

Unit 3

STRESS, HUMAN CAPABILITIES AND WELL-BEING

After reading this chapter, you will

- Understand the meaning of stress
- Know the types of stress
- understand the effect of stress on health
- understand the effect of stress on different aspects of human capabilities
- understand the ways of coping with stress

Chapter Outline

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Introduction

We face different challenges in our day to day lives. Many changes take place in our lives. A person has to respond to these changes. Some changes directly influence the well-being of a person. Such changes are for e.g. meeting with an accident, failing an examination, losing one's job etc. A person feels stress in such situations. The situations in which one becomes stressed also vary from person to person. If two students are asked to write an essay of five pages, it may not create stress for one student but it may be stressful for another student. Sometimes the reasons for stress can be big such as meeting with an accident, fire in shop/house, flood etc. But for some people, small factors can also cause stress such as waiting in a long cue, talking to a person in an office for some work.

We have our own ways of coping with stressful situations. Some people are successful in coping with stress whereas some people fail to cope with it. A person may understand the normal life

situations as stressful. It depends on how the situations are being observed or perceived.

Meaning of Stress

The word 'stress' has originated from Latin word 'strictus' which means tight or narrow. Stress refers to all those physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural changes that occur as a result of different difficult and challenging situations which influences all the aspects of an individual's behavior.

The factors that create stress are known as stressors. Stressors are those events which create stress in us.

The physical problems that result from stress can be extreme fatigue, lack of sleep, nauseating responses etc. Behavioral problems include hurriedness, smoking, alcoholism, etc. Emotional changes can include anxiety, frustration, fear, irritability, extreme anger etc.

Activity 3.1

Make small group of students in your class. Ask them to write the situations that create stress in their lives. Try to understand the individual differences and similarities in reasons of causing stress.

Types of Stress

Stress is mainly of two types; Positive stress which is also known as **Eustress** and Negative stress which is also known as **distress**.

Stress is like electricity. Stress provides energy to a person so that a person starts working, and performing. As electricity is essential for lighting an electric bulb, similarly stress is mandatory for a person to work. If the amount of electricity flowing in a bulb is high, then it

will burn its filament. Similarly, an optimum level of stress is beneficial for a person, if the level of stress goes beyond that, it will be harmful for the person.

This beneficial level of stress due to which a person works, gets better performance and makes achievements, is known as Eustress. This is also known as positive stress. If the level of stress goes above eustress, it influences a person's behavior negatively. This is called distress, also known as negative stress.

Other than eustress and distress, there can be other types of stress on the basis of its causes.

Physical and Environmental stress

This type of stress mainly occurs due to external or environmental factors such as air pollution, crowd, noise, summer or winter season etc. It can also result from witnessing some events such as earthquake, fire, flood etc. A person experiences physical tension due to such stress which can result into any wound, lack of nutritious food, lack of sleep etc.

Psychological stress

This type of stress does not occur due to external factors but is caused by the internal factors of a person. This type of stress occurs from situations when a person thinks too much about a problem; remains tensed due to this, remembers old events again and again, and easily gives up to a problem. Whenever any other person or a situation blocks our needs or motives due to which we cannot achieve our goals, then it creates frustration in our mind resulting in stress. Similarly, if we have to choose between two situations or goals and both the goals appear equally attractive and it

becomes difficult for us to take a decision then ‘conflict’ arises in our mind. Anxiety, frustration, conflict, depression all these psychological problems are caused by stress.

Social stress

Social stress originates due to our interaction with others. Social events such as the illness or death of a family member, tensed relations or differences with the family members or friends, create social stress. Social stress is closely related to personality. For example talking to other persons, going to parties may be stressful for an introvert person. This situation may not be stressful for an extrovert person because he likes to meet peoples.

Effect of stress on psychological functioning and health

Any person faces stressful situations in some or other way in his/her life. If the stress is eustress i.e. level of stress is positive then it will be beneficial for that person. But if the level of stress goes beyond the positive stress level then it will have negative influence on an individual’s behavior and health.

A person faces many physical health related problems such as stomach disturbances, body ache, vomiting, fever etc. A person faces ill-health due to continuity and excess of stress. Stress is a major factor in many diseases such as high blood pressure, diabetes etc. Long term fatigue, lack of energy, physical weakness such symptoms etc are also felt by the person. Stress also weakens immune system. Immune system defends our body against the bacteria and viruses present in our body or entering from outside our body. These bacteria, viruses or

other such factors are termed as ‘antigens’ for the body.

Immune system consists of white blood cells or leucocytes which identifies and destroys these outer elements called antigens. Stress destroys the cells of immune system thereby harming a person’s physical health. Then the person becomes more susceptible to the infections due to bacteria and viruses. Continuous stress results in a state called ‘**Burnout**’ where a person faces many psychological and emotional problems.

