

Effects of Stress, Stress Management and Stress Reduction Methods

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Abstract

This paper reviews two major concepts in the field of Psychology, namely “Stress” and “Stress Management”. The word stress refers to the body’s way of responding to any kind of demand. Stress can have positive as well as negative results. Due to fierce competition in today’s world, most people have to contend with stress and it is regarded very highly because it greatly influences their everyday lives in most situations. Therefore, the concept of Stress Management has become more important, especially in the commercial industry. Top managerial personnel are bound with organizational goals while leading their subordinates towards the same goal. The way one reacts to stress and it is managed are different based on gender. The intention of this paper is to identify the stress warning signs and symptoms, causes and finally recommend stress reduction methods.

Introduction

Stress is one factor responsible for many different problems in everyday life. First, it is important to identify the sources of stress in our personal, social and professional life and a closer look at our personal habits and attitude can truly help in this matter.

Once the stress creating factors are identified then it is time to reconsider adequate ways for dealing with that stress. Smoking and drinking, using relaxing pills and drugs, sleeping or eating too much are common ways, in which people try to relieve stress. Busy everyday schedule is a major source of stress in our everyday life and managing time better can certainly make things easier for us. A change in attitude with a positive mindset helps to face things from a different perspective and less stress can certainly make life happier and healthier.

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What is Stress?

We generally use the word ‘stress’ when we feel that everything seems to have become too much. The term ‘stress’ can be defined in various ways as follows:

“Stress is body’s way of responding to any kind of demand. (Liggy Webb, 2013)

Stress is a normal physical response to events that make you feel threatened or upset your balance in some way.” (Anne Hunt, 2010)

Stress can have positive as well as negative results. Stress is the way human beings react both physically and mentally to changes, events and situations in their lives. The stress response is the body’s way of protecting people. (Christy Tryhus, Bowen Bailie, 2012) When working properly, it helps to stay focused, be energetic, and alert. In emergency situations, stress can save life and give extra strength to defend one self. The stress response also helps to overcome challenges.

Causes of Stress

People experience stress in different ways for different reasons. A lot of factors can cause stress. Some of them can be identified as follows.

- Family responsibilities
- Work place Stress
- Economy
- Relationships (eg.Spouse, Kids, boy/girl friend)
- Personal health concerns
- Housing costs (eg.Mortgage/Rent)
- Personal Safety
- Education
- Health problems affecting family

Most people experience stress because of their work place. The reasons are having too much of responsibility, pressure to perform and meet rising expectations, having a heavy workload, and poor working conditions.

Symptoms of Stress

Stress can affect all aspects of human life including emotions, behaviors, thinking ability and physical health. No part of the body is immune. People handle stress differently, symptoms of stress can vary. People can experience any of the following symptoms of stress.

1. Cognitive Symptoms

Cognitive symptoms of stress include;

- Memory Problems
- Inability to Concentrate
- Constant Worrying
- Seeing only the negative side
- Anxiety

2. Emotional Symptoms

Those who suffer from this effect are likely to show mood swings and erratic behaviors. Symptoms are as follows:

- Sense of loneliness and isolation
- Feeling of anxiety or depression
- Agitation
- Moodiness
- Feeling overwhelmed

3. Physical Symptoms

When human body is placed under physical stress then it creates certain hormones called adrenaline and cortisol. Symptoms are as follows:

- Headaches
- Chest Pain
- Frequent colds and infections
- Low energy
- Loss of sexual desire or ability

4. Behavioral Symptoms

Behavioral symptoms of stress include:

- Sleeping too much or too little
- Changes in appetite
- Exhibiting nervous behaviors
- Using alcohol, cigarettes or drugs to relax
- Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities

Types of Stress

Stress can affect humans both instantly and over time. There are two types of stress.

