

What is Chronic Stress? It's Symptoms and Treatment Options

An elongated and consistent feeling of stress that negatively impact an individual's health can be defined as chronic stress. In other words, when the body experiences stressors so intensely that the autonomic nervous system fails to activate the relaxation response regularly, a person is experiencing chronic stress, and the body remains in a constant state of physiological arousal. The main reasons for chronic stress include the everyday pressures of family and work or traumatic situations.

Also, when chronic stress happens, it affects other parts of the body as well, either directly or indirectly. For example, people with chronic stress may turn to substance abuse to cope with the painful symptoms. However, [stress and addiction](#) deteriorate overall health and you may need a dual diagnosis or **co-occurring disorder** treatment to recover.

This article explains the link between stress and addiction, the symptoms of chronic stress, how it impacts the body, and the **rehab therapies** included in its treatment plan.

Chronic Stress and Addiction

Addiction to alcohol and drugs can change how the brain functions, depending on an individual's mood and conduct, which is prompted by their dependence on substances. Though many people believe they can tolerate high doses of drugs and alcohol and will not develop an addiction, it can drastically impact the lives of those experiencing it. Addiction is a condition having the potential to damage the relationships, finances, and careers of an individual. Also, there are no proven studies about developing an addiction due to stress,

yet its likelihood increases concerning external factors and influences.

People who usually go through chronic stress may feel out of control or helpless at times, especially when other people stay completely normal and perfectly manage everything. Hence, people with chronic stress seek out immediate solutions or quick fixes to relieve their stress instead of finding the root cause of the problem.

How the body responds to stress can also contribute to substance abuse development as a coping mechanism. For example, when we get stuck in dangerous situations, the brain release hormones to protect us from danger and life-threatening situations. However, the brain can have a hard time distinguishing the serious and harmless situations under the influence of chronic stress and release hormones even when they are not necessary. Some incidents that can induce stress are life transitions, work pressure, and relationships. While none of these events is life-threatening to an individual's health, the brain trigger stress hormones, making people more physically and mentally uncomfortable. As a result, they start using drugs or alcohol to alleviate the tension.

Though alcohol or drugs can provide an escape from stressful situations for a while by keeping your worries on hold, relying on these can be dangerous. Unfortunately, turning to addictive substances can cause serious health problems and alleviate stress. Also, **stress and addiction** go hand-in-hand. Therefore, it is essential to seek **co-occurring disorder** treatment.

Symptoms of Chronic Stress

Chronic stress is dangerous because it affects a person's the physical and mental health. The longer you live under chronic stress, the higher the chances of developing long-term health issues. Also, the symptoms of chronic stress range from mild

to severe, depending on the individual. A few of these symptoms include:

- Fatigue
- Decreased energy
- Aches and pains
- Feelings of helplessness
- Feeling loss of control
- Difficulty sleeping
- Disorganised thinking
- Muscle tension
- Headaches
- Irritability
- Gastrointestinal complaints
- Frequent illnesses and infections
- Upset stomach
- Nervousness and anxiety
- Trouble concentrating

If stress isn't managed over time, the prevalence of addiction increases in people, which can pose serious threats without medical help. Ask yourself a few questions mentioned below and if the answer is yes, it's time to seek support.

- Are you using drugs or alcohol to alleviate your worries?
- Do you feel you have no impulse control?
- Are you using eating or gaming as an escape from your emotions?
- Does your life revolve around your addictive behaviour?

Impact of Chronic Stress and Addiction on the Body

Because chronic **stress and addiction** are both prolonged conditions, they can have a detrimental impact on your health and well-being. A few complications that may occur in the

absence of the proper treatment includes:

- Heart disease
- Depression
- Acne
- Hyperthyroidism
- High blood pressure
- Eczema
- Diabetes
- Low sex drive
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Weight changes
- Ulcers
- Regular colds and flu
- Insomnia
- Cognitive/memory problems
- Reduced appetite
- Psychosis
- Financial or work problems
- Mental health issues

Chronic Stress and Addiction Treatment

Going through a stressful event can screw our mental health drastically. And simply reframing the way your mind understands and responds to stress can make all the difference. Three primary rehab therapies for chronic **stress and addiction** treatment include cognitive-behavioural therapy, meditation, and group therapy. Each has its advantages, and depending on what your healthcare professional has suggested, you must include it in your treatment plan.

Cognitive-behavioural therapy (CBT): Psychotherapy, like cognitive-behavioural therapy, helps people build a positive approach towards life. In CBT, the patients are taught how to eliminate the negative thought patterns and behaviours from their life and adopt positive ones. You will also learn coping

skills to manage yourself or respond to triggering stressful situations.

Meditation: Meditation is significantly incorporated into addiction treatment plans as it allows people to achieve a state of calmness and relaxation. Meditation is a mind-body practice where you learn to relieve stress and cope with triggers, preventing the chances of relapse. While it is not a comprehensive treatment approach, it is an excellent holistic tool to help people.

Group Therapy: Another form of psychotherapy, group therapy involves more than one therapist to counsel multiple group participants at the same time. This therapy is widely available at rehab clinics or mental health institutions to help people connect with peers or maintain a social circle with recovering addicts.

Chronic Stress is Serious

Human beings have evolved slowly over a long period to fit in an environment that is technologically intelligent and full of social connections. And as cities began to expand, people also started moving at an alarming rate. This rush of responsibilities induces acute stress in most people. However, the number of people suffering from chronic stress disorder is increasing daily, and the healthcare landscape is changing to address this. Also, this prevalence of stress among young people makes them turn to substance abuse to promote a sense of relaxation. Unfortunately, too much use of addictive substances develops an addiction, and the condition where both **stress and addiction** co-occur is called dual diagnosis or a **co-occurring disorder**. With the help of your holistic doctor, you can get help and manage the symptoms of these conditions, though it takes a concerted effort and willingness to change your life for the better.



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