

Taming the Tension Monster

Here are just a few statistics from 2007 to get us started

- *54 percent* of Americans are concerned about the level of stress in their everyday lives.
- *62 percent* of Americans say work has a significant impact on stress levels.
- *73 percent* of Americans name money as the number one factor that affects their stress level.
- *Increasing numbers* of children, teenagers and college students report feeling under stress.

I am convinced that these percentages has risen in the years leading up to our present day.

Another word for stress is the word tension and it sometimes looks like this. Tension or stress is a specific response by the body to a stimulus, as fear or pain that disturbs or interferes with the normal physiological equilibrium of an organism.

We all have some degree of stress. For some people, it happens before having to speak in public. For other people, it might be before a first date. The funny thing is what causes stress for one person may not be stressful for someone else.

Sometimes stress is helpful - For example it can encourage us to meet a deadline or get things done. But long-term stress can increase the risk of diseases like depression, heart disease and a variety of other problems.

Swindoll stated, "Whoever dubbed our times "The Aspirin Age" didn't miss it very far. It is correct to assume there has never been a more stress-ridden society than ours. For many, gone are the days of enjoying bubbling brooks along winding pathways or taking long strolls near the beach. The relaxed bike ride through the local park has been replaced with the roar of a motorcycle whipping through busy traffic. The easy-come, easy-go lifestyle of the farm has been preempted by a hectic urban family going in six different directions...existing on instant dinners, shouting matches, strained relationships, too little sleep, and too much television. Add financial setbacks, failure at school, unanswered letters, obesity, loneliness, a ringing phone, unplanned pregnancies, fear of cancer, misunderstanding, materialism, alcoholism, drugs, and an occasional death: then subtract the support of the family unit, divide by dozens of opinions, multiply by 365 days a year, and you have the makings of madness! Stress has become a way of life; it is the rule rather than the exception"

Speaking of stress, in a lighter vein, have these words ever caused your heart to jump and your stress level to suddenly shoot up? "The Dentist will see you now."

Lets think about stress today

I. Stress Defined

How is this for a definition? Stress is when you wake up screaming and you realize you haven't fallen asleep yet. Seriously though stress is defined as physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension. Other words that mean about the same thing are words like anxiety, burden, pressure, worry. Does any of you suffer from any of these? Do you enjoy it or would you like some relief

II. Types of stress

Good or helpful stress is all about reacting to the things of life and play that surround us. This helps us handle the things that come as a surprise to us and can be healthy. Bad or negative stress is what we feel when things happen to us and we can not seem to get past the fear, worry and disappointment stage of what might happen to us

The Key is: Whether stress is good or bad is more about a person's response to stress rather than the stress itself.

III. Facts about stress

Anxiety disorders cost the US more than *\$42 billion per year*.

Two-thirds of all office visits to family physicians are due to stress-related symptoms.

Stress is linked to the *six leading causes of death*—heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.

25 percent of workers have taken a day off from work to cope with stress.

Doctors have noticed that there are many causes of stress in life including:

Death: of spouse, family, or friend

Health: injury, illness, pregnancy

Crime: Sexual molestation, mugging, burglary, pick-pocketed

Self-abuse: drug abuse, alcoholism, self-harm

Family change: separation, divorce, new baby, marriage

Argument: with spouse, family, friends, co-workers, boss

Physical changes: lack of sleep, new work hours

New location: vacation, moving house

Money: lack of it, owing it, investing it

Environment change: in school, job, house, town, jail

Responsibility increase: new dependent, new job

Still others say it this way about some leading causes of Stress

59% say money, And in today's society there is stress on middle class Americans, as the rich continue to steal from them through unfair and excessive taxation. The lazy continue to get benefits of every description while being paid for by these middle class stressed out workers who watch their paychecks diminish at an alarming rate

59% say work, 53% say health problems affecting parents or other family members, 50% say health concerns,

50% say nightly news or state of the world today, 48% say health of immediate family (spouse, partner or children), 41% say children.

