



Some Simple Facts About Stress and Coping

Stress is the mental, physical and chemical reaction of our bodies to events or experiences that frighten, excite, confuse, endanger or irritate us. This stress reaction is a normal function of the body. It helps to protect us from danger by preparing the body to react quickly to fight/flee from a dangerous situation. Specifically, your body prepares itself to fight off or flee from an attacking animal. Adrenaline and other hormones are pumped into the blood stream while the heart, muscles, brain and lungs prepare to react to the stressful situation. Normally, the stress reaction lasts for only a short time. If the challenge is resolved or the person effectively deals with stress, the body resumes its state of equilibrium (i.e. returns to its normal state).

Stress is present in our everyday lives. Any event which produces bodily changes is called a "stressor." A stressor can be a person or an event in your environment such as a person attempting to snatch your purse, your misbehaving child or your ill-tempered supervisor at work. A stressor can be a change in your physical condition such as an infection. A stressor can also be a thought that you have such as worrying over something that happened in the past or the uneasy feelings that you have when you are about to meet your boyfriend's parents for the first time.

Everyone has experienced and coped with a variety of stressors that are present in our daily lives. The notion that all stress is bad is a major misconception. Most authorities agree that a certain amount of stress is beneficial to us, since it tends to make our lives more interesting and exciting and seems to help us put forth our best effort. However, too much stress can be harmful. When we have to cope with too many sources of stress at one time, or have to cope with the same stress over an extended period of time, we may develop physical and/or emotional symptoms. These symptoms, in effect, are warning signals which alert us to the fact that we are under stress and unable to resolve the situation and/ or find more effective methods to relieve ourselves of this stress. In addition, these symptoms, in effect, are warning signals, which alert us to the fact that we are under stress and are unable to resolve the situation and / or relieve ourselves of this stress. These symptoms are indicative of our need to develop and / or find more effective methods to relieve the stress we are experiencing.

Scientists have been able to measure stress using precise laboratory tests, including blood pressure readings, assessment of hormone levels in the bloodstream and measurements of brain activity. However, there are many additional symptoms of stress that you can recognize as well; they include, but are not limited to, the following:

1. An overall sense of depression or nervousness
2. The urge to cry or laugh without reason
3. Irrational behavior
4. Excessive focus and anxiety
5. Heart problems, pounding or racing heart
6. Insomnia, grinding teeth, profuse sweating, frequent urination, diarrhea, upset stomach
7. Lower back pain