

Chapter 17

Stress Management

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Introduction:

Stress is no more a rare phenomenon. In this age of cut-throat competition, more and more people are beginning to suffer from stress. One is constantly under pressure to perform and to overtake others in the race for more money and more fame. The reason we suffer from stress is because we are insensitive to the mental and physical habits and patterns which maintain a constant level of activation in our bodies and mind.

Everywhere we are now confronted with a competitively hectic life, thus racing against time and virtually ending up with tension and fatigue. Fatigue, relating to work, is more a state of mind than that of body. Whatever might be our attitude towards life, we cannot get away from the fact that nervous tension has become a regular phenomenon.

The reasons for increase in stress levels are not difficult to find. Due to sedentary (with no physical exertion) life style, more and more people are suffering from chronic diseases like High Blood Pressure, Diabetes and Heart Problems. We have increased our needs e.g. House, Car, Refrigerator, Television, Air conditioner, washing machine and all sorts of electrical gadgets. To possess all such items, we need money and for that we want to earn more and more money, by fair or foul means. All this results in chronic shortage of time. Because the work has increased many-fold, consequently the time-stress will pile up. The result is an overloaded and stressed brain.

It is a problem, because the effects of stress are very detrimental to health, productivity and expression of human potential. Almost every one admits that he/she is experiencing some degree of stress and that stress is certainly a major problem of modern society. As per Dr. Robert Eliot “stress may be the greatest single contributor to illness in the industrialized world.”

Learning Objective: At the end of session , the trainees will be able to :-

- Define stress
- Explain the effects of stress
- Describe the different types of stress
- Explain “Who are more vulnerable to fall prey to stress?”
- Tips for managing stress

Definition of stress: Truly speaking, stress can be called the most severe state of tension. In the present-day world, tensions seem to have become a part of our lives. We quite often get tense almost every day, as our routine has become very complex and life awfully busy. But if the tensions get accumulated and are not channelized and continue to mount with each passing day, a stage may soon come when we are under stress. That is to say that accumulation and prolongation of tension leads to stress. The management of stress must be done quickly, as mental stress leads to a lot of complications, affecting our mental and physical health. We should gain a precise understanding of the nature of stress, and develop practical methods to deal with it. The daily schedule of top-brass in Government and Industry is so packed with meetings and assignments that by the end of the day, they feel completely drained-out.

The result is that they do not seem to find quality-time for themselves and their families these days. All they strive for is the desire to possess and grab more money and more material. This continued stress could be fatal. Thousands of young persons are dying of heart failures, when none of the known risk factors like smoking, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, family history and diabetes are present. Many of our problems are caused by wrong attitudes and conduct.

Stress leads to excessive production of certain chemicals that cause “Vasocostriction” (contraction of conducting vessels). Large quantities of these chemicals, then, do irreparable damage to the body. One has to understand the origin of the conflicts created by the mind and projected through the nervous system and body. Conflicts within and without play prime roles in human life. Experiencing less conflicts will free the human mind from stress. Freedom from stress is therefore an absolute necessity for a modern man. All human beings face challenges and difficulties in dealing with the external world.

The effects of stress: In our body, our state of mind is reflected in various aches and pains as well as in a number of stress related diseases. In fact, most diseases are now linked to the state of sustained stress in which most of us live. This stems directly from our frustrations, worries and despondency (dejection). This is why a suffering and dejected/depressed mind makes the body diseased and painful. Scientific research, however, though much sophisticated, touches only the physical level, while stress is a condition of mind that reflects its symptoms in the body. It is unfortunate that most treatment for psychosomatic diseases is directed overwhelmingly towards giving symptomatic relief and that very little has been and is being done to cure and remove the root causes which are related to the mind. The traditional approach seems to have been drowned in the pond of science. If the body is unhealthy and distressed, the mind does not remain unaffected and this is precisely the area which traditional methods deal with. Yoga considers mind and body as two interrelated aspects of one unit. They are the manifestations (revelation) of one and the same energy. Consequently, one is bound to affect the other. Most of our physical diseases are born out of conflicting and disturbed state of mind, as the route of bodily diseases exists in the mind itself and this fact seems to have been overlooked till date.

