

How Stress Hurts Your Health

It's well known by now that the body takes a beating from chronic stress. Some of the proven negative effects of stress on long-term health:

Heart disease Stress releases adrenalin, which can constrict the arteries, increasing blood pressure and upping the risk of heart attack and stroke. It's been shown that there's a link between stress and a greater likelihood of storing fat in the abdomen (having an apple shape).

Memory loss Stress hormones, sometimes called glucocorticoids, work on the hippocampus, the part of the brain responsible for memory formation. While they help sharpen memory in the short term, over time, repeated exposures impair it.

Gum disease A study published in the July 1999 issue of the *Journal of Periodontology* found that people who experienced high levels of financial stress and poor coping abilities have a twofold risk of developing gum disease, which is one risk factor for heart disease, respiratory disease and diabetes complications.

Depression By altering levels of the brain chemicals norepinephrine, serotonin and dopamine, stress may predispose one to depression.

Weakened immunity Chronically elevated levels of adrenalin and cortisol have been shown to prevent infection-fighting white cells from doing their job. One study indicated that ongoing stress increases the odds of developing a cold by three to five times.

Weight gain Increased cortisol turns on fat-cell storage throughout the body, especially in the abdomen; this causes resistance to insulin, which increases diabetes risk.