

Causes and Signs of Stress

A 2010 American Psychological Association survey, *Stress in America*, reveals a clear message: chronic stress (stress that interferes with the ability to function normally over a period of time) is becoming a public health crisis. According to the results of the survey:

- **Stress is up**
Concerns about money, work, job security, and the economy impact almost half of the persons surveyed.
- **Children are hurting**
Parents' stress affects their children. Physical health symptoms associated with stress are becoming more common in children: headaches, stomach aches, and trouble falling or staying asleep.
- **Self-care isn't a priority**
Managing stress in healthy ways – exercising and eating healthy foods – is taking a back seat to busy lifestyles. Many adults feel they do not have time in their busy schedules to regularly exercise; children are becoming more sedentary. Eating unhealthy foods, skipping meals, and overeating because of stress are becoming commonplace.
- **Lack of willpower is not to blame**
Our culture's emphasis on personal responsibility fuels personal guilt. Look instead to the environment. Find ways to structure your environment to increase the likelihood of making healthy choices at any time. Try some of the following:
 - Walk or bike to work or the grocery store
 - Walk the dog twice a day instead of just once
 - Keep junk food out of the house
 - Limit a child's time in front of the TV or video game

Everyone experiences stress. It is a part of daily life.

The most common causes of stress are:

- Money
- Work
- The economy
- Family responsibilities
- Relationships (spouse/partner, kids, co-workers)
- Personal health concerns
- Housing costs

- Job stability
- Health problems affecting the family
- Personal safety

While the causes of stress may seem a bit abstract, the physical symptoms of stress are very real. Watch for slow changes in stress levels – not all stress comes on suddenly.

Physical symptoms of stress include:

- Irritability or anger
- Fatigue
- Lack of interest, motivation, or energy
- Feeling nervous or anxious
- Feeling depressed or sad
- Feeling as though you could cry
- Upset stomach or indigestion
- Muscular tension
- Change in appetite/weight gain or loss
- Teeth grinding
- Feeling faint or dizzy
- Sleep problems

References:

Clay, R.A. (2011). Stressed in America. *Monitor on Psychology*, 42(1). Retrieved from <http://www.apa.org/monitor/2011/01/stressed-america.aspx>