

Stress Management

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WHAT IS STRESS?

- We are all familiar with the word "stress". Stress is when you are worried about getting laid off your job, or worried about having enough money to pay your bills, or worried about your mother when the doctor says she may need an operation. In fact, to most of us, stress is synonymous with worry. If it is something that makes you worry, then it is stress.
- Your body, however, has a much broader definition of stress. **TO YOUR BODY, STRESS IS SYNONYMOUS WITH CHANGE.** Anything that causes a change in your life causes stress. It doesn't matter if it is a "good" change, or a "bad" change, they are both stress. When you find your dream apartment and get ready to move, that is stress. If you break your leg, that is stress. Good or bad, if it is a **CHANGE** in your life, it is stress as far as your body is concerned.

WHAT IS STRESS?

- Even **IMAGINED CHANGE** is stress. (Imagining changes is what we call "worrying".) If you fear that you will not have enough money to pay your rent, that is stress. If you worry that you may get fired, that is stress. If you think that you may receive a promotion at work, that is also stress (even though this would be a good change). Whether the event is good or bad, imagining changes in your life is stressful.
- Anything that causes **CHANGE IN YOUR DAILY ROUTINE** is stressful.
- Anything that causes **CHANGE IN YOUR BODY HEALTH** is stressful.
- **IMAGINED CHANGES** are just as stressful as real changes.



Emotional Stress

- When arguments, disagreements, and conflicts cause **CHANGES** in your personal life -- that is stress.



- **Illness**

Catching a cold, breaking an arm, a skin infection, a sore back, are all **CHANGES** in your body condition.



Pushing Your Body Too Hard

- A major source of stress is overdriving yourself. If you are working (or partying) 16 hours a day, you will have reduced your available time for rest. Sooner or later, the energy drain on your system will cause the body to fall behind in its repair work. There will not be enough time or energy for the body to fix broken cells, or replace used up brain neurotransmitters. **CHANGES** will occur in your body's internal environment. You will "hit the wall," "run out of gas". If you continue, permanent damage may be done. The body's fight to stay healthy in the face of the increased energy that you are expending is major stress.



Environmental Factors

- Very hot or very cold climates can be stressful. Very high altitude may be a stress. Toxins or poisons are a stress. Each of these factors threatens to cause **CHANGES** in your body's internal environment.



The Special Case of Tobacco Use

- Tobacco is a powerful toxin!! Smoking destroys cells that clean your trachea, bronchi, and lungs. Smoking causes emphysema and chronic bronchitis, which progress to slow suffocation. The carbon monoxide from cigarette smoking causes chronic carbon monoxide poisoning. Tobacco use damages the arteries in your body, causing insufficient blood supply to the brain, heart, and vital organs. Cigarette smoking increases the risk of cancer 50 fold.



The Special Case of Tobacco Use

- Chewing tobacco or snuff is no safe haven. It also damages your arteries, and it carries the same cancer risk. (Cancers of the head and neck are particularly vicious, disfiguring, and deadly).
- Poisoning the body with carbon monoxide, and causing the physical illnesses of emphysema, chronic bronchitis, cancer, and arterial damage, tobacco is a powerful source of added stress to one's life.



Hormonal Factors

PUBERTY

- The vast hormonal changes of puberty are severe stressors. A person's body actually **CHANGES** shape, sexual organs begin to function, new hormones are released in large quantities. Puberty, as we all know, is very stressful.



Hormonal Factors

PRE-MENSTRUAL SYNDROME

- Once a woman passes puberty, her body is designed to function best in the presence of female hormones. For women past puberty, a lack of female hormones is a major stress on the body. Once a month, just prior to menstruation, a woman's hormone levels drop sharply. In many women, the stress of sharply falling hormones is enough to create a temporary **OVERSTRESS**. This temporary **OVERSTRESS** is popularly known as Pre Menstrual Syndrome (PMS).



Hormonal Factors

POST-PARTUM

- Following a pregnancy, hormone levels **CHANGE** dramatically. After a normal childbirth, or a miscarriage, some women may be thrown into **OVERSTRESS** by loss of the hormones of pregnancy.



Hormonal Factors

MENOPAUSE

- There is another time in a woman's life when hormone levels decline. This is the menopause. The decline in hormones during menopause is slow and steady. Nevertheless, this menopausal decline causes enough stress on the body to produce **OVERSTRESS** in many women.



Taking Responsibility for Another Person's Actions

- When you take responsibility for another person's actions, **CHANGES** occur in your life over which you have little or no control. Taking responsibility for another person's actions is a major stressor.



