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Three Different Kinds of Stress

Sarah Mae Sincero 110.5K reads

Aiming for effective stress management initially includes the proper recognition of stress, the stressor, the manifestations, and its effect in one's well-being.

For a better understanding of stress and its influence to an individual, psychologists categorize stress into three different types: acute stress, episodic stress, and chronic stress. In this article, we will discover the characteristics and attributes of each type of stress.

The banner features the Explorable logo and the text "Quiz Time!". Below this, there are three quiz cards:

- Card 1: Image of roller skates on a wooden deck. Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2
- Card 2: Image of a fan of colored pencils. Quiz: Psychology 101 Part 2
- Card 3: Image of a Ferris wheel at sunset. Quiz: Flags in Europe

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Acute Stress

Of all forms of stress [1], acute stress is the most widely experienced one, since it typically is caused by the daily demands and pressures encountered by each one of us. While the word "stress" connotes a negative impression, acute stress is what actually brings about excitement, joy and thrill in our lives. Riding a roller coaster in a theme park, for instance, is a situation that brings about acute stress, yet brings excitement. However, riding a higher and longer roller coaster can bring so much stress that you wish it would end sooner, or that you should have not gone for the ride in the first place. When the long and windy ride is over, you might feel the effects of too much acute stress, such as vomiting, tension headaches, and other psychological and/or physiological symptoms.

Because acute stress occurs only at a very short period of time, these symptoms might only come out when the stress has already accumulated:

- **Emotional distress**, such as anger, anxiety, irritability, and acute periods of depression
- **Physical problems**, such as headache, pain, stomach upset, dizziness, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, hypertension and bowel disorders

Episodic Stress

Acute stress that is suffered too frequently is called episodic stress. This type of stress is usually seen in people who make self-inflicted, unrealistic or unreasonable demands which get all clamoured up and bring too much stress in their attempt to accomplish these goals. Episodic stress is not like chronic stress, though, because this type of stress ceases from time to time yet not as frequently as acute stress does.

Episodic stress is also typically observed in people with “Type A” personality, which involves being overly competitive, aggressive, demanding and sometimes tense and hostile. Because of this, the symptoms of episodic stress are found in Type A persons. These include:

- Longer periods of intermitted depression, anxiety disorders and emotional distress
- Ceaseless worrying
- Persistent physical symptoms similar to those found in acute stress
- Coronary heart diseases, or other heart problems

Chronic Stress

Chronic stress is the total opposite of acute stress; it's not exciting and thrilling, but dangerous and unhealthy. Chronic stress tears the life of a person apart his mind, body or spirit.

This type of stress is brought about by long-term exposure to stressors, such as unhappy marriage, traumatic experiences, unwanted career or job, stress of poverty, chronic illnesses, relationship conflicts, political problems, and dysfunctional families. These stressful situations seem to be unending, and the accumulated stress that results from exposure to them can be life-threatening, and can even lead a person to resort to violence, suicide and self-harm. Serious illnesses like stroke, heart attack, cancer, and psychological problems such as clinical depression and post-traumatic disorder can originate from chronic stress.

Common physical signs and symptoms of chronic stress are:

- dry mouth
- difficulty in breathing
- pounding heart
- stomach ache
- headache
- diaphoresis
- frequent urination
- tightening of muscles
- ...and more...

Mental signs and symptoms include:

- sudden irritability
- tension
- problems with concentration
- difficulty in sleeping
- narrowed perception
- frequent feelings of fatigue

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Links

[1] <http://www.apa.org/helpcenter/stress-kinds.aspx>