

How Stress Steals Years Off Your Life

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Stress does more than simply make you feel frazzled and worn out. It steals years off your life. You may not even realize that this is what's going on, but if you're dealing with stress, your body's aging process is ticking along faster than you think.

High Blood Pressure

Whenever you get stressed, your body kicks into high gear and starts pumping out hormones as a reaction to that stress. As that happens, the hormones push your blood pressure to rise because it speeds up your heart rate.

High blood pressure causes narrowing of the arteries, which in turn makes your blood pressure worse. Regardless of what causes the high blood pressure, it does age you. But when you have high blood pressure due to stress, it also impacts your appearance.

You can start to look several years older than what you actually are - and it's noticeable to others as well as well yourself when you look in the mirror. You'll see changes in your appearance in areas such as your skin and in your face.

High blood pressure can cause saggy areas on your face as well as facial flushing. It also affects the way your blood pressure ages your mind. It speeds up the aging process in your brain.

Your brain can't withstand chronically elevated high blood pressure without any negative side effects. Pressure in the veins from high blood pressure translates to pressure within the brain.

One study showed that a person who has high blood pressure can experience the same brain changes and brain aging of someone nearly a decade older. That means that if someone's aging process is sped up

by stress, they're experiencing altered function and if it's not relieved, it can lead to subtle damage within the brain.

The longer it lasts, the more damage is done - and this damage can start as early as in your 20s. Whenever the stress is consistent, it causes fatigue because your blood isn't circulating as easily.

Your heart is working twice as hard. When you have high blood pressure, it increases your risks of what's commonly considered aging diseases. Some of these medical conditions are kidney disease, heart failure, artery damage and stroke.

You can fight the effects of stress and slow or reverse the aging process. The best way to do this is to understand that your blood pressure is something that needs to be checked regularly - even if you're young.

By keeping an eye on your blood pressure, you can bring it back down before it has a chance to cause damage. One way to track it is by having your doctor check it when you go in for a health checkup.

But you can also check your blood pressure at many pharmacies or you can use machines at home. By getting into the habit of watching your blood pressure for any elevations, you can make the necessary changes.

Blood Sugar Spikes

Whenever you get stressed, your body goes into a fight or flight mode. It doesn't matter if it's a small stressor or a big stressor, the response that your body gives is the same.

You get a sudden burst of glucose in reaction to the stress.

While this response is helpful during a normal stress event - such as when you've had a scare and need to react quickly, the response is not helpful when you're dealing with the kind of stress that sticks around.

Your insulin levels will remain elevated the entire time you're under stress, and this is bad for your body. High levels of glucose in your bloodstream wreak havoc on your body because it can speed up the aging process.

When you have extra sugar in your bloodstream, it starts to visually age your body. It does this outwardly by causing the appearance of dark circles beneath your eyes. It's also a contributing factor in skin blemishes.

Wrinkles can be a by-product of elevated glucose. One of the reasons for this is because whenever glucose is elevated due to stress, it dries out your skin. The elevated glucose, when a direct result of stress, ages your body because it causes dehydration and affects collagen production.

So their skin ends up not looking as smooth and can be prone to splitting on the hands, elbows and heels of the feet. Studies show that people who live with stress and experience above normal blood glucose spikes end up looking older than people who manage their stress.

It also affects your body internally. People who experience elevated blood sugar spikes regularly can end up with similar health problems that both diabetics and the elderly experience.

It doesn't take an extremely high spike to cause aging effects in the body, either. As little as twenty points above what's considered the normal range can have an effect.

When you experience blood sugar spikes, the elevated glucose keeps your body from healing the way it should.

This isn't just with things like cuts or sores or bruises, either. If you work out and you have blood glucose spikes caused by stress, your muscle recovery period will increase, and you'll find that your body recovers like someone who's much older.

The elevated glucose is preventing your muscles from snapping back the way that they normally would. Spikes in your blood sugar can cause you to feel mentally drained as well as physically fatigued, too.

