

Anxiety Depression or Stress

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Overview

Stress is good for you. It keeps you alert, motivated and primed to respond to danger. As anyone who has faced a work deadline or competed in a sport knows, stress mobilizes the body to respond, improving performance. Yet too much stress, or chronic stress may lead to major depression in susceptible people.

Even positive events, such as getting married or beginning a new job, can be stressful and may lead to an episode of major depression. Yet about 10% of people suffer from depression without the trigger of a stressful event.

Stress -- whether chronic, such as taking care of a parent with Alzheimer's, or acute, such as losing a job or the death of a loved one -- can lead to major depression in susceptible people. Both types of stress lead to overactivity of the body's stress-response mechanism.

Coping with Stress & Depression

- **1. Exercise:** Experts recommend a half-hour of moderate exercise, such as walking or swimming five days a week. Exercise produces chemicals in the body that boost your mood and stimulate hormones and neurotransmitters, including endorphins, that can help reduce stress.
- **2. Strong, supportive relationships:** Isolation is a risk factor for depression, while community buffers people from the effects of adversity. Negative, critical relationships are harmful.
- **3. Yoga, meditation, prayer, psychotherapy:** Studies have shown that these practices can be helpful. They have a positive effect on the emotional brain circuits.
- **4. Eating well and not drinking too much alcohol.** People who feel stressed may drink too much; alcohol is a known mood suppressor.
- **5. Making time for yourself.** Schedule some downtime to pursue creative pursuits or a hobby. Today's harried, multitasking life is stressful. If possible, schedule mini-vacations; longer breaks of at least 10 days have been shown to be more beneficial in reducing stress.
- **6. Sleep.** People who are working overtime, or juggling family and work, may not be getting eight hours of restful sleep.
- **7. Cognitive-behavioral therapy.** This type of therapy helps people reframe events in a more positive fashion. Negative attitudes and the tendency to worry can amplify the impact of stress.