Stress Management

FIND YOURELF IN A PEACEFULL STATE

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CONTENTS

01

what is stress

02

Body responses to stress

03

benefits ad cost of stress

04

stress management

05

A prescription of stress management

What is stress

Although "stress" is a commonly used term in today's vernacular, and most people appear to have an intuitive sense of what it means, stress is difficult to precisely define as it is often used interchangeably with a variety of other terms, such as anxiety, pressure, or strain. In a general sense, stress refers to a collection of physiological, emotional, behavioral and cognitive reactions that occur in response to environmental demands.

A "stressor" is any event or stimulus that causes stress. However, what serves as a stressor for one person may not be the same for another. For example, being asked to attend a social event may create stress for someone who perceives that they lack the necessary social skills to fit in, whereas another person who feels comfortable in social situations may not experience any stress.

College is a transitional time of life when new and unique stressors are often being encountered. Not only are college students often away from home for the first time and forced to be more self-sufficient, but they must also cope with the increasing demands of the academic environment. Changes in sleep and eating habits, increased financial responsibilities, having to share living space and possessions with strangers, and increased exposure to unwanted things are the additional stressors often encountered by college students.

Body Responses to stress

When threatened by environmental dangers, changes, or demands, humans experience a variety of physiological and psychological changes. Once a threat has been recognized and appraised as dangerous, the individual evaluates available coping resources. If the demands of the situation are deemed to be greater than the available coping resources, an "alarm" or "Fight-or-Flight Response" is generated.

During the fight-or-flight response, the body prepares for action, generally consisting of either confrontation or avoidance of the threat. The sympathetic nervous system is activated, and hormones, including adrenaline and noradrenaline, are released into the blood stream. Heart and respiration rates accelerate and blood pressure increases, enabling the body to quickly circulate oxygen-rich blood to the brain and large muscles of the body

"Learn to say no to demands, requests, invitations, and activities that leave you with no time for yourself. Until I learned to say no, and mean it, I was always overloaded by stress. You may feel guilty and selfish at first for guarding your down- time, but you'll soon find that you are a much nicer, more present, more productive person in each instance you do choose to say yes."

Hollie Mosier

Benefits and Costs of Stress

Although we generally think of stress as something to avoid, stress is a natural, adaptive response that serves a protective function. At moderate levels, stress helps alert us to potential threats in the environment and enables us to focus our attention on resolving the threat. Stress also provides us with the energy needed to confront or retreat from the threat via the "fight-flight" response. Although some stress is beneficial, prolonged or intense stress can be associated with a variety of negative physical and psychological outcomes. For example, whereas moderate amounts of stress helps to focus our attention, excessive stress leads to diminished attention, concentration, decision-making, and short-term memory.

"Know These Things To manage your stress"

Stress Management

> *Not tomorrow, right now.*

Given the beneficial nature of mild to moderate levels of stress, the goal of stress management is not to eliminate all stress. Rather, stress management techniques are designed to keep stress levels within an optimal range. Engaging in healthy lifestyle behaviors can help to reduce stress and maximize the likelihood of living a long, healthy life.

Physical Activity and Exercise
Considerable evidence has accumulated indicating that regular physical exercise is associated with numerous physical and psychological health benefits. For example, regular engagement in moderate exercise, such as a brisk walk, strengthens the immune system and decreases rates of illness. Exercise also strengthens body muscles, including the heart, preserves muscle mass, and helps with weight management. Individuals who exercise regularly are also at a reduced risk for some chronic diseases, such as diabetes and hypertension.

The following stress management techniques have been consistently supported by empirical research: physical activity and exercise; healthy eating; adequate sleep; relaxation, mindfulness and meditation; laughter, self-expression and social support; and cognitive restructuring.

- ***Physical Activity and Exercise***
- ***Healthy Eating***
- ***Adequate Sleep***
- ***Relaxation, Mindfulness, and Meditation***
- ***Laughter, Self-Expression, and Social Support***

Stress Management Techniques

Healthy eating

When experiencing high levels of stress, research suggests that many people change their eating patterns. One of the most common dietary changes associated with stress involves the increased consumption of caffeine in an effort to improve early morning or late night productivity.

Adequate sleep

Research suggests that the relationship between stress and sleep is bidirectional in that high levels of stress tend to be associated with impaired sleep, and lack of sleep tends to exacerbate the experience of stress. Numerous studies have indicated that excessive stress tends to lead to diminished ability to fall and stay asleep, increased rate of nightmares, and poorer sleep quality

Mindfulness, and Meditation

Relaxation, or easing of physical or mental stress, is often thought to be the antidote to stress. Relaxation and anxiety are thought to be opposing emotions, in that one cannot be relaxed and anxious at the same time. Indeed, the achievement of a state of relaxation during a period of stress is often a challenging task.

Laughter, Self-Expression, and Social Support

It has long been said that, “laughter is the best medicine.” Indeed, we now know that laughter produces many positive physiological and psychological changes in the body. Research indicates that laughter increases oxygen intake and stimulates various muscles and organs, including the heart and lungs. Laughter also reduces blood pressure and blood sugar levels, increases blood flow, and improves energy levels.

A PRESCRIPTION FOR STRESS MANAGEMENT

EXERCISE REGULARLY.

Engage in 3-5 sessions of moderate intensity exercise each week to enhance your immune system and reduce your risk of developing anxiety and mood disorders. However, even if you cannot exercise regularly, remember that even a single episode of exercise can be a great way to relieve stress and improve mood.

EAT A HEALTHY DIET.

Eat plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and fatty fish to maximize your physical health and your body's ability to manage stress.

SLEEP.

Get 7-8 hours of uninterrupted sleep per night to improve your mood and boost your immune functioning.

A Prescription for Stress Management

Practice Relaxation. Engage in relaxation exercises on a regular basis or during periods of moderate to high stress. Progressive muscle relaxation (PMR), guided imagery, and meditation are great ways to reduce your overall level of arousal. Or, combine exercise with meditation or mindfulness by engaging in yoga two to three times per week!

Express Yourself. Look for the humor in stressful situations, and find ways to express your emotions through writing, art, or talking with friends and family

Reframe. Attend to the ways in which you think about and interpret stressful situations and look for opportunities to reframe the situation in a more rational or positive manner. Remember, the test at the end of this chapter is not something to be feared. Instead, it represents an opportunity for you to demonstrate how much you have learned about stress and stress management!.

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