

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL COUNSELLING WING**

### **Centre for Counselling & Support, IISc, Bangalore**

---

#### **ALL ABOUT STRESS**

Modern life is full of hassles, deadlines, frustrations & demands. While some are able to manage the pressures and demands of personal as well as work life, for many, it has become a way of life.

Stress is not always bad. In manageable dose, it helps an individual to perform under pressure and can motivate him/her to perform well.

But, when it exceeds, crosses the threshold, the mind and the body pay the price, resulting in MOOD SWINGS, BURN OUT, and STRAINED RELATIONSHIP AT HOME & WORK PLACE, affecting the QUALITY OF LIFE.

Excessive stress always sends out warning signs to take stock of the situation. If neglected, it plays havoc, causing irreparable damage to the Physical as well as Mental Well Being. The best way to manage the stress is to be aware of the symptoms and take remedial measures to reduce its harmful effects, at the earliest.

#### **WHAT IS STRESS?**

Stress is a normal physical response to events that makes an individual feel threatened resulting in Emotional Imbalance in some way or the other.

Stress affects individuals differently and the experience faced is different from one another

When a danger is sensed, whether it is real or imagined, the body's defence mechanism takes to Fight-or Flight-or Freeze reaction in response to the experienced stress. It is the way of protecting oneself.

The stress response helps to save life in emergency situations giving extra strength to defend and safe guard from the threat. It also helps to meet the challenges—keeps the individual on toes during presentation at work, sharpens concentration during exam and drives the person to study, when otherwise he/she may be watching TV.

#### **ATTITUDE & PERCEPTION MATTERS:**

A psychologist walked around a room while teaching Stress Management to an audience. As she raised the glass of water, everyone expected that they would be asked, Half Empty, Half Full question. Instead with a smile on her face she inquired, how heavy is the glass of water?

Answer roughed out from 8oz to 20 oz.

The Psychologist replied, "Weight does not matter. It depends on how long I hold it".

"If I hold it for a minute, it is not a problem;

If I hold it for an hour, I will have an ache on my arm;

If I hold it for a day, my arm will feel numb & paralyzed.

In each case, the weight of the glass does not change, but the longer I hold it, the heavier is my perception of the weight”.

She continued, “The stresses and worries are like the glass of water.

Think about them for a while, nothing happens.

Think about it a bit longer, they begin to hurt, and

If you think about them all day long, you will feel paralyzed, incapable, left with drained energy, ending up in doing nothing but sit back, worrying over the past happening or incidents.

We should all learn to let go of the stress realized from past happenings. That is the only way to move forward in life. Living in the past is like trying to gather the spilt milk and it is a futile attempt. What matters and important is to take care of the future by living in the present productively with give & take; forget & forgive Attitude.

As early as in the evening as you can, put all your burdens down. Do not carry them through the evening and into the night. Remember to put the glass down at your earliest and divert your thinking onto what needs to be done, from thereon”.

### **Coping with Work Stress:**

While some work place stress is normal and understandable, excessive stress can interfere with individual’s performance, productivity, impacting the physical and emotional health.

Individual’s ability to deal with the stress makes the difference. Finding ways to manage workplace stress is not about making drastic or huge changes or rethinking career ambitions, rather it is focussing on what is within one’s control.

In any work set up or in a place the work is to be carried out in a team or if you have more than a one under you to function, the best way to avoid induced stress, is to take everybody along and walk. Delegating the work and involving them in scheduling the work and planning strategies, ensures involvement and commitment. Individual’s ability needs to be valued and respected. Being liberal in offering rewards and incentives, praising good performance both verbally and officially, providing for career development, producing entrepreneurial work climate gives the employees more control over their work. Genuine interest to give their best will be seen. Personal interest alone can sustain the pressures and demands of WORK STRESS.

Another important factor in angry outbursts is managing one’s Emotions. Emotions are contagious. If you express happy emotions, you will get back the happiness in multifold. Your tone of talk, the words that you use and the way you express them has profound impact

on the moods of the people and the climate in the environment. Unparliamentarily, words aired in anger causes unpleasantness not only to the affected person but also to the one who uses.