Person faces mental health problems also along with the physical health problems. Such persons remain unhappy in their lives. Their temperament also changes. They remain sad, aloof, stay away from other persons and interact less with others. The person feels helpless and assumes that nobody is with him/her.

Physiological effect

Stress also results in increasing levels of some hormones secreted in our body such as adrenalin and cortisol. This result into many functional or physiological changes in the body such as increased heart rate, high blood pressure, increased metabolic rate, decreased activity of the digestive system etc. If the stress is chronic/long lasting, it causes many long term bodily damages which influence the person’s health negatively.

Human capabilities and stress

Human capabilities are studied mainly in three categories.

Cognitive

Emotional/Affective

Behavioural

Cognitive effects

Cognitive abilities are those abilities which are mainly conducted by brain. It includes, for example, thinking, memory, decision making, perception, reasoning, problem solving ability etc. If a person remains stressful for a long time, then his decision making capability, problem solving ability, perception, memory, reasoning power, thinking capability are influenced negatively. A person cannot focus on a task due to stress. The brain runs many different thoughts. Cognitive effects include lack of concentration, lack of memorising power, lack of belief in one's capabilities, negative attitude towards various life situations etc.

Emotional Effects

Emotional capabilities are related to emotions or emotional aspect of an individual's behaviour. Stress also influences the emotions of a person. Stress causes many emotional changes in a person such as restlessness, annoyance, sadness etc. It may also cause some kind of fear or a state of anxiety, depression etc. The person may feel restless, shows lack of patience and fear of failure due to stress. The person starts feeling disappointed.

Behavioural effects

Behavioural effects include negative influences on directly observable responses, such as lack of sleep, less appetite; and also includes influences on habits such as smoking, drinking, consuming drugs etc. All these habits cause serious damage to the physical and mental health of a person. These habits make the person addicted to specific things which severely harms all aspects of the person's life. Lack of sleep deteriorates the performance of a person in studies or at

workplace. The person remains absent from school, college or workplace, he/she abstains from responsibilities. Stress also negatively influences interactions with other persons hence the relationship with family and friends are also deteriorated.

Coping with stress

To save oneself from the harmful influences of stress, it is very necessary that a person effectively copes and fights with the stressful situations. Different persons use various techniques to cope with stress or to manage stress. Coping with stress can be done, usually, by the following three ways:

By Right actions

Coping of stress can be done by collecting relevant information regarding the stressful situation, and by understanding and using alternate actions to fight with stress. For example, if a student is stressful regarding his performance in the examination, then he/she can reduce stress by preparing a study time-table and following it in studies.

By controlling emotions

In this method, a person focuses on controlling negative emotions caused by stress. A person tries not to get disappointed even in stressful situations, does not allow frustration to creep in the mind, and does not allow anger or annoyance to take over his actions. By controlling the emotions, he thinks that the situation that is happening with him/her right now is a temporary phenomenon and everything will be right with time. This type of thinking leads the person towards the goal despite various problems, and hurdles against his goal.

By avoidance

Avoidance also helps a person in overlooking the seriousness/gravity of a situation. Here a person consciously represses the stressful thoughts; the person himself suppresses such thoughts deep in his mind.

Other than the methods discussed above, **Lazarus and Folkman** have also proposed two techniques to cope with stress.

Problem-focused coping

In this technique, the person analyses the stressful situation, understands its various aspects and collects relevant information to eradicate the problems. A person makes all necessary efforts that he/she can make to overcome the problems. A person's full attention is on the various alternatives available to solve the problem. Here, the person remains effortful to get rid of stressful situation and to reach the goal.

Emotion-focused coping

In this technique, a person makes fewer efforts for changing a situation or on solving the problem. Here, the individual does not allow the situations to influence him/her emotionally, thereby not allowing the negative emotions to influence him/her significantly.

Other specific techniques

Some specific techniques can also be used for the management of stress. These are as follows.

Relaxation techniques

In this technique, a person relaxes the body muscles one-by-one taking a deep breath which gives relief to the muscles of body. It also calms

the mind and lowers the body fatigue. Hence, the level of stress also decreases.

Meditation

In this technique, a person detaches oneself from outer world/situation by remaining in a meditated state or yoga. The person reaches to the lowest levels of consciousness in a meditated state giving immense peace to the person. It helps in reducing the level of stress. The person gets more clarity of thought.

Biofeedback

In the word 'Biofeedback', 'bio' means biological processes. If a person is provided information regarding the biological processes or internal physiological activities, then this technique would be called biofeedback. In this technique, a person attends to the physiological and bodily changes such as heart rate, respiration rate etc with the help of some equipments. The person tries to control stress through self control technique and tries to relate its effect with the physiological changes.

