

COMMON STRESS REACTIONS



WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is a reaction to some stimulus or demand that produces an elevated state of arousal or readiness. The greater the stimulus, the greater is the stress reaction. Emergency responders benefit from a moderate amount of stress arousal. They become more alert and ready for action. Stress enhances performance and health. However, if it becomes prolonged or excessive, stress levels reach a “maximum effective arousal” point and deterioration in health and performance occurs. At an extreme level, stress produces harmful effects that can negatively alter our careers and our lives. The following may be significant signs of stress:

BEHAVIORAL

- Increase or decrease in activity level
- Substance use or abuse (alcohol or drugs)
- Difficulty communicating or listening
- Irritability, outbursts of anger, frequent arguments
- Inability to rest or relax
- Decline in job performance; absenteeism
- Frequent crying
- Hyper-vigilance or excessive worry
- Avoidance of activities or places that trigger memories
- Becoming accident-prone

PHYSICAL

- Gastrointestinal problems
- Headaches, other aches and pains
- Visual disturbances
- Weight loss or gain
- Sweating or chills
- Tremors or muscle twitching
- Being easily startled
- Chronic fatigue or sleep disturbances
- Immune system disorders

PSYCHOLOGICAL/EMOTIONAL

- Feeling heroic, euphoric, or invulnerable
- Denial
- Anxiety or fear
- Depression
- Guilt
- Apathy
- Grief

THINKING

- Memory problems
- Disorientation
- Slow thought processes; lack of concentration
- Difficulty setting priorities or making decisions
- Loss of objectivity

SOCIAL

- Isolation
- Blaming
- Difficulty in giving or accepting support or help
- Inability to experience pleasure or have fun