**STRESS**

Most people report that stress (moderately or greater) affects their life. According to the National Institute of Mental Health, stress is the brain’s physical and psychological response to any perceived demands, threats, or pressures from an individual’s external and internal environments. The stress response is a natural phenomenon, also found throughout the animal kingdom. This response is designed to assist in survival, given a potentially harmful or life-threatening situation. During a time of stress, the body releases nerve chemicals and hormones, which prepare the body for “fight or flight.” Your pulse quickens, you breathe faster, muscles tense, the brain utilizes more oxygen and increases its activity, and the immune system is boosted all for the sake of survival. When the threat has passed, the body systems act to return the body to its normal state of function.

However, when stress is chronic, the nerve-chemicals and hormones that are supposed to function in short bursts in order to save your life end up inhibiting and suppressing other bodily functions that aren’t immediately required for survival. So if stress is persistent and prolonged, and the source of stress is a constant presence in your life, problems can arise. When stressful situations go unresolved, the body is kept in a constant state of activation, which increases the rate of wear and tear to biological systems. This results in fatigue or damage, and the body’s ability to repair and defend itself becomes seriously compromised and the risk of injury or disease escalates.

In example, The American Institute of Stress states that stress can cause damage to the cardiovascular system (impaired heart function, heart disease, high blood pressure, stroke, heart palpitations), the musculoskeletal system (tension in skeletal muscles and joints leading to backache, muscular aches/pains, predisposition to arthritis and rheumatoid arthritis), the digestive system (Upset stomach, ulcers, diarrhea, gastritis, peptic ulcers, irritable bowel syndrome, colitis, canker sores in mouth), the immune system (weakened defenses/lower resistance to infections, viral illnesses, allergies, malignant cells/cancer), the reproductive system (lower sex drive, impaired testosterone and sperm production leading to impotence in men, absent, irregular, or painful menstruation in women) and the endocrine system (menstrual disorders, thyroid disorders, adrenal hypo-function). Other symptoms of chronic stress include skin rashes, sleeplessness, anxiety, headaches, depression, anger and irritability.

The Anxiety and Depression Association of America reports that studies have shown a relationship between chronic stress and depression and acceleration in the aging process. People who suffer from recurring depression and chronic stress typically exhibit shorter telomeres, which is the outermost part of the chromosome in white blood cells. As a person ages, telomeres shorten. Studies have revealed that oxidative stress, inflammation, cortisol levels and recurrent depression have been associated with shorter telomere length, supporting the claim that stress accelerates shortening and , ultimately, faster aging.

There are three different types of stress that all carry potential physical and mental health risks: routine stress, stress from a negative change in environment and traumatic stress. Routine stress is caused by pressures in familial relations, work, finances and other daily responsibilities. Stress from a negative change includes losing a job, divorce or an illness. Traumatic stress is typically caused by a major accident, war, assault or a natural disaster in which someone is at risk of being seriously hurt or killed.

People who suffer from chronic stress are prone to more frequent and severe viral infections (such as the cold or the flu), and vaccines are less effective. However, the health problems associated with routine stress may be the most difficult to notice immediately. In cases of routine stress, the source of the stress is more constant than in cases of acute and traumatic stress. This means that the body has no clear indication to return to its normal state of function, and remains in a strained state of being. Over time, this strain on the body starts to degenerate a person’s psychology and biological systems, leading to health problems like heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, anxiety disorders, and a variety of other illnesses.

In the U.S., the top causes of stress are:

1. Pressures from jobs (tension between co-workers, bosses and an overload of work.
2. Finances (loss of a job, reduced retirement, medical expenses)
3. Health (health crisis, terminal or chronic illnesses)
4. Relationships (divorce, death of a spouse, arguments with friends, loneliness)
5. Poor nutrition (inadequate nutrition, caffeine, processed foods, refined sugars)
6. Media overload (television, internet, radio, E-mail, social networking)
7. Sleep Deprivation (Causes an inability to release adrenaline and other stress hormones)

Studies have found there is a difference between stress levels and stress management amongst gender. To date, women report higher stress levels than men (5.4 vs. 4.8 respectively on a scale of 1-10), but surveys suggest that the link between stress and health is harder for men to recognize. Men are less likely than women to believe that it can have any impact upon their health (78% of men vs. 88% of women), despite that they are more likely than women to be diagnosed with certain illness that are often exacerbated by stress.

