

Stress and Older Adults

Stress can be defined as a state of worry or mental tension. Stress is a natural human response that prompts us to address challenges and threats in our lives. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. However, the effects of stress on older adults can be greater than in different age groups. The unique relationship between stress and aging can cause new health problems and worsen existing ones. Stress even speeds up the aging process. Restated, stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, or nervous. Stress is our body's reaction to a challenge or demand. Different situations or life events can cause stress. It is often triggered when we experience something new or unexpected that threatens our sense of self or when we feel we have little control over a situation. We deal with stress in different ways.

There is good stress and bad stress. Stress helps us meet our daily challenges and motivates us to reach a goal, that makes us smarter, happier, and healthier. Good stress is vital for a healthy life. Good stress is short term. Bad stress can be short term (acute) or long term (chronic). Acute stress doesn't take a heavy toll on your body if you can find ways to relax quickly. However, chronic stress, when you repeatedly face stressors, can take a heavy toll on one's body and can cause negative health effects. Chronic stress can cause headaches, insomnia, weight gain, anxiety, pain and high blood pressure. Both good and bad stress cause your body to release hormones like adrenaline and cortisol. Our reactions to stress determine whether it is good or bad.

Stress negatively impacts the body's ability to effectively respond to certain kinds of inflammation that lead to age-related conditions. More stress equals more inflammation, and more inflammation when you're stressed equals more health problems. These may include hardening of the arteries, Type 2 diabetes, dementia, and cancer, to name a few. Chronic stress can also reduce the effectiveness of certain vaccines in older adults.

Stress becomes a problem when it interferes your daily life. To reduce stress, identify good stress from bad stress. As long as it's not chronic, stress can be a positive addition to your life. Make an effort to reduce your chronic stress as much as possible, and add positive activities to promote good stress it creates a healthy balance and a better quality of life.