




The Effects of Physical and Emotional Stress on Brain Health and Aging

Dr. Sherri Simpson Broadwater MD
Adult, Teen, and Child Psychiatrist
June 10, 2022
@drsherrypsych – FB and IG
www.drsherrypsych.net



No Disclosures or Conflicts of Interests

Thanks to My Family, Friends, Mentors, Emory University and the Alzheimer Research Center



Stress is how the brain and body respond to any demand. Any type of challenge—such as performance at work or school, a significant life change, or a traumatic event—can be stressful

Eustress, or Positive stress, has the following characteristics:

- **Motivates, focuses energy.**
- **Is short-term.**
- **Is perceived as within our coping abilities.**
- **Feels exciting.**
- **Improves performance.**

Distress, or Negative stress, has the following characteristics:

- **Causes anxiety or concern.**
- **Can be short-or long-term.**
- **Is perceived as outside of our coping abilities.**
- **Feels unpleasant.**
- **Decreases performance.**
- **Can lead to mental and physical problems.**

Body

Mind



Eating
Changes

Emotions

Behavior



Stress causes an increase in cortisol hormones, which is a natural bodily response.

Stress Hormones:

Restore balance to the body after a stress event

Helps regulate blood sugar levels in cells and

Influences hippocampal activities, where memories are stored and processed.

<https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4422005/>; [Front Neurosci.](#) 2015; 9: 164.

Published online 2015 May 6. doi: [10.3389/fnins.2015.00164](https://doi.org/10.3389/fnins.2015.00164)

Examples of **Eustress**, Positive Stress

- Receiving a promotion or raise at work
- Starting a new job
- A healthy relationship or marriage
- Buying a home
- A new child in the home
- Moving (Not chronic moving - home, school)
- Taking a vacation
- Holiday seasons
- Retiring
- Taking educational classes or learning a new hobby
- Transition between starting/leaving a school or job

Examples of **Distress**, Negative Stress

- The death of a loved one
- Separation from a loved one, spouse, parent, sibling, committed partner, divorce
- **Lack of adequate nurturing/supportive relationships (Family/friends)**
- **Transition between starting/leaving a school or job**
- Losing contact with loved ones.
- Hospitalization (oneself or a family member).
- Injury or illness (oneself or a family member).
- **Experiencing/ witnessing abuse or neglect**
- Relationship stress.
- Bankruptcy/Money Problems
- Unemployment
- Sleep problems
- Educational/professional challenges
- Legal problems
- **(Systemic racism, trauma, oppression, violence - community, family, media)**
- **Natural Disaster**

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Common **internally caused** sources of **distress** include:

- Fears: (e.g., fears of flying, heights, public speaking, chatting with strangers at a party).
- Repetitive Thought Patterns.
- Worrying about future events (e.g. safety, accomplishments, identity, waiting for medical test results or job restructuring).
- Unrealistic, perfectionist expectations.

Habitual behavior patterns that can lead to **distress** include:

- Overscheduling.
- Failing to be assertive.
- Procrastination and/or failing to plan ahead.

EXPECT
SOME
STRESS,
ACCEPT IT,
AND LET IT GO

Markamoment.com



How Does Stress affect the Brain?

Chronic diseases/problems are defined broadly as conditions challenges that last 1 year or more and require ongoing medical attention or limit activities of daily living or both.

Chronic stress causes cortisol and other hormones to remain too long in the body which increases the risk of anxiety and depression (lowering mood), which can become chronic.

Chronic stress also can cause us to stop utilizing our normal coping activities.

Chronic stress can cause structural brain damage.

Chronic stress can decrease our memory, our ability to think through challenges, manage our thoughts/feelings in healthy ways, and complete tasks.

Chronic stress can cause chronic inflammation, a risk factor for chronic depression, obesity, cardiovascular disease, autoimmune disorders (MS/Lupus) and Dementia.



What can we do to reduce stress?

- Any and all tools needed to create and maintain mental, emotional, physical, financial, environmental, sexual, and spiritual health.

Self-Care

- Be aware of eustress, distress, chronic stress
- Establish(Re-establish)Healthy Routine -exercise, healthy eating (4-5 vegetables), limit sweets and fat, hydration, restful sleepin
- Problem – solving – speaking up, increasing skills
- change distractions
- Coping skills (20) including mindfulness, relaxation, ask for help
- Help Seeking

WHAT ARE EXAMPLES OF SELF-CARE? WHAT ARE YOU ACTIVELY DOING TO STAY WELL?

