

Frequently Asked Questions Stress, Stress Reduction and Wellness Practitioners

What is stress and how does stress affect the body?

Stress is defined as the body's response to demands or pressures. These demands or pressures are known as stressors. Stressors can be internal or external, of our own making or thrust upon us, like deadlines at work. Stressors can be both positive and negative. A positive stressor makes us achieve more than we thought we ever could. A negative stressor can be quite debilitating.

The Olympic games illustrates how stress can affect individual performance. Some athletes rise to the occasion, while others choke. The difference is how the individual athletes handle and respond to their stressors.

It is important for each of us to honour and understand that when it comes to stressors the intensity of our individual responses will be completely and utterly unique.

Stressors affect the body by causing stress reactions which are chemical reactions. We can all find common ground, when we discuss the symptoms of these chemical reactions. These symptoms include but are not exclusive to an inability to concentrate and focus, an inability to hear, listen and follow instructions, loss of short-term memory, a decrease in saliva production and dry mouth, a decreased ability to digest food, a loss of peripheral vision, a decrease in immune response, an increase in the ability for our blood to clot, an increased startle response, shortness of breath and sweaty palms.

How much stress are working Canadians under?

- According to Statistics Canada - 73% of working Canadians are mildly to severely stressed.

What are some of the statistics on caregiving, chronic pain and the state of our well-being?

- According to Statistics Canada - 1 in 3 Canadians, 15 years and older spend approximately 3 hours per day caring for a relative or friend with a chronic condition. (In other words, 1 in 3 Canadians are caregivers)
- According to the Family Caregiver Alliance - caregivers report chronic conditions including heart attack, heart disease, cancer, diabetes and arthritis at nearly twice the rate of non-caregivers (45% vs. 24%) and caregivers also suffer from increased rates of physical ailments including acid reflux and headaches.
- According to the chronic pain coalition - 1 in 5 Canadians suffer from chronic pain and that the effects of chronic pain are more debilitating than chronic lung or heart disease.

What are some of the most common causes of stress reactions within the body?

Chronic pain and caring for a sick friend or loved one are extremely significant in any conversation relating to stress. Significant because a majority of us will find ourselves dealing with one, the other, or possibly both during our lifetime. Significant because both have been medically and scientifically linked to causing stress reactions.

Other causes of stress reactions include chronic conditions other than pain, financial burdens, deadlines at work, procrastination, perfectionism, relationship tension, family obligations, insufficient water intake, pharmaceuticals and environmental pollutants.

It is important to understand that the by-products of stress reactions are cumulative and must be released and reduced on a regular basis in order to maintain balance and to keep our minds and bodies functioning at their best.

What are the possible side effects of the long-term accumulation of stress reaction by-products?

When the by-products of stress reactions are not released and reduced on a regular basis, the potential side effects can include but are not exclusive to anxiety, depression, insomnia, fatigue, memory loss, high blood sugar, high blood pressure, asthma, arthritis, digestive issues, irritable bowel syndrome, decreased immunity, skin conditions, cognitive impairment, migraines, panic attacks, irritable bowel syndrome and poorly controlled diabetes.

How can I release and reduce the by-products of stress reactions from my body?

First and foremost, you need to find a relaxation technique that works for you! Each of us is unique and what works for you may not work for an other.

Once you find a relaxation technique that works, do it on a regular basis! But, don't get stuck in a rut. Trying new techniques to supplement your favourite is an excellent way to add variety and enhance your health and well-being.

A good website for finding information on different stress reducing techniques is the Natural Health Practitioners of Canada website - www.nhpcanada.org. Click on "For the Public" then click on "Holistic Health Guide". The guide describes over 60 different alternative and complementary techniques which by their holistic nature are often designed to release and reduce the by-products of stress reactions. It is an excellent place to begin a search for the technique that will work for you.

How do I find a practitioner?

One method to find a practitioner is through an association website. Association websites often include practitioner listings. A few examples include:

- NHPC - Natural Health Practitioners of Canada
- CanASK - Canadian Association of Specialized Kinesiology
- RABC - Reflexology Association of British Columbia

Associations are a good place to start the search as most associations require members to sign a code of ethics and to keep up with industry trends by compelling members to obtain a set number of continuing education credits within a designated time frame. In addition to these requirements, the Natural Health Practitioners of Canada, requires its members to hold current certification in First Aid/CPR training and to take ethics training relevant to being a wellness practitioner.

Another method to find a wellness practitioner is by word of mouth. Don't be afraid to ask a family member, friend or colleague at work. Perhaps someone you know is currently benefiting from the work of a wellness practitioner or they know someone who is and are more than willing to share the practitioner's contact information.

Above all, it is important to find a practitioner that you trust. Your personal comfort is of paramount importance. If you are not able to relax with the practitioner, there is no point to the session. Wellness sessions are intended to release and reduce the by-products of your stress reactions and not to add to them.