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HOW STRESS HARMS YOUR PHYSICAL AND PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

A substantial amount of research has been devoted to the study of psychosocial characteristics and their relations with stress and health. Although early studies focused on the effects of differential exposures to stress, researchers soon realised that substantial gains in understanding the relation could be obtained by taking into account systematic differences in vulnerability to the impact of stress. Stress has become one of America's leading health concerns.

In fact, recent research performed by the American Psychological Association shows that 51 percent of women and 43 percent of men in America experience negative side effects of chronic stress. In order to combat the very real physical effects of stress, experts recommend a number of lifestyle changes to reduce the symptoms of chronic stress for Americans. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, stress can be defined as "the brain's response to any demand.

Stress can affect your physical health, your mental health, and your behavior. In response to stressful stimuli, your body turns on its biological response. Chemicals and hormones are released that are meant to help your body rise to the challenge. Your heart rate increases, your brain works faster, you have more focus, and you experience a sudden burst of energy. According to Antonovsky, stressors in people's lives are endemic, ubiquitous, and open ended (positive or negative).

The National Institutes of Health indicates that there are three main types of stress, each carrying varying risks to your health.

1. Routine stress comes with the pressures of day-to-day life.
2. Stress brought about by an unexpected changes.
3. Traumatic stress, which occurs in a large, life altering event.

The body responds to each of the three types of stress in similar ways, but this manifests itself in each person differently. Common symptoms of stress include: headaches, upset stomach, elevated blood pressure, chest pain, lack of

motivation, change in appetite, anger or irritability, difficulty sleeping, increased risk of developing viral infections. In fact, the impacts of chronic stress, however, are much more severe, as those sometimes life-saving responses to stressors have an impact on other systems.

Digestive system: Under stress, your liver produces extra blood sugar to give you a boost of energy. Stress can also affect the way food moves through your body, leading to diarrhea or constipation.

Muscular system: Your muscles tense up to protect themselves from injury when you're stressed. They tend to release again once you relax.

Reproductive system: While short-term stress may cause men to produce more of the male hormone testosterone, this effect doesn't last.

Immune system: over time, stress hormones will weaken your immune system and reduce your body's response to foreign invaders. People under chronic stress are more susceptible to viral illnesses like the flu and the common cold. Stress hormones affect your respiratory and cardiovascular systems. If you already have a breathing problem like asthma or emphysema, stress can make it even harder to breathe. Under stress, your heart also pumps faster. Stress hormones cause your blood vessels to constrict and divert more oxygen to your muscles so you'll have more strength to take action.

In conclusion, stress is essential for survival. The chemicals it triggers help us to cope with difficulty, but too much stress can cause health problems. The effects of stress often manifest themselves over a long period of time. Common symptoms of stress: headaches, irritability, bad sleep mode and pain chain. Left untreated, the side effects associated with chronic stress can become severe, leading to unhealthy coping habits, mental health disorders, or the development of other chronic conditions. As such, adopting proactive and practical approaches to manage and cope with stress is an important practice for everyone.