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## Emerging from The Stress Warp

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*Stress has become significant due to dynamic social factor and changing needs of life styles. Stress is man's adaptive reaction to an outward situation which would lead to physical, mental and behavioral changes. The study throws light on the widespread silent problem by name Stress', which gave raise to acute dysfunctions and are called many diseases, increase divorce rates, and other harassments. Many people encounter stress from multiple sources, including work; money, health, and relationship worries; and media overload. This is why stress is one of the biggest health problems facing people today. The focus of the paper is to study how the stress affects the mental health and to suggest the stress management techniques.*

### Introduction

We generally use the word “stress” when we feel that everything seems to have become too much - we are overloaded and wonder whether we really can cope with the pressures placed upon us.

Anything that poses a challenge or a threat to our well-being is a stress. Some stresses get you going and they are good for you - without any stress at all many say our lives would be boring and would probably feel pointless.

The difference between “stress” and “a stressor” - a stressor is an agent or stimulus that causes stress. **Stress is the feeling we have when under pressure**, while stressors are the things we respond to in our environment. It is defined as a state of psychological and physiological imbalance resulting from the disparity between situational demand and the individual's ability and motivation to meet those needs

### Stress can be positive or negative

1. Stress is good when the situation offers an opportunity to a person to gain something. It acts as a motivator for peak performance.
2. Stress is negative when a person faces social, physical, organizational and emotional problems.

### When we are stressed the following happens

- Blood pressure rises
- Breathing becomes more rapid

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- Digestive system slows down
- Heart rate (pulse) rises
- Immune system goes down
- Muscles become tense
- We do not sleep (heightened state of alertness)

## **Types of Stress**

### **Acute Stress**

Acute stress is the most widely experienced one it is caused by the daily demands and pressures encountered by each one of us. While the word “stress” connotes a negative impression, acute stress is what actually brings about excitement, joy and thrill in our lives. It includes

- **Emotional distress**, such as anger, anxiety, irritability, and acute periods of depression
- **Physical problems**, such as headache, pain, stomach upset, dizziness, heart palpitations, shortness of breath, hypertension and bowel disorders

### **Episodic Stress**

Acute stress that is suffered too frequently is called episodic stress. This type of stress is usually seen in people who make self-inflicted, unrealistic or unreasonable demands which get all clamoured up and bring too much stress in their attempt to accomplish these goals. Episodic stress is not like chronic stress, though, because this type of stress ceases from time to time yet not as frequently as acute stress does. It Includes

- Longer periods of intermitted depression, anxiety disorders and emotional distress
- Ceaseless worrying
- Persistent physical symptoms similar to those found in acute stress
- Coronary heart diseases, or other heart problems

### **Chronic Stress**

Chronic stress is the total opposite of acute stress; it's not exciting and thrilling, but dangerous and unhealthy. Chronic stress tears the life of a person apart his mind, body or spirit.

This type of stress is brought about by long-term exposure to stressors, such as unhappy marriage, traumatic experiences, unwanted career or job, stress of poverty, chronic illnesses, relationship conflicts, political problems, and dysfunctional families.

Common physical signs and symptoms of chronic stress are:

- dry mouth
- difficulty in breathing
- pounding heart
- stomach ache
- headache
- diaphoresis
- frequent urination
- tightening of muscles

- ...and more...

Mental signs and symptoms include:

- sudden irritability
- tension
- problems with concentration
- difficulty in sleeping
- narrowed perception
- frequent feelings of fatigue

### Symptoms

**Physical:** Fatigue, headaches, back pain, insomnia, nausea, indigestion, cramps, fainting, constipation, diarrhoea, sweatiness, sleeping too much or too little

**Mental:** Forgetfulness, poor concentration, boredom, paranoia, poor teamwork, perfectionism

**Emotional:** Irritability, depression, anxiety, anger, fear, mood swings, apathy, increased sensitivity to criticism

**Relational:** Loneliness, withdrawal, intolerance, relationship problems

**Behavioural:** Substance abuse, eating problems, risk-taking, hyperactivity, overwork, procrastination, missed deadlines, anti-social behavior

**Spiritual:** Emptiness, loss of beliefs and sense of meaning, cynicism, compassion fatigue.

### Causes of Stress

Everyone has different stress triggers. Work stress tops the list, according to surveys. Forty percent of U.S. workers admit to experiencing office stress, and one-quarter say work is the biggest source of stress in their lives.

