

# THE ESSENCE OF STRESS MANAGEMENT

by

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## Introduction

Stress may be regarded as the “wear and tear” our minds and bodies experience as we attempt to cope with our continually changing environment. People often think stress as pressure at work, a sick child or rush-hour traffic. These events may be triggers but stress is actually the body's internal reaction to such “factors” Stress is the automatic “fight-or-flight” response in the body, activated by adrenalin and other stress hormones, which stimulate a variety of physiological changes, such as increased heart rate and blood pressure, faster breathing, muscle tension, dilated pupils, dry mouth and increased blood sugar. In simple biological terms, stress is the state of increased arousal necessary for an organism to defend itself when faced with danger.

Whenever we feel anxious, tensed, tired, frightened, elated or depressed, we are undergoing stress. Few aspects of life are free from events and pressures that generate such feelings and unavoidable part of normal everyday existence. In fact, contrary to popular assumptions, stressed lifestyles are not an exclusively modern phenomenon. Stress has always been intrinsic to human existence, and life without stress would be unbearable, e.g. certain types of stress, such as physical and desirable. It is only when real or perceived change overwhelms the body's ability to cope, that it becomes problematic/harmful (distress), leaving one prone to unwanted physical, mental or emotional reactions and illnesses.

## Job Stress and Health

Stress sets off an alarm in the brain which responds by preparing the body's defensive mechanism. The nervous system is aroused and hormones are released to sharpen the sense, quicken the pulse, deepen respiration, and tense the muscles. This response sometimes called the fight response is important because it helps us to

defend against threatening situations. The response is reprogrammed biologically. Every person responds in similar manner, regardless of whether the stressful situation is at work or home.

Short-lived or infrequent episodes of stress pose little risk. However, when situations go unresolved the body is kept in a constant state of activation, which increases the rate of wear and tear to biological systems. Consequently, fatigue or damage results, and the ability of the body to repair and defend itself can become seriously compromised. The resultant effect is that the risk of injury or disease escalates.

Many studies have looked at the relationship between job stress and a variety of ailments. Mood swings, sleep disturbance, upset stomach, headache, and disturbed relationships with family, colleagues and friends are quick to develop. Early signs of job stress are usually easy to recognize but the effects of job stress on chronic diseases take a long time to develop and can also be influenced by many factors other than stress. Nevertheless, evidence is rapidly accumulating to suggest that stress contributes to several types of chronic health problems including cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal disorders, and psychological problems. Stress becomes harmful (distress), leaving us prone to unwanted physical, mental or emotional reactions and illnesses.

### **Causes of Stress**

The causes of stress (stressors) are multifarious but they can be divided into two general categories, viz: external and internal.

#### **a. External Stressors**

- Physical Environment- Noise, bright lights, heat, confined spaces.
- Social interaction- Rudeness, bossiness, or aggressiveness by others.
- Organizational- Rules, regulations, “red tape” deadlines.
- Major life events- Death of a relative, lost job, promotion, new baby.
- Daily hazzles – Commuting, misplacing keys, mechanical breakdowns.

#### **b. Internal Stressors**

- Lifestyle choices – Caffeine, not enough sleep, overloaded schedules
- Negative self-talk - Pessimistic thinking, self-criticism, over-analysis.
- Mind traps - Unrealistic expectations, taking things personally, all or nothing thinking, exaggerating, rigid thinking.
- Stressful personality traits - type A, perfectionist, workaholic.

These factors generate various symptoms of emotional and mental stress, the most common including anger, anxiety, sorrow, fear, and depression.

### **Negative Stress**

Excessive, prolonged and unrelieved stress can have a harmful effect on mental, physical and spiritual health. If left unresolved, the feelings of anger, frustration, fear, and depression generated by stress can trigger a variety of illnesses.

### **Positive Stress**

Stress can have a positive effect. It is essential in spurring motivation and awareness, providing the stimulation needed to cope with challenging situations. Tension and arousal are necessary for enjoyment of many aspects of life, and without them existence would be pretty dull.

### **Stress and the Individual**

There is no single level of stress that is optimal for all people. Everyone is different, with unique perceptions of and reaction to, events: what is distressing to one person may be a joy to another. Some people are more sensitive to stress than others, owing to experience in childhood and the influence of teachers, parents, religion, etc. Self-generated stress is something of a paradox because so many people think of external causes when they are upset.

### **Suggestions for Managing Stress**

1. Identify all the stressors in your life.
2. Start responding appropriately to your stressors.
3. Take a break and rest appropriately.
4. Nutritional therapy – Green vegetables are recommended to give magnesium, vitamin E and C as well as potassium. Do not take sugary material and drinks. Take only fresh water.
5. Engage in regular but moderate exercises.
6. Indulge in deep breathing exercises.
7. Take alternate warm and cold bath (during the same bath).
8. Soak in warm water for approximately 20 minutes.
9. Slow down when necessary, rework your itinerary.
10. Laughter therapy to let out a lot of tension.
11. Deal with negative emotions – worry, anger, depression, etc.
12. Avoid depressing environments and people of doom and gloom as they are not exciting.
13. Plan your life (daily, weekly, etc)
14. Seek support where necessary – doctor, pastor, imam, and counselor, trusted elder, friend; that is message therapy.
15. Sauna – cold water massage with appropriate oils
16. Word therapy – going into the word of faith.
17. Cast your fears (burdens) upon God.

18. Prayer – soliciting for divine intervention.
19. Learn relaxation techniques – maintain a positive attitude of faith even in trials (Prov. 14: 30). There is nothing new on the face of the earth.
20. Be careful with chemical remedies. Chemical remedies may give temporary relief but not permanent.
21. Reconcile with God. That makes you to be without guilt.

It is necessary that you properly manage stress in order to prevent hypertension.

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