

S T R E S S

1) *What is stress???*

“Stress is an unavoidable consequence of life. The only stressless state is death”

-Hans Selley 1936-

“Stress can be defined as a critical period during which an individual or group is exposed to threat or demand”

-Lazarus 1991-

Stress is a perceived state of disturbed harmony (Homeo stasis) produced by a stimulus, condition or event called *stressor*. It is a psychological and physiological response.

A stimulus, condition or event can become a stressor or threat for the person if he/she is unable to meet the challenge or because of perceived inadequacy to satisfy it.

2) *Same stressor but different responses*

- The impact of a given stressor is not the same on all individuals. It can vary from overwhelming through moderate and mild to insignificant.
- Various factors can influence or determine the way a person responds to stressors: *age, heredity, sex, physiological parameters, attitudes, skills, emotional makeup, financial status, childhood experiences, cultural conditioning, extent of family support and external social support of the individual.*

Two main intra-personal factors influencing the different responses:

Tolerance level: Individuals have different tolerance levels to put up with stressors. Some people get easily disturbed where others still can accept it.

Coping skills: Individuals skills to cope with threats, conditions or events can defer. While some people have gained already experiences or competencies to cope with certain stressors for others it might be totally new and create insecurity (disharmony).

Additional to this we have to consider that stressors can also add to each other. If an individual is already in disharmony because of certain stressors in his life,- further new stressors will add to it and make the person even more vulnerable.

Examples:

- The employer’s criticism may affect the sensitive worker negatively (frustration), the thick-skinned one only marginally and the strong-willed one may even be motivated to improve his work to the expected level.
- Students committed suicide after failure in the final exam.
- After a collision of two cars due to an accident the drivers may abuse each other where else in some Arabic countries they consider it also as kismet to meet each other and be friends.
- The prospect of throwing a party to relatives and friends is very stressful to some individuals. Some others just bloom. They spend hours over hours to prepare the party. These hours neither put them physically nor emotionally in distress, but are enjoyable.

3) How does it show if a person is having stress???

There are four levels on which stress manifests and can be noticeable:

- the particular **cognitions** (e.g. ‘I’m in danger’, ‘the person will hit me’, ‘I’m going to loose my family’, I’ll fail in the exam’),
- **emotions** (e.g. angry, irritable, anxious),
- **physical reactions** (e.g. perspiring, high pulsation, dry mouth) and
- the **behavior** (e.g. running around impatiently, looking with expectations to a direction, shaking legs or feet unconsciously, crying).

4) Types of stressors?

A) Distress vs. Eustress (According to Dr. Hans Selye)

Distress	Eustress
Negative form of stress – reduces function!	Positive form of stress – enhances function!
Unpleasant! Overstrained!	Generally pleasant!
Disturbing the organism!	Improving performance!
Ex.: - Persistent demand and expectations of parents or teachers which can not be met or handled by the child/ student. - Exposure to war or violent situations.	Ex: - Surprise party. - Expecting to meet your beloved ones after a long time of separation. - work challenge which can be met.

The difference between experiences which result in eustress or distress is determined by the disparity between an experience (real or imagined), personal expectations, and resources to cope with the stress.

Note:

- Stressors are not per se negative. Stress can also be advantageous and socially desirable. It can for example motivate a person to take action or to endeavor.
Ex: The competition and rivalry in studies or sports can push the individual to excel themselves. But this is valid only up to a certain point. Beyond a certain point it becomes counterproductive.
- Persistent stress that is not resolved through coping or adaptation is considered as distress.

B) External vs. Internal

Thinking of stressors one considers often external factors as causes but there are also internal stressors as discussed following:

External	Internal
Loss of a close friend	Guilt associated with lying or stealing
Toothache, fever	Negative thoughts as “I’m a looser” etc.
Failure in exams	Continues worrying

Noise pollution	Negative self image
Natural disasters	Visualization of future misfortune

C) Acute vs. Periodic vs. Chronic

The longer a stressor lasts unresolved or coped the higher the risk for organisms to collapse.

PTSD: The more severe form of stress as in Post-traumatic stress disorders (**PTSD**) is an anxiety disorder and clinical diagnosis even if often misused in colloquial language. It has to fulfill certain clinical criteria's which can be diagnosed by a psychologist or psychiatrist.

This disorder can develop after exposure to one ore more terrifying events that threatened or caused grave physical harm. It is an ongoing reaction to an extreme psychological trauma.

Top ten stressful Life Events (according to 'Holmes-Rahe Life Stress Inventory'):

- | | |
|------------------------------|----------------------------|
| 1. Spouse's death | 6. Injury or illness |
| 2. Divorce | 7. Marriage |
| 3. Marriage separation | 8. Fired from job |
| 4. Jail term | 9. Marriage reconciliation |
| 5. Death of a close relative | 10. Retirement |

5) Different categories of stressors

Personal stress

As for instance: expectations which don't get fulfilled.
 Time constrain to do something without help of others.
 Physical or psychological deficiencies.
 Conflict between one's beliefs and the religious teaching.

Family, home or domestic stress

As for instance: Temperamental differences between husband and wife.
 If a child falls sick and is hospitalized.
 Childless couple due to infertility.
 Parental disapproval of the chosen partner.

Educational stress

As for instance: Long hours of teaching without break.
 Expectations of the teacher or parents do not match the students capacity.
 Frequent exams and overload of homework.
 Occupational/Job stress
 Occupational stress arises when the job requirements and work conditions do not match the workers' capacities, needs and resources.

Occupational/Job stress

As for instance: Work overload.
 Insecurity of the job place.
 Isolation at the work place, denial of interaction among the workers.
 Unpleasant physical conditions at place of work like lack of ventilation, dim light... 3
 Psychological threats by the supervisor or other colleges.

6) *Managing stress!!!*

Dealing with stressful situations is a matter of **changing** the stressor (stressing situation) or accepting it (**adapting** to it)!

First choice: - changing –

- You might be able to avoid the stressor!
- Prevent the stressor!
- Alter the stressor!
- Resolve it!

If this is not possible: -adaptation –

- Learn to accept things you can't change or influence!
- Adapt to it and it reduces your stress reaction!

➤ It is scientifically proven that most of the people overestimate their power to control things. But in real it is a multiple source of matters which influence life and outcomes!

If it is possible to change the stressor, give your best to change it!
Realize when it is not changeable & learn to accept / adapt to it!!!

It is recommendable to use some healthy stress reducer to cope with the stress. It is mainly indicated when you are not able to change the stressor immediately or at all.

Healthy stress reducers: Here are some ideas. Try out and find out the most effective strategy for your self to cope with stress. Some ideas.....

- Go for a walk
- Spend time in nature
- Talk to supportive friend
- Sweat out the tension by workout
- Do something for someone else
- Write in diary
- Take a ice-cold bath
- Work in the garden or get involved in other hobbies
- Relaxation exercises (Yoga, Meditation etc.)
- Listen to music

You will generally be less vulnerable to react stressed if you care for a healthy and balanced life style. This means that you should ensure to have enough hours of sleep and rest, have regular and if possible balanced meals and not to forget to take breaks.

But we should also not only neglect our worries and problems. We can plan 'Worry Times' (a planed and set period of time within our daily life where we actively dedicate ourselves to the problems). The aim is:

1. To control them to be active only when we decide and give space to it instead of allowing it to pop up again and again or accompany us like a shadow.
2. To take time for problem solving instead of dragging it forward!!!