

Area 6-Health

How Stress Affects Health

We all struggle with stress from time to time, but for some, it's a constant problem. It is important to understand the toll stress can have on our overall health. We need to identify our own stress triggers, understand the effects stress has on our health mentally, physically, and socially and learn how to reduce stress in helpful ways such as exercise, diet, and mindfulness.

Mandy Gray
Gray89@purdue.edu
Hancock County
Area 6
317-462-1113

What is Stress?

- Stress is simply your body's way of protecting you
- Stress is how your body responds to threats or demands, real or imagined
- Your nervous system responds by flooding your body with stress hormones, cortisol, and adrenaline
- Causes tight muscles, blood pressure elevation, quicker breathing, and sharper senses
- Left untreated, stress can lead to more serious heart problems such as high blood pressure, heart disease, obesity, and diabetes.
- Often stress can cause symptoms that seem like an illness, however, stress is the culprit

Causes of Internal Stress

- Pessimism
- Negative self-talk
- Perfectionism
- All or nothing attitude

Causes of External Stress

- Major life changes
- Work or school
- Relationship difficulties
- Being too busy
- Financial problems
- Children and family

Stress effects on your body

- Headaches
- Muscle tension or pain
- Chest pain
- Stomach upset

Stress effects on mood

- Anxiety
- Restlessness
- Lack of motivation or focus
- Irritability or anger
- Sadness or depression

Stress effects on behavior

- Overeating or undereating
- Angry outbursts
- Drug or alcohol misuse
- Tobacco use
- Social withdrawal
- Exercising less often

Warning Signs of Stress

- Cognitive symptoms-memory problems, inability to concentrate, poor judgment, seeing only the negative, anxious, or racing thoughts, and constant worrying.
- Emotional symptoms-depression or general unhappiness, anxiety/agitation, moodiness/irritability/anger, feeling overwhelmed, loneliness and isolation.
- Physical symptoms-aches and pains, diarrhea/constipation, nausea/dizziness, chest pain/rapid heart rate, loss of sex drive, frequent colds, or flu. •
- Behavioral symptoms-eating more/eating less, sleeping too much or too little, withdrawing from others, procrastinating, neglecting responsibilities, using alcohol/cigarettes/drugs to relax, and nervous habits (nail biting, pacing).

Solutions

- Say no more often
- Eat a balanced diet (eat a rainbow of colors)
- Get enough sleep (8 hours)
- Exercise (move more, shoot for 30 min/day)
- Laugh more
- Relax/Meditate
- Prayer
- Self-Care
- Drink water (8 glasses/day)
- Mindfulness

How to Practice Mindfulness

1

Take a seat. Find a place to sit that feels calm and quiet to you.

2

Set a time limit. If you're just beginning, it can help to choose a short time, such as 5 or 10 minutes.

3

Notice your body. You can sit or kneel however is comfortable for you. Just make sure you are stable and in a position, you can stay in for a while.

4

Feel your breath. Follow the sensation of your breath as it goes out and as it goes in.

5

Notice when your mind has wandered. When you get around to noticing this—in a few seconds, a minute, five minutes—simply return your attention to the breath.

6

Be kind to your wandering mind. Don't judge yourself or obsess over the content of the thoughts you find yourself lost in. Just come back.



References

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