



Stress & Trauma: What They Are & How They Affect Our System as a Whole

Lisa Klein, PTP, IMT.C



Rebekah Kelley: Welcome to the Humanized Podcast. All about personalizing your health. I'm your host, Rebekah Kelley. Today I'm excited to announce our guest, Lisa Klein. But before I do that, I want to remind you to subscribe to all of our various casts in audio, video, and transcription [Humanizedhealth.com](https://www.humanizedhealth.com). I'd also like to thank our lead sponsor, Village Green Apothecary, at [MyVillageGreen.com](https://www.MyVillageGreen.com).

Our guest, Lisa Klein, is the founder and owner of Total Health Physical Therapy, a PT practice specializing in manual therapy and total body rehabilitation. Lisa has spent the entirety of her 30 year career pursuing excellence in manual medicine and total body-mind healing. Lisa, thank you so much for being here. We're so excited to have you.



Lisa Klein: I'm happy to be here, Rebekah. Thank you.

Rebekah Kelley: The title of this podcast is "Stress and Trauma: What They Are and How They Affect Our System as a Whole." Obviously, right now there's a lot of stress and trauma going on.

Lisa Klein: Thanks. Yes. When my COO and I were talking about what to do for this first recording with Humanized Health Podcasts, she immediately said, "Trauma and stress!" I was like, oh, of course, we'll do that!

Rebekah Kelley: What are some common changes in the body when we're experiencing stress and trauma?

Lisa Klein: Stress and trauma affect our bodies in different ways, depending upon the person. You're responding to what you see, what you feel, what you watch on the news, and what you hear. All these sensory inputs are going to be hitting your body, and your body has to process all that information. If it's hard to process, it can cause your body stress. So the adrenals will start to load. The adrenals sit on the kidneys, they are like little hats, and they produce stress hormones.

The more you're seeing, feeling or hearing information that is difficult or challenging, the more the adrenals will start to load. We see this also in our patients who have had physical trauma: car accidents, different things that happened to them. Our bodies are all wired pretty much the same way.

So that will cause some changes. Your body will start to go into a fight or flight response. It goes into a response to what you're seeing, what you're hearing, what you're feeling on a day-to-day basis. If that keeps going, for example, maybe for a year in a pandemic, that can become escalated in your body. Now your body goes into more of a trauma response.

Our bodies are handled by the nervous system, and the nervous system is fed in many ways by the endocrine system. The more your body's under stress, the more the adrenals are loaded, the kidneys are loaded, different organs start to load with the fight or flight response. Your body then may kick into a freeze response, which is mediated by the stomach. So prolonged stress that becomes trauma can cause a cavalcade of problems, including anything from GI issues, nausea, headaches, sleep issues, focusing, sugar cravings, just you name it. And every system's affected by it.

Rebekah Kelley: That makes so much sense. Thinking back over the last several months that we've all been going through, my question is, how can stress cause digestive issues? I've noticed that my stomach is really much more sensitive over the past few months, my appetite fluctuates frequently, and definitely something is going on in my GI tract.

Lisa Klein: When your body starts going into that fight or flight response, it's mediated by what's called the sympathetic nervous system. It's kind of like you're running from a tiger. And so your body goes into an adrenal butterfly response, the body shunts fluid away from the organs into the extremities, essentially. You're no longer just digesting. Digestion is not that important when you're running from a bear, for example.

You know, where we are in time, we think we're so smart. Everybody thinks, especially in Washington, we're so smart. But our bodies do what they've done for thousands of years. When you're under stress, your body will go into this paradigm, which is a change in fluid, change in neurology, change in hormones. It is what it is.

So, in terms of the digestive system, your body will stop focusing on digesting food. It will also start to lock down what are called the diaphragms, because the vagal nerve goes through the respiratory diaphragm. So the more stress you're under, the more your chest will get tight, your diaphragm will get tight, everything will get tight. And the vagal nerve, which controls digestion, goes through the diaphragm. So the poor little vagal nerve gets hit eight ways to Sunday when it's under stress. It's loaded, and now it's impinging on your diaphragm.

Rebekah Kelley: That's exactly what's going on; you described it. I also noticed I seem to get cranky for no apparent reason. Actually, I really am feeling that, especially lately, as I think cabin fever has set in. So what happens in my system that allows stress to cause this?

Lisa Klein: Again, it's the adrenals. When you're under prolonged stress, the organs that control appetite, mood, temperature, all these things, are loaded. That means they don't have the resilience that they're supposed to have. When you do something like drive on the Beltway [I-495 around Washington, DC], which I did for the first time on Saturday, it's very stressful. I'm like, "I'm on the Beltway!" I haven't been on the Beltway in a year. So things that technically, theoretically, you should be fine with, your system is just on a high trigger. It's like a guitar string that's really tight because you haven't had a break. Again, adrenals, organ systems, neurology, blood vessels, everything goes into this fight or flight, sympathetic nervous system situation. And the next thing you know, if you're living with your pod, somebody does something. And you start snapping because you have no resilience.

Rebekah Kelley: Are there differences in the symptoms of physical stress and trauma, versus emotional stress and trauma?

Lisa Klein: That's a great question. We see patients who are very complicated. We see a lot of patients with chronic pain and neurological disorders. All of those things will cause stress on the system. So, theoretically no. Anything that's stressing out or traumatizing your body will cause the same reaction.

However, it looks different in the body. When somebody comes in and we map the fascia, we can kind of tell if it's physical, is it emotional, what is it? Because it presents differently. But overall, no, those things will cause all kinds of stress and trauma to your body. I had a patient who fell off a ladder and broke her wrist in a very unpleasant way. And her blood pressure shot up because it was very painful. So, prolonged physical pain will also cause the adrenals to load.

Rebekah Kelley: I also notice that I'm having trouble concentrating for periods, actually it's 30, 45 minutes. I'm really struggling, and that's not like me.

Lisa Klein: I know! It's a lot of people. So again, there's this thing called the neuro-endocrine connection. It happens with the endocrine connection, which is your adrenals and the glands in the body: the pituitary, hypothalamus, thyroid. The more the endocrine system is loaded, it will load the neurological system, and vice versa. So if you've had neurological trauma, it can affect the glands. And, again, vice versa. Anybody who's been under prolonged stress can start having a hard time neurologically. One thing that we see a lot of are attention and concentration issues.

Kelley: That's me to a T, and actually most of the friends that I talk to.

Klein: Yeah. Pretty much all of us right now have the attention spans of like a small flea. It's really true. That's why we're doing puzzles every night.

Kelley: It's so true. Thanks Lisa. Those are really valuable insights. Lisa Klein can be found at www.totalhealthptdc.com. Let me remind you to subscribe to get access to all Humanized videos, podcasts and transcriptions for all of our thought leaders on Personalized Health at HumanizedHealth.com. Thanks, Lisa.

Klein: Thank you, Rebekah.