Causes of work stress include:

- Being unhappy in your job
- Having a heavy workload or too much responsibility
- Working long hours
- Having poor management, unclear expectations of your work, or no say in the decision-making process
- Working under dangerous conditions
- Being insecure about your chance for advancement or risk of termination
- Having to give speeches in front of colleagues
- Facing discrimination or harassment at work, especially if your company isn't supportive

Life stresses can also have a big impact. Examples of life stresses are:

- The death of a loved one
- Divorce
- Loss of a job
- Increase in financial obligations
- Getting married
- Moving to a new home

- Chronic illness or injury
- Emotional problems (depression, anxiety, guilt and low self-esteem)
- Taking care of an elderly or sick family member
- Traumatic event, such as a natural disaster, theft, rape, or violence against you or a loved one

### **How does stress affect the body?**

Not all stress is bad. All animals have a stress response, which can be life-saving in some situations. The nerve chemicals and hormones released during such stressful times, prepares the animal to face a threat or flee to safety. When you face a dangerous situation, your pulse quickens, you breathe faster, your muscles tense, your brain uses more oxygen and increases activity—all functions aimed at survival. In the short term, it can even boost the immune system.

However, with chronic stress, those same nerve chemicals that are life-saving in short bursts can suppress functions that aren't needed for immediate survival. Your immunity is lowered and your digestive, excretory, and reproductive systems stop working normally. Once the threat has passed, other body systems act to restore normal functioning. Problems occur if the stress response goes on too long, such as when the source of stress is constant, or if the response continues after the danger has subsided.

### **How does stress affect your overall health?**

There are at least three different types of stress, all of which carry physical and mental health risks:

- Routine stress related to the pressures of work, family and other daily responsibilities.
- Stress brought about by a sudden negative change, such as losing a job, divorce, or illness.
- Traumatic stress, experienced in an event like a major accident, war, assault, or a natural disaster where one may be seriously hurt or in danger of being killed.

The body responds to each type of stress in similar ways. Different people may feel it in different ways. For example, some people experience mainly digestive symptoms, while others may have headaches, sleeplessness, depressed mood, anger and irritability. People under chronic stress are prone to more frequent and severe viral infections, such as the flu or common cold, and vaccines, such as the flu shot, are less effective for them.

Of all the types of stress, changes in health from routine stress may be hardest to notice at first. Because the source of stress tends to be more constant than in cases of acute or traumatic stress, the body gets no clear signal to return to normal functioning. Over time, continued strain on your body from routine stress may lead to serious health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, anxiety disorder, and other illnesses.

### **How Stress Affects Mental Health**

When someone is under chronic stress, it begins to negatively affect his or her physical and mental health. The body's stress response was not made to be continuously engaged. Many people encounter stress from multiple sources, including work; money, health, and relationship

worries; and media overload.

With so many sources of stress, it is difficult to find time to relax and disengage. This is why stress is one of the biggest health problems facing people today.

### **Chronic Stress**

Chronic stress increases the risk of developing health problems including obesity, diabetes, heart disease, cancer, and a weakened immune system. Chronic stress also affects a person's mental health. Many studies show a correlation between stress and the development of mood disorders such as anxiety disorders and depression.

According to the American Psychological Association's latest stress survey, 66 percent of people regularly experience physical symptoms of stress, and 63 percent experience psychological symptoms.

### **Link between Stress & Mental Health**

Although many studies have shown a link between stress and mental health problems, the reason behind this connection has remained unclear. Recent research from the University of California, Berkeley, has discovered new insight into why stress can be so detrimental to a person's psyche.

Previous research has found physical differences in the brains of people with stress disorders, such as post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and those without. One of the main distinctions is that the ratio of the brain's white matter to gray matter is higher in those with stress-related mental disorders compared to those without.

People who experience chronic stress have more white matter in some areas of the brain. The UC Berkeley study wanted to find out the underlying reason for this alteration in the brain composition.

### **Gray Matter**

Gray matter in the brain is composed mainly of two types of cells: neurons, which process and store information, and glia, cells that support the neurons.

White matter mostly is composed of axons, which form a network of fibers to connect the neurons. It is called white matter because of the white, fatty "sheath" of myelin coating that insulates the nerves and accelerates the transmission of the signals between the cells.

For this study, the researchers focused on the cells that produce myelin in the brain to see if they could find a connection between stress and the proportion of gray brain matter to white.