- **Allergic Stress** Allergic reactions are a part of your body's natural defense mechanism. When confronted with a substance which your body considers toxic, your body will try to get rid of it, attack it, or somehow neutralize it. If it is something that lands in your nose, you might get a runny, sneezes nose. If it lands on your skin, you might get blistery skin. If you inhale it, you'll get wheezy lungs. If you eat it, you may break out in itchy red hives all over your body. Allergy is a definite stress, requiring large changes in energy expenditure on the part of your body's defense system to fight off what the body perceives as a dangerous attack by an outside toxin.
- **Survival Stress**



Survival Stress

- **Where you are in a physically or emotionally threatening situation your body adapts to help it react more effectively to meet the threat. This is controlled mainly by release of adrenaline. Adrenaline causes a number of changes that help you to survive. The main ones are:**
- **it mobilizes sugars: this gives your body access to more strength, energy and stamina. This helps you to fight harder or run faster.**
- **it reduces the blood supply to your skin and short-term inessential organs. This minimizes bleeding if you are hurt, and ensures that energy is not wasted on processes that are not immediately useful.**
- **you may experience nausea or diarrhea: this eliminates excess weight that might otherwise slow you down.**



Survival Stress

- You may have experienced these changes as 'fear'. However where speed and physical strength are important this adrenaline stress will be helpful and beneficial - fear can help you to survive or perform better.
- Where calm thought or precise motor skills are important, it is best to control and, ideally, eliminate these adrenaline responses.
- In as much as these adrenaline changes shut down the function of organs that are essential in all but the short term, prolonged exposure to adrenaline can cause ill-health.



Internally Generated Stress & Anxiety

- Your personality can affect the way in which you experience stress. You may be familiar with the idea of 'type A' personalities who thrive on stress, and 'type B' personalities who are mellow and more relaxed in their approach. Stress can cause the levels of a neurotransmitter called noradrenalin to rise. This can give a feeling of confidence and elation that type As like. They can therefore subconsciously defer work until the last minute to create a 'deadline high', or can create a stressful environment at work that feeds their enjoyment of a situation. The downside of this is that they may leave jobs so late that they fail when an unexpected crisis occurs. This may also cause unnecessary stress for other colleagues who are already under a high level of stress.

Other aspects of personality can cause stress. Examples are:

- perfectionism, where the perfectionist's extremely or impossibly high standards can cause stress
- excessive self-effacement, where constant attention to the needs of others can lead to dissatisfaction when no-one looks after your needs, and
- anxiety.



STRESS SCALE FOR ADULTS

- In the following table you can look up representative changes in your life and see how much stress value each of these changes is adding to your life. **NOTE ANY ITEM THAT YOU MAY HAVE EXPERIENCED IN THE LAST TWELVE MONTHS.**



Stress	Event Value
DEATH OF SPOUSE	100
DIVORCE	60
MENOPAUSE	60
SEPARATION FROM LIVING PARTNER	60
JAIL TERM OR PROBATION	60



Stress	Event Value
DEATH OF CLOSE FAMILY MEMBER OTHER THAN SPOUSE	60
SERIOUS PERSONAL INJURY OR ILLNESS	45
MARRIAGE OR ESTABLISHING LIFE PARTNERSHIP	45
FIRED AT WORK	45
MARITAL OR RELATIONSHIP RECONCILIATION	40



Stress	Event Value
RETIREMENT	40
CHANGE IN HEALTH OF IMMEDIATE FAMILY MEMBER	40
WORK MORE THAN 40 HOURS PER WEEK	35
PREGNANCY OR CAUSING PREGNANCY	35
SEX DIFFICULTIES	35



Stress	Event Value
GAIN OF NEW FAMILY MEMBER	35
BUSINESS OR WORK ROLE CHANGE	35
CHANGE IN FINANCIAL STATE	35
DEATH OF A CLOSE FRIEND (not a family member)	30
CHANGE IN NUMBER OF ARGUMENTS WITH SPOUSE OR LIFE PARTNER	30
MORTGAGE OR LOAN FOR A MAJOR PURPOSE	25



Stress	Event Value
FORECLOSURE OF MORTGAGE OR LOAN	25
SLEEP LESS THAN 8 HOURS PER NIGHT	25
CHANGE IN RESPONSIBILITIES AT WORK	25
TROUBLE WITH IN-LAWS, OR WITH CHILDREN	25
OUTSTANDING PERSONAL ACHIEVEMENT	25
SPOUSE BEGINS OR STOPS WORK	20



Stress	Event Value
BEGIN OR END SCHOOL	20
CHANGE IN LIVING CONDITIONS (visitors in the home, change in roommates, remodeling house)	20
CHANGE IN PERSONAL HABITS (diet, exercise, smoking, etc.)	20
CHRONIC ALLERGIES	20
TROUBLE WITH BOSS	20
CHANGE IN WORK HOURS OR CONDITIONS	15