Such as:

- Short-term Stress (Acute Stress)
- Long-term Stress (Chronic Stress)

Short-term Stress

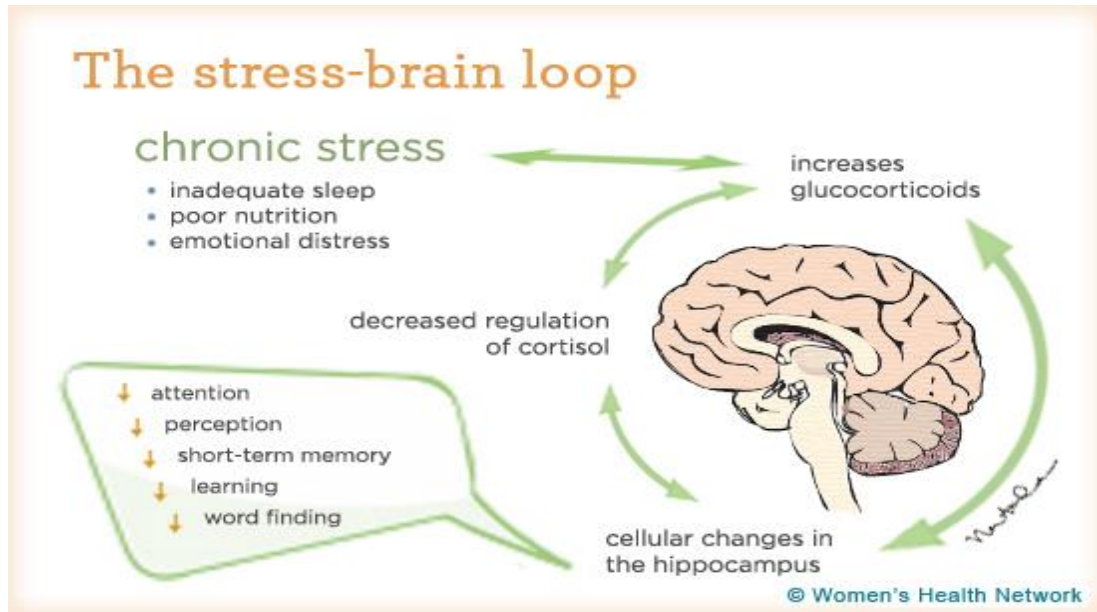
This type of stress is normal and this reacts as the fight-or-flight response. (L.Keefer, 2008) This is when the primitive part of the brain and certain chemicals within the brain cause a reaction to potentially harmful stressors or warnings such as noise, over-crowding, danger, bullying or harassment or recalled threatening experience. When the threat subsides, the body returns to normal, which is called the relaxation response.

Long-term Stress

Stress is;

“The nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it” (H.Selye, 1976)

This type of stress is caused by stressful situations or events that last over a long period of time. This could include having a difficult job or dealing with a chronic disease.



Source: <http://blog.bufferapp.com/the-science-of-stress-how-it's-breaking-down>

Figure 01: Effects of Chronic Stress

The Effects of Stress on the Body

Stress can affect both human body and mind. People under large amounts of stress can become tired, sick and unable to concentrate or think clearly. Sometimes they even suffer from mental breakdowns. It starts causing major damage to human health, mood, productivity, relationships, and quality of life.

When we are stressed the following happens:

- Heart rate (pulse) rises
- Breathing becomes more rapid
- Blood pressure rises
- Digestive system slows down
- Immune system goes down
- Muscles become tense

These physical changes increase as one prepares either to fight or flee from the danger at hand. Physical or mental stress may cause physical illness as well as mental or emotional problems. It is clearly shown by the below illustration. Here are parts of the body most affected by stress.

