

MANAGE YOUR STRESS FOR GOOD HEALTH

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INTRODUCTION

Right from the time of birth till the last breath drawn, an individual is invariably exposed to various stressful situations. The modern world which is said to be a world of achievement is also a world of stress. Today stress management is important in everyone's lives. Stress can have a big impact on our body. One of the more visible potential by-products of stress is weight gain--many people find themselves to be "emotional eaters" who react to stress by reaching for something--often the wrong thing--to eat. Stress can also create a loss of appetite, which can be a problem as well. There are many ways to deal with stress ranging from the dealing with the causes of stress to simply burning off its effects.

WHAT IS STRESS?

The word stress was originally used by Selye in 1956 to describe the pressure experienced by a person in response to life demands. These demands are referred to as stressors. Stress can be positive or negative.

Stress is the "wear and tear" our minds and bodies experience as we attempt to cope with our continually changing environment.

- Stress is the body's automatic response to any physical and mental demand placed on it.
- Adrenaline is a chemical naturally produced in our body in response to stress.
- Fight or flight response is elicited.

DEFINITION OF STRESS

According to Selye (1956), —Stress is defined as the pressure experienced by a person in response to life demands. These demands are referred to as stressors and include a range of life events, physical factors (e.g.: cold, hunger, haemorrhage, pain), environmental conditions and personal thoughts.

According to Selye (1976) Stress is a process of adjusting to or dealing with circumstances that disrupt or threaten to disrupt a person's physical or psychological functioning. • Stress is tension, strain, or pressure from a situation that requires us to use, adapt, or develop new coping skills.

Causes of stress

- Job Insecurity
- High Performance Demand
- Bad Boss \ Workplace Culture
- Personal or Family Problems
- Technology

TYPES OF STRESS

1. Eustress, or positive stress

Eustress, or positive stress, has the following characteristics:

- Motivates, focuses energy
- Is short-term
- Is perceived as within our coping abilities
- Feels exciting
- Improves performance

2. DISTRESS

DISTRESS In contrast, Distress, or negative stress, has the following characteristics:

- Causes anxiety or concern
- Can be short- or long-term
- Is perceived as outside of our coping abilities
- Feels unpleasant
- Decreases performance
- Can lead to mental and physical problems

Negative Stress Results Loss of motivation Reduces effectiveness Physical, mental, and behavioral problems

COMMON SIGNS OF STRESS

- Inability to make decisions
- Inability to act
- Lack of focus
- Hyperactivity
- Appetite changes
- Sleep pattern changes
- Pounding heart rate
- Shaking

IS ALL STRESS BAD?

- ✓ Moderate levels of stress may actually improve performance and efficiency
- ✓ Too little stress may result in boredom
- ✓ Too much stress may cause an unproductive anxiety level

POTENTIAL STRESS TRIGGERS

There are many potential triggers for stress, including the following:

- Increased responsibility
- Major life changes (marriage, divorce, relationship troubles, childbirth, death of loved ones, etc.)
- Relocation
- Financial pressures
- Job changes
- Natural and man-made disasters

- Many other factors

STRESSOR

Stressor is the stimuli proceeding or precipitating a change. It may be internal (fear, guilt) or external (trauma, peer pressure, etc).

Stress due to an excess of adaptive demands placed upon us. The demands are so great that they lead to bodily and mental damage. e.g.: unexpected death of a loved one.

The optimal amount of stress, which helps to promote health and growth. e.g.: praise from a superior for hard working.

TYPES OF STRESSORS:

PHYSIOLOGICAL STRESSORS:

- Chemical agents
- Physical agents Illness, injuries, hormonal fluctuations, inadequate sleep or nutrition
- Infectious agent
- Nutrition imbalances
- Genetic or immune disorders

PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESSORS

- Accidents can cause stress for the victim, the person who caused the accident and the families of both
- Stressful experiences of family members and friends
- Fear of aggression or mutilation from others such as murder, rape, terrorist and attacks.
- Events that we see on T.V. such as war, earthquake, violence
- Developmental and life events
- Rapid changes in our world, including economic and political structures and technology

NEGATIVE EFFECTS OF STRESS

PHYSICAL

- Weight gain/loss
- Unexpected hair loss
- Heart palpitations
- High blood pressure
- Restlessness

EMOTIONAL

- Mood swings
- Anxiety
- Can lead to depression
- Can also lead to unhealthy coping strategies (i.e. alcohol, drugs, etc)

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Importance of Stress Management

- Stress is something that everyone experiences, so learning how to cope with its effects is something that everyone needs to master for their own physical and psychological well-being.
- Those who don't learn and use appropriate stress-management techniques can experience a variety of negative effects, including physical illness, psychological illness, damaged personal relationships, poor productivity and more.