Stress	Event Value
MOVING TO NEW RESIDENCE	15
PRESENTLY IN PRE-MENSTRUAL PERIOD	15
CHANGE IN SCHOOLS	15
CHANGE IN RELIGIOUS ACTIVITIES	15
CHANGE IN SOCIAL ACTIVITIES (more or less than before)	15
MINOR FINANCIAL LOAN	10



Stress	Event Value
CHANGE IN FREQUENCY OF FAMILY GET-TOGETHERS	10
VACATION	10
PRESENTLY IN WINTER HOLIDAY SEASON	10
MINOR VIOLATION OF THE LAW	5

TOTAL SCORE _____



- We have asked you to look at the last twelve months of changes in your life. This may surprise you. It is crucial to understand, however, that a major change in your life has effects that carry over for long periods of time. It is like dropping a rock into a pond. After the initial splash, you will experience ripples of stress. And these ripples may continue in your life for at least a year.



- So, if you have experienced total stress within the last twelve months of 250 or greater, even with normal stress tolerance, you may be **OVERSTRESSED**. Persons with Low Stress Tolerance may be **OVERSTRESSED** at levels as low as 150.



- **OVERSTRESS** will make you sick. Carrying too heavy a stress load is like running your car engine past the red line; or leaving your toaster stuck in the "on" position; or running a nuclear reactor past maximum permissible power. Sooner or later, something will break, burnup, or melt down.



How to recognize that you are under stress

- While a certain level of stress is necessary to avoid boredom, high levels of stress over a sustained period can damage your health. The sections below show common symptoms of stress, and the negative effects that excessive stress can cause. While the symptoms in isolation may or may not show stress, where several occur it is likely that stress is having an effect. Note that as the stress you are under increases, your ability to recognise it will often decrease.



The symptoms are organized into the following sections:

- Short Term Physical Symptoms
- Short Term Performance Effects
- Long Term Physical Symptoms
- Internal Symptoms
- Behavioral Symptoms



Short Term Physical Symptoms

- These mainly occur as your body adapts to perceived physical threat, and are caused by release of adrenaline. Although you may perceive these as unpleasant and negative, they are signs that your body is ready for the explosive action that assists survival or high performance:
 - Faster heart beat
 - Increased sweating
 - Cool skin
 - Cold hands and feet
 - Feelings of nausea, or 'Butterflies in stomach'
 - Rapid Breathing
 - Tense Muscles
 - Dry Mouth
 - A desire to urinate
 - Diarrhea

These are the symptoms of survival stress.

Short Term Performance Effects

- While adrenaline helps you survive in a 'fight-or-flight' situation, it does have negative effects in situations where this is not the case:
- It interferes with clear judgement and makes it difficult to take the time to make good decisions.
- It can seriously reduce your enjoyment of your work
- Where you need good physical skills it gets in the way of fine motor control.



Short Term Performance Effects

- It causes difficult situations to be seen as a threat, not a challenge.
- It damages the positive frame of mind you need for high quality work by:
 - promoting negative thinking,
 - damaging self-confidence,
 - narrowing attention,
 - disrupting focus and concentration and
 - making it difficult to cope with distractions

It consumes mental energy in distraction, anxiety, frustration and temper. This is energy that should be devoted to the work in hand.



Long Term Physical Symptoms

- These occur where your body has been exposed to adrenaline over a long period. One of the ways adrenaline prepares you for action is by diverting resources to the muscles from the areas of the body which carry out body maintenance. This means that if you are exposed to adrenaline for a sustained period, then your health may start to deteriorate.



This may show up in the following ways:

- change in appetite
- frequent colds
- illnesses such as:
 - asthma
 - back pain
 - digestive problems
 - headaches
 - skin eruptions
 - sexual disorders
 - aches and pains
 - feelings of intense and long-term tiredness



Internal Symptoms of Long Term Stress

When you are under stress or have been tired for a long period of time you may find that you are less able to think clearly and rationally about problems. This can lead to the following internal emotional 'upsets':

- Worry or anxiety
- Confusion, and an inability to concentrate or make decisions
- Feeling ill
- Feeling out of control or overwhelmed by events



- Mood changes:
 - Depression
 - Frustration
 - Hostility
 - Helplessness
 - Impatience & irritability
 - Restlessness
- Being more lethargic
- Difficulty sleeping
- Drinking more alcohol and smoking more
- Changing eating habits
- Reduced sex drive
- Relying more on medication



Behavioral Symptoms of Long Term Stress

When you or other people are under pressure, this can show as:

- Talking too fast or too loud
- Yawning
- Fiddling and twitching, nail biting, grinding teeth, drumming fingers, pacing, etc.



