

Defining Stress

- Has had many different definitions
- Most commonly accepted definition today: stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.
- People feel little stress when they have time, experience and resources to manage a situation.
 - Feel great stress when they can't handle demands
 - Stress is a negative experience
 - Effects/reactions depend on people's perceptions and ability to cope

Problems Defining

- A single definition is difficult to use b/c stress is made up of many things
- Different people experience different aspects

Hans Selye

- A founding father of stress research
- 1956 view: "stress is not necessarily something bad – it all depends on how you take it. Stress of exhilarating, creative successful work is beneficial, while that of failure, humiliation or infection is detrimental."
- Believed biochemical effects of stress would be experienced irrespective of whether the situation was positive or negative.
- **Since then, harmful biochemical and long-term effects of stress have rarely been observed in positive situations

Two types of (instinctive) stress response:

- Short-term "fight-or-flight"
 - Basic survival instinct
 - Run faster and fight harder, increase heart rate, blood pressure, and sweating
 - Reduces ability to work with others and to make good decisions
- Long-term "general adaptation syndrome"
 - Effect of extended exposure
- Hans Selye identified three stages
 - Alarm phase-react to the stressor
 - Resistance Phase-time when you adapt and coped with the stressor
 - Exhaustion phase-resistance declines (Exhaustion is same as burnout)

Stress in everyday life

- Is not severe and caused from work overload, conflicting priorities, inconsistent values, over challenging deadlines, conflict with co-workers, and unpleasant atmosphere
- To be stressed you must first feel threatened and second doubt your capabilities to deal with the threat

The Different Kinds of Stress

3 kinds of stress

- Acute Stress
 - most common form of stress
 - due to demands and pressures of recent, past, and anticipated demands and pressures in the future
 - small doses are thrilling and exciting; too much can cause psychological distress, tension headaches, and upset stomach
 - can happy to anyone but is treatable and manageable
 - *Symptoms:*
 - emotional distress-anger, anxiety, and depression
 - muscular problems-back pain, jaw pain, and muscular tensions
 - stomach, gut and bowel problems-heartburn, acid stomach, diarrhea and constipation
 - transient over arousal leads to elevation in blood pressure, rapid heartbeat, sweaty palms, and dizziness
- Episodic Acute Stress
 - occurs in people who lead disordered lives
 - always in a rush, always late
 - "a lot of nervous energy"
 - take on too much (too many irons in the fire)
 - can't organize
 - if something can go wrong, it does
 - **perpetually in the clutches of acute stress
 - interpersonal relationships deteriorate quickly
 - work becomes stressful place
 - generally require professional help
 - lifestyle and personality issues are usually ingrained and habitual
 - sufferers can be fiercely resistant to change.
 - *Affects:*
 - "Type A" (cardiac prone)
 - extreme case of episodic acute stress
 - excessive competitive drive, aggressiveness, impatience, harrying sense of time urgency
 - free-floating, but well-rationalized form of hostility
 - a deep-seated insecurities
 - "Worry Warts"
 - forecast catastrophe in every situation

- “awfulizers” (tend to be over aroused and tense)
 - more anxious and depressed than angry and hostile
 - *Symptoms:*
 - persistent tension headaches
 - migraines
 - hypertension
 - chest pain
 - heart disease
- Chronic Stress
 - the grinding stress that wears people away day after day
 - destroys bodies, minds and lives
 - never-ending “troubles”
 - stress of poverty, dysfunctional families, being trapped in an unhappy marriage or in a despised job/career
 - when an individual never sees a way out of a miserable situation
 - individual gives up search of a solution
 - some stems from traumatic, early childhood experiences that become internalized and remain forever painful and present
 - worst aspect: people get used to it
 - forget it’s there
 - immediate aware of acute stress
 - ignore chronic stress
 - kills through suicide, violence, heart attack, stroke, or even cancer
 - wears people down to a final, fatal breakdown
 - treated with professional help
 - difficult to treat and may require extended medical/behavioral treatment & stress mgmt

Stress and Your Health

- Unhealthy ways people deal with stress
 - Smoke or drink to get chemical relief
 - Do not exercise or eat properly
 - Cut down or worry about their sleep
 - Do not go to the doctor or dentist regularly

Stress and Heart Disease

- When stress is intense stress hormones aren’t used properly and cause increased heart rate and high blood pressure which causes damage
- Heart Attacks occur when the fight-or flight response gets out of control—the blood supply to the heart increases but the blood vessels are too narrow to let the blood go to the heart fast enough
- Stress also causes:
 - Damage to the immune system causing more colds
 - headaches