Pain and Inflammation

Research has shown that whenever you're under stress it affects the aging process by making you susceptible to pain as well as inflammation. Pain

and inflammation are a direct result of the body reacting the stress that you're under.

It causes both short and long term responses in the body. In the short term, you might feel a stomachache or develop muscle aches. But over time, you can develop conditions such as ulcers or chronic muscle pain or weakness due to the stress.

The answer to why this happens is found deep within the body - in the cells, to be exact. When you live your life as healthy as possible and you effectively deal with your stress, you don't experience pain or inflammation other than in normal circumstances.

Stress kills off what you need to keep you alive. When you're under stress, it causes the telomeres, found on the end of the chromosomes to shorten. As these cells shorten, you lose years off your life.

When you're stressed and it causes pain and inflammation, your cells begin to shorten faster and faster. Stress is literally speeding up your body's countdown clock. Over time, your cells lose the ability to divide and they die off.

The more stress you're under, the faster the process is. Studies found that people who live with stress are more likely to lose at least a decade and sometimes more of life. In these studies, it was found that the link between emotions strongly connected to the body's telomere cycle.

Another thing that stress does in the area of pain and inflammation is that it can make the body more susceptible to increased levels of pain and inflammation, and it can lower the threshold for developing conditions associated with aging such as heart disease.

When you develop stress related inflammation, it speeds up your body's aging process because of cytokines. These are secreted by the body whenever something health related is going on that needs to be addressed.

Normally, when a person is sick, these cytokines go to work to make you well again and then all is good. But when you're under stress, your body releases cytokines and they don't go away.

Instead, they stick around and start to create havoc. They create an inflammatory response within the body that doesn't go away. This is one way that people can develop chronic inflammatory health issues and it begins to take a toll on the body.

The result of this leads to what's known as oxidative damage. People who experience this then develop regenerative halting in their cells and tissues, which is part of accelerated aging.

Immune System Deterioration

Your immune system is meant to protect you from foreign invaders. It's supposed to keep you safe from foreign invaders that you might pick up through your skin, or through breathing them.

It's supposed to protect you from bacteria and more. But when you deal with stress, it speeds up the aging process and causes your immune system to deteriorate. That's because stress always suppresses the function of the immune system.

One way that it does this is by creating a shortage of the amount of white blood cells in the body. You need these cells to fight off both small and large infections. The minute your white blood cells decrease, your chances of getting sick go up.

When you get sick, your body is supposed to immediately send out the signal and rush healing cells throughout your body. Whatever the bacteria or virus is, your immune system is supposed to attack it and get whatever is making you sick out of there.

But stress hampers your immune system's ability to work because the stress hormone basically puts a leash on the system. It holds it back and prevents your system from working right.

A weakened immune system then begins to get overwhelmed, unable to keep up with the demands. T cell function naturally declines as a person gets older, but stress impacts the decline of T cell function in the immune system, regardless of your age.

Insomnia

Stress affects your health from head to toe, and it also affects your ability to get the amount of sleep that you need - which, of course, makes your health worse. When you're under stress, you lie awake and it's difficult to shut off your mind.

You can't relax and your body stays in a position of tenseness as well as wakefulness. Sometimes people with stress related insomnia find that they might fall asleep for a few minutes, but then they wake right back up.

They can't stay asleep. When this happens, the next day, they struggle to keep up with the physical and mental demands of their life. So they feel stressed about that, which only exacerbates the stress and keeps the insomnia going.

Your body needs the rest and restoration that sleep provides. If it doesn't get it, several things begin to take place that speed up the aging process. One of these things is cell changes.

When you have insomnia, the cells in your body begin to age. Studies show that people who suffer from insomnia have increased cell age and lose regenerative advances within the cells.

This damage and aging cell reaction will show up in things like wrinkles, lines and bags on your face. The pigment beneath the eyes will begin to darken. Lines and grooves on the skin can deepen.

On the inside of your body, the cell damage and lack of regenerative supply speeds up health conditions and diseases that occur as a result of growing older. People who suffer with insomnia can experience a deficiency in growth hormone.

