

STRESS

A stress response is a natural, neurological and physiological reaction that takes place in your body when you encounter stressors. From an evolutionary perspective, this response was designed for our survival, providing us with an instant ability to either fight or flee a predator. Given the importance of this task, the body undergoes quite a significant transformation to divert the required energy and resources to the critical areas of the body to assist with this response. Hormones are released (adrenaline, glucose and cortisol) and our body responds by increasing our heart rate and blood pressure and sending more oxygen to our brain. Other hormonal systems that are not essential for our immediate survival are shut off including ones that regulate growth, reproduction, digestion and immunity.

While we don't tend to encounter the same types of stressors today, our bodies automatic response has remained unchanged. The stressors we would identify with today aren't as much caused by an event, rather your perceptions or beliefs about that event. Think of your to-do list, deadlines, an upcoming presentation, and social and family responsibilities for example. None of these cause a risk to our survival, but our perceptions of these events can significantly impact our stress levels. If we are someone with a personality more prone to worry and negative thinking and we live a more stressful life then our bodies can live in a fairly constant state of stress.

The different types of stress

- Acute stress is the type of stress we experience on a day to day basis when faced with common stressors. It is brief and reactive and is often caused by negative thinking about past or future events.
- Episodic Acute stress is frequently experienced Acute stress. People who tend to experience this type of stress typically live lives that include more stressful events and have personality types that make them less effective in managing stress. For example, people that are more achievement oriented experience more stress around performance pressures or overload from taking on too much and people that are more prone to worry tend to experience negative thinking about past and future events.
- Chronic stress is generally related to situations in which the individual has experienced a significant amount of stress over a long period of time. It is a constant, grinding level of stress that can be associated with experiences of poverty, abuse, an unhappy marriage, caring for someone with a disability, or a bad work environment, for example.