

STRESS AND YOU

26.1 Introduction

You have to catch your train at 8.00 a.m., but your auto is in a traffic jam. You just have 20 mts. to travel 5 km. Your heart beats fast, you are sweating and grinding your teeth, looking frequently at your watch, scolding people, unable to think clearly.

This type of a situation is a stressful situation when a pressure is built upon you to reach your destination. The moment you reach the station, board the train and take your seat, you tend to take a long sigh "ah" and then you feel a sort of relief has taken place. This relief makes you realize the tension you were in. This tension is the cause of stress. These days the life has become fast and the pressures are so many that we are in a stressful situation in some or the other way. Also we are not able to manage our stress effectively. So one should know what are the sources of stress and how to deal with them. In this lesson let us study about the concept of stress, various reactions and sources of stress and the coping strategies for facing stress.

26.2 Objectives

After reading this lesson you should be able to :

- explain what is stress;
 - give various types of reactions to stress;
 - identify and list various sources of stress;
 - find out the methods of coping with stress.
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26.3 Concept of Stress

Stress means pressure and an uneasy experience. The causes of stress may be yourself, other individual around you and environment. Let us study how stress is caused

Stress caused by the self : *You have not studied till the last date of your exam, and suddenly when you try to study every thing on the previous day of your exam . You are not able to learn and also you are not confident that whether you have covered each topic or not .The tension mounts - What is this situation - You have put yourself in stress.* Stress need not necessarily always be considered negative. It has both positive and negative dimensions. The positive aspect of stress is termed as "eustress" meaning stress producing positive results. The negative dimension is called "distress"

Stress caused by environment : An example can be, your crop is ripe and ready for harvest, suddly continuous rain makes you helpless and worried. Your stress is due to nature or environment.

Stress caused by others : In every way you are due for promotion, but the management fails to promote you. Here your stress is due to others.

As discussed before stress need not necessarily always be considered negative. The positive aspect of stress which is termed as "eustress" produces positive results. Badminton players practice for hour together before a match. Practice is stressful but it would produce good results. This sort of stress is known as "eustress" or effort stress. The famous scientist who invented bulb, Thomas Alva Edison, failed more then 1000 times, Finally he succeeded. He was experiencing eustress.

The negative dimension of stress is referred to as distress, which causes unpleasantness and poor performance. Radha is a bright girl, who always used to get good marks from the beginning. Her marks came down drastically due to her father who comes home drunk and beats her mother. She is worried, tense and cannot concentrate on her studies which resulted in getting low marks in the exams. Radha is the victim of distress.

Intext Questions 26.1

Fill in the blanks with appropriate words.

1. Stress means _____ and an _____.
 2. Stress can be caused by _____, _____ and _____.
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3. The positive aspect of stress is called as _____, which results in better _____ thereby giving satisfaction and happiness to the individual.
4. The negative aspect of stress is called as _____.

26.4 Reactions to Stress

Hereafter we will talk about the negative aspect of stress, that is distress and how to reduce it. Reactions to stress can be classified into the following categories.

- i) physiological reactions
- ii) affective reactions
- iii) cognitive reactions and
- iv) behavioural reactions

(i) Physiological reactions : *Physiological reactions refer to the physical functions which get affected and do not work in their normal routine. The reactions which commonly occur in an individual to stress are*

- (a) rapid pounding of heart and pulse,
- (b) muscles becoming tense,
- (c) dryness of the throat or mouth,
- (d) feeling sick in the stomach, (colloquially it is referred to as "butterflies" in the stomach),
- (e) trembling etc.

Generally, it is the vulnerable and weak bodily system that gets affected by stress first. The resulting symptoms are called therefore psychosomatic reactions. For instance, if the respiratory system is weak, stress attacks it and asthma could be the outcome. Similarly, if the digestive system is vulnerable, it becomes the target for the attack of stress. It usually results in ulcer. Thus almost all the systems can very well reflect the impact of stress by coming out with various symptoms like blood pressure, wheezing, stomach ache, head ache, pain the joints, stuttering etc.

(ii) Affective reactions : Affective reactions are emotional responses which get affected such as anxiety, depression, anger, irritability, having poor control over the emotions, etc.

(iii) Cognitive reactions : Cognitive reactions to stress are

- (a) poor concentration,
- (b) inability to learn any thing new more in the same speed and with the same efficiency,

- (c) forgetting,
- (d) unable to take proper decision that too in time,
- (e) confusion,
- (f) gate crashing of ideas,
- (g) negative or unhealthy thoughts, etc.

All these physiological, affective, and cognitive reactions are covert in nature, that is, they take place within the individual but the behavioural reactions are overt which means that they take place outwardly for instance

- (a) crying,
- (b) talking incoherently,
- (c) irrelevant speech,
- (e) hitting,
- (f) bashing or banging etc.

Physiological reactions	Affective Reactions
Rapid heart beat & pulse	Anxiety
Muscles becoming tense	Depression
Dryness of the throat or mouth	Anger
Trembling etc.	
Cognitive Reactions	Behavioural Reactions
Poor concentration	Crying
Inability to learn any thing new	Talking incoherently
Forgetting,	Irrelevant speech
Unable to take proper decision	Hitting
Confusion	
Negative thought	

26.5 Sources of Stress

Sources of stress can be categorized into four categories, which are as follows.

- 1) Family
- 2) Occupational/Educational
- 3) Personal and
- 4) Environmental

(1) Family

If you are experiencing stress because one of your family member is seriously ill then the sources of your stress is family. The other familial stresses are financial difficulty, the famous Mother-in-law and daughter-in-law quarrel, quarrel between spouses (husband & wife) etc.

