

**SYMPTOMS THAT MAY INDICATE EXCESSIVE STRESS**

- Overeating/undereating
- Resentment/anger
- Sleep difficulties
- Excessive forgetfulness
- Depression
- Confusion
- Irritability
- Talking too fast
- Talking too much
- Unable to talk
- Nausea
- Weakened immunity
- Feeling "faint"
- Chin smoking
- Skin problems
- Indigestion
- Ready tears
- Excessive giggling
- Sweaty hands
- Clinched hands
- Weariness/fatigue
- Inability to be alone
- Nightmares
- Hypochondria
- Butterflies in stomach
- Stomach knots
- "Lump" in throat
- Constipation/diarrhea
- Headache
- Neck ache
- Backache
- Heart palpitations
- Proneness to errors
- Distractibility
- Ulcers
- Lack of sexual interest
- Nervous cough
- Mouth noises
- Menstrual irregularities
- Desire to run away
- Muscle tightness/spasms
- Decreased productivity
- Drug abuse
- Tic in eye or elsewhere
- Fingernail biting
- Playing with hair

# STRESS

## THE GOOD, THE BAD, AND MY PERCEPTION

by Melanie Steed

UGH! There's something stalking me, like my shadow, but I can feel this. It feels like something sticky on the outside of me, and when I try to run away from it, I realize it's stuck to me. Inside of me, it feels like a big metal ball protruding in the pit of my stomach and when I ask it's name, it hisses back to me "strESSSSSS".

Sound familiar? Stress is a mental, physical, emotional and often a behavioral reaction to a wide variety of demands. Much of our stress today is different from that of our hunter and gatherer days. In the days of Neanderthals, if the hunter was faced with a bear he/she either fought or fled. This response is called Cannon's "fight or flight" response.

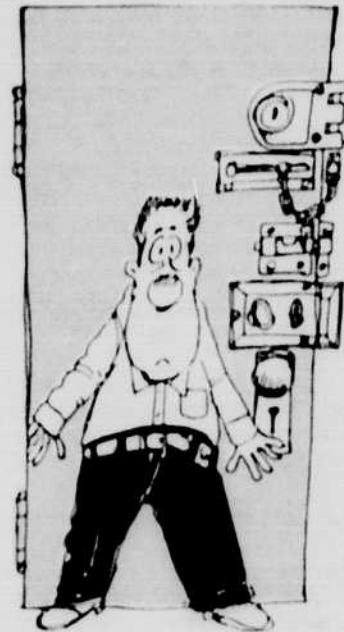
The bear of the 90s is not nearly so physical. This bear plays on the emotions, like deadliness, traffic, competition, academic demands, social stressors and financial worries. However, our bodies still respond to these "perceived" threats as if we were still fighting off that bear. The body does this by releasing sugars and fats into the blood stream for quick energy. The heart pumps faster to provide more blood to the muscles. Oxygen is increased in the blood by breathing faster, muscles tense, digestion ceases, perspiration increases, and senses become more acute; all in preparation for action. Now-a-days, we potentially have much longer peri-

ods of the "fight or flight response".

When we allow ourselves to become all revved up and don't let our stress dissipate health problems may result. In fact, two-thirds and up to 80% (depending on the study) of visits to the doctor are stress-related. Chronic, prolonged stress weakens the immune system and increases a person's risks to colds, flu, infections and even cancer.

Even though stress is thought of as unpleasant, stress may also be a source of great pleasure, such as playing a game of racketball or even a passionate kiss. There are actually three varieties of stress: eustress, the facilitative, good kind of stress; distress, chronic in nature and debilitating; and normal stress, the body adapting to meet the demands of ordinary life. Interestingly, stress can be a defense against other stressors. This seems to be a contradiction, but some kinds of stressors can damage the body, while others stimulate the body and expand its overall adaptive capacity. An example would be the jogger who through self-induced stress produces effects that are beneficial to the body, eustress.

Our perception of stress is a fascinating subject. From time to time accounts of patients who believed themselves to be victims of sorcery or who broke an absolute taboo and feared



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