On the other hand when you speak with composure, receptivity to listen and understand the message (empathetic attitude) that you are trying to convey will be optimally high.

Our mind functions like a computer. It functions as per the command it receives. If Emotions are positive, behaviour will be positive. Negative emotions will result in finding faults, anger outbursts and strained relations. Emotions go through three cyclic process namely cognitive (Thinking), Affective (feeling) and behavioural domains. If thinking is progressive and positive, positive and productive emotions get generated resulting in appropriate and agreeable behaviour. If thinking gets distorted for some reason, it generates negative Emotions affecting the behaviour.

As emotions are contagious, the quality of one's behaviour is bound to affect the inter personal relations and communication, be it in a home environment or at work place. Negative Emotions result in unproductive Distress

### **WAYS PEOPLE RESPOND TO STRESS:**

According to the Psychologist Connie Lillas, people respond to stress in three predominant ways.

Foot on Gas: angry, agitated, or Fight response. High exhibit of Emotions

Foot on brake: Withdrawn, depressed or Flight Stress response. Avoiding people, spacing out and showing very little energy or emotion

Foot on both: A tense or Freeze response, getting frozen under pressure, experience inability to do anything, feel paralyzed and can't do anything. But feel extremely agitated at the surface

### **SIGNS & SYMPTOMS OF STRESS:**

**Cognitive Symptom:** Memory problems, Inability to concentrate, Poor judgement, seeing only the negative, Anxious or Racing thoughts, Constant worrying.

**Physical Symptoms:** Aches & pains, Diarrhoea or constipation, Nausea or Dizziness, Chest pain or Rapid Heartbeat, Loss of sex drive and frequent colds.

**Emotional Symptoms:** Mood swings, Irritability or short temper, agitation or inability to relax, feeling overwhelmed, sense of loneliness & isolation, Depression & general unhappiness.

**Behavioural Symptoms:** Eating in Excess or less, sleeping too much or too little, Isolating from others, Procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, Using alcohol, Cigarettes or drugs to relax. Indulge in Nail Biting or taking to some kind of behaviour habituation.

## **CAUSAL FACTORS:**

**External factors:** Major Life Changes, Financial Problems, Work or Place of Work, Relationship Difficulties, Too busy a life, Children & family

**Internal Factors:** Chronic worry, Pessimism, Negative Self talk, Unrealistic Expectations/ Perfectionism, Rigid thinking/ Lack of Flexibility, Do or Die Attitude, Being harsh on self.

Not only the exhausting work schedules and Rocky relationships, known as stressors can cause stress but anything that puts high demands on an individual or forces to adjust beyond tolerance can also be stressful.

This can include expecting Promotions, investment on a House or vehicle, going to work or study place, getting married, submission of thesis, giving colloquium etc. The stress is not always created by external factors, sometimes it can be even self generated like, getting into relationships knowing the problems of house , procrastinating the committed work, extending beyond deadlines taking things easy , worrying unnecessarily about something that may or may not happen, having irrational and pessimistic thoughts about life etc.

Many a stress is due to Perceptual Distortions and Wrong Attitude.

## **EFFECTS OF CHRONIC STRESS:**

Many Health problems are due to stress that includes pain of some kind, Heart disease, digestive problems, sleep problems, depression, weight problems, Auto immune diseases, skin conditions as eczema.

## **DEALING WITH STRESS:**

‘There is no one size fits all’ solution. The best is to focus on what makes one feel calm and helps to control their emotions, It can be going for music class, playing any instruments, burning calories in Gym, taking a long shower, going for a walk, Swimming or Exercising, Reading a novel or anything that is of interest.

It is said the beneficial way to manage the stress is either try to Change the situation or change your own Attitude and approach. The first step is to try to avoid the stressor. Though not all stressors can be avoided, at least one can learn to know how much not more is or to draw a line at the appropriate instance. Learning to say a ‘No’ or to distinguish between ‘should’ and ‘Must’ will go a long way in avoiding people and the situations that stress an individual out of gear.