(2) Occupational/Educational

For a student stress may be the examinations, hostel etc. A teacher who is not teaching well may add to the stress. Poor pay, over demanding boss, unco-operative co-worker and subordinates, poor working condition are some of the occupational stresses.

(3) Personal

Personal stresses are many. The basis of personal stress are inadequacy, inferiority and insecurity. "My memory is poor," "I am dark", "I am fat", "I am not good looking", "I cannot speak English well", "I am not intelligent", "I am not talented", "I am poor, I have poor health", "I am unemployed/under employed", are some of the thoughts and attitudes making one feel inadequate and insecure and suffer from stresses.

(4) Environmental

Unexpected natural calamities; such as, famine, earthquake floods, etc are environmental stresses. Crowd, poor sanitation, pollution, etc are also sources of environmental stresses.

Try it yourself

Identify your stress in various areas.

Fill up the blanks with your own stressors.

Family

- (1) Finance
- (2) Illness of family members
- (3) Discord between family members
- (4) _____
- (5) _____
- (6) _____

Occupational/Educational

- (1) Poor Pay
- (2) Poor work condition

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

(6) _____

Personal

(1) Poor memory

(2) Worried about physical appearance

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

(6) _____

Environmental

(1) Pollution

(2) Crowded

(3) _____

(4) _____

(5) _____

26.6 Coping Strategies

Having dealt with the nature and source of stress besides reactions to stress, now let us deal with the coping strategies that the individuals usually adopt for combating and managing the stress effectively. Coping is an attempt to manage stress in some effective way. Though there are several strategies through which one can cope up with stress, a few are presented here.

The individuals quite often go for a change of activities when they experience stress while doing a task either in office or elsewhere, like going out and having a cup of coffee or tea; or having a jovial talk with one's friends, or closing one's eyes just for a while and trying not to entertain any thought (almost like doing meditation), trying to think rationally and coming out with practical plans execution so that stress can be reduced if not eliminated.

Of so many coping methods, some are constructive, healthy and positive while some unhealthy, negative and to some extent destructive or self-defeating. The healthy or positive coping strategies are those which will lead the individual towards stress reduction.

The negative or unhealthy coping strategies on the other hand are bound to have adverse effect on the individual, even though the

individual may claim to have succeeded in their attempt to reduce stress by using the strategies. Examples for the negative coping mechanisms are :

- (i) shouting at people and getting the work done,
- (ii) frequently taking tea or coffee,
- (iii) smoking cigarettes,
- (iv) drinking alcohol, etc.

The above may yield temporary benefits, but in the long run the individual will face adverse health.

Positive or healthy coping strategies are rational thinking, discussion and sublimation, some of them are;

- 1) **Rational thinking** : You have lost Rs.100/- through pick-pocket. Instead of worrying, you should tell your self, "I will be careful here after. Thank God I have lost only Rs.100/-, not the 1000/- I carried last week."
- 2) **Discussion** : To solve the misunderstanding between you and your close friend, involve another friend who is known to both of you. Discuss and find out the reason of your misunderstanding.
- 3) **Sublimation** : A couple who have lost their only child, started running a home for orphans. They are sublimating their grief constructively by serving the children who are parentless.

Some Useful Coping Strategies

For Physiological Reactions

- Taking in and letting out deep breath repeatedly
- Listening to music of your choice
- Exercising
- Swimming, Walking
- Yoga, Meditation, Relaxation etc.

For Cognitive Reaction :

Praying to God. Say to yourself that "This is the nature of this man, I can't do anything ." Put a stop to the negative or unpleasant thought and think or imagine a pleasant event. For failures think "God has given me this golden opportunity to learn more and become better". Failures are stepping stones of success.

These are Rational Thinking.

For Affective Reactions :

Express your feelings politely but firmly. For eg : I don't like your behaviour. Please do not repeat it. Expose yourself repeatedly to the situation which cause fear or anxiety.

For eg : If you are afraid of public speaking, try to speak to various groups repeatedly.

For Behavioural Reaction

Leave the place when you get angry with someone. Drink two glasses of cool water. Distract yourself by any other activity like reading or going out for a walk, listening music etc.

Intext Questions 26.2

Fill up the blanks with appropriate words :

1. Coping _____ are the methods or practices adopted by the individual to overcome _____.
2. Trying to think _____ for solving a problem is a _____ coping strategy.
3. Smoking a cigarette to overcome stress is a _____ coping strategy.

What you have learnt

Stress is a kind of internal pressure caused by either internal or external forces. Generally it is because of interaction of both internal and external factors.

Both low and high levels of stress are not helpful for the highest performance which an individual is capable of, only the moderate level of stress results in peak performance.

Stress has both positive and negative features. If it is positive it is known as "Eustress". The negative stress is known as distress.

Reactions to stress are physiological, affective, cognitive and behavioural in nature.

Sources of stress are broadly classified into two categories namely endogenous and exogenous. Similarly the strategies followed by the individual for effective management of stress are categorized into two types which are (i) positive or healthy and (ii) negative or unhealthy.

Stress that is experienced at the workspot is called occupational stress which is due to reasons like the discrepancy between individual and organizational goals, poor cooperation, incoordination, unhealthy competition among workers, role ambiguity, role conflict etc.

Terminal Questions

1. What do you understand by stress ? Give an example.
2. Note down the different reactions to stress.
3. List the sources of stress.
4. What is a coping strategy ? Give example for different strategies.

Key to Intext Questions

26.1

1. pressure, uneasy, experiences
2. self, environment, others.
3. eustress, performance
4. distress

26.2

1. strategies
2. rationally, positive
3. negative

Hints to Terminal Questions

1. Refer section 26.3
 2. Refer section 26.4
 3. Refer section 26.5
 4. Refer section 26.6
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