They'll experience fatigue and loss of muscle strength, both of which are associated with aging but brought on by stress. And it doesn't take several months for insomnia to take a toll on the body. You can experience aging changes in as little as one night of sleeplessness.

Mood Disorders

When you're under stress, it elevates the odds that a mood disorder is going to worsen. It doesn't matter if you've been doing fine lately. Stress changes everything. In many people, the stress that they encounter usually causes or adds to depression.

It's also known to increase anxiety. Studies have shown there's a direct link between mental health and stress. Stress causes an immediate change within the brain. When you encounter stress, the brain signals for certain chemicals to be released.

This is an attempt by the body to deal with the demands that stress is placing on your system. Your emotions are revved up and the brain is releasing these chemicals in an attempt to soothe them.

During this process, the production of stress hormones is also kicked up a notch. This is the hormone that's responsible for your brain's memory function as well as for its emotional health.

Stress can wreak havoc on your moods - from the first second that you experience it. It can cause you to swing emotionally from feeling down or sad to feeling excited or happy.

It doesn't matter that the stress is not a reliable indicator of the circumstances that are actually going on in your life. It can create a false narrative because stress isn't felt in logic.

It's felt in the emotions. If you have a mood disorder, stress is different for you because stress can impact you to the point that you may find it difficult to function. But this stress on mood disorders doesn't just impact your life and make you struggle to get through the day.

It impacts what's known scientifically as your biological aging. Everyone gets older in terms of going from birth to elderly. But that's the normal part of time passing and is known as chronological aging as in one year follows the next.

Biological and chronological aging are different. Stress affects mood disorders in a way that's different from normal aging. This difference is what puts those who have mood issues at higher risk of getting diagnosed with a disease that's normally found in older people.

It's true that different health factors can cause faster biological aging, but stress is the engine that drives the aging when it's coupled with mood disorders and the risk factor is elevated.

Stress can speed up the aging process when you have mood disorders because it alters the physical brain. It does this by changing the brain's white matter, which is in part how the brain uses and exchanges the information that it receives and gives.

Whether or not the changes are brought on due to the increased speed of stress related aging are reversible depends on the length of time you're exposed to the stress and how severe it is.

Memory Lapses

Stressful experiences happen to everyone. You can go through things like relationship issues, the death of a spouse or a divorce. You may go through things like losing your job or experiencing a catastrophic illness or event.

Or you might not even experience big stressors at all. You might encounter small stresses, but over prolonged periods of time. One way to tell if you're stressed is to check your level of frustration.

That emotion goes hand in hand with stress. Regardless of the cause of the stress, studies have shown that stress changes the brain. Any time that the brain is changed, it can cause problems in several areas.

There can be problems with cognitive function, with communication and with moods. Stress speeds up the aging process in the brain because it causes loss of cognitive function at a faster rate.

People who experience stress develop brain changes that have been linked with cognitive decline due to the acceleration of the biological age. These stress changes can mimic and then develop into early dementia as well as other brain function loss.

People who live with stress can begin to be forgetful earlier in life than the normal standard associated with aging. Usually, those who struggle with memory issues chalk the lapses up to just being busy or being naturally or being forgetful.

They don't realize that their brain has undergone structural changes caused by stress. That's only one part of what goes on in the brain when stress runs rampant in your life. Another part is that stress impacts the brain's neurons.

There's a section within the brain that's dedicated to memory. Within this section of the brain, cells are developed. You need new brain cells in order to function well. Stress allows the continual release of these brain cells.

But it doesn't allow them to continue living - and you need healthy brain cells, because these are necessary for memory retention. Instead, stress actively kills brain cells, which impacts the emotional center as well as the ability to recall and retain information.

As stress lingers, you'll begin to experience problems remembering what happened and your brain memory function can lose years off of its memory function. There are some questions as to how stress causes brain cells to die off and one theory is that it's due to the higher level of cortisol produced by someone who's under stress versus someone who isn't.

The bad thing about how stress speeds up the aging process with memory lapses is that while some of it can be short term loss, it can also lead to long term memory lapses.

