

The Consequences of Stress: A mental and physical toxin

Whether you prescribe to the philosophies of western or eastern medicine, there is one prognosis that both schools of thought can agree on: Chronic stress is bad for your health. Some stress-related ailments are rather obvious, like stomach ulcers, headaches, or sleep problems. The sobering truth, however, is that stress doesn't just cause ailments, it can also worsen existing health issues. From head to toe, inside and out, stress can lead to or aggravate a plethora of health problems, like the following:

- ❖ Immune system problems, which can include eczema or psoriasis, asthma attacks, allergy attacks, and frequent or pervasive infections.
- ❖ Sexual health problems, consisting of low or absent libido, lack of arousal, or menstrual disorders.
- ❖ Gastrointestinal problems, including IBS, ulcers, gastritis, colitis, or Crohn's Disease.
- ❖ Cardiovascular problems, such as high blood pressure or high cholesterol levels.



The fact that stress can result in physical as well as mental health problems is not ground-breaking information. What may surprise you is the interdependent relationship between mental disorders and stress. Stress is one of the key factors that triggers or aggravates most mental health conditions. In turn, most mental health conditions are also a source of stress, resulting in a vicious cycle.



Here are some disorders that are linked to or exacerbated by stress:

- ❖ Major Depression
- ❖ Bipolar Disorder
- ❖ Schizophrenia
- ❖ Substance Abuse
- ❖ Anxiety disorders (Generalized Anxiety Disorder, Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder, Panic Disorder)

What makes anxiety disorders of particular concern is the fact that the symptoms of anxiety are similar to those a person experiences under stress. This could result in misdiagnoses, leaving one or both issues unresolved.

Stress & Burnout

When a computer, lightbulb, or engine burns out, it stops working; the same applies to your employees. Stress that continues unabated and unchecked eventually leads to burnout. If we were to put a dollar value on how much burnout affects commerce, U.S. businesses would be singing to the tune of 200 billion dollars each year. That's 200 billion in absenteeism, increased insurance claims, on-site accidents, decreased employee morale, and low productivity.

Research we conducted at PsychTests using data collected from our [BSS-NSF \(Burnout Symptom Screen – for Non-Service Fields\)](#) and [BSS-SF \(for Service Fields\)](#) reveals that the price of burnout isn't limited to a company's bottom line, however:

- ❖ 6% of people in our study have been previously diagnosed with burnout
- ❖ 18% have taken at least one week off work to recover from stress
- ❖ 34% have consulted a professional for a stress-related problem

Of those who have been diagnosed with burnout:

- ❖ 46% feel that they work too much
- ❖ 58% stated that the idea of spending the whole day working with people makes them apprehensive
- ❖ 58% go through periods at work where they feel like crying
- ❖ 64% have difficulty sleeping
- ❖ 69% feel emotionally empty at the end of the day

Symptoms of burnout include the following:

- ❖ **Fatigue/Lack of energy:** You feel like you don't have the energy to get up in the morning, let alone go through a full day's work. You feel lethargic and have difficulty staying focused.
- ❖ **Somatic complaints:** These can include headaches, muscle pain, difficulty sleeping, or illness as a result of a weakened immune system.



- ❖ **Sense of being overwhelmed:** You feel that there is too much weight on your shoulders, and can't handle it anymore. You feel helpless and hopeless.
- ❖ **Detachment:** You stop caring about your clients, colleagues, and the quality of your work. You are no longer motivated to put an effort into getting tasks done. You feel emotionally drained or emotionally numb at the end of the day.
- ❖ **Dissatisfaction:** Your job no longer offers a sense of fulfillment. You feel your efforts will not make a difference in your performance.

Contact:

PsychTests AIM Inc.

Tel : 1-888-855-6975

Fax : (514) 745-6242

sales@psychtests.com

<http://archprofile.com/corporate>

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