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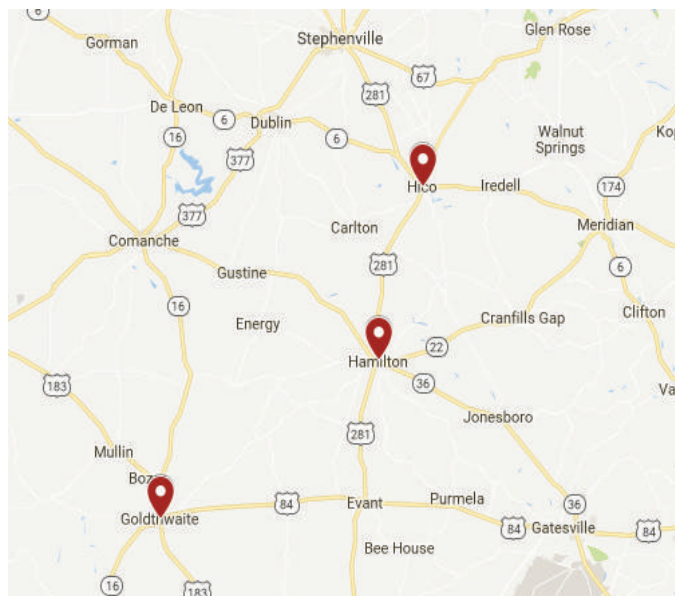
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20 warning signs of stress

Stress affects so many people and infiltrates so many parts of daily life that it can be tempting to write it off as harmless or just a normal part of being human. But the negative effects of stress are significant, and persons who can recognize that are in a good position to find healthy ways to cope with their stress.

The American Psychological Association notes that stress can take a considerable toll on a person's mind and body. Chronic stress, which is a constant stress experienced over a prolonged period of time, can increase the risk of hypertension, heart attack or stroke. In addition, the APA notes that chronic stress causes the muscles in the body to be in an essentially constant state of guard- edness, which can potentially contribute to tension-type headache and migraines. And these are just two of the many ways the body is adversely affected by stress, which the APA says also has been linked to problems with the gastrointestinal system, nervous system and re- productive system.

Since stress can contribute to such unpleasant and potentially life-threatening side effects, it's important that people from all walks of life learn to recognize the warning signs of stress. The American Institute of Stress lists the following among its 50 most common signs and symptoms of stress.

1. Frequent headaches, jaw clenching or pain
2. Grinding, grinding teeth
3. Stuttering or stammering
4. Tremors, or trembling of lips or hands
5. Neck ache, back pain and/or muscle spasms
6. Light headedness, faintness and/or dizziness
7. Ringing, buzzing or "popping sounds"
8. Frequent blushing or sweating
9. Cold or sweaty hands, feet
10. Dry mouth and/or problems swallowing
11. Frequent colds, infections and/or herpes sores
12. Rashes, itching, hives, and/or "goose bumps"
13. Unexplained or frequent "allergy" attacks
14. Heartburn, stomach pain and/or nausea
15. Excess belching and/or flatulence
16. Constipation, diarrhea, loss of control
17. Difficulty breathing and/or frequent sighing
18. Sudden attacks of life-threatening panic
19. Chest pain, palpitations and/or rapid pulse
20. Frequent urination

Stress is a part of daily life. Learning to recognize signs of stress can help people overcome it and reduce their risk for various conditions.