

In addition to the stress of chronic illness, we all have to deal with 'ordinary' everyday stresses.

COMMON STRESSFUL LIFE EVENTS

- Death of spouse/close family member/friend/pet
- Divorce/separation/relationship deterioration
- Serious injury/illness/hospital admission
- Being a victim of violent crime/ burglary
- Loss of job/retirement
- Significant change in financial status
- Change in health of family member/close friend
- Work more than 40 hours a week/change in work/spouse starts or stops work
- Disrupted sleep
- Moving house/change in home circumstances (house guests, renovation)
- Change in social activities/ loss of contact with friends
- Holiday
- Engagement/marriage/new family member

Each of these life events presents stress that can take weeks or months to get over, even if it exists in isolation. With a background ongoing stress of illness, obviously, further stressful life events are going to be more difficult (and take longer) to get over.

Note that this list of life events includes not only negative events but also 'happy' events such as holidays that can be stressful. It is not merely the positive or negative attributes of the event that are pertinent, but predominantly, the *amount of change*.

In addition, the *context and meaning* of the event to the individual will affect the impact it has.

Whilst some psychologists consider a Social Readjustment Rating Scale devised in 1967 by Holmes and Rahe as the best measure of the impact of major life events, others have looked at the impact of more minor problems.

Lazarus and Folkman, in 1989, introduced a Daily Hassles Scale and the Daily Uplift Scale. These inventories were based on the assumption that daily, relatively 'trivial' problems are in fact likely to affect people in a cumulative way, more than single major life events.

The 'hassles' typically included: concern about body weight, health of family members, rising cost of living, home maintenance, misplacing or losing items, crime, physical appearance etc.

It has been suggested that this type of problem is actually more closely correlated to illness than the major life events.

It is therefore highly likely for us to become 'overstressed'. This may manifest itself in the following ways:

- *Brain*: fatigue, crying spells, depression, anxiety, sleep disturbance
- *Gut*: ulcer, cramps, irritable bowel
- *Glandular system*: thyroid gland abnormality
- *Circulatory system*: high blood pressure, abnormal heartbeat, heart attack, stroke
- *Skin*: itchiness, rashes
- *Immune system*: reduced resistance to infection