STRESS MANAGEMENT

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WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is an emotional or physical reaction to positive or negative events in your life, such as getting married or losing your job.

It is a normal reaction to the ever-increasing demands of life on you as an individual.

Stress itself isn't abnormal or bad.

What's important is how you view and deal with the events provoking the stress.
What happens when you are under stress?

- Your brain has an alarm system meant to protect you from environmental hazards.
- When your brain perceives a threat, it signals your body to release chemicals (hormones) to fuel your capacity for a response.
- This has been labeled the "fight-or-flight" response.
Once the threat is gone, your body is supposed to return to a normal relaxed state.

Unfortunately, the nonstop stress of modern life means that your alarm system almost never shuts off.

Over time, high levels of stress hormones lead to serious health problems.

Learning to identify problems and implement solutions is the key to successful stress reduction.
Importance of stress management

- Many people juggle multiple responsibilities—work-life, home-life, care-giving and relationships (parent, wife/husband).
- The pace of modern life makes stress management a necessary skill for everyone.
- Stress management gives you a range of tools to reset your alarm system.
- Without stress management your body is kept in a state of high alert and before long it will break down or make your life miserable.
Types of stress

Stress can affect you over

- a short period of time (Acute stress) or
- a long period of time (Chronic stress).

Your stress level depends on how intense the stress is, how long it lasts, and how you cope with the stressful situation.
Acute (short-term) stress

- This is the body's response to any situation that immediately seems threatening or dangerous.
Most of the time, your body recovers quickly from acute stress.

But acute stress can cause problems if it happens too often or if your body doesn't have a chance to recover.

In people with heart problems, acute stress can trigger an abnormal heartbeat (arrhythmia) or even a heart attack.
Chronic (long-term) stress

This is caused by situations or events that last over months and years.

This could include:

✧ having a difficult job,

✧ living with a difficult husband / a quarrelsome wife or

✧ dealing with a chronic disease.
The things that cause stress are called Stressors

- Most of the stressors in our life come from our interactions with fellow human beings—especially those close to us.
CAUSES OF STRESS (stressors)

- **Your relationships,**
  Problems with your family members—spouse, children, in-laws or feeling a lack of friendship or support in your life.

- **Emotional problems,**
  Such as:
  anger you can't express, depression, grief, guilt or low self-esteem.
Major life changes,

Such as dealing with the death of a parent or a spouse, losing your job, getting married or moving to a new city.

Your health,

Especially if you have a chronic illness such as heart disease, stroke or diabetes.
Stress in your family,

Such as having a newborn child or being a caregiver to a family member who is elderly or who has health problems.

Conflicts with your beliefs and values.

For instance, you may value family life, but you may not be able to spend as much time with your family as you want.
✧ Your surroundings.

Living in an area where overcrowding, crime, pollution or noise is a problem can create chronic stress.

✧ Your social situation.

✧ Having too little money (Pocketitis)

✧ Having too much money instantly (Pocketrophy)

✧ Feeling lonely or facing discrimination based on your tribe, gender, age or religious affiliation can add stress to your life.
✧ **Your job.**

✧ Being unhappy with your work or finding your job too demanding can lead to chronic stress.

✧ **Unemployment.**

✧ Losing your job or not being able to find work can also add to your stress level.
Physical symptoms of stress (Acute stress)

Stress causes physical and emotional changes in your body.

Common physical symptoms of stress include:

✧ A fast heartbeat.
✧ Headaches.
✧ A stiff neck and/or tight shoulders.
- Back pain.
- Fast breathing.
- Sweating and sweaty palms.
- Tummy upset--- nausea or diarrhoea.
Symptoms of chronic stress

The Immune system.

- Chronic stress can make you more likely to get sick often.
- And if you have a chronic illness such as Hypertension, stress can make your condition worse.
The Heart

Stress is linked to:

✦ High blood pressure (Hypertension),
✦ Abnormal heartbeat (Arrhythmia),
✦ Blood clots,
✦ Hardening of the arteries (Atherosclerosis)
✦ Heart attack, and
✦ Heart failure.
The Muscles

Constant tension from stress can lead to chronic

✦ neck,
✦ shoulder, and
✦ back pain.
If you have stomach problems, such as

- Gastroesophageal reflux disease (GERD),
- Peptic ulcer disease or
- Irritable bowel syndrome.

Stress can make your symptoms worse.
The Reproductive system

Stress is linked to:

✦ Menstrual problems—irregular / painful
✦ Fertility problems,
✦ Erection difficulties, and
✦ Pregnancy-related problems (miscarriages)
The Lungs and the Skin

Lungs

✦ Stress can make symptoms of asthma and chronic bronchitis worse.