- irritable bowel syndrome
- mental health problems including anxiety and depression

Positive Effects of High Pressure

- Athletes use fight or-flight adrenaline to power an explosive performance
- Deadlines motivate people

Dangers of Stress

- dangerous when it interferes with ones ability to live a normal life for an extended period of time
- feel “out of control”/ no idea what to do
- feel continually fatigued, unable to concentrate, irritable in otherwise relaxed situations
- can lead to serious health issues

Natural Reactions

- affects physical health (b/c of built-in response mechanisms)
- may sweat at the thought of an important date
- heart rate increases (i.e. while watching a scary movie)
- may cause increase severity of acne
- abdominal pain and irregularity possible
- cause of stress temporary = physical effects usually short-term
- longer feel stress = longer physical reaction systems remain activated

Physical Wear and Tear

- “ages” a person faster than normal (verified in a study of women who had spent many years caring for severely ill and disabled children)
 - Extended reaction can alter the body’s immune system
- associated w/ other “aging” conditions:
 1. frailty
 2. functional decline
 3. cardiovascular disease
 4. osteoporosis
 5. inflammatory arthritis
 6. type 2 diabetes
 7. certain cancers
- impairs brain ability to block certain toxins

Pressure Points

- sudden emotional stress = severe heart dysfunction
- chronic stress = cardiovascular disease
- excessive stress can worsen existing risk factors
 - hypertension/high cholesterol levels
- quick to anger/frequent hostility = incr. risk of heart disease & crying fits
- feelings of despair can easily worsen into chronic depression
- complicate your ability to recover from a sudden illness or nap

Exercise Fuels the Brain's Stress Buffers

- May improve mental health by helping brain cope better w/ stress
- Preliminary evidence suggests...
 - physically active people have lower rates of anxiety and depression
 - Some researchers are looking at possible links between exercise and brain chemicals associated with stress, anxiety, and depression.
 - Work in animals since late 80s found that exercise incr. brain concentration of norepinephrine in brain regions involved w/ body's stress response
 - Some psychologists think exercise thwarts depression and anxiety by enhancing the body's ability to respond to stress
 - Biologically, exercise seems to give the body a chance to practice dealing with Stress
 - forces physiological systems to communicate much more closely than usual

Job Stress

- Jobs...
 - Are an important part of our lives
 - Provide a source of income
 - Fulfill our personal aims
 - Build social networks
 - Serve our professions or communities

Stress at work

- Even "dream" jobs have stressful deadlines, performance expectations, and other responsibilities.
- for some stress is a motivator
- workplace stress can easily overwhelm your life
- **putting your job ahead of everything else can also affect your personal relationships, compounding the work-related pressures
- Job stressors accelerate the onset of heart disease and can also increase the likelihood of heart attacks.

- Common Job Stressors:
 - perceived low rewards
 - hostile work environment
 - long hours
 - layoffs
 - restructuring
 - management changes
- The people most likely to develop cardiovascular disease are blue-collar and manual workers because they tend to have little control over their work environments.
- The older a person gets the higher their blood pressure is, however these people do not feel upset or unduly pressured I their jobs.

Job stress can cause...

- burnout (emotional exhaustion and negative or cynical attitudes)
- depression

Ways to help manage job-related stress

- make the most of workday breaks
- even 10 minutes of “personal time” will refresh your mental outlook
- if you feel angry, walk away
- set reasonable standards
- work together to make needed changes

What You Can Do

- Learn to deal
 - many of the most common long-term stressors arise w/o warning & simultaneously
 - stress mgmt is valuable if family history includes hypertension & other forms of heart disease
- Identify the cause
 - psychologist can help you define and analyze these stressors
 - help develop an action plan for dealing w/ them
- Monitor your moods
 - write down what caused it & thoughts/moods
- Make time for self at least 2-3 times a week
 - ten minutes a day of “personal time” helps refresh your mental outlook & slow down your body’s stress response system
- Walk away when you’re angry
 - walking or other physical activities will also help you work off steam
 - take time to mentally regroup by counting to 10, then re-evaluate
- Analyze your schedule
 - assess priorities and delegate

- eliminate tasks that are “shoulds” but not “musts”
- Set reasonable standards for yourself and others. *Don't* expect perfection.

