

## Relationship poison

How stress can toxify any good bond

Whether it's from work pressures, financial concerns, health issues, or personal insecurities, stress infiltrates our lives, and its impact on relationships can be profound and far-reaching. Even the best marriages will be put to the test, and not all will survive. Understanding how stress can poison a relationship is crucial for learning to clarify and fortify the connection and foster resilience.

### The direct impact of stress

At its core, stress affects individuals by triggering a fight-or-flight response, releasing cortisol and adrenaline, which prepare the body to handle perceived threats. While these physiological responses are beneficial in the short term, chronic stress leads to persistent high levels of these hormones, resulting in physical and emotional exhaustion. This prolonged state can leave us more irritable, less patient, and less emotionally available, creating a breeding ground for conflict and misunderstandings.

### Communication breakdown

Under stress, individuals often become inward-focused, preoccupied with their worries and anxieties. This preoccupation can lead to a lack of attentive listening, dismissiveness, and reduced empathy. While it might seem like your partner doesn't care, they may just be completely overwhelmed with their own stuff. If that is not communicated beforehand, you can bank on tension rising. With lower capacity and internal resources, misunderstandings and conflicts become more frequent, adding further strain to the relationship.

### Codependency and stress

In some relationships, stress can manifest in the form of codependency, where one partner becomes excessively reliant on the other for emotional support and validation. While seeking support from a partner is natural, codependency can lead to an unhealthy dynamic where one partner's stress becomes a burden for both. The caregiver partner may feel overwhelmed by the constant need to provide support, while the dependent partner may feel increasingly insecure and anxious about their own ability to



Stress, the poison apple of relationships

cope. This dynamic can create a vicious cycle of stress and dependency, eroding the foundation of mutual respect and equality that is essential for a healthy relationship.

### Resentment and unresolved issues

When individuals are stressed, they may unconsciously project their frustrations onto their partners, blaming them for issues that are, in reality, external. Over time, these unresolved issues and misplaced blame can lead to a buildup of resentment. The stressed partner may feel unsupported and misunderstood, while the other partner may feel unfairly targeted and undervalued. This accumulation of negative emotions can create a rift between partners, making it difficult to address the root causes of stress and find constructive solutions. This can also have knock-on effects where either one or both withdraw emotionally, physically, or sexually, for reasons such as protection, preservation, or punishment.

### Building resilience together

While stress can have a profoundly negative impact on relationships, it is not insurmountable. Building resilience together as a couple involves open communication, mutual support, and proactive stress management strategies. Regularly checking in with each other, expressing gratitude, and engaging in activities that strengthen the bond can help mitigate the effects of stress. Seeking professional help, such as couples therapy, can also provide valuable tools for navigating stressful periods.

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Scout is a Relationship Therapist providing counselling to couples & individuals. Based in Manly. Telehealth available. Call **0410 030 463** or visit **thelovescout.com** or for more info or to book a session.

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