Weight Fluctuations

Stress causes changes in your weight. For some people, when they're under stress, they lose weight. This type of change can be caused from a difference in calorie intake from what they once ate.

Because of the stress, they lose their appetite and usually end up losing weight, sometimes rapidly. But it can also be caused because stress is forcing your metabolism to speed up.

On the flip side, stress can cause others to gain weight. This can be due to eating more calories in an attempt to deal with whatever it is that's stressing them. Either way that stress causes your weight to fluctuate, the bottom line is still that your body's metabolism is undergoing change.

Stress is extremely hard on your metabolism. One of the reasons that it causes people to put on extra pounds is because during stressful times, cortisol is released at higher levels than when you're not stressed.

Cortisol is responsible for increasing the desire to eat and specifically, it increases the desire to eat fattening or sugary foods. This metabolism change and weight fluctuation impacts everything from your brain health to your muscles.

There is a link between stress, weight fluctuations, metabolism and the aging process. Your metabolism naturally changes as you age. It's supposed to happen slowly with the passing of time.

But stress kick starts that metabolic change and forces your metabolism to change effective immediately. What that means for you is that stress is overwriting the natural stage that your body should be in with where it is metabolically.

It's making the structure, the molecular DNA of your body change - and not in a good way. It's adding year after year to your DNA - all within the space of months. During this process, it's giving you age related changes.

It's shaving off your life expectancy in leaps and bounds by skipping years and shortening your cells. As if that wasn't enough, it's introducing your body to health issues that are commonly associated with growing older, such as heart disease.

Weight fluctuations caused by stress break down your body's natural cell production and that revs up your biological age. While it's common to think that weight loss caused by stress from speeding up the metabolism is a good thing, it's not. When your metabolism speeds up, it creates oxidative damage, which in turn speeds up the aging process.

Skin and Dental Problems

There's no doubt that stress isn't kind to your skin. When you're stressed, the body produces an abundance of cortisol. This hormone is known to destroy collagen. Collagen is the protein that keeps your tissues connected.

When it begins to age, you lose your youthful appearance. You'll experience wrinkles as well as sagging skin. It can also cause dry skin. When collagen is damaged, the skin begins to change, and it doesn't matter whether you're in your 20s or your 60s.

While it can be easy to think of skin in terms of what you see on the outside, it's actually what's going on inside the body that reflects on the outside of the body. When you're under stress, it causes issues like narrowing of the arteries due to high blood pressure.

In turn, a lack of the right amount of oxygen in your body impedes the saturation content for your skin. So you begin to develop problems like sagging skin, fine lines and more. Stress ushers in premature wrinkles.

You can get them even if you're college age. It can even cause the coloring of your skin to change. You can develop these pigmentation changes because the stress is speeding up the normal aging process that skin goes through.

Normally, your skin is supposed to regenerate. Old cells are sloughed off and new cells take their place. But when stress is at work, these processes are interrupted. New cells aren't produced in the quantity needed - just like what happens when you get older.

As the stress continues, the body is producing more cortisol, which leads to prominent veins, papering of the skin and more. You might even notice that your skin looks weathered and cracked.

What's taking place is that stress is speeding up your skin's aging process. It's stripping you of years of soft, supple skin. Your skin isn't the only thing that's impacted by stress. It affects your teeth, too.

Stress causes pain in the face that can stem from the mouth. When you're under stress, you may grind your teeth. And it doesn't always happen when you're sleeping either. You may do it while you're awake and not even realize it.

It can cause you to lose tooth enamel as well as change the shape of your teeth. Both of those symptoms are what naturally happens when the body ages. When you grow older, teeth nerves change.

This change desensitizes the teeth, which in turn leads to oral problems because older people are often unaware that damage to the tooth is going on. This de-sensitivity in the nerves of the teeth can be triggered by stress, which can put you at higher risk for developing cavities.

No matter the level of care you take for your oral health, if you're under stress, it can cause gum disease. It can also cause mouth sores on the lips and inside the cheeks. These are a direct result of stress and are caused by biting at the inside of the lip or the inside of the cheek.