- Bad moods:
 - Being irritable
 - Defensiveness
 - Being critical
 - Aggression
 - Irrationality
 - Overreaction and reacting emotionally
- Reduced personal effectiveness:
 - Being unreasonably negative
 - Making less realistic judgments
 - Being unable to concentrate and having difficulty making decisions
 - Being more forgetful
 - Making more mistakes
 - Being more accident prone



- Changing work habits
- Increased absenteeism
- Neglect of personal appearance

These symptoms of stress should not be taken in isolation - other factors could cause them. However if you find yourself exhibiting or recognizing a number of them, then it would be worth investigating stress management techniques.



Understanding the Importance of Optimum Stress Levels

- The level of stress under which you operate is important: if you are not under enough stress, then you may find that your performance suffers because you are bored and unmotivated. If you are under too much stress, then you will find that your results suffer as stress related problems interfere with your performance. It is important that you recognize that you are responsible for your own stress - very often it is a product of the way that you think. Learn to monitor your stress levels, and adjust them up if you need to be more alert, or down if you are feeling too tense. By managing your stress effectively you can significantly improve the quality of your life.



The approach to optimizing stress depends on the sort of stress being experienced:

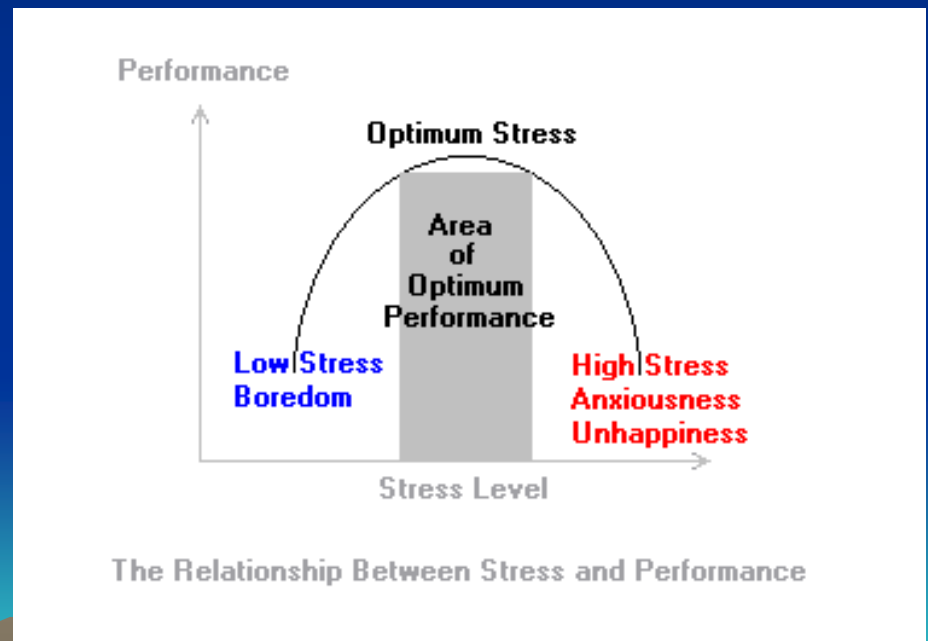
- Short term stress such as difficult meetings, sporting or other performances, or confrontational situations. Here the emphasis is on short term management of adrenaline to maximize performance.
- Long term stress, where fatigue and high adrenaline levels over a long period can lead to degraded performances. Here optimizing stress concentrates on management of fatigue, health, energy and morale.

Naturally there is some element of overlap between these.



Short term stress

The graph below shows the relationship between stress and the quality of performance when you are in situations that impose short term stress:



- (Please note that this graph will be a slightly different shape for different people in different circumstances)
- Where stress is low, you may find that your performance is low because you become bored, lack concentration and motivation.
- Where stress is too high, your performance can suffer from all the symptoms of short-term stress.
- In the middle, at a moderate level of stress, there is a zone of best performance. If you can keep yourself within this zone, then you will be sufficiently aroused to perform well while not being over-stressed and unhappy.

