



■ Dr Aju Abraham

Manage your Stress

Most of you would recognise stress as an integral part of your life in this modern society. However, more often than not, you do not recognise its presence until it has caused significant problems in your life. Stress often leads to the feeling of physical and mental exhaustion with an inability to manage your situation effectively.

Common signs of stress

- Having a hard time making decisions
- Trouble meeting important deadlines
- Feelings of fatigue or sleepiness
- Not feeling good about oneself, moodiness or depression
- Irritability, anger, tendency to criticize and be argumentative
- Lack of focus & forgetfulness
- Getting the constant feeling that something is wrong
- Changes in appetite (eating more or less than normal)
- Smoking, drinking, or using drugs to cope
- Social withdrawal, relationship conflicts
- Rapid heartbeats (palpitation) & rapid breathing (hyperventilation)
- Muscle tension, muscle aches, headaches/migraines
- High blood pressure

Biology of Stress

Stress is frequently seen as our reaction to what is in our environment. When a threat is identified, the body's first response is a state of alarm resulting in a burst of hormone release and a fight-or-flight response. Due to the non-stop stresses of modern life the body's resources for the alarm system gets depleted by time. This finally leads to a stage of exhaustion, manifesting as stress.

Psychology of stress

All human beings have an inborn internal tension ingrained in them as a result of a barrier between the conscious and unconscious mind. Although this internal tension can be reduced through a continuous soul searching, it is never fully eliminated. As social beings, we have a hierarchy of needs, starting from the basic physiological needs to the need for safety, need for belongingness and love, need for maintaining our self-esteem and ultimately the need for self actualization (the full realization of one's potential). There is often a constant tension between the body and the mind, as the mind attempts to cater to these needs in a socially acceptable way. In your pursuit towards self actualisation, you invariably go through various forms of hurt and suffering, which often accumulates if there is no attempt to

understand the origin & meaning of this suffering. This pursuit can also bring expectations on yourself, which if remaining unmet, can lead to a build up of stress. During this pursuit of self actualisation one may go through various stages of coping mechanisms such as denial, avoidance, anger, bargaining & humour, but when stress builds up it can lead to worry, guilt, anxiety and depression. Stress often starts resolving when the earlier stages are effectively managed, finally giving way to a stage of acceptance.

Stress and Illnesses

As a result of long term stress, you can experience various mental health problems, such as depression, anxiety and psychotic illnesses. Chronic stress can also cause various physical health problems, such as headaches, migraines, general increase of aches and pains, hair loss, weight gain/loss, menstrual irregularities in women, peptic ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, hypertension, coronary artery disease, allergies, asthma and arthritis. It can also alter the immune system, whereby increasing the risk of infections.

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How to manage your Stress

Stressful situations will always exist in your daily life. The aim should not be to eliminate those situations, but to learn to manage it. You have to begin by educating yourself. Good interpersonal communication is very helpful in preventing the buildup of stress. You should know your limits, practice peaceful disagreement and avoid manipulation when there are unreasonable demands on yourself. You should learn to use assertive, but not aggressive body language. Learn to respond thoughtfully & effectively, rather than reacting impulsively. There are various helpful ways to reduce the stress, such as exercise, relaxation techniques like breathing exercises & imagery, yoga, meditation, massage, journal writing, art therapy, humor therapy, creative problem solving, communication skills training and developing good time management skills. Finally, if you feel unable to manage the stress yourself, you should seek expert help.

Dr Aju Abraham is a Consultant Psychiatrist running his own exclusive psychiatry clinic in Doha. For further information or any questions related to emotional problems, you can email him at editorthewoman@gulf-times.com