

Stress: The unknown killer

EDITOR'S NOTE: This is the first of a three-part series on stress. The first part is an introduction. Parts two and three will deal with stress in the workplace and at home, respectively.

By GREG COATES
Staff Reporter

Mr. A is 40 years old, single and holds a middle-management position.

He is withdrawn, hates his work and complains of daily headaches. He is also depressed, has very little energy and virtually no social life.

He is often angry, very irritable and looks pale and unhealthy.

Mr. A suffers from severe stress.

With today's fast-paced lifestyle, stress and its related physical problems are becoming a growing concern. Dr. Doug Smith, regional director of the Ontario Psychological Association for York Region, describes stress as an "insidious disease that creeps up on us when we're least aware of it."

And despite its low profile, stress is not to be taken lightly.

"Too many people underrate its effects," said Dr. Smith. "Stress is something to be taken very seriously. It can be a life and death matter."

"It's something you feel you cannot control and creates all kinds of emotions and anxieties that can trap the person," he

added. "Stress can cause pain, worry, grief, fear, anger and suffering."

Unavoidable

"A common misconception is that stress only affects certain people. However, it can strike anyone at anytime. And there's no age barrier. No one is immune to its effects."

"There's no way to avoid it," said Dr. Smith. "No one's safe. If you don't have any stress, you're dead. And if you have too much stress, you're dead."

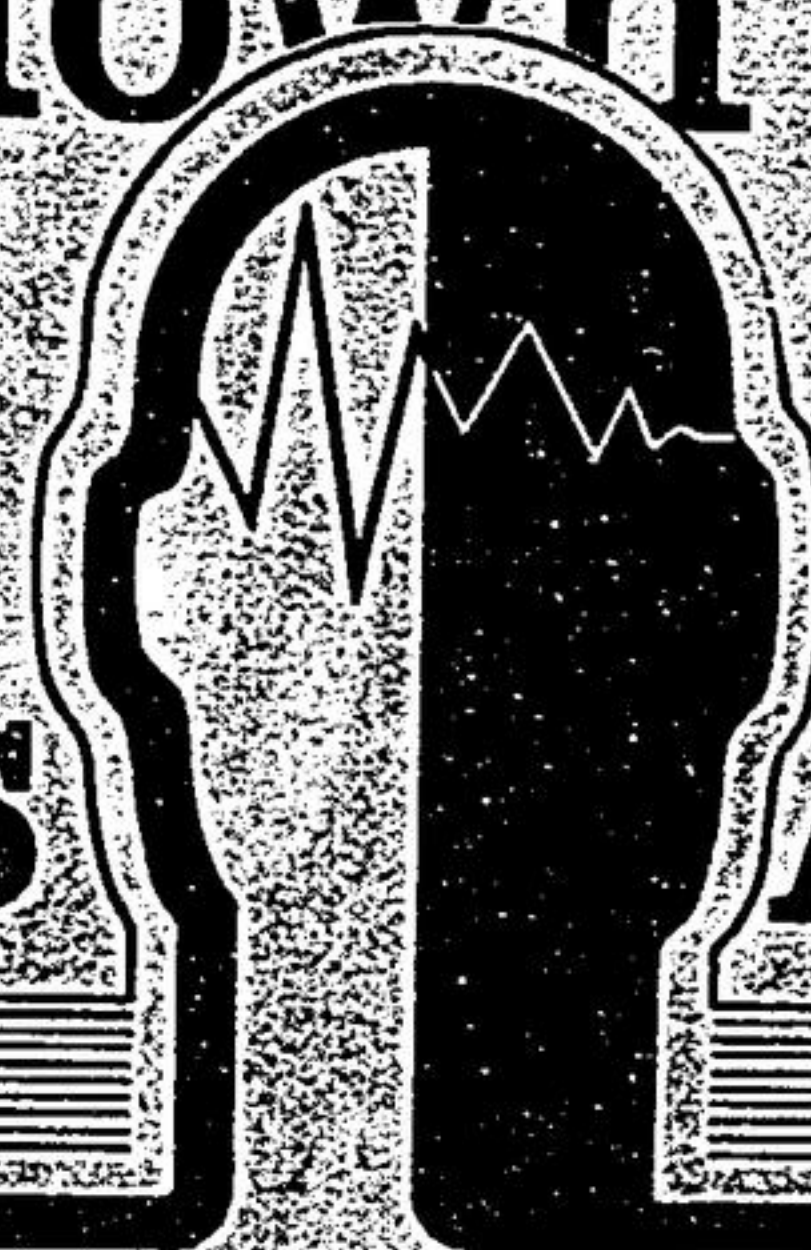
Research has linked stress with many physical problems, including heart attacks, high blood pressure, headaches, backaches, allergies, ulcers and sexual problems.