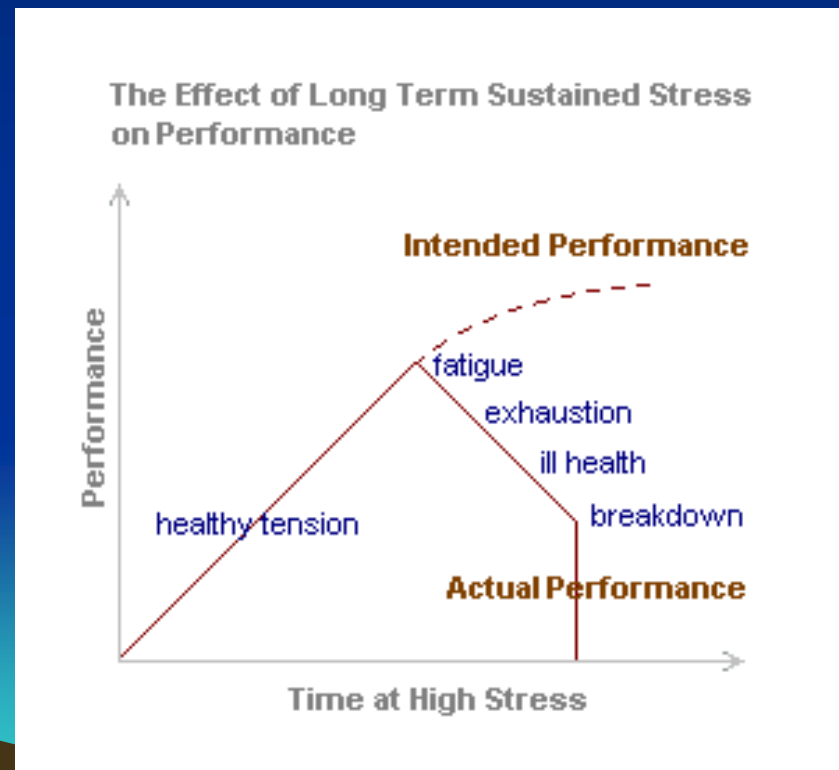


- This graph, and this zone of optimum performance are different shapes for different people. Some people may operate most effectively at a level of stress that would leave other people either bored or in pieces. It is possible that someone who functions superbly at a low level might experience difficulties at a high level. Alternatively someone who performs only moderately at low level might perform exceptionally under extreme pressure.



Long term stress

- The problems of long term, sustained stress are more associated with fatigue, morale and health than with short term adrenaline management.
- The graph below shows the way in which performance can suffer when you are under excessive long term stress:



The graph shows four major stages that you may go through in response to sustained levels of excessive stress:

1. During the first phase you will face challenges with plenty of energy. Your response will probably be positive and effective.
2. After a period of time you may begin to feel seriously tired. You may start to feel anxious, frustrated and upset. The quality of your work may begin to suffer.
3. As high stress continues you may begin to feel a sense of failure and may be ill more frequently. You may also begin to feel exploited by your organization. At this stage you may start to distance yourself from your employer, perhaps starting to look for a new job.
4. If high levels of stress continue without relief you may ultimately experience depression, burnout, nervous breakdown, or some other form of serious stress related illness.

Different people may move between these stages with different speeds under different stress conditions.



What can happen if stress gets out of control

Where you are under excessive levels of short-term stress, then you may find that your performance goes to pieces. Afterwards, however, you will be able to treat this as a learning experience and can adopt stress management strategies to avoid the problem in the future.




The effects of long term stress going out of control can be much more severe. If you do not take action to control it, this can lead to:

- Fatigue and Exhaustion
- Depression
- Burn Out, or
- Breakdown



Avoiding Burn-Out

What is Burn-Out?

- Burn-Out occurs where highly committed people lose interest and motivation.
 - Typically it will occur in hard working, hard driven people, who become emotionally, psychologically or physically exhausted.
- 

Avoiding Burn-Out

You are at risk of burnout where:

- you find it difficult to say 'no' to additional commitments or responsibilities
- you have been under intense and sustained pressure for some time
- your high standards make it difficult to delegate to assistants
- you have been trying to achieve too much for too long
- you have been giving too much emotional support for too long

Often burn-out will manifest itself in a reduction in motivation, volume and quality of performance, or in dissatisfaction with or departure from the activity altogether.



Symptoms of Burn-Out

Burn-out will normally occur slowly, over a long period of time. It may express itself physically or mentally.

Symptoms of burn-out are :

- A feeling of lack of control over commitments
- An incorrect belief that you are accomplishing less
- A growing tendency to think negatively
- Loss of a sense of purpose and energy
- Increasing detachment from relationships. This may cause further conflict and stress, adding to the problem.



Avoiding Burn-Out

If you working very hard, then you should take great care not to burn-out.

- You can avoid mental burn-out by ensuring that what you do remains fun: there is a limit to your mental energy that you should respect. As you get better at what you do, people may want increasing amounts of your time, and will rely on you more and more. It is easy for commitments to get bigger: people tend to be quite happy to consume other peoples mental resources without worrying about the consequences. You must learn to say 'No' to commitments that you do not want to take on - otherwise you will be in severe danger of burning out as you become unhappy with your situation.



If you are in Danger of Burning Out...

