

The Danger of an Overused Stress Response

One of the best ways to promote healing in a person's mind and body is to stabilize and restore a healthy stress response.

In our modern-day culture, most people are walking around with an overused and depleted stress response and it is working against their overall health and well-being. What was designed to be used in temporary moments is now becoming a chronic state.

Stress is not 100 percent bad. In fact, your body is designed to respond well to challenges and critical moments. They become opportunities to grow and flourish. The problem is a daily life filled with stress that depletes our body's ability to maintain healthy balance.

Long-Term Consequences and Chronic Un-Ease

When a person has chronic fear, stress, anxiety, anger, guilt or any other toxic way of thinking in their life, "fight or flight" can be occurring in endless loops. It doesn't have to be intense. Low-level stress that is constant can chip away at our body chemistry. When the stress response is activated, we enter into a persistent sequence called the "General Adaptation Syndrome" (GAS). This process takes place in three stages, the alarm stage, the adaptation/resistance stage and the exhaustion stage.

1. The Alarm Stage. The alarm stage initiates the process when a fearful situation or thought presents itself and the body reacts. Messages are sent throughout your body, telling you, "Let's go! Run! Move! You're in trouble! Better get out of here! You're not safe!" or "Do something quick and defend yourself!" Tension begins to develop in your chest and tightness manifests itself in your throat. Shortness of breath

and perspiration are common as well. Meanwhile your muscles begin to throb with vigor as adrenaline gets pumped into your system, giving you seemingly “superman” strength.

Your pupils begin to dilate as your mind develops an intense focus on the situation at hand. This is all part of the system that God intricately designed so that you could run from a dangerous circumstance. In an ideal situation, the parasympathetic nervous system would, after the stressor had been dealt with, initiate a course of action that brings you back to calmness and homeostasis.

This response was designed to help us run from a bear. The problem is that we are not running from bears today. We are escaping pain and stressing over bills, relationships and pressure-filled circumstances.

Threat of Danger

Understand that your body does not know the difference between real and perceived danger. It responds to both the same way.

That is how the enemy messes with our biology—by creating a threat or conflict in our thinking that steals our peace. He knows that if you receive it, your body will respond as though it is a real threat. It doesn't matter if a bear jumps out at you or you develop panic at being in a crowd of people, there will be physiological responses.

When GAS is in a chronic repetitive operation, the nervous system does not have a chance to bring the body back to peace. The fear response is still being executed repeatedly. For someone struggling with fear issues, it is not an issue of a bear running at them. It could be their boss. It could be their future, their spouse, the situation their child is in, finances, security, a mother-in-law or any number of things.

There may not even be a clear object creating the inward conflict or torment. There may be a projection in thought that

is nowhere to be found in physical reality. Due to our non-stop driven culture, there can be no resolution or healing unless we make some significant changes. When fight/flight continues its loop, we are led into the second phase of GAS.

2. Adaptation/Resistance Stage. If the cause for pressure, conflict, anxiousness, torment or anger is not resolved, the body makes an attempt to get accustomed to this “fight or flight” state for long-term protection. It is at this point that the body has realized that the alarm stage is not temporary, but will remain in process for an indefinite amount of time.

Instability now becomes a way of life and many people, not seeing the connection between thought and their lack of health, become accustomed to living this way. Although we were not designed for long-term adaptation of stress, our organs and faculties do their best to maintain survival.

Unfortunately, our culture is so driven and intense that millions live in this state for very long spans of time. For many it is even the standard of living.

Our bodies can get away with this resistance stage for a certain amount of time, but after a while it becomes increasingly threatening to good health. At this stage, the fight-or-flight responses are firing in repeated fashion without much of a break or relief. The body, in fact, increases its resource withdrawal from the different organ systems as cortisol is continually secreted.

3. Exhaustion Stage. At the exhaustion stage, the effects of anxiety and stress on a person are beginning to show signs of wear and tear. It is at this junction that the body really starts to wear out and reveals the fact that we were not designed to be in this state for too long at all. The adrenal glands at this point have been constantly pumping to the extent that the body ends up living on fumes, while

progressively moving towards exhaustion. The body also has been worked up, focused and drilled by certain strongholds and now there is no avoiding the exhaustion and breakdown.

A Pandemic Problem

It has been my observation that most people are living in some form of ongoing fight or flight. The sad reality is that we have folks inside and outside the church that are struggling with this issue. Fear is no respecter of persons. Bitterness, guilt, shame and rejection love taking prisoners, and can affect the fight or flight mechanism just as much.

People are being attacked by the toxic thoughts from the enemy and don't even know it. What makes matters worse is that too many have adapted to stronghold-driven living to the point that they defend their way of life. They end up saying things like, "I'm not really stressed. This isn't a fear issue. I just have a lot of work and responsibilities. I am the victim of circumstances. I can't stop feeling this way. This is just the way I am." The deadly habits and training are not dealt with and the cycle continues.

The Body Crashing

When people hit the exhaustion stage, depression and hopelessness are often there. At this stage, the issues of life that have been masked and ignored for years are now exposed and wreaking havoc, causing the person to believe there is no hope. This is often where people are when they panic and cry for help. Yet, there are years of unresolved issues that have taken the person for a tormenting ride. Now they are panicking and struggling to maintain hope.

Our Driven Nation

Sadly, this is happening all over our country and across the world. It has become pandemic in the United States and one of the reasons is because we are such a driven nation. We move

and go and we cannot seem to stop. The next appointment is coming; the next meeting is right around the corner; or the next event needs to be prepared for.

Whenever free time is made available, there is an incessant drive to fill it with more tasks and more chores to complete. We don't even have time to deal with our issues, especially as they pertain to our life.

The Pace of Life

We find ourselves today in an environment filled with fast-paced deadlines that seem to progressively get more jam-packed. The heartbreaking result is that millions of people are struggling with brokenness, heartache, disappointment and pressures. They don't even realize how this culture of drivenness is affecting their biology and they are hopeless about the potential to recover from their disease. The result is that many are left without answers. They're consumed with so many struggles and conflicts and no one has taught them what to do with them. Meanwhile, God is calling out with a much better way to live.

In order to start receiving healing spiritually, psychologically and biologically, we are going to have to slow down and start facing the issues of our life. We are going to have to stop feeding the distractions and the things that numb the pain and get honest with ourselves. God wants us to face the issues of our life and begin the renovation process. {eoa}

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