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## How to describe stress levels

The extent to which stress impacts our lives is hard to fathom. This is more true than ever in the face of the COVID-19 crisis. In fact, 78% of American adults say the coronavirus pandemic is a significant source of stress in their lives. Although levels of stress have increased globally in the past few years, the conversation around stress is growing. And with this growing conversation comes more insight into the causes of stress and how we experience stress differently. You may think of stress as simply a feeling of being overwhelmed. But there are different types of stress, each with its own physical and mental consequences. Let's explore the different types of stress, their causes, and what you can do to fight them. Effective stress management begins with recognizing the specific types of stress affecting you. What is stress? Stress is our psychological and physiological reaction to an event or condition that is considered a threat or challenge. We most commonly refer to stress as a feeling of emotional pressure and strain when we feel unable to cope or are overwhelmed by something. When we experience stress, our bodies react by releasing a surge of chemicals and hormones throughout our bodies. This triggers the fight-or-flight response that many of us are familiar with. But it also affects numerous other systems within us, including our metabolism, memory, and immune system. Under normal circumstances, our mental, emotional, and physical state should return to normal once the stressful event has passed. This is where our mental fitness comes into play. While small amounts of positive stress can help us perform better, the key is that this stress is brief. Acute and prolonged stress may lead to long-term health problems and exacerbate existing conditions. What causes stress? There are many different causes of stress, and each one will affect us differently. Here are some of the most common reasons we experience stress. 1. Financial obligations Not being able to meet financial obligations is a big stressor for a lot of people. Particularly in the wake of COVID-19, where many people faced either reduced earnings or no earnings at all. Some situations that might cause financial stress include: The inability to pay your bills Losing your job Long-term unemployment Increasing debt 2. Death of a loved one Most of us have experienced the devastating emotional impact of the passing of a loved one. For many of us, it is not only grief that we feel. As well as the stress from a major loss, some people experience a mix of other emotions like loneliness, disappointment, and even anger. 3. Job loss The loss of a job is not just about the loss of income. Very often, it causes our self-confidence to take a knock as well. In some cases, being stressed and unable to find work for a long period of time can lead to job search depression. Feeling hopeless about your job prospects and career path can further exacerbate high stress levels. 4. Traumatic events Traumatic events like natural disasters and car accidents are often completely out of our control. These kinds of unpredictable and unforeseen events naturally create a lot of stress and even post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for those that experience them. 5. Problems at work In today's increasingly fast-paced world, many of us feel the brunt of performance pressure. We feel that we constantly have to do more at work to keep our jobs. This compounds with the increase in time pressure that most of us feel from today's near-instantaneous communications. As a consequence of this constant stress, many of us suffer from burnout. 6. Emotional well-being struggles All of us are subject to low moods and experience worry. But these emotional states can lead to chronic stress without the right emotional regulation skills. In turn, this can develop into anxiety and depression. 7. Relationship issues While all relationships create stress, many of the stressors are relatively mild and easily dealt with. It is the larger issues within relationships, such as divorce or an unhappy marriage, that produce a lot of stress for the people involved. What are the types of stress? While there are many different kinds of stress, based on research studies about the types of stress in psychology, stress can be divided into three primary types: 1. Acute stress Acute stress results from your body's reaction to a new or challenging situation. It's that feeling you get from an approaching deadline or when you narrowly avoid being hit by a car. We can even experience it as a result of something we enjoy. Like an exhilarating ride on a roller coaster or an outstanding personal achievement. Acute stress is classified as short-term. Usually, emotions and the body return to their normal state relatively soon. 2. Episodic acute stress Episodic acute stress is when acute stresses happen on a frequent basis. This can be because of repeatedly tight work deadlines. It can also be because of the frequent high-stress situations experienced by some professionals, such as healthcare workers. With this type of stress, we don't get time to return to a relaxed and calm state. And the effects of the high-frequency acute stresses accumulate. It often leaves us feeling like we are moving from one crisis to another. 3. Chronic stress Chronic stress is the result of stressors that continue for a long period of time. Examples include living in a high-crime neighborhood or constantly fighting with your life partner. This type of stress feels never-ending. We often have difficulty seeing any way to improve or change the situation that is the cause of our chronic stress. Symptoms of stress Stress can affect many aspects of your health and well-being, even though you might not realize it. Here are some signs and symptoms of each type of stress. Acute stress 1. Pupil dilation. As part of the fight-or-flight reaction, our pupils dilate to allow more light to enter the eyes and enable us to see our surroundings more clearly. 2. Heart rate increases. This is another part of the fight-or-flight reaction that can be disconcerting if it feels like heart palpitations. 3. Perspiration. When we are stressed, our body temperature rises, which causes us to sweat more. 4. Fast and heavy breathing. This symptom is also part of the fight-or-flight reaction. This aims to introduce more oxygen into the body's systems so it can more effectively react to stress. 5. Anxiety. This is the feeling of worry and fear that results from exposure to a stressor. 6. Emotional ups and downs. In other words, irritability and swings in the emotions that we experience. 7. Poor sleep. Our sleep is often disrupted by our anxiety and the cocktail of hormones produced by the fight-or-flight reaction. 