And what about lawlessness where there are corrupt judges and lawyers who get criminals and celebrities off the hook with just a slap on the wrist while honest people live in fear and desperation. And also an overlooked source is, Trying to cross tomorrows bridges today. Trying to climb the mountains that are still miles away on the horizon of life's road.

IV. Some symptoms or signs of stress First in the

A. Physical area

- Headaches
 - Nervousness
 - Rashes
 - Stomachaches
 - Fast heartbeat
 - Perspiration

B. Mental area

- Lack of Concentration
 - Forgetfulness
 - Drop in performance
 - Carelessness

C. Emotional area

- Bored
 - Anger outbursts
 - Nightmares
 - Sad/depressed
 - Scared
 - Withdrawn
 - Fighting

V. God's plan for stress relief

Jesus actually modeled several ways to defeat the stressors in life:

A. First, find a quiet place and get away from the stressors. Throughout his ministry we would find Jesus getting away from the pressures of the ministry and the crowd. Why, so he could relax by spending time with the Father. We need to learn to do the same in our lives.

B. Secondly face your stressor head on and don't deny it. He faced the cross but said in Lk 22:42-45: *"Father, if you are willing, take this cup from me; yet not my will, but yours be done."*

C. Thirdly, pray to the Father for help and insight in dealing with your stressors. Speaking of insight, listen to the words of Oswald Chambers concerning prayer. He says

"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God ..." (Rom. 8:28). The circumstances of a saint's life are ordained of God. In the life of a saint there is no such thing as chance. God by His providence brings you into circumstances that you can't understand at all, but the Spirit of God understands. God brings you to places, among people, and into certain conditions to accomplish a definite purpose through the intercession of the Spirit in you. Never put yourself in front of your circumstances and say, "I'm going to be my own providence here; I will watch this closely, or protect myself from that." All your circumstances are in the hand of God, and therefore you don't ever have to think they are unnatural or unique. Your part in intercessory prayer is not to agonize over how to intercede, but to use the everyday circumstances and people God puts around you by His providence to bring them before His throne, and to allow the Spirit in you the opportunity to intercede for them. In this way God is going to touch the whole world with His saints."

D. Fourthly, make sure when you deal with your stressors you keep your eternal perspective. Don't forget stress will one day pass away so don't get too worked up about things

VI. Other practical suggestions for relief *"Write your troubles in dust, your blessings in marble."* When you find yourself stressed, ask yourself this one question: Will this matter in 5 years from now? If yes, then do something about the situation. If no, then let it go.

Doctors, Pastors and mental health people have given us 5 things we can do to persevere through stress:

- Exercise daily
 - Eat a nutritionally balanced diet
 - Seek mature Christian counsel
 - Use wisdom in making decisions
 - Plan on creating a hobby or event that you enjoy doing weekly which will help you in times of stress.

Since finances are one of the big problem areas, lets diverge a moment and think about some practical ways to avoid the financial stress trap One big one is to quit spending and to quit charging. Use Cash! Many are stressed because they are not living within their means. But did you know that living within your means will not make you mean but it will actually free you. Then some people just need to get a job! It may not be a job you like but it is better than the welfare line that others pay for

Next, ask yourself the following questions:

1. Do you usually use credit cards to finish out the month?
2. Do you ever pay bills late?
3. Do you float funds from expense accounts to pay your bills?
4. Do you ever hate to hear the telephone ring?
5. Do you always pay minimum payment on your credit cards?
6. Do you never tithe or make charitable gifts?
7. Have you had more than one overdraft check on your bank account this past year?
8. Is a savings or retirement account non-existent?
9. Do you dream of getting rich quickly?

All you need to do to relieve stress is to answer these questions with the answers you know deep in your heart as to what they should be

VII. Benefits of a less stress life

Your physical health improves because you will have fewer ulcers

Your world view improves **Hope Vs Hopelessness**

Your interpersonal relationships improve.

You will have the ability to enjoy times with your friends and family.

Your finances improve Why? Simply Fewer Dr. bills Fewer bills from the pharmacy

Fewer bills for things you find out you can live without

Finally,

Your sleep will improve. A lot less tossing and turning

The bottom line is a less stress life is just better all the way around