

What Is Stress?

Stress is an emotional and physical reaction to anything that is demanding, threatening, or challenging to you in some way.

Stress can be a reaction to:

- Minor events, such as the routine pressures of daily work and family life.
- Major events, such as a serious injury or the death of a close friend or family member.

Stress can be a reaction to:

- Good things, such as a new job, buying a house, getting married, or having a child.
- Bad things, such as a job loss, money problems, illness, divorce, discrimination, crime or a car accident.

Stress can also come from anything that is out of the ordinary and puts you out of your comfort zone (like speaking in public or taking on new responsibilities at work). Stress often comes from external events, but it can also be self-generated. You can self-generate stress, for example, by worrying too much or getting stuck on negative thoughts.

Everyone feels stressed now and then. A little stress can actually be good for you. Stress can allow you to focus your energy and can motivate you to perform your best. However, a lot of stress, especially when the stress is long-term, can be damaging to your mind and body. Overwhelming stress can lead to mental and physical health problems, as well as problems in your relationships, work and family life. Traumatic stress (resulting from major events such as being assaulted) can lead to serious psychological problems, but even routine chronic stress can lead to a weakened immune system and health problems such as heart disease, diabetes, depression and anxiety.

What are the signs and symptoms of chronic stress?

The table on the next page lists some of the common warning signs and symptoms of stress. The more signs and symptoms you notice in yourself, the closer you may be to stress overload. Many of the warning signs and symptoms of stress can be caused by medical problems. It's important to see a doctor if you have many of the warning signs and symptoms to determine their cause.

Signs and Symptoms of Chronic Stress

Emotional	Mental	Physical	Behavioral
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Feeling overwhelmed • Irritable, easily angered • Unable to relax • Depression or unhappiness • Moodiness • Feeling isolated or lonely 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Constant worrying • Anxious thoughts • Poor concentration • Focusing on the negative • Memory problems 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Digestive troubles • Rapid heartbeat or chest pains • Frequent colds • Headaches or muscle aches/pains • Insomnia • Nausea or dizziness • Loss of interest in sex 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Nervous habits like nail biting • Eating more or less than usual • Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax • Sleeping more or less than usual • Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities

Adapted from HELPGUIDE.org, Stress Symptoms, Signs, and Causes, found at:
<http://www.helpguide.org/articles/stress/stress-symptoms-causes-and-effects.htm>.