Skin

✦ Skin problems such as acne (pimples) and itching can be made worse by stress.
Emotional symptoms of stress

Features of emotional stress manifest in the way you think, act and feel. You may:

✦ Feel frustrated, lose your temper more often, and yell at others for no apparent reason.

✦ Feel anxious or tired all the time.

✦ Find it hard to focus on tasks.

✦ Worry too much about small things.

✦ Imagine that bad things are happening or about to happen to you.
Prevent Stress

The best way to prevent stress is

✓ to avoid getting into situations that are likely to

✓ overwhelm your ability to cope.
Managing stress

Stress management involves

✦ taking control of how you respond
✦ to stressful situations in your life.
Foundation of stress management

The foundation of stress management is to realize that you are in control of your life!
How you handle stress depends on:

✦ Your dominant personality (Sanguine, Choleric, Melancholic or Phlegmatic);

✦ What you have learned from your family about how to respond to stress;

✦ How you think about stressful situations; and

✦ Your social support systems.
The steps in stress management

To get stress under control:

✧ Find out what is causing stress in your life.

✧ Look for ways to reduce the amount of stress in your life.

✧ Learn healthy ways to relieve stress to reduce its harmful effects on you.
What is causing stress in your life?

Sometimes it is easy to see where the stress is coming from:

- You just lost your job,
- Getting married or
- There is a new baby in the family.

But other times it may not be so clear why you feel stressed.
Keeping a **stress journal** may help.

- Get a small notebook and write down when something makes you feel stressed.
- Then write how you reacted and what you did to deal with the stress.
- Keeping a stress journal can help you find out what is causing your stress and how much stress you feel.
- Then you can take steps to reduce the stress or handle it better in future.
The coping techniques

- Short-term measures

And

- Long-term measures
Short-term measures for handling acute stress

- Breathing method
- Shaking method
- Laughing; and
- Drinking
Long-term measures

Managing stress is all about taking charge of your life:

- Take charge of:
  - Your thoughts,
  - Your emotions,
  - Your time,
  - Your environment, and
  - The way you deal with problems.
Unhealthy coping strategies

When under stress, some people resort:

- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Over-eating or under-eating
- Withdrawing from friends, family and social activities
- Using hard drugs
- Sleeping too much
- Filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing the stressor
- Lashing out, angry outbursts and exhibiting physical violence
Healthy ways of coping with stress

- They all require **change**.

You can either:

- Change the situation or
- Change your reaction to the situation.

- When deciding which option to choose, it’s helpful to think of the

- four As: Avoid, Alter, Adapt or Accept.
THE FOUR As

Change the situation:

1. Avoid the stressor.
2. Alter the stressor.

Change your reaction:

1. Adapt to the stressor.
2. Accept the stressor.
Strategy #1
Avoid unnecessary stress

✦ Not all stress can be avoided, and it’s not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed.

✦ However, a large number of stressors in your life can be avoided.
Learn to Say “No”

Know your limits and stick to them.

Whether in your personal or professional life,

refuse to accept added responsibilities when you know you can’t cope.
Avoid People Who Stress You Out

✦ If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can’t turn the relationship around,

✓ limit the amount of time you spend with that person; or

✓ end the relationship altogether.
Take control of your environment

✧ If the news make you anxious, turn the Radio or the TV off / change the channel

✧ If the traffic gets you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route.

✧ If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, let somebody do the shopping for you.
Avoid Hot-button Topics

If you get upset over

✦ Sports,
✦ Religion or
✦ Political discussions,

cross them off your conversation list.
Cut Down Your To-do List

- Analyze your schedule, responsibilities and daily tasks.
- Distinguish between the “shoulds” and the “musts.”
- Drop tasks that are not truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them altogether.
Strategy #2: Alter the situation

- If you can’t avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it.

- Often, this involves changing the way you communicate with people.
Change your communication style

There are three main styles of communication

- Passive,
- Assertive, and
- Aggressive.
Passive communication

- In passive communication, you may not express your opinions, feelings and needs.

- You may be uncomfortable speaking your mind, especially when you are with supervisors or people you see as important (power factor).

- When you are passive, you don't take part in decisions that affect you, or you don't take a stand on issues that are important to you.

- Being passive can make you feel like you have no control over a situation.

- Feeling a lack of control leads to stress.
In **Aggressive communication**, you honestly state your opinions, feelings and needs, but you do it at the expense of others.

You may be seen as rude, unreasonable, demanding or a bully.

And being aggressive often offends other people.

