

THE **STRESS** HEALTH CONNECTION



Stress is frequently considered an unavoidable side-effect of today's busy world. We know it can ruin a good mood or good day, but what is becoming of greatest concern is the fact that it may also be **ruining our health**.

There are many different sources of stress. **In the workplace**, layoffs, cut-backs and bankruptcies create tension and stress that grow as employers are demanding more results from fewer people in less time. **At home**, kids, spouse and career may make conflicting demands on our time, causing further stress and increasing danger of contracting stress-related illnesses.

Stress is a major contributor to heart disease, one of this country's leading causes of death. Stress elevates blood pressure, speeds up breathing and increases the amount of adrenaline flowing through our bodies. *Prolonged stress* keeps the body in a constant state of tension and excitement, forcing the heart to work harder.

There is also growing evidence that **stress interferes with immune system functioning**. When the body is under stress, its supply of **natural killer (NK)** cells is reduced. Since these cells are an important part of the body's defense against infection, the fewer of them you have, the greater your chances of becoming ill.

It shouldn't surprise us that stress-related illnesses often follow traumatic events such as a divorce or job loss. What may be surprising is that **positive events can also contribute to illness**. Drs. Thomas Holmes and Richard Rahe theorized that it is *the amount of change required by an event rather than the change itself* that causes ill health. They developed a scale of 43 stressful Life Events, both "positive" and "negative" that they used to predict illness in people.

Marriage, retirement, and promotions or other outstanding career achievements are among the top 25 illness-producing stressors. Even though they are happy events, they require a lot of change and adaptation, which produces stress and eventually may cause a stress-related illness.

You can reduce the chances of stress harming your health by paying attention to physical warning signals, such as:

- Extreme or chronic fatigue
- Constant tension headaches
- Frequent colds or infections
- Persistent stomach trouble
- Recurrent skin problems
- Repeated minor accidents (stress can lower concentration and disrupt attention. Research shows clear links between stress and increased physical injuries).

You can also help avoid illness by changing your point of view. **Unhealthy thinking patterns create or increase illness-producing stress**. Dr. Sam Klarreich suggests protecting your body by replacing old attitudes with healthier ways of thinking like these. ..

Mistakes are O.K. Viewing mistakes as learning experiences rather than failures reduces the amount of stress they cause.

Approval comes from within. Letting other people judge your worth and performance is stressful. It's *your* opinion of yourself that *truly* counts.

Perfect ≠ happy. Everything doesn't come at once. Concentrate on what you have rather than what's not there.

Change can be good. Focus on the opportunities that change brings instead of the disruption it causes.

HelpPeopleSM
Employee Assistance Program

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