EFFECTIVE STRESS MANAGEMENT INVOLVES THE FOLLOWING:

- Learning to recognize the signs that you are experiencing stress
- Recognizing the circumstances that trigger stress reactions in you
- Applying stress management techniques to help you cope

RECOGNIZING THE SIGNS OF STRESS

- Stress is both a psychological and physiological response to change.
- It does not manifest itself the same way in everyone.
- Some people do not eat enough when they are stressed, while others binge-eat.
- Some develop insomnia during times of stress, while others sleep excessively.
- When your "ordinary" behaviors and responses change significantly as a result of life circumstances, chances are that you are experiencing stress.

MANAGING STRESS

TIPS TO REDUCE STRESS

- Keep a positive attitude.
- Accept that there are events that you cannot control.
- Be assertive instead of aggressive. Assert your feelings, opinions, or beliefs instead of becoming angry, defensive, or passive.
- Learn to manage your time more effectively.
- Set limits appropriately and say no to requests that would create excessive stress in your life.
- Make time for hobbies and interests.
- Don't rely on alcohol, drugs, or compulsive behaviours to reduce stress. Drugs and alcohol can stress your body even more.
- Seek out social support. Spend enough time with those you love.
- Seek treatment with a psychologist or other mental health professional trained in stress management or biofeedback techniques to learn more healthy ways of dealing with the stress in your life.

Stress Management Techniques

There's a lot more you can do to help manage stress. Consider these lifestyle changes:

Exercise

Physical activity can help improve your sleep. And better sleep means better stress management.

People who exercise also tend to feel less anxious and more positive about themselves. When your body feels good, your mind often follows. Get a dose of stress relief with these exercises:

If you don't have the time for a formal exercise program, you can still find ways to move throughout your day.

Diet

The benefits of eating health foods extend beyond your waistline to your mental health. A healthy diet can lessen the effects of stress, build up your immune system, level your mood, and lower your blood pressure. Lots of added sugar and fat can have the opposite effect. And junk food can seem even more appealing when you're under a lot of stress.

To stay healthy and on an even keel, look for complex carbohydrates, lean proteins and fatty acids found in fish, meat, eggs, and nuts.

Antioxidants help too. They protect your cells against damage that chronic stress can cause. You can find them in a huge variety of foods like beans, fruits, berries, vegetables, and spices such as ginger. Stick to a healthy diet with a few simple tips. Stay away from processed foods, and try not to eat mindlessly.

Sleep

A common side effect of stress is that you may struggle to fall asleep. If this happens three times a week for at least 3 months, you may have insomnia, an inability to fall and stay asleep. Lack of sleep can also add to your stress level and cause a cycle of stress and sleeplessness.

Better sleep habits can help. This includes both your daily routine and the way you set up your bedroom. Habits that may help include:

- Exercise regularly.
- Get out in the sunlight.
- Set a sleep schedule.
- Don't look at your electronic gadgets 30-60 minutes before bed.
- Try meditation or other forms of relaxation at bedtime.

The role of your bedroom in good sleep hygiene also is important. In general, your room should be dark, quiet, and cool. Your bed also plays an important role. Your mattress should provide support, space and most of all, comfort.

Relaxation Techniques

Yoga: This is a form of exercise, but it can also be a meditation. There are many types of yoga. The ones that focus on slow movement, stretching, and deep breathing are best for lowering your anxiety and stress.

Meditation: Meditation works well for many people and has many benefits. It can lower stress, anxiety, and chronic pain as well as improve sleep, energy levels, and mood. To meditate, you will need to:

1. Find a quiet place.
2. Get comfortable (sitting or lying down).

3. Focus your attention on a word, phrase, object, or even your breath.
4. Let your thoughts come and go and do not judge them.

Deep breathing: When you practice deep breathing, you turn on your body's natural ability to relax. This creates a state of deep rest that can change how your body responds to stress. It sends more oxygen to your brain and calms the part of your nervous system that handles your ability to relax.

Biofeedback: Learn how to manage your heart rate, muscle tension, and blood pressure when stress hits. Biofeedback gives you information about how your body reacts when you try to relax. Sensors are placed on your body that call out changes in everything from your brain-wave pattern to your muscle tone. Working with a biofeedback therapist, you can start to take control of the signals by changing how your body reacts to the sensor.

Connect with people: Spend time with friends or family members who will listen to you. It is a natural way to calm you and lower your stress. When you connect with people in person, your body releases a hormone that stops your fight-or-flight response. You relax.

