

## IS STRESS MAKING YOU SICK part 2

How do you know when you are experiencing stress? There are many signs to watch for. Sometimes we recognize stress in others before they do. Behaviors such as agitation or rudeness when dealing with others, excessive eating or drinking or simply the tenseness that appears in one's face can be a signal.

Symptoms of stress show up in four ways, physical, mental, emotional and behavioral.

In the classic stress reaction, "fight or flight response", the heart beats faster and harder (palpitations), muscles tense and breathing rate increases. These are sign of *acute* stress.

*Chronic* stress manifests itself differently. Starting from the head down, physical symptoms can include headaches, dizziness, jaw clenching, teeth grinding, sore or tight neck or shoulder muscles, chest pains, abdominal pain or intestinal symptoms. Back pain and tightness are very common. As well appetite may be lost or increased. Fatigue is one of the most common symptoms as is trouble sleeping. All of these symptoms can be caused by other factors so it is important to look for patterns or groups of these symptoms that may indicate stress.

The most common mental symptom is difficulty concentrating. Others include trouble making decisions, memory problems or loss or change in sense of humour. Some people experience their mind going blank or racing with too many thoughts at one time.

It is common for stressed people to experience emotional symptoms and feel nervous, anxious, tense, or agitated. Many feel irritated, impatient, and short tempered. Others may feel themselves slowing down feeling, flat or apathetic. Behavioral Symptoms can include increased drinking, compulsive eating or even nail biting.

Many of these symptoms can also be signs of anxiety or depression. It is important to talk to a health care professional to rule out other causes.

Stress can manifest itself in many ways. Most people have five or more symptoms that are characteristic of them. You may find yourself getting one or two and moving up to several more as things get worse. The key is learning to read your own body's signals. Identifying stress is the first step to doing something about it.

As you become more aware through your bodies reactions that you are experiencing stress, the next step is to identify where it is coming from. As stress is merely your "reaction" to a situation, you must identify what your own triggers or "stressors" are. Your stressors are not the same as every one else's.

If a group of people are experiencing the same set-back at the same time, like a delayed flight at an airport; some people will head to the airport bar or restaurant, some will go on calmly reading their book while others will get angry and head to the ticket counter to complain. It is not the situation causing the stress but the individual's reaction to it.

To better understand what happens to your mind and body after a stressful event, follow the delayed flight scenario through the four steps psychologists call the stress pathway.

First, the event or situation occurs which you perceive through one or more of your five senses; in this case you hear that your flight is delayed. You then process this information, interpret what it means to you and make a judgment. This happens so fast you feel that the situation itself caused the stressful reaction. Depending on your interpretation of the event, your body has a stress reaction, and may start experiencing some of the stress symptoms.

Learning to manage the stress in your life is an important aspect of overall health and well being.

***City Centre Health and Fitness offers Lifestyle Change and Medical Weight Loss Programs that deal with Stress Management techniques. Contact Kirby at 250-487-1481***