

5 SILENT SIGNS THAT YOUR CLIENTS ARE STRESSED

By Elizabeth Rae Kovar M.A.

Stress is a part of the modern life. No one can avoid stress with responsibilities such as full time work, childcare, daily errands and house maintenance. Most people acknowledge stress, but are unaware of the severity of certain silent triggers. Most people equate stress to staying busy and running around from Point A to Point B, but most do not recognize emotional and mental stress or behavioral patterns as “real stress.”

The American Institute of Stress labels stress as, “America’s Number One Health Problem.” Although heart disease is America’s Number One Killer, many people believe stress is an underlying cause (along with a poor diet) that triggers heart problems. In modern living, job stress is one of the leading causes of a stressful life. Today, people do more with less and are pressured to meet tight deadlines or high sales goals. College kids and teenagers also endure stress because many are working while in school; thus, working and studying for long days with less leisure and play time.

When stressed the body goes through the stress response or “fight or flight.” Our bodies undergo a physiological change to help us “flee from danger.” However, since we are no longer “fleeing” we are putting ourselves through endless moments of “fight or flight.” Our bodies experience this change without any control. During stress our heart rate and blood pressure skyrocket to increase blood flow to the brain to improve decision making, blood sugar rises to fuel more energy “to escape,” blood flow moves away from the visceral area and into the working muscles to help us “flee” and blood clotting occurs naturally so we avoid blood loss when injured. This myriad of automatic responses are supposed to benefit the body when actual danger is present, but unfortunately self-induced stress occurs too frequently.

These five silent signs indicate that a client is stressed, maxed out or requires mindful practice.

STRANGE OR SUDDEN PHYSICAL ISSUES

Does your client one day have numbness and the next an ear ache? People who are chronically stressed, and/or have a poor diet or lack of caloric intake, may experience numerous physical issues that simply “come out of no where.” Although the client should seek medical attention, many “bouncing” symptoms that are not persistent maybe rooted to stress.

Each system of the body responds to stress differently. For example, the gastrointestinal system is an area where people begin to experience opposing effects. Not only can the stomach experience “butterflies,” nausea or an ache, but people may notice extreme bowel movements between constipation or diarrhea. Stress effects digestion, the absorption of nutrients and minerals in the small intestine and how quickly the food is digested. Combined with a lack of water or a poor diet, a person may experience constipation where another maybe “on edge” and experience the alternate effect.

If the body is “flip-flopping” issues it may be a sign to find if stress is the underlying cause.

ABNORMAL OR EXCESSIVE CRAVINGS AND EATING HABITS

Several mindful eating specialists believe that when a person has more anxiety he or she does not “feel full” because they are changing their hormonal response. Most of the time when people are stressed, they crave junk food. Some individuals use eating as a coping mechanism for their emotional state. If all of a sudden a person who eats healthily wants to eat nothing but junk food, he or she may want to check into their emotional state and stress.



Long term, stress eating is an emotional response that can become automatic or a habit if left untreated. Normally, when the body and the mind feels good, the body does not want junk as its prime energy source.

CHRONIC PAIN WITH NO PATHOLOGY

If a person complains of chronic pain, but does not have any pathology (diagnosis) he or she may be channeling their stress to a certain area of their body.

Chronic pain can be

caused from overtraining (physical stress) but combined with emotional and mental stress; the body breaks down quicker than normal. So, if a person does not have any specific tears, ailments, misalignments or injuries, stress could be the culprit.

During stress, muscles become tense and trembling can occur. One way to recognize what causes the stress is to exit one's normal surroundings. Whether it's a vacation or a hike in the park, when the mind and body is not fixated on a specific issue, the body can relax. If the pain goes away stress could be the problem.

MENTAL OBSESSION

The world is different today than most people remember during their childhood. Mental obsession is a fixation on a certain topic that begins to consume one's life. Stressful thoughts while eating disrupts digestion and pulls the body out of "relaxation mode" and into "fight or flight." Thus, the blood flow does not aide digestion, but rather helps the muscles that need to flee. Marriage, politics, work - anything that a person thinks about the majority of the day is a mental obsession.

EXTREME BEHAVIORS

As previously mentioned, the body can go through extremes. Stress effects for one person are different than another. A person may swing through extreme eating and then no hunger. For example, a person who is constantly on the go, stressed and doesn't have time to eat may "block" their hunger pangs due to a hormonal release to decrease the symptoms of hunger such as headache, lack of focus, fatigue. Whereas another person, who is lonely, bored and has mental obsession may fill their time and emotions with eating. The body adapts to whatever "habit" the person adopts. Mood swings

and irritation are another indicator of extreme behavior.

HOW TO HANDLE STRESS

The best thing to note with stress is that clients need to discover what they can and cannot control. Controlling stress doesn't happen overnight, but starting with a list of what a person can and cannot control is best. From this point, a person can prioritize tasks or responsibilities. This way, he or she can alleviate some stress by focusing on the most important tasks. Completing one task at a time is the best. **OSF**

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