

# HOW TO OVERCOME KILLER STRESS

## PAYDAY

It was November 30, 1991 - the date is firmly etched in my mind - we had returned from visiting a older friend. I took a shower, then became extremely nauseated - I don't ever remember being that ill - then tried to throw up, but was too sick to. I then headed for the front door to get some fresh air and became dizzy. I lay down on the floor to avoid passing out. Heart attack! came to mind - I may be dying. I asked my wife to call the ambulance. I prayed aloud, asking God to forgive my sins. I wanted to call my son in Tulsa, but there was not enough time. The ambulance crew arrived, along with two friends. One prayed aloud for me. The cool night air felt good.

Preliminary tests at ICU indicated a stomach virus, but the attending physician recommended further tests. There had been heart symptoms for about ten years, but I hadn't followed the doctor's advice for medical tests. I had noticed pain up into my neck during exertion, and a general heaviness in the chest area. There were times when my heartbeat would skip and I became winded easily.

My wife had suffered a stroke in 1986 and was later pronounced permanently disabled. To compound the situation, now we were under great financial stress. My mailorder business was not doing well financially, though I enjoyed it and it seemed tailor-made for our circumstances.

A resting EKG indicated that my heart was not getting enough oxygen. A stress ekg indicated some problem. Then, in January 1992, a heart catheterization indicated that I had not had a heart attack. I was placed on one aspirin per day and Cardizem, which is a heart and blood pressure medicine.

Stress was making me seriously ill. My family was very supportive, but stress agents were taking their toll. I had served as an Army Chaplain in Vietnam, and finished a military career in the Army Reserve, retiring a colonel in 1988. I had earned a BA, two masters degrees and a doctorate, taught in two colleges for a total of five and a half years, pastored for eleven years and spent about five years in school administration. At one time, I was teaching a full load at college, working on a doctorate and working on a reserve military career.

Things went to "zero." Children made me nervous. Crowds of people bothered me. I didn't want to go anywhere. Other physical

problems began to surface. I looked for a pastorate and jobs, but didn't know if I could perform. Bankruptcy was put off until stress forced the issue - we filed for bankruptcy December 1992.

I had been effectively become a drug addict. No, I did not inject drugs in my veins or smoke or "snort" them. But, by worry and stress, I inadvertently had my brain command the adrenal gland to do so! Many of you are stressed-out, too. Learn from my bad experience, or you may not be so fortunate. Sometimes the first heart attack is the killer!

#### SHORT-TERM STRESS (FEAR)

God made a human being so that in case of real or imagined danger, the adrenal medulla (the inside part of the adrenal gland) produces adrenaline, a hormone, which is injected into the blood stream. Adrenaline produces an "acute alarm" reaction in the body. This acute reaction is generally short-term. The heart beats faster and blood pressure is raised. Blood is shunted from the stomach and skin to the muscles to provide physical strength for "fight or flight." High-energy fats are dumped into the bloodstream, blood sugar level rises, breathing quickens, eyes dilate and chemicals appear in the blood to clot blood rapidly in case of injury. This heightened condition may save one's life, but it is hard on the body.

#### LONG-TERM STRESS (WORRY)

When one perceives a real or imagined loss of control, the adrenal cortex (the outside part of the adrenal gland) produces cortisol, another hormone, which is injected in the blood stream. Cortisol produces a "vigilance reaction" in the body. This is a chronic reaction - a long term state. Blood pressure rises slowly, body tissues retain sodium and other vital chemicals. High-energy fats and blood-clotting chemicals are released into the blood stream. Sex hormones are repressed. Gastric acid production is increased to maximize digestion. The immune system is repressed, making one more susceptible to disease.

#### WORRY-INDUCED ILLNESS

Both conditions can trigger a heart attack. Excess stomach acid can cause ulcers, Atherosclerosis (hardening of the arteries) and continued high blood pressure can result due to continued stress. In short, fear, anxiety, overconcern and worry causes the brain to command the adrenal gland to inject strong chemicals into the blood stream. These chemicals act as a poison over a period of time.

Dr. S. I. McMillen discloses,

Emotional stress can cause high blood pressure, toxic goiter, migraine headaches, arthritis, apoplexy (cardiovascular accident or stroke), heart trouble, gastrointestinal ulcers, and other serious diseases too numerous to mention.

Dr. Carl Jung was the first to teach that the cause of schizophrenia was a toxin injurious to the brain - said toxin being formed by emotional disturbance, especially anxiety.

In short, worry or anxiety can cause physical and mental illness.

#### THE WAY BACK

One by one, with the help of God and others, I worked on each stress agent. A program of walking, diet and medicine is helping. I recommend two excellent resource books to help overcome killer stress.

One of the best medical resources for stress management is Dr. Robert S. Eliot's book, *Is It Worth Dying For? How to Make Stress Work for You - Not Against You*. Dr. Eliot experienced a heart attack himself, and now directs the Institute of Stress Medicine in Denver and serves as Professor of Cardiology at the University of Nebraska Medical Center.

Another classic book on managing stress and preventing other illnesses is Dr. S. I. McMillen's book, *None of These Diseases*.

Now is the time to act! Read and heed these timely books! See a physician if there are serious symptoms present.

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