Substance Use and Abuse

Being under stress drives some people to use and abuse substances that harm their body. Family members of those who abuse substances are also under stress. There's a common understanding that when someone is

under the influence, you're not dealing with the true person - but instead, you're dealing with whatever substance has been taken.

The same is true when it comes to the health and aging process of someone who abuses substances. Their body isn't just dealing with the natural cause of aging. They're synthetically aging.

When someone abuses substances, it causes them to age inside and out at a faster rate, putting both their health and often, their lives at risk. As the body ages, normal cell changes take place that lead to issues associated with older people and the elderly.

With substance abuse issues, the stress starts that process, even if that person is young. From there, it leads to inflammation throughout the body. It also changes the way the brain is able to think, and it opens the door for the arrival of diseases.

Stress causes the acceleration of diseases that are brought on as a result of substance abuse. One of the reasons for this is because the substance often prevents the natural cycle of cell production.

It can cause heart disease from high blood pressure, stroke, and kidney disease. It affects every organ in the body - including the brain. The abuse can cause anxiety, depression and mental health episodes.

One reason behind this is because substance abuse can damage neurotransmitters in the brain. Many substances that are used can dry out the skin and rob you of important vitamin and minerals that you need - not just for skin health, but for organ health as well.

One of the things that happens as people get older is their vision begins to change, often worsening. Things like cataracts are common. When someone abuses a substance, it impacts the health of the eyes and can cause the biological age of the eyes to be decades older than what they actually are.

The veins are affected by stress. When stress speeds up the aging process, it can cause the veins to widen. This can create long, thin red lines that stem out from the center of a vein.

These veins can be large and can cover noticeable portions of the body wherever they develop, which is usually in the face or on the legs. This is a common side effect of substance abuse.

Losing patches of hair is also common with substance abuse. That's because the body's aging process reaches the stage of someone who's much older. The reason that this happens is because the abuse interferes with the body's hair growth stage.

Instead of the hair following the growth cycle, then rest period naturally, the aging process is sped up and the hair simply falls out faster than it grows. This is why people who abuse substances often look many years older than what they actually are.

Digestive Issues

Your digestive system is part of an elaborate system within the body and it works in tandem with the brain. When you're stressed by something, it can trigger a reaction in your gut.

Studies have shown that people who live with unresolved stress in their lives often experience temporary and sometimes life altering digestive issues. Your emotions can drive how your digestive system reacts.

Your brain decides what your digestive needs to do or not do and it uses neurons to communicate. When you're under stress, and you're feeling anxious or angry or sad, this information is relayed to the gut.

The stress that you feel then causes a reaction in this system and that reaction can be uncomfortable at best and make you physically ill at worst. Your body reacts to stress by limiting the amount of blood that travels to your digestive system.

It can make your stomach tighten up - even to the point of causing painful cramping. It can make you feel nauseated to the point you feel like you're going to vomit. Stress can cause a boost in the production of stomach acid, which makes you feel heartburn or sick to your stomach.

Long term stress often results in ulcers as a by-product of this over production of acid. Stress can make you unable to have a bowel movement because you develop constipation, or it can lead to diarrhea.

Stress can worsen certain digestive conditions such as IBS. It can also cause inflammation. You may experience an imbalance in the natural bacteria that's found in your gut.

Stress can affect your ability to eat the way that you usually do. Normally, when someone eats, the process of the food breaking down happens naturally and without incident.

But when stress is in the picture, it speeds up the aging process in your digestive system and you develop issues that are common in older people. What ends up happening is you can develop a multitude of symptoms - including the same symptoms as someone who has diseases such as gastroparesis.

In this condition, the stomach doesn't empty like it's supposed to. Stress can cause slow emptying of the stomach. It can also lead to common digestive conditions associated with aging such as flatulence, indigestion and even GERD.

Stress isn't something you have to live with. In fact, it's a condition that can have serious side effects on you if you ignore it or learn how to merely live with it. Take control and reduce or eliminate stress that steals years off your life, starting now!



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