

Coping with Stress

- Stress:
- Pressure or tension felt by the individual.
- Refers to physical, mental or emotional strain or tension caused by overworking the mind, body and heart.
- is unpleasant state of emotional and physiological (increased heart beat) arousal that people experience in situations that they receive as dangerous threatening to their well being. Stress can have both positive and negative effects.

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- is a psychological and physiological response to events that upset our personal balance in some way. When faced with a threat, whether to our physical safety or emotional equilibrium, the body's defenses kick into high gear in a rapid, automatic process known as the “fight-or-flight” response.
- is a response to stressors. A stressor is anything, e.g., a situation that can cause the stress response
- is a state of worry resulting from pressure caused by the problems of life.

- Stress is a normal, adaptive reaction to threat.
- It signals danger and prepares us to take defensive actions. Stress also motivate us to achieve and fuels creativity.
- stress also seems to improve motivation and performance or less complex tasks.
- In small doses, stress is a good thing. It can energize and motivate you and perhaps even prevent or delay certain types of damage to your cells.
- High stress levels have been linked to depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, an impairment of immune system and cancer.

For example:

- Death of close family members
- Divorce or separation of parents
- Physical changes during adolescence
- Health problems
- Lack of rest
- anxiety

Symptoms of stress

- Head aches
- Pain around neck
- Stomach pain
- Skin problems(change of skin colors)
- forgetfulness
- Irregular heart beat
- Difficulties in learning
- Forgetfulness
- Bad dreams
- Muscle tension
- Loss of appetite
- Increased use of alcohols
- Substance abuse -- excessive drinking or drug use
- Self suicide
- Isolation: lack of desire to socialize
- Marital/family/roommate conflicts
- Cynicism

Sources of stress:

From the family

- Family instability
- Financial pressure
- Death
- Illness
- High family expectations can be potential sources which may put an individual to stress.

From the environment

- New environment and new friend
- Ambiguity—a lack of clarity in a situation
- Peer pressure
- Preparing for exams
- Excessive workload
- Lack of faculty/department contact

Stress Coping Mechanism

- Coping with stress mean using **thought** and **actions** to deal with stressful situations and lower our stress levels. Coping with stress involves behavioral and/or cognitive strategies.
- Coping consists of all things **people do to control, tolerate** or **reduce** the effects of life's stressors- perceived threats, existing problems, or emotional losses.
- Coping is not single strategy that applies to all circumstances.

1.Task-oriented strategies:

- you may feel comfortable analyzing the situation and taking action to deal directly with the situation
- Obtains information about the stressor
- Considers alternative courses of action and their outcomes
- Decides priorities
- Acts to deal directly with the stressor\

2. Emotion-oriented strategies:

- you may prefer to deal with your feelings and find social supports
- Makes efforts to be hopeful and control own emotions
- May vent negative emotions
- May decide nothing can be done

3. Avoidance-oriented strategies:

- you may use activities or work to take your mind off the situation
- Denies or minimizes the seriousness of the situation
- Consciously suppresses stressful thoughts
- Uses self-protective thoughts
- **Individuals low** in trait anxiety tends to use the task-oriented strategy.
- **Individuals high** in trait anxiety tend to use the emotion- or avoidance-oriented strategies. This approach de-emphasizes the social context

4. Physical Strategies

- These methods provide more direct and deliberate means of controlling and reducing the impact of stress and prepare us to deal with unexpected stress and keep us in stress ready condition.
- **Cooling off:** the most immediate way to handle the physiological symptoms of stress is to calm down. The following are some the activities that can be done to help us calm down.
- **Relaxation:** One of the most effective means of dealing with physical stress reactions is to relax during stressful situations. Here is how to do it.
- Make sure you are sitting in a comfortable position, with your head supported. Start breathing slowly and deeply.
- Let your entire body go limp and try to let go off any tension that remains. Try to visualize your body getting more relaxed.
- Systematically tense and release each part of your body, beginning with your toes.

Exercise:

- Exercise plays several roles in reducing the negative effects of stress. For one thing regular exercise reduces heart rate, respiration rate, and blood pressure (although these responses temporarily increase during exercise periods). Furthermore, exercise give people a sense of control over their bodies, plus a feeling of accomplishment. It even provides a temporary respite from the environment that is causing the stress in the first place, and it helps people sleep better at night.
- The best exercise for these purposes is aerobic exercise-regular strenuous activity that heightens cardiovascular functioning, such as brisk walking, jogging, bicycling, swimming, dancing and so on.

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- avoiding smoking, eating nutritionally balanced diets, exercising regularly, and among other factors, adopting an internal locus of control and a positive attitude toward life.

5. Problem-Oriented Strategies:

- These are emotional or cognitive coping strategies that lead to changes in how one views or appraises stressful situations rather than strategies for changing the situations themselves. Some of these techniques include the following.
- **Reappraising the problem:** problems can be changed into challenges losses into unexpected gains.
- **Learning from experience:** Even when people suffer major losses, traumas and serious illnesses they can often find useful lessons in them.
- **Making social comparisons:** successful coopers often compare themselves who are (they feel) less fortunate.
- **Cultivating a sense of humor:** ability to see the humor in tense or even tragic situations, to appreciate humor and witty people and to use humor in coping with stress.

6. Problem-Focused Strategies

- Problem focused forms of coping are strategies that deal directly with the situation or the stressor in ways that will eventually decrease or eliminate it. The better a person is at solving problems, the more likely he/she will develop effective coping strategies. These strategies consist of:
 - Identifying the stressful problem,
 - Generating possible solutions,
 - Selecting the appropriate solution, and
 - Applying the solution to the problem,
 - Eliminating the stress.

7. Drawing on social support

- An important resource for coping is gaining social support from friends, families, colleagues and social organizations and churches.
- Researchers have found out that social support, the knowledge that we are part of mutual network of caring, interested others, enables people to experience lower levels of stress and to be better able to cope with the stress they do under go.
- The social and emotional support that other people provide each other helps in dealing with stress in several ways. For instance such support demonstrates that a person is an important and valued member of a social network. Similarly other people can provide information and advice about appropriate ways of dealing with stress.

8. Inoculation

- A final strategy for coping with stress is inoculation: preparing for stress before it is encountered.
- Inoculation methods prepare people for stressful experiences by explaining, in as much detail as possible the difficult events they likely to encounter.
- As part of the process people are asked to imagine how they will feel about the circumstances and to consider various ways of dealing with their reactions—all before the experience has actually occurred. Probably the most crucial element however is providing individuals with clear, objective strategies for handling the situation, rather than simply telling them what to expect.

9. Emotion-focused coping:

- is aimed at controlling the emotional response to the stressful situation. Examples include: using alcohol or drugs, seeking emotional social support from friends or relatives, and engaging in activities, such as sports or watching TV, that distract one's attention from the problem.

Healthy ways of coping with stress

The Four A's

- **Avoid** the stressor
- **Alter** the stressor Focus on Changing the situation
- **Adapt** to the stressor
- **Accept** the stressor Focus on Changing your reaction

Unhealthy ways of coping with stress

- These coping strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run:
- Smoking
- Drinking too much
- Overeating or under eating
- devoting extended hours in front of the TV or computer
- Withdrawing from friends, family, and activities
- Using pills or drugs to relax
- Sleeping too much
- Filling up every minute of the day facing problems
- Taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence)