

GENERAL SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF UNHEALTHY STRESS

By Leon Grové.

South African Stress levels are particularly high, and many lifestyle diseases, health-risk behaviours, suicide behaviours, violence, trauma-producing behaviours, performance levels and difficulties in coping are stress related. Studies have shown that up to 50% or more of work absenteeism in some companies is stress related. At the same time, suicidal behaviour, lifestyle diseases, HIV/AIDS, cancer, substance abuse, health risk behaviours, difficulties to cope with change, population growth, technology, retrenchments are all stress related. (75)

Stress is difficult to define and the definition or use of the word will vary depending on to whom you are speaking. Stress can be thought of as the perception that events or circumstances have challenged, or exceeded a person's ability to cope. Stress occurs within each individual and is determined by his/her particular characteristics. This will explain why some events (a deadline at work for example) can almost paralyse one person but inspire another. But to most of us the word stress is a way of saying that we are feeling tired, pressurised, exhausted, unhappy, overwhelmed, tense, powerless or fearful or distressed. (*Managing Stress - Time Life Books*) (118)

Professor Lourens Schlebusch (University of KZN) has just designed and validated a Stress Symptom Checklist (SSCL). He suggests that one should look at 3 levels of stress. The three systems involve an analysis of your physical reactions, psychological reactions and behavioral reactions which are also related to your social interactions because that is where you often express your behaviour. You are often aware of your physical and psychological behaviour but your behavioural reactions are often observed by others who might comment on how your behaviour seems to have changed. (90)

Physical Reactions

This would include symptoms like difficulties in relaxing, high blood pressure, unexplained headaches, muscle tension, unexplained nausea.

Psychological Reactions

This would include symptoms like feelings of helplessness, being over self-critical, feeling you cannot cope, feeling you have been neglected or let down.

Behavioural Reactions

This would include symptoms like poor time management, the need to constantly take work home, a drop in personal standards, difficulty in completing one task before rushing on to the next one, inability to meet deadlines, feeling that you function better under pressure.

- **A positive company culture causes 21% less stress and 12,5% less burnout for top and middle managers.**
- **Happy managers are 30 – 40% healthier than their unhappy colleagues.**

If you have a stress-related psychological disorder that you cannot cope with you should seek help from a registered psychologist..

(100)