### **Stress Disorders & Brain Connectivity**

This might mean that people with stress disorders, such as PTSD, have alterations in their brain connectivity. This might lead to a stronger connection between the hippocampus and the amygdala (the area that processes the fight-or-flight response). It might also cause weaker connectivity between the hippocampus and the prefrontal cortex (the area that moderates the responses).

If the amygdala and hippocampus have a stronger connection, the response to fear is more rapid. If the connection between the prefrontal cortex and the hippocampus is weaker, then the

ability to calm down and shut off the stress response is impaired. Therefore, in a stressful situation, a person with this imbalance will have a stronger response with a limited ability to shut down that response.

### **Oligodendrocyte Cells**

This study shows that the oligodendrocyte cells might play a key role in long-term changes to the brain that could lead to mental health problems. The researchers also believe that the stem cells which, due to chronic stress, are becoming myelin-producing cells rather than neurons, affect cognitive function, because it is the neurons that process and transmit the electrical information necessary for learning and memory skills.

### **Stress Management Techniques**

There are three broad methods you can follow to treat stress, they include self-help, self management, and medication.

#### **Self help for treating stress**

- **Exercise** - exercise has been proven to have a beneficial effect on a person's mental and physical state. For many people exercise is an extremely effective stress buster.
- **Division of labor** - try to delegate your responsibilities at work, or share them. If you make yourself indispensable the likelihood of your feeling highly stressed is significantly greater.
- **Assertiveness** - don't say yes to everything. If you can't do something well, or if something is not your responsibility, try to seek ways of not agreeing to do them.
- **Alcohol and drugs** - alcohol and drugs will not help you manage your stress better. Either stop consuming them completely, or cut down.
- **Caffeine** - if your consumption of coffee and other drinks which contain caffeine is high, cut down.
- **Nutrition** - eat plenty of fruit and vegetables. Make sure you have a healthy and balanced diet.
- **Time** - make sure set the time each day for yourself. Use that time to organize your life, relax, and pursue your own interests.
- **Breathing** - there are some effective breathing techniques which will slow down our system and help us to relax.
- **Talk** - talk to your family, friends, work colleagues and your boss. Express your thoughts and worries.
- **Seek professional help** - if the stress is affecting the way you function; go and see your doctor. Heightened stress for prolonged periods can be bad for your physical and mental health.
- **Relaxation techniques** – meditation and massage have been known to greatly help people with stress.

### **Relaxation and Meditation Techniques**

A variety of stress management techniques are available that involve learning how to control

stress. These techniques involve learning to consciously relax your body through a variety of techniques, such as meditation or guided imagery. There are various techniques which will help us to feel relax from stress.

### **Meditation**

The beauty of practicing meditation is that it allows you to “let go” of every day worries and literally “live in the moment.” People who meditate regularly report improvements physically, mentally, and spiritually. To begin a meditation practice, you will need to find a quiet spot, away from the phone, television, friends, family, and other distractions..

### **Biofeedback**

This method involves attaching surface electromyography electrodes (SEMG) to your skin. The SEMG measures your blood pressure, muscle tension level, breathing, and heart rate. A biofeedback therapist will meet with you and show you the ways in which your body reacts on a computer screen. This is taught by a psychologist or specialized therapist who has been trained in biofeedback techniques.

### **Yoga**

Yoga combines meditation and physical exercise to achieve improved health and sense of well-being. Yoga has been practiced in India for over 5,000 years. Yoga involves repeating movements that can help improve strength and flexibility as well as promote mental and physical health and greater self-understanding. The movements are very graceful and have spiritual significance.

### **Guided Imagery**

Guided Imagery is a wonderful stress reduction tool which uses “visualization” techniques to improve health. It has been used effectively for cancer patients who literally imagine themselves without the cancerous cells. According to the Guided Imagery Resource Center, guided imagery can “reduce blood pressure, lower cholesterol and glucose levels in the blood and heighten short-term immune cell activity.”

### **Conclusion**

Stress in the work place has become the black plague of the present century. Much of the stress at work is caused not only by work overload and time pressure but also by lack of rewards and praise, and more importantly, by not providing individuals with the autonomy to do their work as they would like. Most of the employees were not satisfied with the grievance handling procedure of the organization which was found by the unstructured interview. Organization must begin to manage people at work differently, treating them with respect and valuing their contribution. If we enhance the psychological well being and health of the employees, in the coming future the organization would make more revenue as well as employee retention. Because it is said that, “A Healthy Individual is a Productive Individual”

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