What is Stress?

Definition

Stress is the non-specific response of the body to any demand placed on it. Stress can create feelings of conflict and/or anxiety within an individual. Stress can stem from demands one places on oneself or from outside stimuli or situations. Some stress is easily identified, such as increased financial responsibilities; while other stress, such as feeling that one must earn peer acceptance, may go undetected. If stress is not identified and resolved, it can progressively deteriorate one’s ability to function.

Causes

Stress is most frequently caused by change, such as personal loss of a loved one; job advancement or career change; illness or injury and lifestyle changes. Some personalities are more prone to stress because of poor coping skills or unhealthy mental health attitudes towards life and/or self.

Effects

Some stress is positive and creates diversity and challenges in life. Positive stress can keep motivation and creative responses at their highest level.

Persisting stress or "distress" results in debilitating anxiety that affects one's overall mental, emotional and physical health.

Some signs of stress are headaches, dizziness, fast heartbeat, abnormal eating habits, troubled breathing, inability to slow down or relax, depression, ulcers, high-blood pressure, phobias, and disturbed sleep patterns.

Stress-coping Skills

With proper coping skills, stress can be managed. Skills may include:

- **Take a deep breath.** Deep breathing helps calm the body.
- **Watch your thoughts.** Negative or fearful thoughts create more anxiety and stress. Thinking positive about a situation helps reduce stress.
- **Practice visualization.** Visualize what you want to happen in your life and affairs.
- **Exercise Regularly.** Physical activities often relieve the body of unnecessary tensions and allow the body to function more effectively. Exercise also provides needed diversions from life's pressures.
- **Learn to relax.** Just a few minutes of peace and quiet each day to give one the ability to properly assess a challenging situation and to respond in an appropriate manner. Relaxation is a skill. Read something inspirational and listen to your favorite music.
- **Talk about stress.** Opening up about your problems or tensions with close friends, a therapist, co-workers or a clergy member will allow a sharing of feelings and an opportunity to keep potential stressors in proper perspective.
- **Structure planning of daily activities.** By properly planning and using one's time, daily demands can be handled before they create unhealthy stress. Daily planning provides for a varied schedule, which can include work, leisure, social and family activities, as well as personal time.
- **Set realistic goals.** People who expect too much of themselves are most frequently troubled by stress. Goals must be realistic to be motivational.

- **Do some fun things.** Treat yourself regularly by doing something that you enjoy.

- **Get regular physical checkups.** Often physicians can discover physical manifestations of stress that enable one to deal effectively with the tensions of stress.

- **Seek more information about wholistic ways to handle stress.** Contact the Wholistic Stress Control Institute to learn how to effectively manage the stress in your life.

### What is Burnout?

**Definition:**

- a condition that evolves slowly over a period of prolonged stress
- wearing down and wearing out of energy
- exhaustion born of excessive demands which may be self-imposed or externally imposed by families, jobs, friends, value systems or society which depletes one's energy, coping mechanism and internal resources.
- a feelings state which is accompanied by an overload of stress and which eventually impacts one's motivation, attitudes and behaviors.

**Occurs in stages:**

1. Intense compulsion to prove (strive for control)
2. Willingness to deprive self, avoid conflict and needs and sacrifice one's values
3. Denial, disengagement, observable behavior changes
4. Depersonalization, emptiness, depression
5. Total burnout and exhaustion

**Often accompanied by:**

- denial - estrangement from own feelings
- stress, anger, hostility, neglected needs
- guilt and low self-esteem

**People in this society are at risk when they are:**

- nurturing - anticipate the needs of others
- alone - need someone to fill us up
- powerless
- a perfectionist and workaholic
• struggling with their own power, autonomy and identity

Can be alleviated by:

• Making correct lifestyle choices including diet, exercise and relaxation methods and reducing harmful habits and addictions
• Developing and maintaining a social support system.
• Becoming absorbed in meaningful tasks.
• Learning to cope with stress