Their negative reaction can lead to stress for everyone including you.
Assertive communication

- In **Assertive communication**, you state your opinions, feelings and needs openly.
- You do this in a respectful, tactful and thoughtful manner.
- You are more likely to get a better response when you practice assertive communication.
Learn to be assertive

- Being assertive helps you communicate in a healthy way.
- When you are assertive, you take part in decisions that affect you.
- You have the satisfaction of knowing that you can express your feelings and opinions honestly with others.
- It helps you stand up for yourself without offending others.
- It also helps you feel more in control of a situation.
How can you be more assertive?

- To be more assertive, you focus on what you say, how you say it, where you say it, and when you say it.
- You can plan and practice how to be more assertive using the assertiveness ladder.
- It works both at home and at the workplace.
The ‘LADDER’ principle

- **L:** Look at what you want and what you need. Define what you want and keep it in mind during your discussion.

- **A:** Arrange a time and place to discuss the situation.

- **D:** Define the problem for the other person. Don't assume the other person already knows about the problem.

- **D:** Describe your feelings using "I" statements.
An "I" statement tells how you feel without blaming someone else. For example, try saying "I'm feeling frustrated," instead of "You frustrate me."

**E: Express** what you want or need. Be specific, brief and firm. For example, instead of asking your friend to be "more considerate," ask him to call if he'll be more than 15 minutes late.

**R: Reinforce** the idea of getting what you want. Show the other person how your request might be good for both of you.
Manage Your Time Better

- Poor time management can cause a lot of stress.
- When you’re running behind schedule, it’s hard to stay calm and focused.
- But if you plan ahead you can alter the amount of stress you’re under.
**Strategy #3**

Adapt to the Stressor

✧ If you can’t change the stressor, change yourself.

✧ You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing

✓ *Your expectations* and

✓ *Your attitude.*
Reframe problems

✧ Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective.

Instead of getting upset about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to

✓ listen to your favorite music, or

✓ enjoy looking more closely at the new cars or the new buildings springing up in the city.
Look at the big picture

✦ Take perspective of the stressful situation.
✦ Ask yourself how important this situation will be in the long run.

✓ will it matter in a month? A year?
✓ is it really worth getting upset over?
✦ If the answer is no, focus your time and energy on something else.
Adjust Your Standards

✦ Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress.

✦ Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with “good enough” some of the time.
Focus on the positive

When stress is getting you down,

✦ take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life,

✦ including your own positive qualities and gifts.
Find a purpose

- People who strive to meet a goal or fulfill a mission — whether it's growing a garden, caring for children or finding one's spirituality — are better able to handle stress than those who don't have such aspirations.

- Having a goal provides a sense of purpose, bolsters self-esteem and brings people together.

- What your goal is doesn't matter as much as whether the process of working toward it is meaningful to you.
Strategy #4
Accept the things you can’t change

- Some sources of stress are unavoidable.
- You can’t prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness or a natural disaster.
- In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are.
- Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it’s better than fighting against a situation you can’t change.
Don’t try to control the uncontrollable.

✧ Many things in life are beyond our control—particularly the behaviour of other people.

Rather than getting upset over them,

✧ focus on the things you can control such as

✧ the way you choose to react to problems.
Look for the upside

- When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth.
- Ask yourself; what can I learn from this?
- If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
Share your feelings

- Talk to a trusted friend (if you are married, that should be your spouse).

- Expressing what you’re going through can be very helpful, even if there’s nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.
Learn to Forgive

- Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes.

- Let go of anger and resentments.

- Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving people and moving on.
Strategy #5: Make time for Fun and Relaxation

- You can reduce stress in your life by having fun.
- If you regularly make time for fun and relaxation,
- you will be well-equipped to handle life’s stressors when they inevitably come.
Healthy ways to relax

✦ Go for a walk.
✦ Spend time in nature (beach / water falls).
✦ Call a good friend for a chat.
✦ Take a long bath in deodorised water.
✧ Work in your garden.
✧ Get a massage from your partner.
✧ Read a good book or magazine.
✧ Listen to good music.
✧ Watch a comedy film / cartoons
✧ Go for window shopping
Set aside time for relaxation

- Include rest and relaxation in your daily / weekly schedule.
- Put the phone off or on silence
- This is your time to take a break from all responsibilities and recharge your emotional batteries.
Keep your sense of humour

✓ Get yourself a list of jokes from the internet so you can find something to laugh about.
Get enough sleep

- Adequate sleep fuels your mind, as well as your body.

- Sleep helps your body to repair itself and helps your body to recharge its batteries and renew its energy.
What a world !!!

Rent, taxes, death. I hate growing up.
THANK YOU

QUESTIONS TIME