

Stress Symptoms

By recognizing the early symptoms of stress—rising blood pressure, rapidly beating heart, clenched teeth, aching neck and shoulders, sweating hands and feet churning stomach, dropping sexual interest — you and your family can begin to regain health and self-esteem.

Before farm/ranch families can do much about managing stress, they have to know when they are experiencing it. Much of the time people do not know what is going on in their bodies and in their relationships with others.

Many people learn to screen out unpleasant circumstances. For example, they deny their problems. One farmer insisted, “Everything is fine — just fine.” The truth is his net income had dropped 20 percent that year and 15 percent the year before. He was denying reality. Sometimes we blame others. One farmer who was feeling totally helpless because of an upcoming loan payment blew up at his wife for suggesting they take a vacation: “There you go again talking about ways to waste money.” And sometimes people try to escape reality through eating binges, spending sprees, or using other drugs.

Through such avoidance mechanisms, you attempt to screen out any unpleasant, uncomfortable stress alarms. But early warning signs are like a flashing red light on the dashboard of your car when the engine is overheating. If you ignore it long enough, the engine will blow. Rising blood pressure, rapidly beating heart, clenched teeth, aching neck and shoulders, sweating hands and feet, churning stomach, dropping sexual interest — these are all red lights flashing on your body’s dashboard warning you that trouble could lie ahead. If you ignore your body’s physical signals of stress and strain too long, you invite real problems — hypertension, declining health, accident proneness, serious illness, nervous breakdown or coronary heart disease.

So it is important that you recognize early warning signals of stress in your body, your actions, your emotional life, and your relationships with others.

Physical symptoms

When you block the free-flow of energy in your body by tying your muscles up in knots and by keeping your body tense, you can experience aching muscles, stomach problems, diarrhea or constipation, shortness of breath, cramps and fatigue. Become aware of what your body is experiencing. You might start doing this for three minutes before each meal.

Behavioral symptoms

When under stress, some people have trouble relaxing, concentrating, making decision or sleeping. All of these may lead to farm/ranch accidents. Others find under pressure they smoke more, drink more, or eat too much or too little. A good clue you are stressed is when you have difficulty being flexible or adapting to changing circumstances.

Emotional symptoms

One nice thing about farm/ranch life is that parents and children can work side-by-side. Nevertheless, too much togetherness and not enough privacy and personal time can lead to tension over chore assignments and supervision. Some warning signs include increased irritability over trifles, impatience, frustration, depression, angry blowups, difficult controlling emotions, cold-shoulder rejection and low self-esteem.

Relationship symptoms

Often members from different families farm/ranch together. While many of these arrangements work well, sometimes problems arise. Brothers close in age may slip into a competitive style that sometimes leads to serious problems. Such conflicts often hook the mother into acting as the intermediary. Lack of good listening and communication skills can lead to intense family blowups, communication breakdowns, strained relationships, sarcastic arguments, marital dissatisfaction, parent-child conflicts, verbal and physical abuse, or even separation and divorce.

By recognizing the early warning signs of stress, farm/ranch family members can begin early to regain personal health and self-esteem. And they can improve the emotional well-being of the entire family.

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