

STRESS MANAGEMENT: A STRATEGY WITH REFERENCE TO HAPPINESS

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1. Introduction

Stress is a normal human reaction that happens to everyone. In fact, the human body is designed to experience stress and react to it. When you experience changes or challenges (stressors), your body produces physical and mental responses. Stress is the way human beings react both physically and mentally to changes, events, and situations in their lives. People experience stress in different ways and for different reasons. The reaction is based on your perception of an event or situation. If you view a situation negatively, you will likely feel distressed—overwhelmed, oppressed, or out of control. Distress is the more familiar form of stress. The other form, eustress, results from a “positive” view of an event or situation, which is why it is also called “good stress.”

Emotional wellbeing is the foundation of happiness. Each one of us experiences multiple emotions in our daily lives. According to experts, negative emotions lead to stress. This can be because of bad interaction with someone or some unpleasant situation, too much work, or even due to too much of everyday hassles like being stuck in long traffic jams. Negative emotions can impact both mental and physical health of people and so it is important to manage these emotions. But how can one deal with negative emotions like stress, ego and fear.

Stress Is the Ratio of Emotional Pressure and Inner Resilience

Each one of us responds to situations differently due to the difference in the coping powers. Something that is stressful for person may not be a matter of concern for someone else. For example, for a child the reason for stress could exams, for a professional it could be a target, in a relationship it could be getting along with the other person. A lot of these pressures are not in our control. It is important to note that the intensity of stress can differ with respect to our attitude towards it. We must learn to be more resilient because how much inner resilience or coping power we can have, is in our control.

2. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In a recently conducted study, approximately 15% of students indicated having had suicidal ideas, the second leading cause of mortality (after road accidents) among individuals aged 18 - 24 years, and 30% presented depressive symptomology during the previous 12 months (Lafay, Manzanera, Papet, Marcelli, & Senon, 2003). Other risk factors include the consumption of psychoactive substances, which tends to increase over time, with alcohol consumption consultations planned to become an integral part of medical visits to first-year students. Events take place, an individual becomes disorganized, disoriented and therefore less able to cope up, thus resulting in stress relating health problems. The pressure to perform well in examinations or test and time allocated makes academic environment very stressful (Erkutlu and Chafra, 2006; Polychronopoulou and Divaris, 2005; Misra and McKean, 2000). This is likely to affect the social relations both within the University and outside (Fairbrother and Warn, 2004) since there is conflict with the social aspect of one life. Researchers (Makach Pines and Keinan, 2007; Ongori, 2007; Ongori and Agolla, 2008; Agolla, 2009) have long identified stress symptoms as lack of energy, taking over the counter medication, high blood pressure, feeling depressed, increase in appetite, trouble concentrating, restlessness, tensions and anxiety among others. An individual experiencing one of these factors is likely to be a victim of stress.

3. Symptoms of stress:

Long-term stress or continued activation of the stress response causes wear and tear on the body. Physical, emotional and behavioral symptoms develop.

Physical symptoms of stress include:

- Chest pain.
- Exhaustion or trouble in sleeping.
- Headache
- High blood pressure
- Stomach or digestive problems.
- Weak immune system.

Emotional and mental symptoms like:

- Anxiety

- Depression
- Panic attacks
- Sadness.

Some manage it with unhealthy behaviours like

- Smoking.
- Using drugs
- Drinking alcohol too much.
- Gambling.
- Developing an eating disorder.
- Participating compulsively in sex.

4. Causes of Stress:

- Stress originates from work, financial pressures, family responsibilities, relationships and personal health concerns.
- Life events such as marriage, changing jobs, divorce, or the death of a relative or friend are the most common causes of stress.
- People experience intense stress levels because of imminent danger and a high degree of uncertainty—police officer, fire and rescue worker, emergency relief worker and the military.

The National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH) notes some of the more common stressors for college student:

- Increased academic demands
- Being on your own in a new environment
- Changes in family relations
- Financial responsibilities
- Changes in your social life
- Exposure to new people, ideas, and temptation

5. Managing Stress for Healthy and Happy Life:

The first step understands yourself better—how you react in different situations, what causes you stress, and how you behave when you feel stressed. Once you've done that, take the following steps:

Meditation Helps the Mind to Let Go Stress and Build Resilience

Meditation is the key to a healthy mind, stronger resilience and better will power. Meditation comprises three things – building an affirmation, visualizing it and experiencing it. One can start meditating with simple affirmations like 'I am a happy soul, untouched by negative energies', visualizing and experiencing the same throughout the day which will help in being positive and calm. "As is our consciousness, so will be our thoughts and behaviour. Concentration and determination will always be elusive for a wavering mind. A simple life with control of mind can always find happiness".

It is also suggested on being mindful while feeding the brain with outside content from sources like televisions, books, newspapers, and internet and recommends consuming only that content which can help in keeping one positive and aids in personal growth of the person. If the mind is not in control, the words will not be in control and eventually the body will not be in control of a person leading to complications like conflicts and accidents. Stress as an emotional disease quoted by **Sister BK Shivani, International Motivational Speaker, Brahma Kumari** and an uncomfortable emotion and urged organizations not to let stress become a part of their workplace culture. Instead, she encouraged them to create a **no-anger zone**, emphasizing that providing workers with time for them is a part of Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) to prevent exhausted and fatigued minds.

Speaking on the quality time and the quality of content being fed to the mind, **Sister BK Shivani** advised to disconnect from work after working hours, giving quality time to self and family. She also spread awareness for being conscious about the quality of content consumed during leisure time, as it directly impacts mental well-being and instead suggested to spend this time on self-improvement. Additionally, she highlighted three important aspects of a simple life: A good sleep hygiene, discipline, and working on personal values and principles.

Some other ways to prevent stress:

- Try relaxation activities, such as meditation, yoga, breathing exercises and muscle relaxation.

- Take good care of your body each day. Eating right, exercising and getting enough sleep help your body handle stress much better.
- Stay positive and practice gratitude, acknowledging the good parts of your day or life.
- Accept that you can't control everything. Find ways to let go of worry about situations you cannot change.
- Learn to say "no" to additional responsibilities when you are too busy or stressed.
- Stay connected with people who keep you calm, make you happy, provide emotional support and help you practically. A friend, family member or neighbor can become a good listener or share responsibilities so that stress doesn't become overwhelming.

6. Conclusion/ Suggestions

- Instead of focusing on the situation, people need to work on building the coping power. It asserts that just like a person needs to build physical stamina to deal with physical stress, there is a need to build inner resilience to cope with emotional stress.
- Instead of blaming the people or situation, we need to focus on our thoughts because we are the creators of our own thought and feelings. If we feel stressed, it is because we let ourselves to feel so.
- Choosing the response towards a situation is a way to become the master of one's mind instead of being mastered by it.
- Sleeping well and stopping the use of mobile phones and computer devices two hours before sleeping and at least two hours after waking up.

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