

STRESS

UNDERSTANDING AND DEALING WITH EVERYDAY STRESS

by William G. Schlake

WHAT STRESS IS...

Stress is an abnormal condition that disrupts the normal functions of the body or mind. No two people are affected in exactly the same way, or to the same degree, but most people living in our highly industrialized society suffer from its effects at one or more times during their lives. Symptoms range from mind headaches, occasional bouts of insomnia, overall restlessness, digestive problems, irritable bowel syndrome, constipation and diarrhea, and abdominal pain.

SELECTED LIFE EVENTS THAT CAN BRING ON STRESS:

Death of Spouse.

Death of a close family member.

Death of a close friend.

Major personal injury, illness or pregnancy.

Sexual molestation, drug abuse.

Major change in the health or behavior of a family member.

Gaining or losing a new family member.

Sexual difficulties.

Marital separation from mate.

Marriage, marital reconciliation, divorce.

Arguments with spouse, family members, friends, co-workers.

Changes in sleeping habits or change in part of day when asleep.

Vacations, Major holidays. In-law troubles.

Financing major purchases.

Beginning or ceasing formal schooling.

Change in usual type and or amount of recreation.

Change in outside social activities, religions, etc.

Major change in eating habits, living conditions, moving.

Spouse beginning or ceasing work outside the home.

Changing to a different line of work.

Major change in responsibilities at work.

Changes in working hours or conditions.

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Troubles with the boss.

Being fired at work.

Starting a new job or career.

Retirement from work.

Business readjustment, changes in financial condition.

Minor violations of the law (e.g., traffic tickets, disturbing the peace, etc.)

Detention in jail or other institution.

Dealing With Work Related Stress

Examples that can cause work related stress are trying to get too much work done in too little time, cutting corners or otherwise taking chances that may put you, or someone else at risk, and trying to get along with superiors and co-workers.

Everybody has days when there simply seems there's too much work to get done. Trying to get everything done by yourself can bring on stress. Some people try and deal with the pressure by delegating certain jobs to others. If you can unburden yourself and not worry about when and how the work gets done, if you can put full faith and trust in co-workers or subordinates it can be an effective escape valve. Trouble is, most people can't let go. If you have the type of personality that demands to know how things are going, chances are you're only increasing the pressure and stress on yourself by constantly worrying if the work is getting done or not.

To lessen stress you must either learn to trust others to get the job done, or prioritize jobs to get rid of "what must be done" first. Many people tend to "put off" the difficult jobs they hate to do until the last possible minute. Of course, this only makes it all the more difficult and stressful when you finally get around to doing what you should have done earlier.

When you feel the "walls closing in on you" if possible, take a break. Many people in trying to relax actually kick their bodies into overdrive by using their break time to either get a nicotine or caffeine fix. Instead of calming you down, both substances being stimulants speed up your body processes. You may think you're relaxing, but your blood pressure and heart are working harder.

Instead of coffee or cigarettes try a brief chat with friends, a short leisurely walk, even just looking out the window for a few

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minutes. Never take breaks, or eat lunch at your work station. The point of a break is to get away from whatever work you're doing. You can't get your mind off your work if you're chained to your work area.

Getting along with your co-workers and the boss can be more than a sore point. It can be something you learn to put up with, or it can turn into a festering wound that only gets worse with time. If you're having problems, get them out in the open. Most managers today at least have some training in dealing with personal problems. If you can't clear the air or have tried using all the company procedures to resolve a grievance, and you no longer enjoy your job, hate to go to work in the morning, or feel that the pressure is getting to be too much, it may be time to seriously consider a change.

STRESS AWAY FROM WORK

Anyone who's ever been stuck in a major traffic jam probably has seen the darker side of many people's personalities. It seems everyone is always in a hurry to either get, or go somewhere, and never seem to allow enough time for the everyday problems that are bound to crop up from time to time.

Banging on the steering wheel, laying on the horn, giving someone the "finger," or shooting a string of obscenities is only reacting to something that has already happened. You can't make the guy in front of you go any faster, or prevent someone from cutting you off. Accidents, road repairs, and just plain heavy traffic happens. Learn to deal with it or don't drive. If you must, at least change your route from time to time. Always allow plenty of time, and try and make all trips as pleasant as possible. You may not realize it, but how you act on your way to work, or on your way home will have either a positive or negative impact. Accept the fact that it's something you just have to get through so you may as well try and make the best of it.

