

What Happens When Everyday Stress Becomes “Too Much”?

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Dr. Keith Comeau is a Medical Doctor and Transformation Strategist who lives and practices in Burlington, Ontario. His interest in stress and Anxiety Management was inspired by professional and personal life experiences. He has developed and personally leads a program (“The Anxiety Management Seminar Series”) that enables individuals to better understand, manage and control their stresses and anxiety.

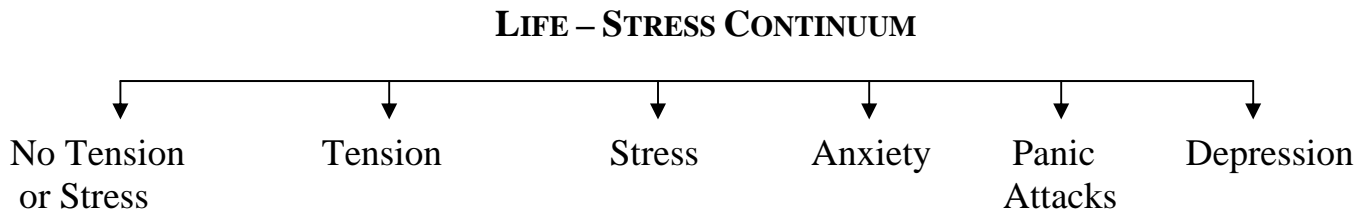
Dr. Comeau has a successful family medicine practice and a private coaching practice that serves the business community. He developed “The Practical Transformation Program”, a program designed to enable individuals, groups and organizations to effectively change/transform themselves from where they are in their personal, professional and business lives, to where they would like to be, could be or should be. Earlier in his career, Dr. Comeau was a social worker with special interests in individual, group and family therapy. He received formal education and training for this through the Clinical Behavioral Sciences Program at McMaster University. For more information on Dr. Comeau see www.drkcomeau.com

This article was designed to create an awareness about what happens when stress becomes "too much".....what it looks like,... what happens as we become more stressed,...how it affects mental and physical health, our family, and our work. It concludes with some fundamental steps one can take to begin to manage their stress/anxiety more effectively.

What happens when you put too much data into your personal computer (our body’s mind/brain equivalent)? There is only so much room for file storage space. The system gets overloaded and its ability to further function is compromised ... it “crashes”. What happens when you over work and do not maintain a machine (an equivalent to our body). Eventually it breaks down and “crashes” also. The human mind and body system functions in many ways similar to a computer and machine. Our mind/brain system can only handle so much emotional information and data (stress) before it becomes overwhelmed. Ongoing and escalating stress can lead to this system breaking down.

The mind/brain is responsible for sending signals to the body, giving it messages about what it needs to do next. A mind/brain system that is overwhelmed, will send “overwhelmed signals” to the body. The body acknowledges these stressed signals and begins to experience overload. This appears in the form of increased blood pressure, heart rate and respirations, headaches, back and neck pain, diarrhea, stomach pains etc. As well, the immune system will become compromised, putting us at greater

risk for infections (colds, flu, pneumonia etc.) or more serious illnesses (diabetes, heart attack, cancer, etc.) The mind/brain response to stress is emotional and physiological in nature. These symptoms include worrying, nervousness, upset, irritability, fatigue, trouble sleeping etc. The model that we use to best explain this work life stress situation is in the form of a continuum.



Very few people live without tension and stress. Tension is in our everyday life. Examples of tension are being stuck in traffic, waiting in line at the bank or grocery store, rushing to pickup the kids, waiting to hear back from someone over a very important issue, wondering whether you will get that new promotion etc. As the degree and amount of tension increases, it leads to stress. Symptoms of stress are worrying, nervousness, irritability, fatigue, trouble sleeping, and feeling you do not have enough time. As a person continues to feel this way, it impacts their personal and professional life. This further impacts their relationships at home and at work. Most often, it affects their relationship and connecting with their partners and their children. As the degree and amount of stress increases, people begin to experience anxiety. Symptoms of anxiety are excessive stress and worry, restlessness, feeling keyed up, being on edge, feeling tense, tired with difficulty sleeping, feeling irritable, angry and upset, difficulty controlling thoughts, panic attacks, forgetfulness, worries about your health, not feeling you are in control of your life. Ongoing unresolved stress and anxiety can lead to depression. Symptoms of depression are; feelings of sadness or irritability, loss of interest or pleasure in activities once enjoyed, changes in weight or appetite, changes in sleep pattern, feelings of guilt, hopelessness, worthlessness, inability to concentrate, remember things or making decisions, fatigue or loss of energy, restless or decreased activity, complaints of aches and pains, for which there is no medical explanation, and thoughts of death or suicide.

People in high stress work/life situations usually find themselves at the edge of stress with some anxiety symptoms. A large number of people experience

outright anxiety and a small group of these will go on to full-blown anxiety and panic attacks. Others may experience symptoms of depression.

Each individual has different experiences in the life-stress continuum, depending on their personality makeup, past history of worrying/anxiousness, current life situation and the issues they are dealing with in their lives.

It is our interpretations of these situations that stimulate the mind/brain to react (and over-react). We can not change or control the source of our stresses (the boss, the demands of our job, busy family household with complicated life routines etc.) but we can learn to manage our thinking and mental processing of these issues and learn new healthier ways to live our lives that will allow us to better deal with life's stressful situations. By doing this I can guarantee you will improve the quality of your life as well as reduce the stress, anxiety and depression in your life, as well as significantly influence positive changes with your family, friends and work.

The following are several simple changes that can be made to our day to day life, which will positively impact our life stress situation;

1. Be aware of what you are feeling. Understand the symptoms are stress, anxiety and depression related.
2. Talk to and share this information with a friend, partner, family member etc.
3. Get help. Speak to your doctor for advice and to ensure that the symptoms are not medically related.
4. Life style modification. Increase exercise and decrease substance use such as caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, non-prescription drugs and high fat foods.
5. Speak to a counselor, read a book on stress-anxiety management, take a course, join a support group etc.

Stress and anxiety is very real and can take over and control one's life. It is extremely common and effects most individuals at some point in life. My advice for you is to embrace the stress and anxiety in your life because it will not just go away. Learn to understand what is at the true root of your symptoms and feelings. Develop a method or system to manage and control it. Most of all, find people who understand and support your recovery from

stress and anxiety, to a place of higher power and personal success. Begin the journey to take control of your life and your future.

For more information on Dr. Comeau and/or the “The Anxiety Management Series” please visit our web-site www.drkcomeau.com or contact us at our office at (905) 333-0116 in Burlington, Ontario