

Physical effects of stress

A few years ago osteopaths were mainly consulted for back pain and sciatica, it seems that today stress related physical strains are becoming increasingly common.

Life in London is in lots of cases a lot more stressful than people would imagine and has particularly been for a great proportion of its population in the last few months.

What is stress?

Stress is a normal response of your body to fight against any kind of aggression.

There is 3 phases in stress:

- The alarm phase is a phase of shock during which the body will favour the mechanisms and organs which will help it to escape from the situation or fight the aggression. It will increase the breathing rate, the cardiac rhythm, which will increase the supply of blood, sugar and other important elements to the muscles. To be able to do so it will reduce other functions like digestion or body temperature that can wait until the end of the alarm.
- The adaptation phase during which certain substances will be released into the blood to calm down or even reverse the mechanisms it started in the alarm phase. If the aggression stops the body will be back to normal in most cases. If the aggression persists, the body will find it difficult to adapt and compensate, leading to phase 3.
- The exhaustion phase during which the body can't cope and therefore is unable to adapt and compensate anymore.

What are the physical signs and effects of stress?

They can vary significantly. The most common are:

Tiredness, irritability, anxiety, bowels issues like IBS, insomnia, pain between the shoulder blades, pain in the shoulders, neck, jaw and teeth, headaches, difficulties to focus, dizziness....

If stress persists it can cause more serious issues (of which) stomach ulcers, high blood pressure, serious cardio-vascular diseases, nervous breakdowns, as well as, a decrease of the efficiency of the immunity system leading to increase risk of getting infectious diseases.

What can we do?

In cases when the aggression can't be suppressed there is several techniques and medical solutions which can help you dealing with your stress.

- A regular physical activity even light can help you relax (help you detach from the aggression) as well as help you face the problems in a more settled way

- Surrounding yourself people with a positive attitude or spend at least a few minutes each day doing an activity you particularly enjoy.
- Learn to regulate your breathing. In order to do so, seat comfortably, rest one hand on your tummy and the other hand on your chest. Breathe normally, the hand resting on your tummy should move before the one on your chest when you breathe in. Focus on the sensation of your tummy getting bigger and bigger under your hands and take a deeper breath in once in a while. And this for 5 to 10 min each day.
This exercise helps you relax your diaphragm which is a muscle separating your abdomen from your thorax and which has a very important role in breathing and stress.
- Alternative treatments like osteopathy, chiropractics, physiotherapy, acupuncture, massage can help with stress related aches and pains.
- Your general practitioner, psychotherapists, counsellors, and psychiatrists can also help you with your stress at different levels, offering you different approaches adapted to your situation.

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