

HOW STRESS AFFECTS INDIVIDUALS DIFFERENTLY

By Elizabeth Kovar M.A.





As humans and technology evolve, so does stress. Modern day stressors include environment pollution, technology, work, relationships and other various responsibilities. Although there is a formal definition for stress, each individual would define stress differently. The American Institute of Stress defines stress according to researcher Hans Selye, “non-specific response of the body to any change of demand.”

If asking a group of people what stresses them out, each individual would respond with a different response. Some people may find work stressful where others may find a relationship unhealthy and stressful. Although many people would find one common group, work, as their prime stressor, there are varying degrees under the main category. For example, one person may find work stressful because of their nagging boss where another may find work stressful because of responsibility or travel demands.

As each factor affects people differently, this same concept applies to health concerns. The American Institute of Stress website features a list of common signs and symptoms of stress. Some may seem contradictory to one another such as weight loss and weight gain and increased or decreased appetite. Many clients may get confused by the opposing symptoms. We as trainers need to look at the big picture of our client's lifestyle in order to find a link between stress and health behaviors.

For example, a person who finds work stressful maybe extremely busy completing tasks and attending meetings. This on-the-go person, who never sits still, may have a suppress appetite and crave stimulants to keep them going. Thus, without an appetite a person may not want to eat or may forget to eat due to lack of time or stomach problems.

On the other hand, a person who finds their boss stressful, but has a mundane job (primarily sitting at their desk) and looks for tasks to stay busy may find an increase in hunger and stress eat while on the job with desk candies or other treats. The boredom eating fuels cravings and promotes “better” emotions so this person can escape the negative boss. Thus, enhancing weight gain and stimulating appetite. As we can see, stress is individualistic in nature that there is no “one size fits all” solution. In times of chronic stress, it is vital to get the mind to escape responsibilities and connect with something they enjoy. As fitness professionals we are prone to suggest walking, yoga, meditation and breathing exercises as a form of stress release. However, not every individual will be open to attending mind-body classes or immediately implement breathing exercises.

Many individuals cope with stress through leisure pursuits such as reading a book, listening to music or playing with the dog. Once the person grasps the concepts of how to disconnect from stress, they can progress to various forms of exercise to continue with stress maintenance.

Stress is not a largely complex topic, but is often confusing because of the various causes and effects. Distinguishing how stress affects our minds and bodies, we can better understand how to educate our classes and clients. **OSF**

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