



STRESS

Stress can be defined as the way our body makes us feel as it responds to events in our lives.

What causes stress?

Stress may be caused by physical challenges, such as being in a dangerous situation, or by emotional challenges, such as moving to a new school, or dealing with a long list of study or work tasks. When we face a stressful situation, a part of our brain called the hypothalamus sends messages to the adrenal glands to release adrenaline and cortisol into the bloodstream.

These hormones make us breathe more quickly, make our hearts beat faster, and dilate our blood vessels to allow more blood to flow to our extremities. This makes us ready to act quickly if necessary, and is called the 'fight or flight' or 'stress' response.



In the right situation, stress can be a good thing - for example, just before acting in a play or giving a speech, these hormones can make us more focused and we may perform better. They can also help us to react quickly in emergency situations - for example, avoiding an unexpected hazard when riding a bike.

However, some life situations and events can create stress for several reasons. We might feel:

- *Unprepared* for them.
- *Unhappy* about them.
- *Unable* to cope with them.



How can stress make me feel?

Stress that is felt over a longer period - perhaps due to moving to a new town, or changing family circumstances - can be more difficult to manage. If we are under long-term stress, hormones are constantly produced at low levels by our adrenal glands. This can cause symptoms such as:

- Chronic tiredness.
- Lowered immunity to illness.
- Feelings of sadness, anxiety or irritation.
- Problems sleeping or eating.

What can I do about it?

Everybody feels stressed at one time or another. However, there are some things we can do to help ourselves.

- Get enough sleep.
- Eat healthy and nutritious foods.
- Get regular exercise.
- Ask a trusted person for help when we need it.
- Do something every day that helps you to relax.

It is also helpful to try to keep a positive attitude, to think calmly, and to remember that everybody feels stressed at times.



References

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