Focus On: Nine Ways Stress is More Dangerous Than You Think

Some people believe stress makes them perform better. But that's rarely true. Research consistently shows the opposite – that stress usually causes a person to make more mistakes. Besides making you forget where you put your keys, stress also can have dramatic negative impacts on your health.

Here are nine examples:

1. **Stress makes it difficult to control your emotions**

It's no secret that stressed people can fly off the handle. But new research reveals just how little stress is required for you to lose your cool. A 2013 study by neuroscientists found that even mild levels of stress can impair our ability to control our emotions.

In the study, researchers taught subjects stress control techniques. But after participants were put under mild stress – by having their hands dunked in icy water – they could not easily calm themselves down when shown pictures of snakes or spiders.

2. **Stress can promote disease**

Some people are more prone to certain diseases, and chronic stress can give these conditions the green light. Stress has been linked to illnesses that include cancer, lung disease, fatal accidents, suicide, and cirrhosis of the liver. Researchers at Johns Hopkins University have discovered that children exposed to chronic stress are more likely to develop a mental illness if they are genetically predisposed.

3. **Stress can affect your love life**

Sex is a pleasurable and effective way to relieve stress. But stress can also get you out of the mood quicker than you think. A 1984 study found that stress can affect a man's body weight, testosterone levels, and sexual desire. Numerous studies have

shown that stress – especially performance anxiety – can lead to impotence. High levels of stress in pregnant women also may trigger changes in their children as they grow, specifically behavioral and developmental issues.

4. **Stress can ruin your teeth and gums**

Some people respond to stressful situations through nervous tics or by grinding their teeth. While people often grind their teeth unconsciously or when they sleep, it can do lasting damage to your jaw and wear your teeth thin.

5. **Stress can ruin your heart**

Stress can physically damage your heart muscle. Stress damages your heart because stress hormones increase your heart rate and constrict your blood vessels. This forces your heart to work harder and increases your blood pressure. According to the American Institute of Stress, the incidence rate of heart attacks and sudden death increases after major stress inducing incidents, like hurricanes, earthquakes, and tsunamis.

6. **Stress can make you gain weight**

In the ancient days of hunter-gatherers, harsh conditions forced people to eat as much as possible when food was available in order to store up for lean times. That compulsion lives on inside us and comes out when we are stressed. Researchers at the University of Miami found that when people find themselves in stressful situations, they are likely to consume 40 percent more food than normal. Those scientists recommended turning off the nightly newscast before eating dinner, to keep bad news – and overeating – at bay.

7. **Stress can make you look older**

Chronic stress contributes significantly to premature aging. Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, discovered that stress shortens telomeres – structures on the end of chromosomes – so that new cells can’t grow as quickly. This leads to the inevitable signs of aging: wrinkles, weak muscles,

poor eyesight, and more.

8. **Stress weakens your immune system**

The connection between mind and body is often underestimated. But everyone has experienced a cold when they can least afford to. That's because the high demands stress puts on the body make the immune system suffer, which makes you more vulnerable to colds and infections. The American Psychological Association (APA) recommends calming exercises, as well as social outlets, to relieve stress.

9. **Stress can lead to long-term disability**

The potential dangers created by even mild stress should not be underestimated. They can lead to long-term disability serious enough to render you unable to work. Researchers reached this conclusion after their five-year study of 17,000 Swedish working adults, ages 18 to 64, published in 2011 by the Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health. One in four study subjects in the Stockholm area who had mild stress were awarded disability benefits for physical conditions like angina, high blood pressure, and stroke. Nearly two-thirds drew benefits for a mental illness.

Read the full article by Brian Krans here: https://www.healthline.com/health-news/mental-eight-ways-stress-harms-your-health-082713#1

