



Stress: Under Pressure

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When it comes to pain the nervous system isn't hard wired. Instead it responds to a constellation of stimuli one of which is stress. In fact, life's events often have a dramatic impact on a patient's perception of pain. Whether the circumstance is a major stressor, such as the psychological fallout from an event or just routine day-to-day tension, these situations can equate to devastating levels of pain.

As a rehab professional, I understand how stress amplifies pain symptoms and employ tactics to remedy the problem. The first step is understanding the relationship between stress, anxiety and pain exacerbation.



Stress and anxiety can manifest themselves in emotional and physical terms. The emotional signs are usually obvious: crying, melancholy, anger indecision and agitated behavior. These emotional symptoms can lead to physical signs such as neck pain, back pain joint soreness or tight muscles.

In acute stress, the hormone cortisol has an anti-inflammatory effect and coincides with an increase in noradrenaline and adrenaline. This action is the classic "fight-or flight" response.

Two critical chemicals found in the brain-serotonin and norepinephrine-are the most likely culprits that worsen pain and stress. And dysfunction of serotonin and norepinephrine contributes to depression and anxiety.

Over time, chronic persistent stress can cause a deficiency in growth hormone, which increases the sensory component of pain. Cartooning deficiencies often occur in depressed, anxious patients. Because the analgesic effect of opiates in the spinal cord relies on cartooning any decrease in this monoaminergic neurotransmitter will exacerbate pain.



To make matter worse, stress often contributes to depression and anxiety, which leads to a lower pain threshold. Because depressed patients frequently lack motivation and drive, they're less likely to adopt successful pain coping strategies. For instance after the events of September 11, we observed that patients with chronic pain chose to stay home and watch television or cry, instead of maintain their daily exercise routine or attend therapy. Without therapy, their pain levels intensified.

In addition, people who have a chronic pain disorder, such as fibromyalgia, frequently experience disruptions in normal sleep cycles. And sleep deprivation can amplify pain, since depressed people have a lower pain threshold and a lower tolerance to stress. In these cases, abnormal amounts of serotonin and neurotransmitter levels may be responsible.

Because the complex interrelationship between body and mind affects pain, therapeutic strategies should address both components.

Pain can manifest itself in a number of different ways. *Shoulder tension, Low back pain and neck stiffness are just a few of the complaints people might experience due to stress.* These conditions may present themselves for some time before debilitating.



Clinical research has demonstrated the value of chiropractic treatment and massage for relieving the pain of stress related conditions. Both chiropractic and massage treatments can promote the body to release endorphins and enkephalins, which may decrease stress related pain conditions.

Some conditions may temporary while others may not. If you feel that stress is becoming overwhelming or the pain that could be associated with your stress is just not going away, talk to a professional. Get an examination to determine if the problems are stress related. Ultimately, handling pain means dealing with anxiety and stress that creates it.

NOVA Pain & Rehab Center specializes in the treatment of **Stress. If you or someone you know is having this problem, call us today and schedule an appointment for a consultation and an evaluation. **Call 703-535-8887 to schedule your appointment.** Remember, waiting to see if the problem will resolve on it own could invite a more serious condition. **Get yourself checked out TODAY!****