According to Dr. Smith, 39 stress can be controlled. The trick is to learn how to cope with and handle it.

"As long as we are aware of stress and can gauge the stress level, then we can do something about it," he said. "We all have the resources within us to cope with stress and lessen its effects."

Symptoms to look for include general irritability, inability to concentrate, disorientation, anxiety, nightmares, fears, constant worry, boredom, excitability and restlessness.

STRESS



AND YOU

"People today want instant relief which just isn't possible," said Dr. Smith. "It takes effort, time and sometimes professional assistance. Stress is unique to the individual."

Growing problem

He added with the fast pace of today's society, stress is becoming a bigger problem every year.

"Everything is rush, rush, rush. We're bombarded with information and things to do," said Dr. Smith. "Nobody has time today. We have so much coming in everyday it's hard to juggle the load."

He added if the trend continues, stress problems will just get worse.

"By the year 2000 everyone will

need their own psychologist to deal with stress," said Dr. Smith.

Statistics which back Dr. Smith's assessment of the growing problem include:

- One in two Canadian marriages end in divorce.
- One of every four families are led by a single parent.
- One of every six Canadians encounters severe stress (enough to disable) in his/her life.
- One in 10 members of the work force has an alcohol problem.
- And 15 per cent of absenteeism is due to severe stress.



DR. DOUG SMITH
Stress can disable

Next week, the Weekender will feature Dr. Smith's methods of coping with stress in the workplace.



Social readjustment rating scale

Rank	Life event	Value
1)	Death of spouse	100
2)	Divorce	73
3)	Marital separation	65
4)	Jail term	63
5)	Death of close family member	63
6)	Personal injury or illness	53
7)	Marriage	50
8)	Fired from job	47
9)	Marital reconciliation	45
10)	Retirement	45
11)	Change in health of family member	44
12)	Pregnancy	40
13)	Sex difficulties	39
14)	Gain of new family member	39
15)	Business readjustment	39
16)	Change in financial state	38
17)	Death of close friend	37
18)	Change to different line of work	36
19)	Change in number of arguments with spouse	35
20)	Mortgage or loan for major purchase (home etc.)	31
21)	Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
22)	Change in responsibilities at work	29
23)	Son or daughter leaving home	29
24)	Trouble with in-laws	29
25)	Outstanding personal achievement	28
26)	Wife begins or stops work	26
27)	Begin or end school	26
28)	Change in living conditions	25
29)	Revision of personal habits	24
30)	Trouble with boss	23
31)	Change in work hours or conditions	20
32)	Change in residence	20
33)	Change in schools	20
34)	Change in recreation	19
35)	Change in church activities	19
36)	Change in social activities	18
37)	Mortgage or loan for lesser purchase (car etc.)	17
38)	Change in sleeping habits	16
39)	Change in number of family get-togethers	15
40)	Change in eating habits	15
41)	Vacation	13
42)	Christmas	12
43)	Minor violations of the law	11

SCORING:

- 149 points or less — 37 per cent chance of illness in the next two years
- 150 to 299 points — 51 per cent chance of illness in the next two years
- 300 points or more — 80 per cent chance of illness in the next two years

STRESS: JUGGLING THE LOAD