Stress may lead to :

- * Heart Attack * Diabetes * Hypertension
- * Alcoholism * Ulcers * Cancer
- * Sleeplessness * Depression * Obesity
- * Mental illness and so on.

How many young persons ride a bicycle or play games on weekends? The answer is very few. Little wonder that a host of them are falling prey to diseases, most of which are generally associated with middle age or old age groups. Doctors attribute this alarming trend to sedentary life styles, stressful jobs, bad food habits, lack of exercise, smoking or

drinking. Needless to say this trend is more prevalent in urban areas. The daily routine of people in the rural areas usually includes manual work, some amount of exercise, even if it is in the form of walks. Besides, they keep away from junk food and fried fatty-acids and their environment is free from air, noise and water pollution.

Different types of stress

Stress is mainly of 3 types:

1. **EMOTIONAL STRESS** or the mental stress is the stress generated by our personality as we interact with our environment on day to day basis. Emotional stress leads to physiological stress and this result in diseases of the target organ. This can also be called Social stress. What is increasingly clear is that stress is at the root of all physical diseases regardless of the organ system involved.

2. **DIGESTIVE STRESS** is the stress we get from poor eating habits; it basically depends on what we eat, how we eat and when we eat. As a source of stress, a poor diet is second only to emotional (or mental) events. The simple fact that we eat several times a day is more than enough opportunity to generate constant imbalance. Bad dietary habits can create constant stress. Very few people know that diet is a significant determinant to our health. Modern man does not pay attention to the quality of food he eats, nor does he eat it properly. He is unaware of the fact that food without nutritive value is unhealthy, he eats it too fast and he has allowed junk food to dominate his diet. After becoming aware of our habits however, we will find that bad dietary habits can create constant stress

What we eat: Freshness, simplicity and nutrition are the food qualities most suitable for our health. For the well-off families, refined sugar, which contains absolutely no nutrients, makes up 25% of their diet; and fats, which also contain no nutrients total up to 45%. High sugar diet is associated with diabetes whereas high fat is associated with heart ailments. This does not necessarily mean that we should eliminate refined sugar from our diet. Instead, we should begin to develop a consciousness how refined sugar may be creating serious problems for us as individuals. Similarly a limited quantity of fat is necessary-- say about 10% of the total diet and how much fat people consume is an open secret.

How we eat: As Swami Rama has rightly said "how we eat is just as important as what we eat." But we are always in a haste to take time to really chew and taste our food. After two or three quick bites, we swallow it and expecting the 'poor' digestive system to break it down further. Our liver does not have mechanism to crush down swallowed-size pieces. Eating properly is an art. It saves us from over-eating and it satisfies our senses. Our ancestors used to offer a silent prayer before meals, which would give them time to clear the mind of disturbing emotions and thus achieve a calm physique before eating. When we eat in a serene and carefree environment and hardly do we have any realization of this fact.

When we eat: The third way to create stress by our dietary habits is when we eat. Eating “on the run” almost guarantees that one is going to suffer from digestive stress. The more frequent one does this, the more likely, it is likely to lead to constant stress. Irregular snacks and constant eating forces the digestive system work non-stop. This aggravates digestive stress. The first and probably the simplest point here is the scheduling of the meals. During digestion, blood is diverted to the digestive track away from the brain and our ability to think clearly is seriously impaired. The timing of meals is therefore, extremely important. Surprisingly, it is most often overlooked. Thus we have seen how our dietary habits provide the basis for our physical foundation--our body. By paying attention to what we eat, how we eat and when we eat as well as the effects these have on us, can be helpful in significantly reducing chronic stress.

3. **ENVIRONMENTAL STRESS** is created by factors as smog, noise and air pollution. Most of the common physical stresses in our lives are no longer the stresses associated with survival, but are more subtly, less obvious physical stresses, such as — improper lighting, high ambient noise, poor quality of air and food, overcrowding, subsonic vibrations associated with motor vehicles, and other such concomitants (co-existents) of technologically advanced culture.

Who are more vulnerable to fall prey to stress?

Dr. Mayer and Dr. Ray have categorized personalities under two heads. i.e. Type A and Type B. They point out that Type A are more prone to cardio-vascular diseases (CVD) than Type B.