The second try is, if avoidance is not possible try and Alter the stressor. Be assertive to deal with the problem directly. Instead of allowing yourself to experience chronic stress by bottling up your feelings, it is better to express your concerns and feelings in a diplomatic and respectful manner and let the people involved understand your concerns and apprehensions.

If that fails, the next possibility is to Change ‘self’. Try to look at the problems from out of box, focussing on the larger picture or positive things in life. Pose a question—is this really something worthy of getting upset?

The next possibility is to Accept and reconcile with the reality when nothing can be done about a situation or make the person see sense or reason. Sometimes, even the most stressful circumstances can be an opportunity for learning or help in personal growth

### **MANAGING THE WORK AND WORK PLACE STRESS:**

1. Taking Responsibility for improving Physical And Emotional Well Being
2. Avoiding Knee Jerk habits as smoking, Drinking and Drugs
3. Avoiding negative Thoughts, Attitudes and negative people
4. Being organized
5. Effective Time Management = Effective Self management ( of day to do activities)
6. Learning Better Communication skills to ease and improve relationships with authorities and colleagues. Make the communication friendly and efficient. Cultivate a friendly , social climate
7. Be aware of the most important component-Emotional Intelligence

### **All about Emotional Intelligence:**

It is the ability to manage one’s emotions appropriately in a work place or in a social set up. Knowing what to express and how to express without hurting the personal EGO of fellow employees, reveals the mental maturity. This is known as Emotional Intelligence in Psychological terms. There are four most important components to have check on the Work Place Emotional Intelligence.

1. **Self Awareness:** It is the ability to recognize one’s Emotions and their impact while taking any decisions.
2. **Self Management:** The ability to adapt to changing circumstances
3. **Social Awareness:** The ability to sense, understand and react to other’s Emotions and Feel comfortable socially.
4. **Relationship Management:** The ability to inspire, influence and connect with others and manage the conflicts effectively

### **RELAXATION TECHNIQUES TO MANAGE THE STRESS:**

Well nourished physical health helps to cope with stress. Morning exercise or any kind of physical activity helps to stay active throughout the day. Ideal it will be to start the day with a nourishing Breakfast to get the required energy to actively involve in day to day routine-be it studying, research or any kind of work at the work place. Better to minimize intake of coffee and sugar, cut back on alcohol and Nicotine.

Adequate, 7 to 8 hours of sleep is required for an effective functioning and to keep one's emotional balance in control. Staying late night or inadequate sleep tires the physical and cognitive domains, increasing irrational and negative thinking.

Some of the Most Effective Relaxation techniques: Deep Breathing, Meditation for Stress Relief, Progressive Muscle relaxation, Mindfulness ( Quiet environment, comfortable position and Point of Focus), Observing intruding thoughts-not fighting against the racing thoughts, bringing it back to the focus, Guided imagery or visualization, Yoga and Meditation

### **TO CONCLUDE:**

Managing stress is all about taking charge of your thoughts, Emotions, work or personal schedules and the way you deal with problems & issues. There may be innumerable factors which leave you with minimum or no option at all to do anything about the demanding work, the Research Process or Career and Family responsibilities etc.

The way to manage a desperate situation is to realize that it is your life and you have to take control of everything that happens in your life. Taking charge and owning responsibility to your life is the foundation for Stress management.

The minute you realize the inability to carry out day to day activities, it is better to

1. Start identifying the source of your stress-look closely at your habits, attitudes and Excuses.
2. Be a proactive person, show your assertiveness, manage the time better
3. Focus on positives,
4. Accept the things that cannot be changed, finally
5. Do not try to control the uncontrollable and finally,

**DON'T CHEW FROM BOTH ENDS AND ALLOW YOURSELF TO BURN OUT.**

Prof.Nalini Dwarakanath,  
Counselling Psychologist