

# Chronic stress: causes, effects and treatments



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## Report on Chronic Stress

### Introduction

Stress is an unavoidable part of life. Be it at home or the workplace, different challenges arise which ultimately lead to stress. There are various types of stress related issues, one of which is chronic stress (American Psychological Association, 2015). Chronic stress is that branch of stress when there is an overwhelming response emotionally to any situation which an individual deems to be out of his or her control. This type of stress is characterized by the release of corticosteroids in the human body, especially the endocrine system which triggers the increase of stress. Though these hormones might be beneficial for a short period of time, continuous stress inducing activities can lead to a constant release of hormones which can cause fatal side effects (Bruno, 2012).

### Detection of chronic stress

There are various methods through which chronic stress can be detected early to ensure immediate correction. Our body begins to give us various warning signals during our daily life which can be a symptom of increased stress. It affects all the functioning of our body and makes us feel unbalanced and hypersensitive (Chandola, Brunner & Marmot, 2006). If a person is suffering from chronic stress, then he or she will be easily irritated or overwhelmed by any situation (Sanders, 2014). These people will be unable to concentrate on anything for long and will constantly worry about the tasks ahead of them. Also, they will feel extremely isolated and suffer from physical strain and nausea. These symptoms can also be related to <https://assignbuster.com/chronic-stress-causes-effects-and-treatments/>

other physical or psychological problems and therefore requires a full diagnosis by a doctor to be sure (Scott, 2014).

#### Differences and similarities with other diseases

Although the physical and chemical reactions to various mental disorders can be similar, there is a vast difference between them. For example, stress is similar yet different from anxiety in many ways (The Stress Management Society, 2015). Stanford University's associate chair of psychiatry and behavioral sciences David Spiegel says that " while the line between stress and anxiety often gets blurred, there are distinct things to be aware of- including how these emotions affect the body and the root causes of each" (Holmes, 2014). The chemical reactions that occur in our body are very similar during chronic stress and anxiety. The physical reactions that occur in our body during both stress inducing and anxiety inducing causes include an increase of heartbeats, quick breathing and tightening of muscles. Yet anxiety and stress are different in various ways. He says that while we feel chronic stress we are very much aware of the causes behind it while in anxiety we usually do not know what exactly we are anxious about (Holmes, 2014).

Another important psychological term which is often confused with chronic stress is depression. Laura J. Martin, MD and MPH, states that the causes behind both chronic stress and depression are often the same (McEwen & Lasley, 2002) Any traumatic incident in our lives, such as loss of a job or the death of a loved one, can lead to both chronic stress as well as depression. In fact, it is more likely that while chronic stress is the first response to any

such life-changing situation, prolonged exposure to stress can also lead to depression. “ Stress, or being stressed out, leads to behaviours and patterns that in turn can lead to chronic stress burden and increase the risk of major depression,” states Bruce McEwen, PhD (McEwen & Lasley, 2002). But it has also been noted that depression and chronic stress can be caused by different reasons. Most people who are resilient towards stressful activities are quite able to carry on with their lives without becoming depressed (Segerstrom & Miller, 2004). Also, people tend to become depressed even though there are little or no stressful incidents in their lives. While any one incident can cause chronic stress, it requires a combination of a few stressors to become clinically depressed (McEwen & Lasley, 2002).

#### Effects of chronic stress

Effect on health: Stressful activities are always around us, yet people almost always find a way to deal with the stress. If you are stressed over a huge pile of work, deadlines to meet, a conflict with your spouse or any other incident, your body always reacts in the same way (Psychiatry, 2009). The release of stress hormones in our body helps us to respond to the chronic stress until it is resolved (Sincero, 2012). But a prolonged exposure to chronic stress can lead to a continuous flow of hormones in our body which can be harmful. It disturbs all the other systems of our body and causes a rise of blood pressure levels, increased risk of heart attacks or strokes, decrease in fertility and accelerated aging (Miller, Chen & Zhou, 2007). The usual physical effects of chronic stress are pain, insomnia, loss of weight and skin conditions like eczema (Sanders, 2014). Also, Dr. Richard Weinstein, a private chiropractor and a member of the American Chiropractic

Association's Council on Nutrition and the National Institute of Chiropractic Research, says that " the adrenal glands have a nasty tendency to rebound", which means that the physical effects of chronic stress can return " if the cause of the cortisol imbalance is not addressed." (Weinstein, 2004)

Effect on behavior: Chronic stress can lead to certain changes in our behavior pattern as well. Since chronic stress is a result of a prolonged exposure to stressors, many changes can be detected in the behavior of these people (Carthage, 2013). The patients who are suffering from chronic stress reveal particular habits and behavior, such as moodiness, irritability, agitated behavior or isolation from friends and family (Helpguide. org, 2015). These people are prone to angry outbursts and impulsive decisions and are generally unhappy about everything around them. Their eating and sleep patterns also change and they develop certain unhealthy habits like drinking alcohol, biting nails or pacing. This in turn affects their social and personal lives (Weinstein, 2004).

Effect on brain: According to the recent findings of the University of California, Berkeley, it has been found that due to the excess release of hormones due to chronic stress, certain permanent changes occur in the brain which results in people becoming prone to other mental diseases (Lupien et al., 2009). After conducting a series of experiments, Daniela Kaufer, UC Berkeley associate professor of integrative biology, and her colleagues, have come to the conclusion that chronic stress causes the generation of more myelin-producing cells and fewer neurons than acceptable (Weinstein, 2004). This often leads to an increase of myelin or

white matter in certain parts of the brain, which can cause a disruption in the critical functions of the brain like the neuronal system (Bergland, 2014)

### Treatment of chronic stress

At one point in our lives, everybody experiences stress due to one factor or another. Since avoiding stress is completely impossible, there are certain steps that can be taken to cope with it (Breazeale, 2012). Some of them include:

1. Consult a proper psychologist or psychiatrist and ask him to do a full evaluation if you are experiencing overwhelming situations, suicidal thoughts, etc.
2. Seek help from a doctor and redress any new or existing health issues.
3. Contact your friends, family, community or organization to share emotional issues and ask for help in dealing with stressful situations.
4. Identify any symptoms that you might be going through, such as eating or sleeping disorder, anger, depression or loneliness, and try to solve these problems.
5. Prioritise your tasks and decide what must be completed now and what you can do later. Refuse to take up any new tasks if you feel overburdened.
6. Make a list of what you accomplished at the end of the day.
7. Avoid spending too much time thinking about certain issues.
8. Indulge in regular exercises daily and plan your exercising and eating activities to make sure they are balanced.
9. Take up certain stress reducing activities like yoga, meditation etc.

(Thaker et al., 2006)

## Conclusion

Being “stressed out”, as many people would call it, and being actually stressed, both physically and mentally, is a significant issue, as highlighted in this article by the number of intricacies involved in chronic stress (Medical News Today, 2014). Whether the symptoms of stress are recent or have been continuing for a long period of time, it is important to immediately look into the problem and discover new forms and therapies to address and solve the issue (Holmes, 2014). To seek relief from the stressors, it would be better to consult a proficient therapist and examine the causes behind the stress and how to decrease it.

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