

## *Insights into Stress*

### *From PBS:*

**Stress is your body's response to anything that disrupts your normal life and routines.** Your body responds to stressful events with an instinctive "fight or flight" response. This physical response comes from a rush of adrenaline and other hormones that speed up your heart and breathing and give you a burst of energy so that you can respond to danger.

We may not need to fight, or flee from, predators and immediate danger very often. But the stress response still kicks in when we feel a threat. In the modern world, the causes of stress can be everyday events and changes, such as relationships, work, money, and difficult decisions.

If stress lasts too long or happens too often, it can lead to more serious problems such as anxiety or depression, and physical health problems such as heart disease and obesity. According to the American Psychological Association, the majority of office visits to the doctor involve stress-related complaints, and stress is linked to the six leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.

\* Available here: <http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/stress-and-anxiety/what-stress>

### *National Institutes of Health:*

When you face a dangerous situation, your pulse quickens, you breathe faster, your muscles tense, your brain uses more oxygen and increases activity—all functions aimed at survival. In the short term, it can even boost your immune system.

However, with chronic stress, those same nerve chemicals that are life-saving in short bursts can suppress functions that aren't needed for immediate survival. Your immunity is lowered and your digestive, excretory, and reproductive systems stop working normally. Once the threat has passed, other body systems act to restore normal functioning. Problems occur if the stress response goes on too long, such as when the source of stress is constant, or if the response continues after the danger has subsided.

For example, some people experience mainly digestive symptoms, while others may have headaches, sleeplessness, depressed mood, anger, and irritability. People under chronic stress are prone to more frequent and severe viral infections, such as the flu or common cold, and vaccines, such as the flu shot, are less effective for them.

Of all the types of stress, changes in health from routine stress may be hardest to notice at first. Because the source of stress tends to be more constant than in cases of acute or traumatic stress, the body gets no clear signal to return to normal functioning. Over time, continued strain on your body from routine stress may lead to serious health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, anxiety disorder, and other illnesses.

\* Available here: <http://www.nimh.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml>