Abstract

Recent years have seen a sudden rise in the number of people suffering from health related problems due to stress. Today's world is changing dramatically and rapidly over the past decades. The period of accelerating changes human beings are now witnessing has put a strain on individuals and the entire societies. A stress “epidemic” seems to have spread all over the human population on the planet earth. Therefore, it is the dire need of the hour to think about the ways through which the negative effects of stress on health can be reduced. This paper is also an attempt to highlight the negative side of stress, its signs, and related diseases as well as the techniques or methods through which reactions to stress can be controlled and a healthy world of healthy individuals can be created.

1. Introduction

Human life is full of difficulties. Due to these difficulties, man suffers a lot but at the same time it is noted that if there are no difficulties in life, life would have become static. It is, of course, the difficulties that bring motion in life. But on the other hand, if the difficulties are raised beyond men’s capabilities, they will certainly develop the form of abnormality known as stress. Stress can be defined as an internal state which can be caused by physical demands on the body (disease conditions, exercise, extremes of temperature, and the like) or by environmental and social situations which are evaluated as potentially harmful, uncontrollable, or exceeding our resources for coping. The physical, environmental, and social causes of the stress state are called stressors. Once induced by stressors, the internal stress state can then lead to various responses. On the one hand, it can result in a number of physical, bodily responses. On the other hand, psychological responses such as anxiety,

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hopelessness, depression, irritability, and a general feeling of not being able to cope with the world can result from the stress state (Morgan, King, Weisz, and Schopler, 2006).

### 2. Different Kinds Of Stress

Stress is not always a bad thing. Stress is simply the body's response to changes that demands some coping. There is a difference between eustress, which is a term for positive stress, and distress, which refers to negative stress.

**Eustress**: Stress resulting from positive events or conditions is called eustress e.g. planning and preparing to go for a holiday. Eustress can be fun, exciting, and energizing. It motivates one to continue working. It is when this stress is no more bearable and/or controllable that distress comes in.

**Distress**: Stress resulting from unpleasant events or conditions is called distress e.g. failing a test in a class. Distress causes anxiety or concern, decreases performance, and most often leads to serious mental and physical problems. Distress can be of three types-

- **Acute stress** is the most common form of distress. It is induced as a response to an instant fear, anticipated challenges, or pressures of the recent past or of the near future. These fears and challenges could be actual or imagined. Examples include fear of appearing in an interview, stressing over exams, almost getting into an accident etc. Because it is short term, acute stress doesn't cause substantial harm associated with long-term stress. However, it can emerge in anyone's life, but it is highly curable and manageable.

- **Chronic stress** involves situations that are not short-lived. When stress becomes a regular part of the daily routine for a long time, it is known as chronic stress. It often develops when a person looses all his hope to come out of a bad situation. Typically, when the individual stops looking for an answer to his problems and he loses control over his life. Examples of chronic stress include problematic relationships, workplace worries, and monetary or health troubles.

- **Episodic Stress** is the type of stress that develops when constant disorganization, chaos, worries, and crisis is a part of life for the individual. For example, Type A’s generally suffers from episodic stress. These are the type of people who tend to always be in a hurry, but always late. They often overburdened themselves with so many demands and face failure to organize the overabundance of tasks. This type of stress can also result from constant worries, pessimism, and helplessness that one experiences in his life.

### 3. Causes Of Stress

The causes of stress are known as stressors and there are actually thousands of different types of stressors. Any event in life that a person finds frightening, difficult to control and cope with or creates excess tension can be a potential source of stress. It is important to bear in mind that individual differences also exist in experiencing the stressors, therefore what one person finds stressful another may not. Stressors can be broken down roughly into following categories-
Work Stressors
- Time pressures
- Job insecurity
- Excess working hours
- Workplace bullying
- Low pay
- Conflict with colleagues
- Workaholic

Family Stressors
- Relationship difficulties
- Arguments with children
- Partner with health problems
- Partner with alcohol /drug problems
- Caring for a chronically ill relative
- Children leaving home
- Bereavement

Environmental Stressors
- Pollution
- Excess Noise
- Poor housing
- Damp conditions
- Traffic Jams

Social Stressors
- Fear of crime
- Poverty
- Low social support
- Racial harassment
- Victim of crime