Behavior: How you respond to people directly impacts your stress levels. Manage your response with these tips:

- Try not to overcommit yourself
- Share the responsibility
- Count to 10 before you respond
- Walk away from a heated situation
- Distract yourself with music or podcasts

Deal with Circumstances: Engaging in avoidance behavior is not an effective technique for stress management. Ignoring problems or pretending that things are fine when they are not only leads to greater stress in the long run. Managing stress effectively requires actually dealing with it and working through it.

Inner voice: Nothing affects your stress levels like the voice inside your head. The good news is you are in control. You can exchange negative thoughts for positive ones. There are more benefits to positive self-talk than reducing stress. These include a longer life, lower levels of depression, greater resistance to the common cold and cardiovascular diseases, and better coping skills for when hard times hit.

Laugh therapy: When you laugh, you take in more oxygen. Your heart, lungs, and muscles get a boost and your body releases those feel-good hormones. Laughter also improves your immune system, lessens pain, and improves your mood for long period of time.

Talk therapy: Long-term talk therapy helps some people deal with stress. One approach, cognitive behavioral therapy, helps you change negative thought patterns. Your therapist can guide you toward other approaches that might be helpful.

Breathing Techniques for Stress Relief

Breathing Exercises

Your breath is a powerful tool to ease stress and make you feel less anxious. Some simple breathing exercises can make a big difference if you make them part of your regular routine. Before you get started, keep these tips in mind:

- Choose a place to do breathing exercise. It could be in your bed, on your living room floor, or in a comfortable chair.
- Don't force it. This can make you feel more stressed.
- Try to do it at the same time once or twice a day.
- Wear comfortable clothes.

Many breathing exercises take only a few minutes. When you have more time, you can do them for 10 minutes or more to get even greater benefits.

Deep Breathing

Most people take short, shallow breaths into their chest. It can make you feel anxious. With this technique, you'll learn how to take bigger breaths, all the way into your belly.

1. Get comfortable. You can lie on your back in bed or on the floor with a pillow under your head and knees. Or you can sit in a chair with your shoulders, head, and neck supported against the back of the chair.
2. Breathe in through your nose. Let your belly fill with air.
3. Breathe out through your nose.
4. Place one hand on your belly. Place the other hand on your chest.
5. As you breathe in, feel your belly rise. As you breathe out, feel your belly lower. The hand on your belly should move more than the one that's on your chest.
6. Take three more full, deep breaths. Breathe fully into your belly as it rises and falls with your breath.

Breath Focus

While you do deep breathing, use a picture in your mind and a word or phrase to help you feel more relaxed.

1. Close your eyes if they're open.
2. Take a few big, deep breaths.
3. Breathe in. As you do that, imagine that the air is filled with a sense of peace and calm. Try to feel it throughout your body.
4. Breathe out. While you're doing it, imagine that the air leaves with your stress and tension.
5. Now use a word or phrase with your breath. As you breathe in, say in your mind, "I breathe in peace and calm."
6. As you breathe out, say in your mind, "I breathe out stress and tension."
7. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes.

Equal Time for Breathing in and Breathing Out

In this exercise, you'll match how long you breathe in with how long you breathe out. Over time, you'll increase how long you're able to breathe in and out at a time.

1. Sit comfortably on the floor or in a chair.
2. Breathe in through your nose. As you do it, count to five.

3. Breathe out through your nose to the count of five.
4. Repeat several times.

Once you feel comfortable with breaths that last five counts, increase how long you breathe in and breathe out. You can work up to breaths that last up to 10 counts.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

In this technique, you breathe in as you tense a muscle group and breathe out as you release it. Progressive muscle relaxation helps you relax physically and mentally.

1. Lie comfortably on the floor.
2. Take a few deep breaths to relax.
3. Breathe in. Tense the muscles of your feet.
4. Breathe out. Release the tension in your feet.
5. Breathe in. Tense your calf muscles.
6. Breathe out. Release the tension in your calves.
7. Work your way up your body. Tense each muscle group. This includes your legs, belly, chest, fingers, arms, shoulders, neck, and face.

Modified Lion's Breath

As you do this exercise, imagine that you're a lion. Let all of your breath out with a big, open mouth.

1. Sit comfortably on the floor or in a chair.
2. Breathe in through your nose. Fill your belly all the way up with air.
3. When you can't breathe in any more, open your mouth as wide as you can. Breathe out with a "HA" sound.
4. Repeat several times.

BENEFITS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT

- ✓ Physical health gets better
- ✓ more energy and stamina
- ✓ Emotions stabilized
- ✓ positive attitude
- ✓ hopeful/happier
- ✓ Ability to focus improved
- ✓ able to learn and achieve

CONCLUSION

Finding the stress management techniques that work effectively for you in the stressful situations that arise throughout your life can be a powerful resource for health promotion.