Most people are smart enough to know that they should set some time aside to take it easy. If you participate in some sports activity, remember you're doing it to relax! While many people naturally have their competitive nature come to the surface when engaging athletics, don't lose sight of the fact you're

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participating to have fun. Don't get bent out of shape if you don't always win or otherwise play up to par. The whole point is to enjoy yourself and forget your everyday worries. Treat it as a night out with the "boys," or gals and relax!

Families can be as source of support, an oasis away from the everyday pressures or sometimes it's only a place to grab a few hours sleep and get back in the rat race. Your children, spouse, family members, in-laws can be a source of irritation at times. If someone is constantly doing something that really "bugs you," tell the offending person or persons and see if things can be straightened out before things get out of control.

A man's home (a woman's too) should indeed be a place to rest and relax. Many people find it helpful unwind by sharing the day's events with their loved ones. It should not develop into a daily routine, nor should you give a detailed blow by blow recap of the day's events, but when things go wrong, who better to talk to than your family? Holding things back, keeping it inside yourself, almost always does more harm than good and can affect not only your well-being but everyone else in your family as well. Talking things over is a great way to get rid of built up stress that many people overlook.

You should also be a good listener. Don't unload your problems and have no time for your mate's or children's problems. They may seem trivial to you, but they are real problems that need solving just like yours.

A great way to get rid of stress is, every once in a while, do something totally different and unexpected without any prior planning. Don't fall into a trap when you must do such and such thing a certain way, or at specific time or place. If you always put on a blue suit on Thursday, or go to an Italian restaurant on Tuesday, break the habit every once in a while. Even doing things you like can become stressful if you're stuck in the same old rut week after boring week.

Stress can best be managed by realizing what you can change about your life and knowing what you can't. Learn how to recognize the difference and you'll enjoy life more and be better able to deal the ups and downs that are part of everyone's life.

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MEASURING YOUR STRESS LEVEL

If you've been wondering what degree of stress you live under, here is a quick way to get a fair estimate. Dr. Thomas and Dr. Richard Rahe composed a table of events and the amount of stress they cause. The most interesting feature of this table is that the people they interviewed actually told them, how they could rate specific events for the stress they cause, so this is human rather than a medical appraisal of the degree of stress those events caused. As you get used to certain changes in your life, they become less stressful, so these ratings will not be entirely accurate for you. If, for example, you take a vacation only every five years, you might rate it a 25 instead of a 13. The common starting point used was a standard rate of 50 for marriage for all the people interviewed.

The combined total of both positive and negative stresses in the past few months will give you an idea of your current stress level. Keep in mind that people have varying stress-handling capacities and this table does not take into account such regular stresses as recreational drug use, alcoholism, chronic illness, allergy, battering and random stresses such as car accidents, contest winning to the dreaded tax audit. This is presented as information only and should not be used for diagnostic or treatment purposes.

EVENT

- Death of spouse	100	
- Divorce	73	
- Marital separation	65	
- Jail term	63	
- Death of a close family member	63	
- Personal Injury or illness	53	
- Marriage	50	
- Fired at work		47
- Marital reconciliation	45	
- Retirement		45
- Change In health of family member	44	
- Pregnancy		40
- Sexual difficulties	39	
- Addition of new family member		39

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- Business of adjustment		39	
- Change in financial status		38	
- Death of a close friend		37	
- Change to different line of work		36	
- Change in number of arguments with spouse		35	
- Mortgage over \$10,000			31
- Foreclosure of mortgage or loan		30	
- Change in job responsibilities	29		
- Son or daughter leaving home		29	
- Trouble with in-laws			29
- Outstanding personal achievement		28	
- Wife or husband begins or stops work		26	
- Beginning or end of school		26	
- Change in living conditions		25	
- Revision of personal habits		24	
- Trouble with boss		23	
- Change in work hours or conditions		20	
- Change in residence			20
- Change in school		20	
- Change in recreational activities		19	
- Change in church activities		19	
- Mortgage or loan under \$10,000		17	
- Change in sleeping habits		16	
- Change in number of family get-togethers		15	
- Change in eating habits		15	
- Vacation		13	
- Christmas			12
- Minor violations of the law		11	
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HOW TO OVERCOME KILLER STRESS

By Dr. John E. Russell

PAYDAY

It was November 30, 1991 - the date is firmly etched in my mind - we had returned from visiting a older friend. I took a shower, then became extremely nauseated - I don't ever remember being that ill - then tried to throw up, but was too sick to. I then headed for the front door to get some fresh air and became dizzy. I lay down on the floor to avoid passing out. Heart attack! came to mind - I may be dying. I asked my wife to call

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the ambulance. I prayed aloud, asking God to forgive my sins. I wanted to call my son in Tulsa, but there was not enough time. The ambulance crew arrived, along with two friends. One prayed aloud for me. The cool night air felt good.