8. Poor concentration. This symptom is a consequence of stress hormones and chemicals released into the body by the fight-or-flight response. Episodic acute stress 1. Muscle tension. This is meant to help our body guard against injury and pain. When exposed to episodic acute stressors, our muscles don't get the opportunity to relax. 2. Poor concentration. More pronounced than with acute stress, you may also notice increased difficulty with memory and recall. 3. Feeling overwhelmed. This is the feeling of not being able to cope nor able to visualize effective solutions to the causes of your stress. 4. Uncontrolled anger and irritability. We find ourselves lashing out more often and with less provocation. We may also find ourselves reacting strongly to things that normally we would tolerate. 5. Migraines. These are often the result of muscle tension. The frequency and severity of migraines are likely to increase under episodic acute stress. 6. Hypertension. A majority of people will be unaware of having high blood pressure. The only reliable way to detect hypertension is to have your blood pressure measured by a health professional. Chronic stress 1. Weight gain. This is often the result of "stress eating," but it can also result from long-term hormonal imbalances caused by chronic stress. 2. Heightened levels of adrenaline and cortisol. Long-term effects of heightened levels of adrenaline and cortisol can affect memory and digestion. They can also suppress the immune system. 3. Insomnia. Difficulty in falling and staying asleep, often resulting in not feeling rested from whatever sleep you did get. 4. Panic attacks. Sudden onset of feelings of fear and anxiety accompanied by the symptoms of acute stress. 5. Feelings of helplessness. Feeling that you are not able to do anything to help yourself or improve your situation. 6. Chronic headaches. Frequently occurring tension headaches, generally defined as occurring more than 15 days in a month. 7. Emotional fatigue. This manifests as feeling tired a majority of the time, irrespective of the type of rest you're getting or sleep. 6 consequences of stress It should be noted that some stress, if effectively dealt with, is fine. It is unlikely to result in long-term negative effects on your health and well-being. But chronic stress can result in serious health problems, such as: 1. Anxiety disorders Anxiety disorders can manifest as an inability to control our emotional responses to situations. These disorders often involve persistent fear and worry that hinder our ability to function in daily life. The high-stress state that accompanies panic disorders also has serious long-term consequences for physical health. Panic attacks, panic disorder, and PTSD are all types of anxiety disorders. 2. Depression Depression often presents as persistent feelings of helplessness and low self-worth. It saps us of our motivation, vitality, and creativity. Depression is often associated with losing interest or pleasure in previously enjoyed activities. Major Depressive Disorder (MDD) also affects our thinking, feelings, and behavior. It hinders our ability to function in daily life. 3. Burnout Burnout is the consequence of chronic stress that results in feelings of mental, emotional, and physical exhaustion. It is often accompanied by self-doubt and a feeling of detachment from the world with an increasingly negative outlook. 4. Digestive problems Stress can affect the speed with which food moves through our intestines. This can cause several digestive conditions, such as: Irritable bowel syndrome Inflammatory bowel disease Ulcers It has been shown that stress can weaken our intestinal barrier, thereby compromising our immune system. 5. Heart disease When chronic stress results in prolonged periods of heightened adrenaline and cortisol levels, there can be serious consequences for your heart. High blood pressure can result in the hardening of the arteries. This requires the heart to work harder while getting less blood and oxygen. 6. Obesity and disordered eating Some people binge or stress eat as a result of high stress levels rather than practice intuitive eating. When this happens over longer periods of time, it can result in obesity, related health conditions, and eating disorders. Other people experiencing chronic stress eat less, which can result in undernourishment. What you can do to fight stress Let's look at different types of stress management activities you can do to make stress work for you. 1. Exercise Engaging in regular physical exercise is an excellent way to help manage your stress. Ideally, you should aim for at least 30 minutes of exercise five times a week. Whether that's taking a walk in nature or doing a virtual workout like yoga, getting your body moving has many benefits for the mind and body, and soul. 2. Utilize mindfulness Mindfulness and meditation are relaxation techniques that can be practiced anywhere. Focused, deep breathing promotes self-awareness and can reduce the effects of stress and worry. 3. Try therapy and coaching Professional therapy and coaching can help us develop stress management techniques. Seeking professional help also helps us uncover the underlying causes of our chronic stress. 4. Time management Effective time management is about finding the right work-life balance. Good time management provides us with time to do positive, nurturing things for ourselves. 5. Spend time in nature Spending time in nature can be very therapeutic. In addition to fresh air and sunlight, this self-care practice provides an excellent space for us to slow down. 6. Eat healthily Maintaining a nutritious diet ensures that we are getting the right nutrients and enough water to promote our physical and mental health. A healthy diet can improve and help stabilize our moods. 7. Spend time with friends and family By maintaining our social connections with close friends and family, we develop a support network. This social well-being can help us identify and manage stress. 8. Practice sleep hygiene Good sleep hygiene includes making sure that your bedroom is comfortable and conducive to sleep. We can improve our sleep hygiene by maintaining a stable sleep schedule and building good habits that get us ready for bed. Using a sleep tracker is another innovative way to track your sleep and optimize your sleep patterns. Or better yet, you can invest in a stress tracker that can both detect stress and monitor your sleep cycle. Know which types of stress need professional help Stress is a recurring condition within our lives. But it doesn't need to become a long-term problem. Don't be too hard on yourself. By looking for ways to reduce our stress, developing good habits and stress management techniques, we can reduce the chances of suffering from the long-term health impacts of stress. If you feel that you can't manage your stress or stress-related symptoms, it's important to obtain professional help. Learn more about how BetterUp's expert coaches can help you. Don't let stress get the better of you.





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