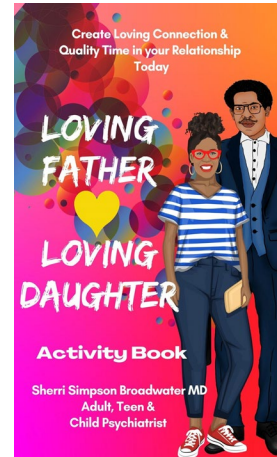
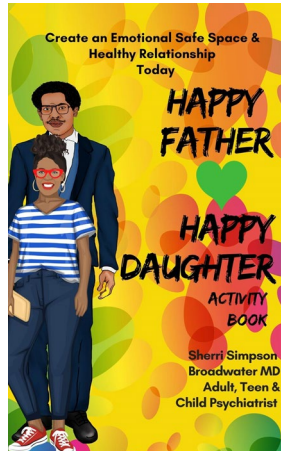
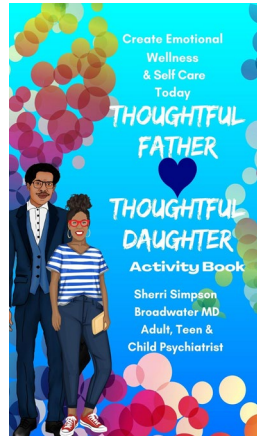
- Humor
- Exercise/ Movement
- Healthy Eating/Hydration
- Hydration
- Safety
- Adequate sleep
- Structure
- Compassion
- Let go of regret
- Forgiveness
- School-personal flow
- Sunshine
- Deep Breaths
- Music
- Ask for Help
- Create healthy connections – practice positive connecting, vulnerability and real
- Face your fear
- Learn to say yes to positive things, creative things, or new things
- Create and maintain healthy boundaries
- Using our voice
- Connect with what you like about yourself
- Plans of Action
- Create a Vision Board
- Therapy – Individual, Family
- Emotional Skills Group
- Prayer
- Affirmations, Reminders of Worth, Value and Worthiness
- Reminders of other who accept themselves and who have overcome

Where to Find Help?

- Ask your primary care physician for referrals
- Ask for a referral from a colleague, friend or family member
- Ayanatherapist.com
- [Beam.org](https://beam.org) - Black Emotional and Mental Health Collective
- Check your insurance panel website or call line
- Employee Assistance Program EAP - 3 free sessions through Human Resources
- [Justdavia.com/blog/directories-for-therapists-of-color](https://justdavia.com/blog/directories-for-therapists-of-color)
- Local community service board or health department
- [Melaninandmentalhealth.com](https://melaninandmentalhealth.com)
- NAMI - National Alliance on Mental Illness
- National Queer and Trans Therapists of Color Network (NQTTCN)
- [Openpathcollective.org](https://openpathcollective.org)
- [Psychologytoday.org](https://psychologytoday.org)
- [Therapyforblackgirls.com](https://therapyforblackgirls.com)
- [Therapyforblackmen.org](https://therapyforblackmen.org)

Questions

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Anxiety Symptoms – Generalized, Panic, Social

- Dizziness.
- Muscle tension or pain.
- Restlessness.
- Sleeplessness.
- Trouble concentrating.
- Racing heartbeat.
- Fast breathing.
- Shaking or trembling.
- Worry about what I'm doing right, wrong, what I didn't do, what I did do, what will I do, what won't I do.
- Fear of being judged
- Overly judgmental, critical
- Being perceived as not being smart, than,
- Very high bar,

How Does Stress affect the Brain?

Stress causes an increase in cortisol hormones, which is a natural bodily response.

Chronic stress causes cortisol and other hormones to remain too long in the body increases the risk of anxiety and depression development.

Chronic diseases/problems are defined broadly as conditions and challenges that last 1 year or more and require ongoing medical attention or limit activities of daily living or both.

Clinical and or Major Depression – symptoms more days than not for 2 weeks

- Decline in sleep rejuvenation
- Decline in energy
- Decline in concentration
- Eating – too much or too little
- Helplessness, hopelessness, worthlessness
- Feeling revved up and or appearing lethargic
- Low libido

Tips for Coping With Stress and Anxiety

Participate in social and community activities.

Social interaction and a sense of giving to your community enhance self-esteem and reduce stress.

