands and pressures of the recent past and anticipated demands and pressures of the near future. Acute stress can be thrilling and exciting in small doses, like on a rollercoaster, but too much is tiring.
2. Episodic acute stress – This includes those people who suffer acute stress often. You know the people whose lives are so disordered that they live in chaos and crisis. They're always in a rush, but are always late.
3. Chronic stress – This is the response to emotional pressure suffered for a long period of time in which the person feels they have little or no control.

While each person can experience stress and react in a different way, some of the physical and mental symptoms of stress include:

- Lack of energy
- Difficulty making decisions
- Difficulty keeping track of things
- Feeling on edge
- A change in eating habits
- Sleeping more than usual or difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep
- Being more emotional
- Increased use of alcohol or drugs to relieve stress
- Chronic back pain
- Tension headaches
- Neck Pain
- Intestinal problems, stomach pains, diarrhea
- Heart palpitations
- Dry mouth

When you are feeling stressed or dealing with a stressful situation you should act to relieve your stress levels. Here are some examples of things to try:

- Take a time out – Relax and refresh
- Eat well balanced meals – Helps keep your body healthy
- Limit alcohol and caffeine – These are stimulants and tends to cause more stress
- Get enough sleep – Gives your body a change to rest and repair
- Exercise daily - Helps you feel physically well and maintains your overall health
- Take deep breaths – Helps to keep you calm and not breathing too fast
- Count to 10 slowly – Gets you to concentrate on a calm activity
- Go For a Long Walk or Drive – Nature can get your mind in a calm mood
- Write things down – The act of writing takes you mind of the stress
- Be an Optimist – Positive thoughts helps combat stress
- Meet up with an old friend – Talking things out can always help get perspective
- Get yourself a pet – Taking care of something that depends on you can relax you

If you begin to notice a decline in performance, misuse of alcohol or drugs, inability to cope with the demands of you daily life, have irrational fears, experience a significant change in sleeping or eating habits, have suicidal thoughts or urges to hurt others or are self-destructive, you could be reacting to chronic stress. If you are suffering from chronic stress you should seek assistance from your Personal Care Physician. Your physician can help determine if your stress is due to an anxiety disorder, a medical condition, or perhaps both. Your physician can help you with treatment which may include medications or a referral to a mental health provider.

So now that you know some of the many things to watch for regarding stress, be good to yourself and if you notice symptoms, check with your Personal Care Physician at your next visit regarding getting help. Or better yet, schedule a visit now with your physician to discuss getting care and get on the road to a healthier, happier life style beginning now!