Your body may be saying you are stressed

By Mandy Kendall

Are you sick and tired of being sick and tired? More and more studies are showing that stress is one of the major causes of physical illness today. Recent government statistics show that 75 to 90 percent of doctor's visits are stress related.

Some stresses are short lived (traffic jams or a deadline at work) and when they are over the stress is released. However, there are many stresses that stay with us for long periods of time, sometimes for a lifetime. These chronic stressful situations (a high pressured job, family or financial situations, for example) can have a tremendously negative impact on our health.



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Who can get stressed?

Pretty much everyone experiences stress in one way or another. Kids especially can be put under huge amounts of pressure by peers, parents, teachers and themselves to conform to social expectations. Generally anything that makes you feel unhappy, out of control or under pressure is probably a sign of stress.

What are stressors?

Stressors (things that cause us stress) come in many different

guises. Work, finances, family pressures are in the list of top stress inducers. Self imposed pressure is also a big contributor to stress. We can expect far too much of ourselves in today's world and, when you couple that with all the external factors in our lives, it's not surprising that it can all get so overwhelming.

So, how do we know if we're stressed?

Frequent illness – If you find that you catch everything going, getting one cold after another, and when you do get sick it takes ages for you to get better, this may be a strong indicator that your immune system is compromised and stress can be one of the biggest factors. If you've ruled out any underlying condition that could be undermining your defenses, chances are the stress in your life is making you sick.

Our bodies are great at telling us we are being stressed, often it starts with small indicators like losing a little sleep, having an upset stomach, getting a headache or having heart palpitations. If we don't address the issues (i.e. the stuff that is causing us to be stressed) our bodies will just continue to send us signals, i.e. waking a few times a night can then turn into insomnia, an upset stomach turns into irritable bowel syndrome, a slight headache turns into a migraine and a rapid heartbeat turns into a panic attack, and the list goes on. Some other common signs of stress include: high blood pressure, frequent illness, weight gain or loss and back pain.

Can my stress affect people around me?

Stress is not contagious like a disease, but those close to you can be affected by the stress in your life. Researchers at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia published a report in Pediatrics in October 2012 explaining that a number of stressors from parents can increase the risk of obesity in their children. The report states, "Stress in parents may be

an important risk factor for child obesity and related behaviors. The severity and number of stressors are important.” Your ability to have normal healthy relationships with your family and friends can be greatly reduced when you are under stress. Not only might you be physically unwell enough to spend time with them, but your reduced mood and ability to cope with day-to-day things might not make you much fun to be around.

How to deal with it

Come up with a strategy – Whatever works to calm your world and your body do it as often as you can. Whether it’s time with family or friends (or just time alone), exercise, meditation, or perhaps a massage. Everyone has different de-stressors that work for them.

Give yourself time and permission, this is not pampering yourself. You’re not being selfish. This is a “put on your oxygen mask before helping others” strategy. You will be no good to anyone if stress gets the better of you. Be selfish for the sake of everyone you care about.

Focus on the things you can control – There is much that can be learnt from the serenity prayer: “Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.” For a long time now my husband and I have purposefully not watched the news and we feel so much better for it. We choose how we find out about local, national and international events that don’t come with all the hype and graphic images you see on TV.

Be honest with yourself – Sometimes just putting all your worries and concerns on a piece of paper can be very revealing, especially if you list them under headings of “the things I can control” and “the things I can’t control”.

What would you say to someone else experiencing your issues – This one can take some practice but can be incredibly

effective. Think about something that is causing you stress and then imagine someone you love and care about telling you they have this issue. Then think about what you would say to help them. We are often our own harshest critics, and our advice is often very different when it comes from a place of love and caring.

Don’t be afraid to ask for help – A problem shared really can be a problem halved. Often our perception of a situation can get grossly over-exaggerated in our heads and just getting some feedback from an objective standpoint can put things into perspective. Whether it is professional therapeutic advice or a trusted friend to talk to.

Until next time.

Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe, which aligns wellness seekers with their ideal wellness provider. If you have questions, would like some advice, or would like to request some Qwik-e tips on any health and well-being topic, drop her an email at connect@healthconnective.com or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.