The following are some of the typical traits of Type A and Type B ;

Type A: Hurried speech, always under tension, restlessness, constant rapid movement in eating, lack of patience, chronic sense of time urgency, thinking and performing several things at a time, an over-smart attempt to dominate conversation, vague sense of guilt during periods of relaxation, competitiveness, always dominating, pre-occupied, over concerned about how to get things done, ego-centrism, unable to delegate power for fear of losing control, perfectionists, no concern for other types of people and typical gestures such as clenching fists, grinding teeth etc. Such persons are more prone to heart diseases.

Type B: Such a person has no sense of time urgency, no need felt to discuss or display one’s achievements and accomplishments, no exhibition of superiority, absence of Type A habits, not devastated by criticism, flexible, gives benefit of doubt, ability to exist E4E5 Mgmt-Stress Management Rev Nil 15/2/2010 5 of 7 without guilt, can work without any kind of excitement, without any agitation, respectful to others, relaxes when fatigued, believes in team effort, co-operative and helpful to others, not afraid to admit mistakes and so on.

Type C: Apart from the above two types, there is another type--Type C, which also exhibits the ill effects of stress. People of this brand have got negative approach to life. They fail to perceive brighter aspects of life. They are totally pessimistic and think “life is all dark, there is no hope, because I am born like that, I can never achieve success.” Such

a negative mental set-up in Type C is the cause of his suffering. The core belief in such a person is that no matter what he does, it is not going to have much effect. The busy executive is a classic example of Type A personality. On the other hand, Type B personalities appear to be calm and relaxed and free from the desperate urgency of fighting against time. They do not harbour anger and know when to relax and enjoy. Type A persons, suffering from emotional stress, are three times more likely to experience heart diseases. Type A personalities are almost under constant pressure to perform. However, type A personalities do not accomplish more than type B personalities. They only exert more effort in order to do the same amount of work that type B does accomplish in a much more relaxed way. To remedy it, we can say that we should go slowly. We should not be excited. We should not do anything on the spur of the moment. Those, who are cautious and patient, are likely to commit fewer mistakes and stay safe from diseases, which occur as a result of nervous tension. The sum total of the above is as Swami Vivekananda said “the calmer we are, the less disturbed our life will be, and the more shall we love and the better our work will be.”

Tips for managing stress

Mind: Mind is the major culprit responsible for harboring stress. You must learn to touch the mind at the right point. Unless you know how to manipulate your own mind you cannot get much benefit from it. The mind has many compartments. Some of them you must lock up carefully; that is, bad impulses and memories must be checked. The others must be opened, that is, the tendency to practice detachment, devotion etc. must be encouraged. But finally you must set fire to all the compartments, for truth is beyond both bad and good. One, who has controlled his mind, has controlled the whole world. The following are the major ways to eliminate or reduce stress:

- Diet Control
- Positive thinking
- Exercise & Yoga-asanas
- Breath control and
- Meditation

Diet Control: One means of reducing chronic digestive stress is to begin learning about nutrition and to begin paying attention to how the food we eat affects us both mentally and physically. Major problem for modern man is that a great deal of what he eats not only fails to provide any nutrition but also leads to serious diseases. All this will lead to serious autonomic imbalances, which is stress. The basic strategy for successfully improving one's diet is to learn to gear dietary intake to nutritional needs. Over-eating is a common phenomenon of digestive stress. Eating very large meal, especially one that is oily and greasy, will tend to delay the digestive process. Similarly foods extremely high in protein or oil and fats require increased secretion on the part of the liver and kidneys. Until these wastes are cleared from the blood there will be some impairment of consciousness and lack of clarity in the mind.

Positive thinking: The first step to remedy nervous tension is to have a clear understanding of its causes. If our mind is healthy, we can get rid of nervous tension. As

long as we have fragmentary perception and associate reality with the body/mind, we continue to suffer. An optimist should think that if he practises sincerely and wholeheartedly, with no negative thinking, he would be successful. For example, none could climb the Mount Everest till 1953, till Tensing and Hillary dared to do it. After that, lot of persons have been able to climb, even through non-conventional routes. Success is not the outcome of wishful thinking; it is the product of both intelligence and industry. From Srimada Bhagwat Gita, if we could adopt only one *Shaloka* in our life, we will be successful i.e. “action thy duty, reward not thy concern”.