- If you feel that you are in danger of burning out, or are not enjoying what you do, the following points can help you correct the situation:
- Re-evaluate your goals and prioritize them
- Evaluate the demands placed on you and see how they fit in with your goals
- Identify your ability to comfortably meet these demands.
- If you are over-involved, reduce the commitments that are excessive
- If people demand too much emotional energy, become more unapproachable and less sympathetic. Involve other people in a supportive role. You owe it to yourself to avoid being bled dry emotionally.
- Learn stress management skills



- Examine other areas in your life that are generating stress, such as work or family, and try to solve problems and reduce the stress
- Get the support of your friends and family in reducing stress
- Ensure that you are following a healthy lifestyle:
 - Get adequate sleep and rest to maintain your energy levels
 - Ensure that you are eating a healthy, balanced diet - bad diet can make you ill or feel bad.
 - Get adequate regular aerobic exercise
 - Limit your caffeine and alcohol intake



Late Stages of Burn-Out

- If you are in late stages of burn-out, feeling deeply de-motivated and disenchanted with your job or life, get help from a good psychologist.

If You Have Burned Out...

- If you are so de-motivated that for a time you do not want to continue with what you do, then take some time off. Alternatively try to switch to another area of activity within your organization. If you come back later, you may find that you start to enjoy work again, and can take on only those commitments that you want.



- You may, however, find that you have absolutely no interest in continuing with what you are doing. In this case it may be best to drop it altogether. If you are the sort of person who has burned out, i.e. highly motivated and hard driving, then a complete change of direction may be appropriate. It is very likely that you will find another area in which you will excel. You will discover that you are only de-motivated and listless in the area in which you have burned out.



- The difference is that you will have already burned out once: next time you now know the signs to look for and the things to watch. Providing that you learn these lessons you will be able to pace yourself, and control your energy much more effectively. This will help you to control stress so that you operate at stress levels where you can give your optimum performance.



'Breakdown'

- Where an individual has been under sustained stress for a long period of time, has suffered serious life crises, or has reached a stage of exhaustion and demoralisation, then breakdown may occur.
- This may show itself physically as a heart attack, angina or a stroke, or may show as 'nervous' or 'mental' breakdown, where the sufferer becomes mentally ill. In the latter case symptoms may not be seen by the individual, but may be obvious to partners, friends and colleagues



'Breakdown'

- 'Breakdown' sounds sudden and dramatic - in the case of physical breakdown it may be. Mental breakdown, however, may be slow in onset, and may be mild or severe. The boundary between prolonged unhappiness or exhaustion and breakdown is blurred - one definition of breakdown may be that the sufferer finally carries out some act that makes it impossible to continue functioning normally in society.



Symptoms of nervous breakdown may be:

- uncharacteristic, uncontrollable, irrational behavior
- intense and excessive anxiety
- severe depression
- obsessive activity - persistent performance of an irrational activity, or of a normal activity to an irrational degree
- manic depression - depression interspersed with periods of euphoria
- destructive and self-destructive behavior:
 - sobbing
 - screaming
 - shouting
 - violence
 - self-mutilation
 - suicide



- doing stupid things:
 - giving up a good job
 - breaking up good relationships
 - shoplifting
 - becoming dependent on drugs
- schizophrenia
- Where breakdown appears to be underway, seek professional help immediately.



Planning to Manage Stress

- We operate best at an optimum stress level: not having enough stress leaves us feeling bored and lethargic. Having too much stress damages our performance in the short term, and can lead to unhappiness, exhaustion, burn-out and serious illness in the long term.



Making an Action Plan to Manage Stress

- Once you understand the level of stress under which you work most effectively, and know precisely what is causing you stress, the next stage is to work out how to manage stress effectively.



Increasing Stress Levels - Psyching Up

- Where you are not feeling motivated towards a task, either because you are bored by it, or because you are tired, then you may need to psych yourself up. This will increase your arousal so that you can perform effectively.



You can use the following techniques to psych up:

- Focus on the importance or urgency of the task
- Set yourself a challenge - i.e. to do the job in a particular time or to do it to a particularly high standard
- Use suggestion - 'I can feel energy flowing into me'
- Break job down into small parts, do each part between more enjoyable work, and take satisfaction from the successful completion of each element.



Stress Reduction Techniques

- If outside factors such as important events or relationship difficulties are causing stress, then a positive thinking or imagery based technique may be effective. Where stress and fatigue are long term, then lifestyle and organizational changes may be appropriate.
- If the feeling of stress come from adrenaline in your body, then it may be effective to relax the body and slow the flow of adrenaline.



Mental Techniques for Stress Reduction

- This section concentrates on techniques for controlling stress that comes from events or anxiety.
- This includes stress and anxiety before a speech, exam, presentation or performance, and stress that comes from unpleasant or irritating events.



Anticipation & Avoidance

- By anticipating stress you can prepare for it and work out how to control it when it happens. This can be carried out in a number of ways:
- **Rehearsal:**
By running through a stressful event such as an interview or a speech several times in advance you can polish your performance and build confidence.
- **Planning:**
By analyzing the likely causes of stress, you will be able to plan your responses to likely forms of stress. These might be actions to alleviate the situation or may be stress management techniques that you will use. It is important that you formally plan for this - it is little use just worrying in an undisciplined way - this will be counter-productive. Formal planning of responses to stress is explained in the Mind Tools section on athletes' on-site psych plans.
- **Avoidance:**
Where a situation is likely to be unpleasant, and will not yield any benefit to you, it may be one you can just avoid. You should be certain in your own mind, however, that this is the case.

