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Why we are more Overwhelmed Now!

Why we are more stressed now. Do not be a victim to advances in technology.

Written by L. John Mason, Ph.D., Author of the Bestseller; [Guide To Stress Reduction](#).

Overwhelmed???

Why we are more stressed now than ever before!

Quality of life has suffered. Health has been affected. The rate of change has accelerated. Productivity can be jeopardized. We are "running" faster than ever and do not feel like we can ever catch up! Personal and professional support is draining away.

We are "stuck" with a "primitive" response mechanism which may never evolve fast enough to keep pace with technology. This ancient survival mechanism is built into our genetic code and has its origin billions of years ago. We still need this response on occasion, but day to day, it may be a major thorn in our side. It has been known since the 1930's as Walter Cannon described it, the "Flight/Fight" response. This automatic reaction to fight or to flee to save our life is still needed, however, the normal daily reactions to less than life threatening situations, can trigger a part of this reaction in a habitual way which is slightly different for each of us.

The problem arises when we ignore the response until our systems have to over-react to get our attention. A major display by this mechanism can look like: tension headaches, tight neck and shoulders, sleeping problems, back pain, high blood pressure, irregular heart rate, stroke, heart disease, asthma attacks, panic/anxiety attacks, stomach problems, sexual dysfunction, certain skin irritations, hyper sensitivity, learning problems, memory problems, communication problems, poor decision making, emotional swings, resistance to change, lower productivity, and increased likelihood of worker's compensation claims due to stress or on the job accidents and injury. Any of these symptoms can affect an individual employee, a team, a department, or the whole company's bottom line. 70-90% of visits to medical doctor's offices are for symptoms that are either caused or made worse as a reaction to this primitive stress response.

Symptoms of stress cost companies Billions of dollars annually in lost time, reduced productivity, worker's compensation claims, replacement of key personnel, even lawsuits, and internal sabotage from overwhelmed employees. Prevention not only can enhance quality of life, it will also raise productivity, reduce sabotage, and assist retention strategies.



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To make a point that we are more stressed today than ever before, consider the ever increasing rate of change based on new information. The "Information Age" was coined in the 1980's. It has created a revolution of new information technologies. To see this point more clearly, think back to common societal changes since the mid to late 1980's. Did you have cable TV in 1985? How many channels did you get from your cable provider? How many channels of TV do you have today, with cable or satellite dish? Probably 15+ channels in 1985 to now as many as 500 choices. In the mid-1980's did you have a fax machine? A "pager"? A personal computer? E-mail? A Cellular telephone? You have probably experienced all of these since then. If you still do not have a "Cell phone," you are not immune from the increased numbers of them... Just go to a movie, a restaurant, church, a meeting.... everywhere you go people are using the new technologies and probably stressing you out. A big one to consider that did not exist in the 1980's is related to "cell phone" use while driving. Do you call when driving? Do other people behave unsafely when they are distracted by calls while driving?

Do you remember the early 1990's? You could get new computer with software and not have to upgrade for 2-3 years. Now, if you get a new computer, it is outdated before you get it home and out of the box. Software upgrades seem to happen by the minute... Have you noticed that there are more coffee and espresso stands in the last 10 years? Is this how people cope with the increase in the pace of change and new information? Are there more cases of people going "postal" or "car rage", or "air rage," or whatever new anxiety we experience.

A final question, since 1985 has your genetic code "upgraded" to keep up with the pace of the Information Age? It takes thousands of years to biologically evolve! Psychologically and emotionally we must learn coping strategies to ensure our healthy survival. That is why now, more than ever before in human history, we must invest time and resources in preventing the adverse effects of our own stress response. Though it does take time and energy, prevention is worth the price. We can actually save time and get more done, by eliminating the internal distractions of stress. Also, we need to mentor, as positive role models, our children in these coping strategies that they will require to survive the ever-increasing presence of stress in our society.

There are models of companies using various prevention strategies and finding a return on investment. I know of one study with the company Coors Brewing Company of Golden, Colorado where human resources reported a \$5 return on every \$1 invested in health and wellness programs. The positive return was based on reduced sick time, fewer accidents, increased morale and productivity. The more subtle cost savings due to prevention of sabotage (and resistance to change) from overwhelmed, disgruntled employees is very difficult to measure, but still a significant factor in many organizations. Often, improved communication, allowing for input from all levels of the workforce, can be a valuable stress management and prevention strategy that leadership is learning.



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In house trainers, coaching and mentoring can create a tailored program that will best fit your organization. Outside consultants, coaches, and trainers can assist your organization to build the most effective programs, if your in house staff does not have the necessary training or experience. Consider the cost benefits of reduced: sabotage, health claims, accidents, sick time, turnover, and loss of productivity due lack of focus. Proactive retention strategies, which have used employee surveys, include stress management as a highly requested benefit (always in the top three requested programs.)

If you feel that you might benefit from an individualized stress management program to minimize your overwhelm and stress, consider the Stress Education Center's 5 session on-line course or some Executive Coaching to get you through this difficult situation.