

For Your Information

Recognizing the Signs of Stress

It's Monday morning, your first day back at the office after a refreshing three-weeks holiday. You're ploughing through the memos and phone messages that piled up on your desk while you were gone. The phone rings, you have three meetings to attend today, and your quarterly report needs to be written. You felt great on vacation, but now it's beginning to dawn on you: That chronic ache in your shoulder is back, and stress is to blame.

"Stress is very powerful," explains a chiropractor. "It's unbelievable what it will do!" A stiff neck, a sore back, muscle aches, pains in the extremities, digestive problems - can often be recognized as manifestations of physical and mental stress. Back or neck pains are common complaints. While the chiropractor cannot remove patients' stressful problems, he can help the pain.

Your body was designed with stress in mind. When you feel threatened or challenged, hormones are released, muscles tense, heartbeat increases, breathing speeds, pupils dilate, digestion slows and the blood steps up its coagulation ability. All this prepares you well for assault by, say, a tiger or wild boar. "Stress can be an invitation to health or to illness," says Dr. Mark Hendler, a chiropractor with a Ph.D. in psychology. The results of stress can be positive or negative. And either too much or too little stress can cause stress management problems.

A stress reaction doesn't follow a neurological pattern, like a slipped disc or a pinched nerve! The effects of unmanaged stress can show up just about anywhere in the body as pain, stiffness, tightness, skin disorders or other illnesses. Some patients say they feel like they are in an envelope, they feel squeezed! You can lose sleep, wake up tired, feel overwhelmed by responsibilities at home or work and succumb to a general malaise or anxiety that, in turn, colors everything else that you do. It's a vicious circle.

While it's common to think first of the negative aspects of stress, stress is not always something to be avoided. Life demands both balance and fluctuation. Stress can be a factor in seeking a better level of function. "It's when stress is overwhelming - either due to the duration or one large exposure - that it becomes a disorganizing, destructive influence," says Dr. Hendler. The key is: Stress is manageable. Some people aren't aware they are suffering from stress in their lives. Others need outside help to handle what they know is a problem.

Stress can become easier to integrate into life by eating a nutritionally balanced diet, learning assertiveness, communicating feelings that may include counseling or psychotherapy, receiving chiropractic adjustments, physiotherapy for body pains and learning relaxation techniques.

Who do you know who could use our help?