□ **Exercise & Yoga-asanas:** Physically training is beneficial. Moderate but consistent exercise regularly and punctually will help maintain good physical health (exercise at least twice a week). This will strengthen the heart, improve circulation, lower cholesterol and reduce your chances of a heart attack. In recent years, man has become very exercise conscious. Those who practice yoga consistently are healthier, have less coronary-vascular diseases (CVD), fewer frustrations and generally report greater satisfaction with their lives than those who do not. For yoga to be effective in significantly altering chronic levels of stress, the attentional faculty of the mind must be on the activity itself and not wandering into past and future imagery. Yoga does not see the cause of an ailment in the deterioration of a particular organ of a body. It takes into account the whole holistic system (i.e. body, mind and spirit). Purifying and making the body healthy helps cure the disease. The physical benefits of yogic exercises include a lower resting heart rate, a lowered blood pressure, a reduction in weight, decreased blood sugar and in total cholesterol. Doing about 30 minutes of stretching exercises per day is quite beneficial. Once you have good knowledge of *Yoga-asanas*, you can choose a routine each day that meets your needs. Pay attention to all levels of your being when you perform **the postures**.

□ **Breath control (Pranayamas):** One of the most important skills for managing stress is learning to regulate the breath. Breath plays an important role in overcoming physical and mental tension. Yoga provides the profound knowledge of every structure and pattern that provide a logical framework for understanding stress and leads directly to the ability to regulate stress and eventually become free from its consequences. There is an emerging awareness of a critical relationship between breathing and cardio-vascular functioning. Breathing also influences blood pressure. Breathing – an activity that we all do and pay very little attention to -- is quite probably the single most important tool in stress management. Most of us have poor breathing patterns that create stress and disturb us both physically and emotionally.

□ **Meditation:** In terms of stress management, inner concentration and meditation are the keys to freedom. It is true that a consistent practice of relaxation and physical exercises will modify or alleviate stress, but they will not eliminate the stress inducing patterns in the mind. Doing only relaxation and physical exercises is like putting out a fire-only to come back and find it burning again. It is more efficient to remove the conditions which create the fire than to continually have to put the fire out. In other words, it is much simpler and more effective to understand the subtle mental/emotional origins of stress, and then to alter or remove them, than to continually rescue the body and mind from

stress. This has been just a brief overview of the process of inner concentration and meditation; it is intended only to give you a practical understanding of the importance of training the mind and expanding one's conscious awareness. It involves self training and as with any training program, it takes time and practice. The rewards, however, are far greater than the effort involved. Almost immediately you will begin to experience increased mental and physical health, increased mental clarity and control, increased personal effectiveness and most important, an increased capacity for experiencing joy. The more skillful you become, the greater the rewards. Regular meditation increases empathy (understanding), concern and interest in the well being of others. In meditation, alpha waves increase, reflecting an extremely restful, non anxious, non-problem solving mental state. After successful meditation the person is relaxed, with a greater capacity for creativity, love and compassion.

CONCLUSION: Read books on positive things and on religion; always make sure you complete your duties well in time; learn to delegate work whenever you can; you should be sure of your goals and priorities. Plan your recreation. On holidays, find out what makes you happy and do it. Play games, spend time with your family, go to the gym., to a party, to the park or listen to songs, watch TV, paint, cook, chat or surf the Internet. Learn techniques of relaxation. A structured life and a balanced diet, some physical exercises in terms of cardiovascular acceleration like jogging, skipping, *yoga-asanas*, running and gradually entering the mental function. Relaxation, *Pranayama* (breath control) and meditation should find place in your daily routine. In the present world which is full of stress, there is no parallel to yoga and meditation. It should be clearly understood that there is no medicine for mental diseases in Allopathy, except for the sedatives and so called tranquilizers. Try to remain calm and quiet in all circumstances.

Questions :

1. Define stress
2. Explain the effects of stress
3. Describe the different types of stress
4. Differentiate between different types of stress
5. Explain "Who are more vulnerable to fall prey to stress?"
6. Explain type A , type B and type C people
7. Tips for managing stress
8. What is Diet Control?
9. What is Positive thinking?
10. What is Meditation

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