

Stress as real threat

Sun Star Bacolod · 14 Dec 2020 · 4

ARE YOU stressed out? High-tech 21st century living is full of hassles, frustrations, demands, and deadlines, much more with the pandemic. Stress is more than coping with these givens of modern living. Stress for many, especially the poor is finding money for the next meal, for what used to be the middle class, securing once job or business to maintain the level of living they have been accustomed to.

For many people, particularly urban dwellers, stress is so common that it has become a way of life. Yet stress is not always bad. In small doses, it can help us perform under pressure and motivate us to do our best. Still, when we are constantly running in emergency mode, our mind and body pay the price. We can protect our selves by recognizing the signs and symptoms of stress and taking steps to reduce its harmful effects.

What is stress?

It is primarily our body's response when we face a crisis—a life-threatening situation, whether mere perception or real, our nervous system responds by releasing a flood of stress hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones activate the body for emergency action: our hearts pound faster, muscles tighten, blood pressures rise, breath quickens, and our senses become sharper. These physical changes increase our strength and stamina, speed our reaction time, and enhance our focus – preparing us to either fight or flee from the perceived danger.

Normally, stress is a set of physical response to events that make us feel threatened or upset our balance in some way. In such an in stance, the body's defenses are goaded into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the “fight-or-flight” reaction—that is, the stress response.

Stress helps us stay focused, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save our lives – giving us extra strength to defend ourselves. For instance, when threatened with a vehicular accident, stress can spur us to slam on the brakes of our car to avoid it.

The stress response also helps us rise to meet challenges. Stress is what keeps us on our toes during an important presentation. It sharpens our concentration when for instance, we are attempting to win a game winning free throw, or drives us to press on even in the face of stiff competition in business.

Still, beyond the normative stage, stress ceases to be helpful and can start to cause major damages. Beyond the tip ping point, our health, mood, productivity, relationships, and quality of life will be significantly affected.

We need to learn how to recognize when our stress levels have gone beyond control. Stress can easily overwhelm us. Repeatedly faced with fight or flee response, we can actually get used to it. We will not even notice how much it is affecting us. Stress can start to feel 'normal', though it is taking a heavy toll on us. Our mind, body, and behavior are affected in many ways, but every one experiences it differently.

How much stress is too much?

Because of the wide spread damage stress can cause, it's important to know our own limits. But just how much stress is "too much" differs from person to person. Some people roll with the punches, while others crumble at the slightest obstacle or frustration. Some people even seem to thrive on the excitement and challenge of a high-stress lifestyle. Our ability to tolerate stress depends on many factors, including the quality of our relationships, our general outlook on life, our emotional intelligence, and genetics. The signs and symptoms of stress overload and helpful tips on how to avoid being stressed out or being burnout will be discussed in my succeeding article for this column.*