

STRESS

The term stress has been borrowed by biology from engineering, where it implies an ability to withstand a defined amount of strain.

“A state manifested by a specific syndrome which consists of all the non-specifically induced changes within a biological system.”

The term implies any condition that harms the body or damages or causes the death of a few or many cells. The body immediately tries to repair the damaged cells but it can do so only if the diet is adequate, providing a generous supply of all the essential nutrients. If, however, rebuilding of cells is not able to keep pace with their destruction, the condition will result in disease. The most common diseases associated with stress are heart disease, diabetes, headache and peptic ulcer. Other diseases resulting from stress are ulcerative colitis, chronic dyspepsia, asthma, psoriasis and sexual disorders.

Reactions to stress are manifold. No one situation is stressful to all the people all the time. Some of the factors that can produce stress are the boss or the subordinate, the traffic, the telephone or the lack of it, overwork or not enough work to do, too much money or too little of it making decisions, dull routine jobs, lack of authority and apprehensions about the future.

Symptoms:

A number of physical changes take place at the time of stress induced arousal. The brain and nervous system becomes intensely active, the pupils of the eye dilate, digestion slows down, muscles become tense, the heart starts pumping blood harder and faster, blood pressure increases, breathing becomes faster, hormones such as adrenaline are released into the system along with glucose from the liver and sweating starts. All these changes take place in a split second under the direction of the nervous system. If the stress factors are immediately removed all the changes are reversed.

Stress in its earlier and reversible stage leads to poor sleep, bad temper, continual grumbling, longer hours of work with less achievement, domestic conflict with family members, repeated minor sickness, absenteeism and prolonged absence for each spell of sickness, accident proneness, feeling of frustration and persecution by colleagues and complaints of lack of cooperation and increase in alcoholic intake.

It is essential that these symptoms are recognised early by the patients or their well-wishers and remedial measures taken to overcome them. If, however, stress is continuous or repeated frequently, a variety of symptoms appear such as dizziness, stiff muscles, headache, vision problems, breathing difficulties, asthma, allergies, palpitation, digestive disorders, blood sugar irregularities, backache, skin disorders, bowel disorders and sexual difficulties.

Causes:

Stress may be caused by a variety of factors both outside the body and within. External factors include loud noises, blinding lights, extreme heat or cold, X-rays and other forms of radiation, drugs, chemical, bacterial and various toxic substances, pain and inadequate nutrition. The factors from within the body include hate, envy, fear or jealousy.