Physical Stressors
- Lack of sleep
- Poor diet
- Drug misuse
- Alcohol misuse
- Smoking
- Chronic pain
- Illness
- Lack of relaxation
- Surgery
- Excess to little exercise

Psychological Stressors
- Excess Anger
- Unrealistic beliefs/expectations
- Excess pessimism
- Unemployment
- Perfectionism
- Loneliness
- Low self-esteem
- Low level of assertion
- Rigid thinking style
- Negative self-talks

4. Signs Of Stress
When people face a stressful event, their bodies respond by activating the nervous system and releasing hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol. These hormones cause such internal and external bodily changes which help them to react quickly and effectively to cope up with the stressful situation. This is known as the ‘fight or flight’ response. The hormones increase heart rate, pulse rate, breathing, blood pressure, metabolism and muscle tension. Pupils dilate and perspiration rate increases. While these physical changes help try to meet the challenges of the stressful situation, they can cause other physical or psychological symptoms if the stress is prolonged and these bodily changes don’t settle down. These symptoms can include:

**Psychological Symptoms**
- Worrying
- Muddled thinking
- Impaired judgment
- Nightmares

**Physical Symptoms**
- Headaches
- Frequent infections
- Taut muscles
- Muscular twitches
5. Stress And Diseases

The body doesn’t distinguish between physical and psychological threats. When people are stressed over a busy schedule, an argument with a friend, a traffic jam, or a mountain of bills, their body reacts just as strongly as if they were facing a do-or-die situation. If people have a lot of responsibilities and worries, their emergency stress response may be “on” most of the time. The more their body’s stress system is activated, the harder it is to shut off. Prolonged exposure to stress can have serious health related consequences. Chronic stress causes disturbances in nearly every system of our body. It can increase heartbeat, pulse rate, blood pressure up to a level that it can result in hypertension, heart attack, stroke etc. It can also be a cause of infertility, and fastens the aging process. It weakens our immune system, making us more prone to diseases. Diseases found to be associated with the long-term stress are-

- Heart disease
- Chronic fatigue
- Anxiety attacks
- Mood swings
- Psychological distress
- Depression
- Sleep problems
- High blood pressure
- Eating disorders
- Irritable bowel syndrome
- Fibromyalgia

- Peptic ulcers
- Poor immune function
- Chronic pain
- Colds
- Flu
- Viruses
- Headaches
- Migraines
- Alcoholism
- Smoking-related respiratory ailments
6. Stress Management Techniques

i.) **Biofeedback:** It is a procedure to monitor and minimize the physiological symptoms of stress by providing feedback about current physiological activity and is often accompanied by relaxation training. Some of the physiological functions that can be controlled include brainwaves, muscle tone, skin conductance, heart rate and pain perception. Biofeedback training involves three stages: developing an awareness of the particular physiological response; learning methods of controlling those physiological responses in calm conditions; and finally transferring that control into the everyday life situations. Biofeedback has been reported very effective in the treatment and management of stress and stress related disorders in so many studies (Datey, 1980; Nestoriuc and Martin, 2007; Nestoriuc, Martin, Rief, and Andrasik, 2008: Lemaire, Wallace, Lewin, Grood, and Schaefer, 2011).

ii.) **Time management:** Time management is one of the key skills required to get success in this fast moving world. It is a method of helping people learns how to make best possible use of their time to increase their efficiency, effectiveness, and productivity. It incorporates a wide range of activities including planning, setting realistic goals, organizing, prioritizing, and finally analyzing. This technique has been found to be very effective in reducing job stress (Hosseini, Nourbakhsh, and Sepasi, 2013; Zaidi, 2015) and academic stress in students (Macan, Shahani, Dipboye, and Phillips, 1990).

