

How Stress Affects You Physically

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CHRONIC STRESS

can lead to **heart disease, depression** and **obesity** if left untreated.

Source: American Psychological Association

National Stress Awareness Month



CENTERSTONE

WEST FRANKFORT– We know what goes on in our minds when we feel stressed. For some, stressful situations are met with thoughts about the worst possible outcome. For others, stress boosts motivation, helping them focusing on important deadlines or getting housework done. It is normal to experience stress in response to situations.

But what about when stress becomes chronic? According to Courtney Weiler, Clinic Manager for Centerstone, “When we experience chronic stress, we might find ourselves mentally and physically exhausted, unable to concentrate, feeling depressed or having increased anxiety. We might not have the capacity to deal with what comes at us and feel like shutting it all out.” Stress can also go beyond this mental turmoil and into physical problems.

Physical impacts of stress

There are several physical conditions that can be impacted by stress. Some common issues include muscle tension, headaches, heartburn, increased blood pressure, rapid breathing and insomnia.

When stress is more chronic, more serious issues can occur, such as type 2 diabetes, heart attack, strokes, weakened immune systems (and subsequently more infections) and fertility problems. Chronic stress can also impact behaviors such as alcohol consumption and overeating, which may lead to more problems.

Signs that stress is affecting you

When you face new challenges, stress is not the first reason that usually comes to mind. You may notice that you are experiencing exhaustion, increased muscle tension, headaches and problems sleep without understanding why. When you realize these new symptoms are affecting you, it may be time to take stock of what is going on in your life.

As change is a common stressor, ask yourself if you are dealing with any changes in your job, family or elsewhere. Courtney Weiler says, “We’ve all been living through a pandemic for the first time, which has caused many disruptions to our routine and daily life. Sometimes we go through our days so quickly that the impact of stress hit us all at once.”

Processing stress

A helpful starting point for processing stress is talking about what is bothering you and how you are feeling. You can do this with a trusted friend, family member or professional counselor. Talking to them will help you process your own thoughts on your stress and will provide an opportunity for them to share their viewpoint to help even more.

Because you cannot avoid stressors, what's important is that you actually manage your stressors and learn coping strategies. There are several activities you can put your time into and changes you can make that can help you manage your stress and feel better physically and mentally.

- Exercising and being physically active
- Cooking
- Listening to music
- Crafting
- Playing with your children
- Meditating
- Saying no and setting boundaries with work and relationships
- Set a consistent sleeping routine

As you adopt these behaviors, take note of how you feel before, during and after. Exercise mindfulness at all steps and see how these strategies help you manage your stress.

If you feel you need professional help managing stress, Centerstone is here to help. Call us at 1-877-HOPE123 or visit centerstoneconnect.org to connect with care.