Take care of yourself. Get regular exercise, eat nourishing food, and maintain a healthy weight.

Participate in activities you enjoy.

Have you always wanted to learn a new language? Take up ballroom dancing? Mentor a child? Now is the time! (And activities like these will also help your brain.)

Stay focused on positive things

and avoid negative self talk such as “I can’t do that” or “I’m too old.” When your self talk is negative, you will feel more stress. Instead of thinking what you can’t do, remember what you can do.

Seek out
-Cheerleaders

Connect with the people who are most meaningful to you.

People with friends tend to be happier than those without. Stable social relations help you adjust to changes such as retiring, moving, and losing loved ones.

Remember stressful events that you successfully coped with in the past and repeat what worked before.

Success Memories are key!

Focus on addressing your problems instead of feeling helpless about them.

Think of them as “challenges” or “tests” rather than as insurmountable obstacles.

Learn and use relaxation techniques and meditation.

If you are a caregiver, **make use of support and education groups**, as well as respite care, which provides time off for caregivers.



MENTAL HEALTH INCLUDES:

- Flexibility
- Realistic expectations of everything and everyone
- Multiple, healthy relationships
- Multiple, activities that add value to your life
- A variety of coping skills (20)
- A life purpose
- A self-care plan
- A positive individual and collective identity
- Can express a variety of feelings

WHAT IMPACTS OUR MENTAL HEALTH?

- Our Biology
- Our Heredity
- Our Behaviors – Eating, Exercise, Hydration, Sleeping
- Environmental Toxins – what we put on our bodies, what we put in our bodies, what are bodies are impacted by e.g. planes, trains, cars, frequencies
- Our Community – Access to resources i.e. what we need, finances, housing, education, health-care, creativity, success
- Our Relationships - Parent-child, Siblings, Family, Peer, Neighborhood, School, Community
- Our Safety/Protection/Prevention – Wellbeing (Free of abuse and neglect) Health, Natural Disasters, Pandemic, School, Family, Community, Local, National, International (Free of Violence and Aggression)
- Our Equity, Acceptance, Justice
- Our Spirituality, Sense of a Power outside of ourselves, Hope, Faith

COVID-19, QUARANTINE, SOCIAL INJUSTICE, BEING A TEEN

- The Unknown
- Getting Sick
- Isolation
- Alone with your thoughts
- Worry about your future
- When is normal returning
- Can't participate in activities
- Can't connect with peers
- Perception of perfection on social media
- Fear, Anger, Worry
- Why Me?
- Insecurity
- Thoughts of Unworthiness
- Not being taught how to be mentally well



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TEEN DEPRESSION: MORE THAN JUST MOODINESS

- Being a teenager can be tough, but it shouldn't feel hopeless. If you have been feeling sad most of the time for a few weeks or longer and you're not able to concentrate or do the things you used to enjoy, talk to a trusted adult about [depression](#).



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DO I HAVE DEPRESSION?

- Do you often feel sad, anxious, worthless, or even “empty”?
- Have you lost interest in activities you used to enjoy?
- Do you get easily frustrated, irritable, or angry?
- Do you find yourself withdrawing from friends and family?
- Are your grades dropping?
- Have your eating or sleeping habits changed?
- Have you experienced any fatigue or memory loss?
- Have you thought about suicide or harming yourself?

DEPRESSION IN MEN

- Men may be more likely than women to be exhausted and irritable,
- Avoid the things they used to enjoy, lose sleep, and use alcohol or drugs to cope. They also may become
- Frustration, Discouraged, Recklessness, Angry, Exhausted, Irritable and sometimes Abusive.
- Some bury themselves in their work or busyness to avoid addressing feelings and emotions
- Lack of effort

DEPRESSION IN BLACK WOMEN

- Women may focus on aches and pain – upset stomach, neck pain, headache,
- Irritability, Complaining
- Over focus on caring for others
- Burying self in accomplishments and being busy
- Using food, shopping, focus on the external self to distract from feelings and emotions to avoid addressing feelings and emotions
- Denial of feelings and thoughts
- Denial of health concerns



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- A life purpose
- A self-care plan
- A positive individual and collective identity
- Can express a variety of feelings

WHAT IS SELF CARE?