iii.) **Meditation:** Meditation can be a wonderful technique to counteract the effects of stress. It affects the body in almost the opposite ways that stress does. It helps the body to repair the stress caused damages itself. Basically, it is a method of sitting comfortably in a silent place, concentrating on the breathing, and then bringing mind’s attention to the present life events without worrying about the past and future events. It refreshes both the mind and the body and helps to regain the lost strength and positivity. The main objectives of this technique is to develop compassion, love, patience, generosity, forgiveness and more far-reaching goals such as effortless sustained single-pointed concentration, single-pointed analysis, and an indestructible sense of well-being while engaging in any and all of lives activities. Meditation has been reported to reduce psychological stress and stress-related health problems in so many studies (Kabat-Zinn, Massion, Kristeller, Peterson, Fletcher, Pbert, Lenderking, and Santorelli, 1992; Manocha, Gordon, Black, Malhi, and Seidler, 2009; Goyal, Singh, Sibinga, Gould, Rowland-Seymour, Sharma, Berger, Sleicher, Maron, Shihab, Ranasinghe, Linn, Saha, Bass, and Haythornthwaite, 2014).

iv.) **Cognitive behavioral therapy:** This therapy is based on the idea that stress is a result of distortions in one’s thought process. Filtering, polarized thinking, overgeneralization, jumping to conclusions, catastrophizing, personalization etc. are some examples of cognitive distortions which lead to negative thinking,
behavior, emotions, and finally stress. The central idea of this therapy is to replace irrational and negative thoughts with rational and positive ones. In this therapy, the counselor helps the client to get rid of his problems by altering the way he thinks and behaves through talking. A number of studies have reported cognitive behavior therapy a promising stress management technique (Granath, Ingvarsson, Von Thiele, and Lundberg, 2006; Kar, 2011; Hofmann, Asnaani, Vonk, Sawyer, and Fang, 2012).

v.) **Relaxation technique:** Relaxation technique is a powerful weapon against stress and stress related health problems. In this technique, people are trained to alternatively flex and reflex their muscles so as to gain control over the relaxation response. Relaxation techniques are often used as a part of a wider stress management program and can reduce muscular strain, lower the blood pressure and slow heart and breathe rates, with many other health benefits (Mohtaram, 2008; Navaneethan and Soundararajan, 2010).

vi.) **Yoga:** Yoga is known as a mind-body practice that integrates all aspects of health- physical, psychological, social, spiritual, and emotional. Yoga is a combination of body postures, controlled breathing, and meditation. The practice of yoga produces a biological state contrary to that of the fight-or-flight stress reaction and with that interference in the stress reaction, a state of equilibrium and union between the mind and body can be attained (Arora and Bhattacharjee, 2008). Yoga is found to increase muscular power and body flexibility, stimulates and improve respiratory and cardiovascular function, improve recovery from and treatment of addiction, lower stress, anxiety, depression, and chronic pain, improve sleep patterns, and enhance overall well-being and quality of life (Woodyard, 2011).

vii.) **Hypnosis:** It is known as a state of heightened suggestibility which can be used to help clients to comply with direct suggestions for behavior change. It helps the clients to control their negative feelings, behaviors, and thoughts associated with stress. In other words, it can be stated that hypnosis gives a person the ability to control his reactions to stress. Hypnosis has been found very helpful in alleviating various types of stress and stress related problems (Ammond, Davidson, and Kovitz, 1971; Whitehouse, Dinges, Orne, Keller, Bates, Bauer, Morahan, Haupt, Carlin, Zauss, and Orne, 1996).

viii.) **Physical Exercise:** Physical exercise is any bodily movement that demands energy and helps to enhance and maintain physical and mental fitness and overall health. American Heart Association (AHA) states that physical activity can improve one’s quality of life mentally as well as physically, and can lower one’s overall stress level. Regular exercise plays an important role in managing weight and stress by reducing the tension, anxiety, anger, and mild depression that often go hand-in-hand with stress. A number of researches have shown a direct relationship between increased levels of physical exercise and increased

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hippocampal volume, increased cerebral blood flow, enhanced spatial memory, and reduced brain tissue loss (Colcombe, Erickson, Raz, Webb, Cohen, Mcauley, and Kramer, 2003; Pajonk, Wobrock, Gruber, Scherk, Berner, Kaizl, Kierer, Muller, Oest, Meyer, Backens, Schneider-Axmann, Thornton, Honer, and Falkai, 2010). Research has shown that performing physical activity on the daily basis is an effective means of reducing anxiety and stress and improving psychosocial health (Dunn, Trivedi, and O’Neal, 2001; Bhui, 2002; Economos, Hildebrant, and Hyatt, 2008).

References