Reducing the Importance of an Event

A number of factors can make an event take on a high level of significance and cause stress as a result:

- The importance and size of the event
- The prospect of a large financial reward, of promotion, or of personal advancement
- The presence of family, friends or important people
- If stress is a problem under these circumstances, then think carefully about the event - take every opportunity to reduce its importance in your eyes:
- If the event seems big, put it in its place along the path to your goals. Compare it in your mind with bigger events you might know of or might have attended.



Reducing the Importance of an Event

- If there is a financial reward, remind yourself that there may be other opportunities for reward later. This will not be the only chance you have. Focus on the quality of your performance. Focusing on the rewards will only damage your concentration and raise stress.
- If members of your family are watching, remind yourself that they love you anyway. If friends are real friends, they will continue to like you whether you win or lose.
- If people who are important to your goals are watching then remind yourself that you may well have other chances to impress them.
- If you focus on the correct performance of your tasks, then the importance of the event will dwindle into the background.



Reducing Uncertainty

Uncertainty can cause high levels of stress.

Causes of uncertainty can be:

- Not having a clear idea of what the future holds
 - Not knowing where your organization will be going
 - Not having any career development plans
 - Not knowing what will be wanted from you in the future
- Not knowing what your boss or colleagues think of your abilities
- Receiving vague or inconsistent instructions
- In these cases lack of information or the actions of other people are negatively affecting your ability to perform.

The most effective way of countering this is to ask for the information you need

If you ask in a positive way, then people are usually quite happy to help



Imagery in Stress Reduction

- Imagery is a potent method of stress reduction, especially when combined with physical relaxation methods such as deep breathing.



Imagery in stress reduction

You can use imagery in the following ways to reduce stress:

One common use of imagery in relaxation is to imagine a scene, place or event that you remember as peaceful, restful, beautiful and happy. You can bring all your senses into the image, with sounds of running water and birds, the smell of cut grass, the warmth of sun, etc.

Use the imagined place as a retreat from stress and pressure.



Imagery in stress reduction

Scenes can involve complex images such as lying on a beach, sea and sand around you, 'hear' the waves crashing against rocks

Other uses of imagery in relaxation involve mental pictures of stress flowing out of the body

You can also use imagery in rehearsal before a big event



Thought Awareness, Rational Thinking and Positive Thinking

Thought Awareness

- Thought awareness is the process by which you observe your thoughts for a time, perhaps when under stress, and become aware of what is going through your head. It is best not to suppress any thoughts - just let them run their course while you observe them



Examples of common negative thoughts are:

- worries about how you appear to other people
- a preoccupation with the symptoms of stress
- dwelling on consequences of poor performance
- self criticism
- feelings of inadequacy

Thought awareness is the first step in the process of eliminating negative thoughts - you cannot counter thoughts you do not know you think.



Thought Awareness, Rational Thinking and Positive Thinking

Rational Thinking

- Once you are aware of your negative thoughts, write them down and review them rationally. See whether the thoughts have any basis in reality. Often you find that when you properly challenge negative thoughts they are obviously wrong. Often they persist only because they escape notice.



Thought Awareness, Rational Thinking and Positive Thinking

Positive Thinking and Affirmation

You may find it useful to counter negative thoughts with positive affirmations.

Examples of affirmations are:

- I can do this.
- I can achieve my goals.
- I am completely myself and people will like me for myself.
- I am completely in control of my life.
- I learn from my mistakes. They increase the basis of experience on which I can draw.
- I am a good valued person in my own right.



Thought Awareness, Rational Thinking and Positive Thinking

Firstly decide rationally what goals you can realistically attain with hard work, and then use positive thinking to reinforce these.



Meditation

Meditation is a very effective method of relaxation.

Meditation is particularly useful where:

- you have been under long term stress,
- you have been under short term stress which has caused adrenaline to be released into your bloodstream,
- you have been worrying about problems,
- you have been physically active.



Relaxing using meditation can have the following effects:

- slows breathing
- reduces blood pressure
- helps muscles relax
- gives the body time to eliminate lactic acid and other waste products
- reduces anxiety
- eliminates stressful thoughts
- helps with clear thinking
- helps with focus and concentration
- reduces irritability
- reduces stress headaches



Meditation Techniques

The essence of meditation is to quieten your thoughts by focusing completely on just one thing.

In all cases it helps if your body is relaxed.

A number of different focuses of concentration may be used

Some of these are detailed :



- **Breathing:**

A useful method may be to focus your attention on your breathing. Concentrate on breaths in and out.