Preliminary tests at ICU indicated a stomach virus, but the attending physician recommended further tests. There had been heart symptoms for about ten years, but I hadn't followed the doctor's advice for medical tests. I had noticed pain up into my neck during exertion, and a general heaviness in the chest area. There were times when my heartbeat would skip and I became winded easily.

My wife had suffered a stroke in 1986 and was later pronounced permanently disabled. To compound the situation, now we were under great financial stress. My mailorder business was not doing well financially, though I enjoyed it and it seemed tailor-made for our circumstances.

A resting EKG indicated that my heart was not getting enough oxygen. A stress ekg indicated some problem. Then, in January 1992, a heart catheterization indicated that I had not had a heart attack. I was placed on one aspirin per day and Cardizem, which is a heart and blood pressure medicine.

Stress was making me seriously ill. My family was very supportive, but stress agents were taking their toll. I had served as an Army Chaplain in Vietnam, and finished a military career in the Army Reserve, retiring a colonel in 1988. I had earned a BA, two masters degrees and a doctorate, taught in two colleges for a total of five and a half years, pastored for eleven years and spent about five years in school administration. At one time, I was teaching a full load at college, working on a doctorate and working on a reserve military career.

Things went to "zero." Children made me nervous. Crowds of people bothered me. I didn't want to go anywhere. Other physical problems began to surface. I looked for a pastorate and jobs, but didn't know if I could perform. Bankruptcy was put off until stress forced the issue - we filed for bankruptcy December 1992.

I had been effectively become a drug addict. No, I did not inject drugs in my veins or smoke or "snort" them. But, by worry

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and stress, I inadvertently had my brain command the adrenal gland to do so! Many of you are stressed-out, too. Learn from my bad experience, or you may not be so fortunate. Sometimes the first heart attack is the killer!

SHORT-TERM STRESS (FEAR)

God made a human being so that in case of real or imagined danger, the adrenal medulla (the inside part of the adrenal gland) produces adrenaline, a hormone, which is injected into the blood stream. Adrenaline produces an "acute alarm" reaction in the body. This acute reaction is generally short-term. The heart beats faster and blood pressure is raised. Blood is shunted from the stomach and skin to the muscles to provide physical strength for "fight or flight." High-energy fats are dumped into the bloodstream, blood sugar level rises, breathing quickens, eyes dilate and chemicals appear in the blood to clot blood rapidly in case of injury. This heightened condition may save one's life, but it is hard on the body.

LONG-TERM STRESS (WORRY)

When one perceives a real or imagined loss of control, the adrenal cortex (the outside part of the adrenal gland) produces cortisol, another hormone, which is injected in the blood stream. Cortisol produces a "vigilance reaction" in the body. This is a chronic reaction - a long term state. Blood pressure rises slowly, body tissues retain sodium and other vital chemicals. High-energy fats and blood-clotting chemicals are released into the blood stream. Sex hormones are repressed. Gastric acid production is increased to maximize digestion. The immune system is repressed, making one more susceptible to disease.

WORRY-INDUCED ILLNESS

Both conditions can trigger a heart attack. Excess stomach acid can cause ulcers, Atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and continued high blood pressure can result due to continued stress. In short, fear, anxiety, overconcern and worry causes the brain to command the adrenal gland to inject strong

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chemicals into the blood stream. These chemicals act as a poison over a period of time.

Dr. S. I. McMillen discloses,

Emotional stress can cause high blood pressure, toxic goiter, migraine headaches, arthritis, apoplexy (cardiovascular accident or stroke), heart trouble, gastrointestinal ulcers, and other serious diseases too numerous to mention.

Dr. Carl Jung was the first to teach that the cause of schizophrenia was a toxin injurious to the brain - said toxin being formed by emotional disturbance, especially anxiety.

In short, worry or anxiety can cause physical and mental illness.

THE WAY BACK

One by one, with the help of God and others, I worked on each stress agent. A program of walking, diet and medicine is helping. I recommend two excellent resource books to help overcome killer stress.

One of the best medical resources for stress management is Dr. Robert S. Eliot's book, *Is It Worth Dying For? How to Make Stress Work for You - Not Against You*. Dr. Eliot experienced a heart attack himself, and now directs the Institute of Stress Medicine in Denver and serves as Professor of Cardiology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Another classic book on managing stress and preventing other illnesses is Dr. S. I. McMillen's book, *None of These Diseases*.

Now is the time to act! Read and heed these timely books! See a physician if there are serious symptoms present.

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