There is also evidence to suggest that children are now suffering from higher stress levels. Since the 1950’s, suicide rates among adolescents have more than quadrupled, and only 36% of 7th graders could say they were truly happy with their lives. Within the past decade, pharmaceuticals used to treat emotional disorders have escalated by 68% for girls and 30% for boys. Stress in children has been linked with childhood weight gain and cognitive degeneration. During times of stress, the body releases higher levels of cortisol, which chews up the brain if it loiters there long-term. Experiments were performed on lab rats in the U.S., Israel, Germany, China, and Italy. The scientists gave the rats daily injections of rat cortisol for several weeks. The results found that the cortisol killed brain cells in the hippocampus region, which left the rats feeling depressed, anxious, fearful, immature, needy, and unable to learn new behaviors. M. Sapolsky, a Stanford University professor of psychology, states that when the brain is under stress, the hippocampal neurons no longer work as well, neural networks become disconnected, the birth of new neurons is inhibited, and the hippocampal neurons become endangered. This means that chronic stress inhibits an individual’s ability to learn new things and commit new material to memory.

In addition to cognitive degeneration, adolescents under stress exhibit a higher likelihood of smoking, drinking, using illegal drugs; they become more irritable and emotionally sensitive, have nightmares or difficulty sleeping, are unable to concentrate, have a lower educational performance, face eating and digestive problems, suffer from headaches, stomachaches, greater fears, anxiety, isolation and they regress mentally, emotionally and psychologically.

Stress in children is typically derived from three places: school, home, and peers. At school, stress can come from an unstructured classroom, unclear or unreasonable expectations, and fear of failure. At home, stress comes from a lack of family routine or over-scheduling, a prolonged or serious illness, poor nutrition, changes in familial situations or family strife, abuse, financial problems, and again unclear or unreasonable expectations. Stress also comes in the form of peer pressure, such as changing schools, dealing with bullies, trying to “fit in,” and moving to a new community.

Based on the data provided from the American Psychological Association and the American Institute of Stress, 77% of people in the U.S. regularly experience physical symptoms from stress, 73% of people experience psychological symptoms caused by stress, 48% state that stress has a negative impact on their personal and professional life, and 33% of people say they are constantly living in states of extreme stress. Furthermore, stress costs employers and the health care industry over $300 Billion annually. Clearly, too much stress can be detrimental.

But the optimal life is not a life without stress. When people are stress-free/have no stress in their lives, they become lazy, lethargic, bored and apathetic people. They lose their ability to manage crisis, and lose their acute sense of alertness and awareness of their surroundings. These people can no longer recognize the dangers in their environment, and can no longer differentiate the well-wishers from the harmful people in their life. Anybody can cheat them, deceive them, fool them and betray them. A lack of stress reduces their intelligence, intuitive power and ability to plan for their future life. They cannot be visionary, and as a result, the chances for these people to enjoy prosperity in their lives are very, very small.

These people lack the essential ability to adapt and learn from other’s sufferings or other’s mistakes. For example, in India, if you slaughtered an animal, like a goat, in the presence of other goats, you will find that the goats in queue have no response or concern for their own eminent demise. That is due to an insufficient amount of stress in their life. Hence, I would like to summarize here that there are several after-effects/side-effects of severe stress, which can be very harmful for a human’s growth and survival, but I would like to say that the effects of no stress is of greater consequences than the effects of severe stress. Most of our clients are interested in attaining a stress-free life, but I believe that no stress will take you nowhere in your journey towards happiness, prosperity and transformation. Without a degree of stress, you cannot grow and flourish in your life. Don’t pray to the God of your understanding for a life free from any stress.