- **Focusing on an object:**

Here you completely focus attention on examination of an object.

- **Imagery:**

This can be a very refreshing and pleasant way of meditating. Here you create a mental image of a pleasant and relaxing place in your mind. Involve all your senses in the imagery:



Physical relaxation techniques

- These are useful where stress is caused by physical processes in your body: perhaps where muscles are tense, or where you are experiencing the effects of adrenaline.



Taking Exercise

- Taking frequent effective exercise is probably one of the best physical stress-reduction techniques available. Exercise not only improves your health and reduces stress caused by unfitness, it also relaxes tense muscles and helps you to sleep
- An important thing to remember is that exercise should be fun - if you do not enjoy it, then you will probably not keep doing it.



Progressive Muscular Relaxation

The idea behind PMR is that you tense up a group of muscles so that they are as tightly contracted as possible. Hold them in a state of extreme tension for a few seconds. Then relax the muscles to their previous state. Finally you consciously relax them again as much as you can

For maximum relaxation you can use PMR in conjunction with breathing techniques and imagery



Breathing Control

Deep breathing is a very effective method of relaxation.



Techniques for Reducing Long Term Stress

Adjust your working methods and your lifestyle. A positive attitude, a healthy diet with sufficient exercise and adequate rest, and a pleasant environment.

Adjusting these things will improve the quality of your life as well as increasing your resistance to stress.



Time Management

Time Management is a set of related practical skills that help you to use your time in the most effective and productive way possible.

- Assess the value of your time, and how effectively you are using it
- Focus on your priorities so that you know which tasks should be done, which ones can be delegated, and which ones can be dropped
- Plan projects so that they are done properly, with adequate resources
- Use the time you have more effectively
- Manage and avoid distractions
- Increase your productivity and personal effectiveness



Time Management

This helps you to reduce long-term stress by:

- helping to put things in perspective when you feel 'drowned' in work
- ensuring that you are in control of where you are going and what you are doing
- helping you to be highly productive, and secure because of this
- improving your enjoyment of your current role, and increasing your prospects of promotion to more interesting jobs
- giving you more quality time to relax and enjoy life outside work.



Your attitude and it's effect on your stress

Attitude is fundamental to long term stress management. Where your attitude is negative or hostile, you will create problems out of opportunities and cause stress by alienating and irritating other people.

Where you have a positive attitude, you can maintain a sense of perspective and draw the positive elements out of each situation. You will find that people will be more helpful and co-operative as they find you a pleasure to work with.



Being in Control

When you are in control of your life, you can control the level of stress you face.

When you are out of control and unable to schedule events, then you cannot prevent stress building on top of stress.

Being in control of your life is largely a matter of attitude.



Change

It is important that you learn to welcome change - otherwise you will expose yourself to intense stress.



Attitudes to Other People

- Relations with other people can be either very satisfying or very stressful and unpleasant. While a certain amount of this comes down to their personalities, your attitude has a surprisingly large effect on the way that other people respond to you.



The following are important factors in forming harmonious relationships with other people:

- **Take a positive approach:**
People enjoy working with and relating to happy, optimistic people.
- **Project a positive image:**
Take care over personal grooming. Learn about body language, and learn how to adopt a good, open posture.



The following are important factors in forming harmonious relationships with other people:

- **Be assertive:**

When you deal with other people, you should confidently project your right to have your views taken into consideration.

- **Pay compliments where they are due:**

If you notice something good about someone, or they have done something well, compliment them. This costs you nothing, and helps to build their confidence.

- **Try to leave people pleased to have spoken to you.**



The following are important factors in forming harmonious relationships with other people:

- An extremely powerful technique when dealing with other people is to try to understand the way they think.
- Sometimes things can go wrong. Some people are not intelligent in the way they conduct relationships
- *If someone is sarcastic and rude to you:* remember that this is probably caused by a fault in their character. They are probably irritating and offending many other people as well.



- *If someone hurts you:*
Forgiveness is important in maintaining relationships
- *If you are facing a frustrating situation:*
using relaxation techniques can be useful. This helps you to remain calm with people.
- *If someone is annoying you:*
it is almost always best to remain calm and neutral



Health, Nutrition and Exercise

- If you eat a good, well-balanced diet then you should be able to minimize this sort of chemical stress. Your body will be receiving all the nutrients it requires to function effectively.



Eliminating Stress From Your Environment

- If your environment is well organized and pleasant, then it can help to reduce stress and increase productivity.
- You can reduce stress in your environment by improving: :
 - Air quality
 - Lighting
 - Decoration and tidiness
 - Noise
 - Furniture & Ergonomics
 - Personal space



Thank You



Stress at Work

DR. Hanaa Abdel wahab
Psychiatrist