- Self - Care is Any and All Tools Needed for Emotional, Financial, Physical, and Spiritual Health.
- SELF- CARE INCLUDES HEALTHY EATING, EXERCISE, COPING SKILLS, AND REGULAR DOCTOR APPTS WITH A DOCTOR WHO TRULY CARES FOR YOU AND YOUR LIFE!



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COPING SKILLS ROCK!

- A coping skill or tool is an activity or action that helps us manage and distract ourselves from unwanted thoughts and/or emotions. Coping tools do not replace problem-solving, so you may need both to feel better.
- To be effective, write down your coping skills.
- To be effective, practice your coping skills daily.
- Consider asking healthy, trusted people in your life to remind you of your coping skills.

Coping Skills

Distraction

Conversation, listen to talk radio, read, do puzzles, TV, computer games, jigsaws, solve a problem, make a list, learn something new, cleaning & tidying, gardening, arts & crafts.

Pros

Gives your heart & mind a break.
Great for short term relief.
Great to get through a crisis.

Cons

Can't do it for too long.
Doesn't resolve any underlying issues. Meds can make it hard to concentrate.

Grounding

Use body & senses: smell fragrances, slowly taste food, notice the colours around you. Walk on the grass barefoot, squeeze clay or mud, do yoga, meditate, exercise.

Pros

Helps slow or stop 'dissociation' (feeling numb, floaty or disconnected).
Reduces physicality of anxiety.

Cons

Sometimes it's better to stay a bit dissociated (that's how your mind protects you).

Emotional Release

Yell, scream, run! Try a cold shower. Let yourself cry... and sob. Put on a funny DVD and let yourself laugh! Try boxing, popping balloons, or crank up some music & dance crazy!

Pros

Great for anger and fear.
Releases the pressure of overwhelming emotion.

Cons

Hard to do in every situation. Feels odd. Some people might think you're acting 'crazier' (be selective with how & where you do this)

Self Love

Massage hands with nice cream, manicure your nails, cook a special meal, clean your house (or just make your bed), bubble bath or long shower, brush hair, buy a small treat.

Pros

Become your own best friend, your own support worker.
Great for guilt or shame.
You deserve it!

Cons

Sometimes can feel really hard to do, or feel superficial (but it's not).

Thought challenge

Write down negative thoughts then list all the reasons they may not be true. Imagine someone you love had these thoughts – what advice would you give them?

Pros

Can help to shift long-term, negative thinking habits.
Trying to be more logical can help reduce extreme emotion.

Cons

The more emotional you feel, the harder this is to do. In particular, feelings of shame can make this very hard.

Access your higher self

Help someone else, smile at strangers (see how many smiles you get back), pray, volunteer, do randomly kind things for others, pat dogs at the local park, join a cause

Pros

Reminds us that everyone has value and that purpose can be found in small as well as large things.

Cons

Don't get stuck trying to save everyone else and forget about you!

REASONS WHY OBTAINING EMOTIONAL WELLNESS MAY ALSO REQUIRE FORMAL, MENTAL WELLNESS TREATMENT INCLUDE:

- Persistent negativity, helplessness, hopelessness, and or worthlessness
- Witnessed and or experienced violence, chaos
- Long periods of avoidance /Emotional detachment
- Anxiety, worry, panic that is overwhelming, makes you feel trapped, stuck or stagnant
- Low tolerance for conflict and emotional acting out, aggression, intimidation, and or violence
- Inability to see your child as one deserving of compassion
- Chaotic relationships or unfulfilling relationships
- Persistent jealousy and competitiveness
- Periods of under functioning or poor functioning
- Power struggles without a proactive or positive goal/outcome
- Loss of control; Loss of dreams; Loss of goals
- Thoughts, intention and or plans of death, suicide, injury to yourself or others
- Difficulty pivoting or repositioning; Having a hard time resetting your mind
- Denial, Wishful Thinking, Substance Use, Deflecting, Antagonistic Venting
- Professionally, it may appear as avoiding or problems with supervisor, Sabotaging projects, Tardiness, Absenteeism, Stirring up mess, Splitting, Underperformance, Progressive Disciplinary Actions
- Any thoughts, feelings and behaviors that result in impairment or disruption in your life e.g. sleeping, drinking, eating, gambling, sex, pornography
- Areas in your thinking and in your life are unexplained
- Abuse Hx – Emotional, Physical, Sexual, Financial, Neglect: Receiver and or Giver
- **SEE SOMETHING...SAY SOMETHING....SOME**