

THE COUNSELOR

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Life is full of problems. We cannot escape this world's frustrations, disappointments, inconveniences, and hardships. New jobs, layoffs, mergers, holidays, vacations, marriage difficulties, divorce, illnesses, personal injuries, deaths, changes in residence and schools, money problems, flat tires and traffic jams, are only a few events that create stress. It is estimated that stress-related illnesses cost industry and businesses between \$50 to \$70 billion a

year. Stress is a major contributor, directly and indirectly, to coronary heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidental injuries, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide. These illnesses and problems are 6 of the leading causes of death in the United States. Two-thirds of office visits to family doctors are prompted by stress-related symptoms.

McCubbin (1983) defines stress, as our body's physical and emotional reaction to circumstances or events that scare, aggravate, confuse, excite, or endanger us. We are bio-psycho-social creatures. Thus, stress is a bio-psycho-social event

(Brown 1996). The word "stress" itself can refer to life circumstances that are maximally taxing, such as a high pressure job; our psychological and emotional responses to such circumstances, as in anxiety, worry, and hyperactivity; and the physiological responses our bodies make to accommodate these situations, such as increased

heart rate, sweating, upset stomach, and muscle tension. Stress is the continuing interaction of these three realms of our being. Stress can come in

the form of pressure from the outside that can make us feel tense on the inside. Stress usually involves having to adjust to some change. Not all stress is bad. A certain amount of tension or stress is necessary to keep us active and alive.

Too many changes over a short time cause stress and illness. We cannot escape change. Many drastic changes often result in harmful tension. Stress becomes very unhealthy when it persists over a long time with no intermissions. Chronic stress can lead to physical, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion.

STRESS



REACTION & SYMPTOMS

Stressful events or situations for one person may not be stressful for someone else. One's view of events as stressful depends on several factors. A person's reaction to stress depends on the meaning they attach to the situation; the resources they have available to cope with a crisis; their past experiences with stress; the amount of control they feel; and the number of stressful events that have occurred during the past two years. When stress accumulates, the stress symptoms become more severe as we experience more than one stressful event. For example, research suggests that most people require several years to recover from a divorce. During the adjustment period, if another crisis occurs such as the death of a close family member, stress may accumulate greatly.

A person experiencing a stressful situation may experience any or all of the following.

Stress Symptoms

- Crying
- Depression
- Increased smoking
- Drug/alcohol misuses
- Dry mouth/throat
- Grind teeth
- Nail biting
- Back tightens up/ache
- Restlessness, fidgeting
- Withdrawn from people
- Aggression
- Boredom
- Can't concentrate
- Sleep or go to bed to escape
- Inability to sleep
- Headaches
- Dizziness
- Face feels hot, flushed
- Loss of appetite
- Neck/shoulders tighten up/ache
- Heart beats faster
- Hands and/or feet feel cold or sweaty
- Heartburn
- Stomach upset/nausea
- Cramps
- Increased urination/defecation
- Diarrhea
- Legs get shaky or tighten up
- Tapping fingers/feet

Some of the most common emotional and spiritual symptoms of stress include irritability, anxiety, depression, excessive anger, disillusionment, cynicism, and bitterness. The top ten stress producing events according to Holmes and Rahe (1976) on their Life Change Scale are: death of a spouse; divorce; marital separation; jail term; death of a close family member; personal injury; marriage; fired from work; marital reconciliation; and retirement.

DIFFERENT TYPES OF STRESS

Stress from Worry - Most people worry about something much of the time. Bills, money, job security, finding a mate, staying married, children's safety, stock market, etc.

Stress from Work - Satisfying or dissatisfying work can be stressful. Excessive workload, unreasonable boss, monotonous work, job insecurity, performance pressure, and dissatisfaction create stress.

Stress from Failure - Our society places a tremendous premium and pressure on success. From Little League Baseball on we are told to win at all costs. Success is rewarded and failure is punished.

Stress from Conflict - An inevitable fact of life. Conflict causes tension, and emotional anguish. We must deal with it in order to remain healthy.