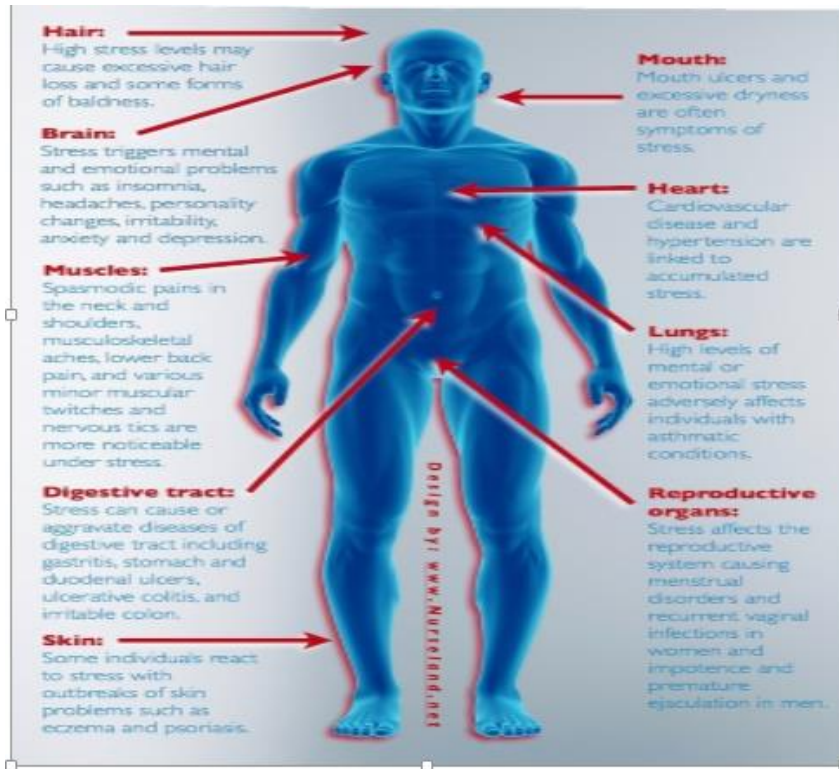


Figure 02: Parts of the body affected by stress

Source: www.healthline.com/health/stress/effects-on-body

According to the diagram, stress can affect human nervous system, musculoskeletal system, cardiovascular system, gastrointestinal system, reproductive system etc. The relationship between stress and illness can be drawn as follows;

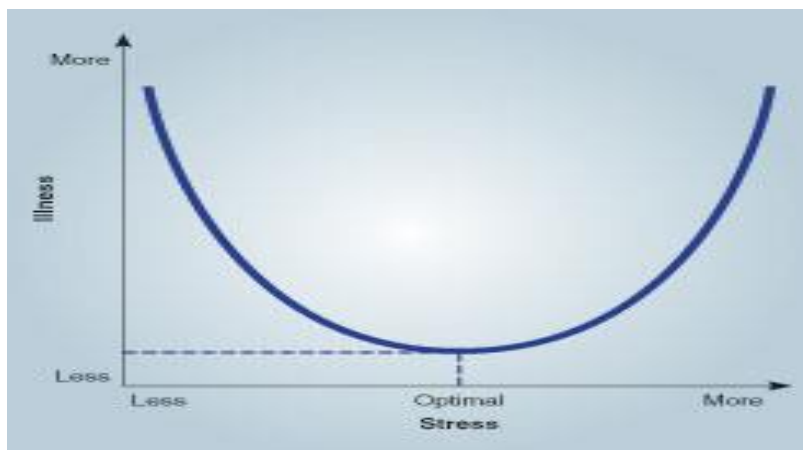


Figure 03: Relationship between stress and illness

Source: www.simplypsychology.org

The importance of Stress Management

Stress is a normal and unavoidable part of life. But too much stress can affect our emotional and physical wellbeing. If we do not manage stress well, we may have headaches, stomach pain, sleeping problems, illness and depression. Therefore managing stress is essential. It is all about taking charge: taking charge of our thoughts, emotions, schedule, environment and the way we deal with problems. Stress management involves changing the stressful situation when we can, changing our reaction when we cannot, taking care of our self and making time for rest and relaxation.

Stress Reduction Methods

The best way to manage stress is to learn healthy coping strategies. People can learn to manage stress and lead happier, healthier lives. Therefore identifying stress reduction methods is essential for every human being. These methods help to either remove or change the source of stress. They are as follows;

- Learn and practice relaxation techniques; (eg.meditations/Yoga)
- Keep a positive attitude
- Exercise regularly
- Eat healthy, well-balanced meals
- Make time for hobbies, interests and relaxation
- Get enough rest and sleep

Conclusion

The word stress is body's way of responding to any kind of demand. Stress can have positive as well as negative results. Stress can affect the mind, body and behavior in many ways and everyone experiences stress differently. Sometimes it leads to serious mental and physical health problems. Therefore, identifying the symptoms of stress at first is essential. The way one reacts to stress and it is managed are different. Stress reduction methods help to manage stress and it certainly make our life happier and healthier.

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