

STRESS MANAGEMENT FACT SHEET

What is Stress?

Dr. Hans Selye, the father of stress theory, defined stress as "the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it." The "demand" can be a threat, a challenge or any kind of change which requires the body to adapt. Stress can be good when it helps us perform better, or it can be bad when it causes upset or makes us sick.

What Does the Stress Reaction Consist Of?

The stress reaction results from an outpouring of adrenaline, a stimulant hormone, into the blood stream. This, with other stress hormones, produces a number of changes in the body, which are intended to be protective. The result often is called the "fight-or-flight response" because it provides the strength and energy to either fight or run away from danger.

The changes include an increase in heart rate and blood pressure (to get more blood to the muscles, brain and heart), faster breathing (to take in more oxygen), tensing of muscles (preparation for action), increased mental alertness and sensitivity of sense organs (to assess the situation and act quickly), increased blood flow to the brain, heart and muscles (the organs that are most important in dealing with danger) and less blood to the skin, digestive tract, kidneys and liver (where it is least needed in time of crisis). In addition, there is an increase in blood sugar, fats and cholesterol (for extra energy) and arise in platelets and blood clotting factors (to prevent hemorrhage in case of injury).

What are Common Symptoms of Stress?

Physical: fatigue, headache, insomnia, muscle aches/stiffness, heart palpitations, chest pains, abdominal cramps, nausea, trembling, cold extremities, flushing or sweating and frequent colds.

Mental: decrease in concentration, indecisiveness, mind racing or going blank. Loss of sense of humor.

Emotional: anxiety, nervousness, depression, anger, frustration, worry, fear, irritability, impatience. Behavioral: fidgeting, increased eating, smoking, drinking, crying, yelling, and swearing.

What are the Causes of Stress?

External stressors include:

Physical environment: noise, bright lights, heat, confined spaces

Social {interaction with people}: rudeness, bossiness or aggressiveness on the part of someone else Organizational: rules, regulations, "red tape," deadlines

Major life events: death of a relative, lost job, promotion, new baby

Daily hassles: commuting, misplacing keys, mechanical breakdowns.

Internal stressors include: Lifestyle choices: Negative self-talk, caffeine, not enough sleep, overloaded schedule, pessimistic thinking, self-criticism, over-analyzing.

Mind traps: Unrealistic expectations, taking things personally. "All-or-nothing" thinking. Stressful personality traits: Type A, perfectionist, workaholic.

It is important to note that the stress that most of us have is actually self-generated. Recognizing that we create most of our own upsets is an important first step to dealing with them.

What are Some Ways to Master Stress?

1. Change lifestyle habits -

- Decrease caffeine (coffee, tea, colas, and chocolate).
- Well-balanced diet
- Decrease consumption of junk food.
- Eat slowly.
- Regular exercise (at least 30 minutes, three times per week).
- Adequate sleep.
- Leisure time (do nothing for yourself every day).
- Relaxation exercises (meditation)

2. Change stressful situations.

- Time and money management.
- Assertiveness.
- Problem-solving
- Possibly leaving a job or a relationship.

3. Change your thinking.

- Look at things more positively.
- See problems as opportunities.
- Refute negative thoughts.
- Keep a sense of humor.

4. Diversion and distraction. Take a time-out (anything from a short walk to a vacation) to get away from the things that are bothering you. It gives you a break and a chance for your stress levels to decrease. Then, you can return to deal with issues feeling more rested and in a better frame of mind.

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