Stress from Burnout - The state of physical, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual exhaustion. This is epidemic in the helping professions. No one is immune from burnout. It comes on so gradually that we usually don't recognize it until we are too worn down to stop it.

Stress from Loss - Physical and emotional effects of losing someone or something. Usually involves feeling helpless or loss of control. Typically includes some form of anxiety or depression. Impacts everyone.

STRESS BUSTERS

There are ways to reduce and manage stress in your life. Consider the following suggestions. Accept responsibility for your health and well being. Listen to your body. Look for symptoms you feel when you are stressed. Learn to recognize these signals and take preventive steps to reduce stress-related conditions. Identify and analyze your current stressors. Look at what's causing your stress. What resources do you have for managing it? Determine your plan of action and carry it out. Change the situations that can be changed. Have a positive attitude. Accept

that your lifestyle produces stress and that you can control unwanted after effects. Accept what you cannot change. Discuss stressful situations as a family. Work together to develop family coping skills and increase family strengths. Set priorities and goals as a family. Clarify family members' roles and responsibilities. Accept responsibility for your own feelings. You choose the way you feel. Be realistic in your expectations of yourself. Avoid too many life changes in a short period of time. Talk about your problems with someone you trust. A stressed person needs someone to listen to them, to support them, and to allow them to express their feelings. Improve your time management skills. Begin a regular exercise program.

Exercise should be aerobic at least 4 times a week for a minimum of 20 minutes. Brisk

walking, swimming, jogging, rowing, cycling, and aerobic dance provide excellent exercise. Learn to relax. Relaxation techniques include deep breathing, creative escape, and self-talk. Remember, worry is debilitating, futile and takes time and energy. Most of what we worry about will never happen. Strike a healthy balance with work. Take breaks, walks, and rest. Avoid overdoing it, don't burn out. Realize that failure is a natural part of life, accept it and let it motivate you to do your best. Learn from your failures. Conflict is an inevitable fact of life. Identify the problem and source. Conflict may be undesirable but it often leads to improved relationships, problem-solving, and self-confidence, when you commit to resolve conflicts.

VICTORY OVER STRESS

As Christians we have the ultimate source of victory over stress - God. We will struggle, fail, fall down, lose, and have trouble in this world. Jesus guaranteed it (John 16:33). He overcome the world. That's the Good News! In Christ, we can endure and overcome all the problems, difficulties, and stress this world offers. Use adversity to strengthen you and "consider it pure joy when you face trials of many kinds" (James 1:2). Adversity develops perseverance and endurance, and ultimately victory over stress in Christ. His grace is sufficient. His power is made strong in our weakness. Develop a faith perspective that clearly sees God as ultimately in control of all matters. God is all-knowing and powerful. Perceiving and experiencing life as threatening, unmanageable, and out of control, is inconsistent with the Christian faith perspective. Develop an increasingly Christian value system and take some things less seriously when compared to our view

of eternity and God's Kingdom. We do not have to be helpless victims of stress producing situations, people, and circumstances. We have been given an inner ability by God to handle the external pressures of life. When we consciously surrender our stresses to Christ, giving them all to Him (1 Peter 5:7), He uses them for our growth and His glory. The Apostle Paul stated "For our present troubles are small and won't last long. For the troubles we see will soon be over. But the joys to come will last forever" (2 Corin. 5:16-18). Laugh a lot and encourage your friends and family to laugh as well. A cheerful heart is good medicine. Parents, teachers, counselors, and clergy, show your children, students, and flock by example how to deal with stress in a Godly manner. Everyone experiences stress. Issues vary from one age group to another, but stress affects us all. Stay close to God and live each day in joyful anticipation. Let God guide and equip you to have victory in all areas of your life, especially over stress. Hold on to what you believe.

F.Y.I.

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SPEAKING ENGAGEMENTS

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- 5/8 - The Early Adolescent Years
 First Presbyterian Church - Houston
- 5/22 - Working with Youth -
 Trust and Boundaries
 Youth Pastors Forum - KSBJ
- 6/10 KSBJ Volunteer Training