

■ Introduction

Modern society has changed dramatically over the last two decades. The speed of life has increased, with more rapid transport, instant communications and even fast food. As the pace of life has increased there has also been an increase in certain stress related illnesses such as coronary heart disease and strokes.

We all have different temperaments, but for certain people life is a constant rush, a hurry from one activity or achievement to another. This style of behaviour often has its roots in early childhood where the 'need to achieve' and be successful is instilled from an early age.

The combination of this type of temperament and the increased pace of modern life can often lead to major stress problems or 'hurry sickness'.

■ What is Type A behaviour?

Two American cardiologists, Friedman and Rosenman, noticed that a great many of the people they saw with coronary heart disease and strokes tended to be of a similar nature, and were likely to be rather difficult to rehabilitate, as they did not find it easy to adjust their lifestyles. They initiated research into what has come to be known as Type A behaviour.

Type A behaviour is characterised by a cluster of traits:

- ① *Competitiveness*: An overriding need to achieve;
- ② *Hurry sickness*: An intense sense of time urgency;
- ③ *Hostility*: Inappropriate aggression if progress is impeded;
- ④ *Joyless striving*: always on the go, with many projects at once;
- ⑤ *Inability to relax*: difficulty turning off.

Type B behaviour is, on the other hand, the exact opposite, the individual being characterised by being more relaxed, less hurried and less inclined to compete.

■ Type A behaviour and your health

A number of research studies have indicated that individuals who score highly on Type A behaviour have double the risk of heart disease compared with those who are classified as having low Type A scores or Type B behaviour. This is independent of other traditional risk factors such as blood pressure, serum cholesterol, smoking and age. Type A behaviour is also associated with other stress-related conditions such as stomach ulcers, allergies, the exaggerated response of the sympathetic nervous system to stress ('fight or flight' response) and poor levels of mental health (anxiety and depression). Type A behaviour also seems to be linked with high levels of success in career and financial terms.

■ Physiology of Type A behaviour

The underlying physiology of Type A behaviour seems to be that such behaviour leads to excessive discharge of the stress hormones – noradrenaline, adrenaline and cortisol – and one result is an excess of insulin in the bloodstream. This can mean that it can take three or four times longer than normal to get rid of dietary cholesterol after meals. A potential result is a narrowing of blood vessels, together with increased deposits of clotting elements in the blood.

Research indicates that, with the right intervention, people can manage their Type A behaviour effectively, reducing the risks of physical and mental ill-health without impairing their performance.