Cognitive Behavioural techniques

In this technique, the negative thoughts of a person are replaced by positive ones, which encourage the person to fight with the stressful situation.

Exercise

Regular exercise gives different physical health related benefits to a person. It improves the capacity of heart. It also increases lungs' functioning capacity. The level of fat is reduced in the body. Immune system is strengthened. If a person regularly indulges in various exercises such as swimming, running, cycling, skipping

rope etc., then it not only improves physical health but it also decreases stress.

Activity 3.2

Make a list of different symptoms of stress. Which are the symptoms that you notice in yourself? Identify its causes. Discuss with your teacher to get rid of such symptoms.

Health and Well-being

A person's health can be improved by using the techniques discussed above to control and manage stress. These techniques are not only beneficial for physical health but also for mental health. The World Health Organisation has defined health and said that health is not merely the absence of illness or disease. But health is a holistic term that includes three aspects of an individual's health i.e. physical, mental and social aspect. The World Health Organisation has given importance to well-being also. Well-being is closely related with health. Well-being includes good physical health and the tendency to be happy. If a person lives as happy and satisfied person, he/she shows well-being. A person can be happy only when he is physically healthy, with no negativity in mind, no disappointment or fear, and is able to live life happily in society; the family, friends and others. If a person learns to cope with factors causing stress by adjusting with the changing life situations, he can enjoy well-being in his life.

Important Points

- Many changes take place in our lives. A person has to respond to these changes. Some changes directly influence the well-being of a person

- We have our own ways of coping with stressful situations. Some people are successful in coping with stress whereas some people fail to cope with it.
- Stress refers to all those physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioural changes that occur as a result of different difficult and challenging situations which influence all the aspects of an individual's behavior.
- The factors that create stress are known as stressors. Stressors are those events which create stress in us.
- Stress is mainly of two types; Positive stress which is also known as Eustress and Negative stress which is also known as distress. The other types of stress are physical and environmental stress, psychological stress and social stress.
- Stress also influences a person's health significantly. A person faces both physical and mental health related problems. Stress weakens immune system. Stress also results in increasing levels of some hormones secreted in our body such as adrenalin and cortisol.
- Effect on cognitive abilities : If a person remains stressful for long time, then his decision making capability, problem solving ability, perception, memory, reasoning power, thinking capability are influenced negatively.
- Behavioural effects include negative influences on directly observable responses such as lack of sleep, less appetite, and leads to habits such as smoking, drinking, consuming drugs etc.

- Stress causes many emotional changes in a person such as hurriedness, annoyance, sadness etc. It may also cause fear or a state of anxiety, depression etc.
- To save oneself from the harmful influences of stress, it is very necessary that a person effectively copes and fights with the stressful situations. This can be done by taking right actions, by controlling emotions, and by avoidance.
- Lazarus and Folkman have also proposed two techniques to cope with stress: Problem-focused coping and Emotion focused coping.
- The other techniques to cope with stress include relaxation technique, meditation, biofeedback, cognitive behavioural technique and exercise etc.

Practice Questions

Multiple Choice Questions

1. Positive stress is called:
 - A. Stress
 - B. Eustress
 - C. Distress
 - D. Both B and C
2. Which of the following is an emotional effect caused due to stress?
 - A. Nausea
 - B. Fever
 - C. Fear in mind
 - D. Smoking
3. Which aspect of an individual is influenced due to stress?
 - A. Cognitive
 - B. Emotional
 - C. Behavioural

- D. All of the above
4. Which techniques of coping with stress has been proposed by Lazarus and Folkman?
 - A. Problem-focused
 - B. Emotion-focused
 - C. Biofeedback
 - D. Both A and B
 5. Which of the technique is useful in coping with stress?
 - A. Exercise
 - B. Meditation
 - C. Relaxation
 - D. All of the above

Short-Answer Questions

1. What is stress?
2. What are stressors?
3. What is Burnout?
4. Differentiate between eustress and distress.
5. Which aspects of a person are influenced by stress?
6. How problem-focused technique works in coping with stress?
7. What is biofeedback?
8. What is the effect of stress on immune system of the body?
9. What are the causes of stress?
10. What do you understand by social stress?

Long-Answer Questions

1. What is stress? Explain the types of stress with examples.
2. Explain the physiological effects of stress.
3. Explain the effect of stress of human capabilities.

4. Explain various techniques to cope with stress.
5. Discuss the relationship of health and well-being.

Answers to Multiple-Choice Questions

1. B 2. C 3. D 4. D 5. D