Stress Management

- Three approaches to manage stress
 - Action-oriented—seek to confront the problem causing the stress
 - Must have some power over the situation
 - Most satisfying and rewarding ways to manage stress
 - *Action oriented section include:*
 - cope with stress of work overload
 - survive stress of problem jobs
 - deal with problem people
 - manage environmental stress
 - manage performance stress
 - avoid burnout
 - Emotionally-oriented—do not have the power to change the situation but we can manage the stress by changing our interpretation of the situation
 - Not as rewarding as Action-oriented approach because this can be a recurring stress
 - Acceptance-oriented—something happens where we have no power or emotional control and focus should be on surviving the stress
 - First stage of coping is realizing lack of power

Stress Diary

- Useful for understanding the causes of short-term stress
- Insight into own reactions
- On a regular basis, write down how stressed you feel (to help you understand)
- Write causes of stress in more detail
- How you react & whether reactions are appropriate/useful
- *Useful:*
 - gather information regularly
 - helps separate common routine stress from those that occur occasionally
 - Make regular entries”: after each incident that is stressful enough for you to feel that it is important
- *Record:*
 - date/time of entry
 - how happy you feel now (-10 to 10) & the mood
 - how stressed you feel (0 to 10)
 - most recent stressful event you have experienced
 - symptoms you feel
- **Analyzing the Diary** (look back after approx. two weeks)
 - look at the different stresses & pick out the most frequent (and list in order)

- prepare a second list (most unpleasant stress on top w/ least unpleasant on the bottom)
- top of those lists are the most important to learn how to control
- working through the stresses, look at their underlying causes, and your appraisal (how well did you handle the event?)
- look through diary at the situations that cause stress
- look at how you felt when you were under stress
- ****After working through the diary, should understand more fully what the most important & frequent sources of stress are. Learn from the various levels & situations.**

Stress SWOT Analysis

- Useful technique for understanding an organization's strategic position
- **Strengths:** capabilities, resources and advantages of an organization
 - personal strengths (things you are good at & people respect you for; areas of good experience)
 - support network (family, friends, professional or other networks, gov't services, powerful contacts, co-workers, team)
 - resources you can draw on (money, assets, power)
- **Weaknesses:** things the organization is not good at, areas of resource scarcity and areas where the organization is vulnerable
 - personal weaknesses (areas where you are aware that you are not strong, or things that people fairly criticize you for)
 - Lack of resources (where other people at your level have access to these resources or where the absence of resources is impacting your situation)
 - Bad situations (experiencing problems with your job or relationships, or where you have a poor living or working environment)
 - *challenge these weaknesses rationally to ensure that they are fair & genuine
- **Opportunities:** good opportunities open to the organization, which perhaps exploit its strengths or eliminate its weaknesses
 - work your way through the strengths you have identified (how can you draw on these strengths to help you manage stress)
 - work through the weaknesses you have identified (these are opportunities for positive change & development of new skills)
 - consider the real world, practical opportunities that would be open to you if you took advantage of these opportunities to improve your stress management)
- **Threats:** things that can damage the organization, perhaps as people exploit its limitations or as its environment changes
 - consider the consequences of leaving your weaknesses uncovered
 - consider the damage to relationships, career and happiness that would come from failing to manage stress

****SWOT** helps to understand unique positions with respect to stress management
****By looking at strengths-** ensure that you recognize all of the personal strengths, skills, resources and social networks that can help you manage stress.
****By looking at weaknesses-** identify areas you need to change in your life, including new skills that you need to acquire.

Making a Stress Management Plan

- By making a plan, you can focus your attention on the most serious sources of stress in your life; can work on bringing these under control
- *Stress Planning Process diagram*
<http://www.mindtools.com/stress/ps/StressPlan.htm>
 - Identify the sources of stress
 - List and prioritize the sources
 - to separate the important stressors that must be dealt with from the minor
 - start by writing down a list of sources, and then add the most frequent/serious sources
- *Tip:* create this list using a spreadsheet; much easier to sort the list into the correct order without a lot of tedious redrafting
 - Identify appropriate stress management techniques
- Create your stress management plan
- Work through the most important stressors on list one-by-one
- Think about what you learned about self when used Stress SWOT Analysis
- Then think through for yourself whether these are the most effective techniques or skills to use or whether others may be more appropriate

****As you create your plan, make sure that you do not over-stretch yourself: last thing you want is to get stressed-out by failing to meet the timetable of your stress mgmt plan**

***Make entries in diary to remind you to review your plan**

***With plan, should now have a good idea of what you have to do to manage the stress in your life**

Sources:

www.apahelpcenter.org

<http://www.mindtools.com/stress.htm>

www.stress.org

www.teachhealth.org