So then, what is the solution for a better life? I always pray to the God of my understanding for the ability to handle and to manage the stress in my life, instead of praying for a stress-free life. A life without stress is a life of boredom, without charm and without mystery. If you know your entire future, then there is no surprise, no mystery and no charm. Life becomes boring. People lose the ability to endure and fight crisis. Your defense system has no ability to protect you. The medical health care system is mainly focused on the stimulation or activation of the related cells, organs, and organ systems of the body, through the help of medicine. Many cells within the body are sleeping; not active. That gives a huge amount of laziness and lethargy to the body. If inactive, body cells stop producing enough energy, which is detrimental to human’s health. Medical doctors provide medicine in order to push these lazy, lethargic cells into activity, and people start to experience immediate relief. This is due to an insufficient amount of stress in the body system. Stress can be compared to the hormones in the body. When there are no hormones, the body is in greater danger than if there was an excess of hormones. Stay away from the concept of no stress in life. The body needs a balance. People need balance.

When we breathe, we inhale air, but our system only uses the oxygen contained in the air. The rest is exhaled. But hundreds of scientific experiments have shown that pure oxygen is more harmful than polluted air. Pure oxygen actually kills brain cells, while polluted air damages the system very slowly. Both are bad, but pure oxygen has a much worse impact on a human’s life. That’s why pure oxygen is not the solution for maintaining good health, but pure *air*/unpolluted *air* is the best solution for human health. Similarly, severe stress is definitely dangerous for someone’s everyday life and for his or her growth, but no stress is likened to pure oxygen; its impact is much more severe in one’s life.

There must be a balance. A permissible level of stress refers to a degree of stress that does not deteriorate or degenerate the body systems by any means. On the contrary, stress is responsible for a person’s high levels of alertness and awareness of their environment, and assists in advising the person on what to do. Stress can help motivate a person and help them to accomplish daily challenges through more efficient means. It gives a boost to your memory and sharpens your senses, giving you a laser-like focus so as to be able to avoid situations of greater stress and danger. This stress helps people to remain active, respond quickly to anything good or bad in the environment; it increases and enhances intuitive powers, intelligence and intellectual abilities. People become more visionary, are able to enjoy an easy-going life, and have a huge ability to prevent and manage the severities of stress. They are pro-active. They are able to prevent and suffer less from any kind of emotional trauma and have the ability to recognize opportunities and take advantage of them as soon as they arise. People under moderate stress are very successful in their occupation, including their job and business, and their family lives.

A small amount of stress helps people to become more prosperous in their life, by all means. That is very important for a high-quality life, including physical health, mental health, and emotional and psychological balance. Permissible doses of stress actually helps to fortify the immune system, improving the way your heart functions and defending your body from infections. In fact, people who experience moderate levels of stress before undergoing surgery have a faster rate of recovery than those who has low or high levels of stress.

Stress inspires and motivates people, and gives them the energy for greater accomplishments, resulting in greater fulfillment and appreciation in life. It helps people to maintain healthy relationships, to enjoy the abundance of money and pleasure of sex in their life. People under stress are more gracious for the abundance of things in their life, and are able to recognize and acknowledge this abundance. These people are not suffering from any kind of psychosomatic disorders, like anxiety, depression, manic depression, sleep disorders, emotional imbalance, financial crisis, and relationship problems. They have the ability to recognize the right fit; the things that matter in their life. These people are very open to new technologies and to new ideas and concepts. A small amount of stress gives people greater flexibility in their life. These people are more inclined to believe in the concept of God/Creator and are always very grateful of what they are receiving from Nature, instead of filled with complaints and resistance to Nature. As a result, Nature is more willing to flow through them and attract abundance in all areas of their life. They are more empathetic for other people, less judgmental and the brain is not pre-occupied with unnecessary, useless thoughts.

Stress promotes health, compassion, and responsibility for family and society, because they feel less frustrated and more satisfied, so they have that desire to contribute more for humanity. They enjoy giving to others instead of taking from others. Within permissible limits, stress changes the whole character and behavior of people. It changes their complete perception about themselves and the world they live in, and the wisdom they are able to extract from all experiences in their life. They are selfless. They are leaders. They are transformed, happy people. Everything in life is about balance. If we do not make the effort, we cannot grow.

What matters is our perception about the struggles in our lives. Stress is there to fortify our hearts and minds, to build our character, venture to unexplored places and to enable us to reach new levels never perceived before. Stress welcomes God and Nature into our totality, and is essential for transformation: for greater people and a greater world.