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Stress Reduction Process

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Stress

It's almost impossible to live without some stress. On the other hand, most folks wouldn't want to, because it gives life some pizzazz and excitement. Although, if stress gets out of control, it may harm the health, the relationships, and the enjoyment of life. Stress is tension and when tension occurs it blocks one's needs. Learning to identify when an individual is under stress, what is stressing, and different ways of coping with stress can greatly improve both the mental and physical well-being.

Stress is the most common illness that everyone experiences at some point throughout their lives. Stress happens even though a person may be wealthy, powerful, attractive, or happy. Stress can cause both mental and physical symptoms. According to the college textbook *Essentials of Psychology* by Douglas A. Bernstein, "Stress is the negative emotional and physiological process that occurs as individuals try to adjust to or deal with stressors." (p.398) In other words, stress is your body's way of responding to any kind of demand. It can be caused by both good and bad experiences. For instance, when one feels stressed by something going on around them, their body reacts by releasing chemicals into the blood. These chemicals give them more energy and strength, which can be a good thing if their stress is caused by physical danger. However, stress can also be a bad thing, if their stress is in response to something emotional and there is no outlet for this extra energy and strength.

The term stress was borrowed from the field of physics by one of the fathers of stress

research Hans Selye. In physics, stress describes the force that produces strain on a physical body (bending a piece of metal until it snaps occurs because of the force, or stress, exerted on it). Hans Selye began using the term stress after completing his medical training at the University of Montreal in the 1920's. He noticed that no matter what his hospitalized patients suffered from, they all had one thing in common. They all looked sick. In his view, they all were under physical stress. The physical stress resulted in the release of stress hormones dubbed "General Adaptation Syndrome". He proposed that stress was a non-specific strain on the body caused by irregularities in normal body functions then, later established different types of stress.

There are four main types of stress; chronic eustress, acute eustress, acute distress, and chronic distress. Chronic eustress and acute eustress are both good types of stress and acute distress and chronic distress are both bad types of stress. Chronic eustress is a long lasting, recurrent good stress. When one is in a state of chronic eustress, the body has very high levels of the feel good hormones such as dopamine and oxytocin. These hormones make it possible for a person to have high levels of self-esteem and to have really strong relationships in all areas of life, whether it would be romantic, parental or work-related. Acute eustress is a short, intense good stress. When one is in a state of acute eustress, the body is temporarily, intensely and quickly flooded with the feel good hormones such as dopamine and oxytocin. This type of stress is desirable and it does a body good to experience this type of stress often. Furthermore, acute distress is a rapid onset, short, intense bad stress. The body is flooded with emergency response hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones allow one to be alert and have increased strength, endurance and energy, thereby allowing them to respond to imminent danger. Chronic distress is a long lasting, recurrent bad stress; it is the worst type of stress that can occur in one's life by far. It is the cause of most peoples' problems. The body is constantly flooded

with emergency response hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline. When the endocrine system is over-used to an extent, things begin to malfunction. One should be aware of the chronic distress stage, because a person may end up overproducing the emergency response hormone and under-produce the feel good hormones.

Many people live with stress and don't know that they are going through it. Some may experience short-term stress or some may experience long-term stress or both. When going through mental (emotional) signs and symptoms of stress, one may experience tension, irritability, inability to concentrate, feeling excessively tired, and trouble sleeping. On the other hand, one may also experience physical signs and symptoms of stress such as dry mouth, a pounding heart, difficulty breathing, stomach upset, headache, frequent urination, sweating palms, and tight muscles that may cause pain and trembling. There are cognitive signs and symptoms such as memory problems, inability to concentrate, poor judgment, seeing only the negative, anxious or racing thoughts, and constant worrying. And there are also behavioral signs and symptoms of stress such as eating more or less, sleeping too much or too little, isolating one's self from others, procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax, and developing nervous habits like nail biting or pacing. Determining how much a person develops too much stress differs from person to person. Bear in mind that the signs and symptoms of stress can also be caused by other psychological and medical problems.

Causes of stress depend on each individual. Something that is stressful to someone may not be as stressful to the other. Stress can be self-generated and there are external and internal factors of stress. The common external causes of stress can be things like major life changes, work, relationship difficulties, financial problems, being too busy, and children and family. The common internal causes of stress can be things like inability to accept uncertainty, pessimism,

negative self-talk, unrealistic expectations, perfectionism, and lack of assertiveness. In most cases, the situations and pressures that cause stress is dubbed stressors. Stressors are not necessarily a negative thing; they could be a positive thing such as when a person has high demands and is forced to adjust to new things like getting married or buying a house can be stressful.

The effects of stress are different for different people; however, exposure to too much stress can lead to serious health problems. If one does not change the way their stress issues, it can raise blood pressure, suppress the immune system, increase the risk of heart attack and stroke, contribute to infertility, and speed up the aging process. Also, stress can even rewire the brain, leaving that person more vulnerable to anxiety and depression. Doctors say that many health problems are caused or exacerbated by stress.

If a person recognizes their stress or a person recognizes someone else's stress, they should always seek for help. The sooner a person gets help the better. They could remove themselves from stressful situations. When seeking for help, a person should try to find strategies to help control the stress. Now learning how to deal with stress is challenging when under stress. There are strategies like looking for causes, examining your relationships, evaluating, being positive, seeking advice, doing something for others, learning to pace oneself, exercising, creating a quiet place, developing good sleeping habits, getting good nutrition, and just having a humor and fun time with family and friends. Going to the doctor shouldn't be the first option especially when under financial issues. One should try to make time management easier for themselves. There are things to make time for things to get done easier and faster like developing lists, jotting down what the daily schedule is going to be for the day, setting deadlines as well.

Overall, everyone needs to be aware of stress, the signs and symptoms, the causes, the

effects, and the strategies to coping with stress as that may get in the way of living the life. One may consider taking stress quizzes online to determine their stress. A person must try to find ways to make time manageable. Although, an individual shouldn't try to do everything themselves in coping with stress, if they are experiencing any of the warning signs of stress, it's important to see a doctor for a full evaluation. The doctor can help determine whether or not the symptoms are stress-related and consult them to a specialist.

Sources:

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Chuck Baldwin's Chapter 10: Health, Stress, and Coping PowerPoint notes.

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