




De-Stress Yourself

You all know I have terminal cancer-and I have a lot of it. But what you may not know is that stress induces its spread and induces its activity. Stress may even bring it on. Yet stress is the fuel of the activist. - **Tom McCall**



Stress Short for Distress

☛ Mental Stress

- Problems at work, school exams, high-pressure situations, worry

☛ Emotional Stress

- Difficult relationships, marriage, children, grief, resentment, past hurts that are unforgiven

☛ Physical Stress

- Injury, surgery, medical procedures, poor digestion, malnutrition, dehydration, insufficient rest, illness

More Stresses

Environmental Stress

- air pollution, pesticides, food additives, preservatives, toxic chemicals, computer electro-magnetic frequencies

Spiritual Stress

- Unrest in beliefs, over-commitment, unfulfilled dreams, not knowing why you exist, lack of purpose

Are any of these stresses a part of your life?

Be aware that each one has an impact on the state of your overall health.

Overview

- ✓ Understanding Stress
- ✓ Causes of Stress
- ✓ Types of Stress
- ✓ Building Defenses
- ✓ Stress Remedies
 - Think stress away
 - Relaxation Techniques
 - Ultimate Solution

Excerpts from
www.mindtools.com/stress

Defining Stress

- Stress is a shortened form of the word “distress”
- physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension
- *Physiology.* a specific response by the body to a stimulus, as fear or pain, that disturbs or interferes with the normal physiological equilibrium of an organism
- Difficult to define because people experience stress differently.

Not Necessarily Bad (circa 1956)

- Depends on how you take it
- Stress from exhilarating, creative and successful work can be beneficial
- Stress from failure, humiliation, or fear can be detrimental
- The biochemical effects of stress are experienced regardless of whether the situation is positive or not.

Modern Approach to Stress

- **Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize**
- **Effect depends on the person's perception of a situation and their real ability to cope with it**

Types of Stress

- ✓ Fight or Flight
 - Short-term
 - Basic Survival Instinct
- ✓ General Adaptation Syndrome
 - Long-term
 - Consistent exposure to stress
- ✓ Thought and Interpretation
 - The way we think
 - The way we interpret



Fight or Flight



- When an animal experiences shock or perceives a threat, hormones (mainly adrenaline) are quickly released to help it survive
 - Run faster and harder, longer
 - Increase heart rate and blood pressure
 - Delivers more oxygen and blood sugar to important muscles
 - Blood goes from skin to internal organs
 - Attention is focused on threat to exclusion of all else

Based on early work on stress by Walter Cannon, 1932

Fight or Flight

☞ Power, but little control

- Mobilization of body power for survival has consequences
 - Excitable
 - Anxious and Jumpy
 - Irritable with a reduced ability to work with others
 - Accident prone
 - Less able to make good decisions

Fight or Flight

- Adrenaline hormones can also be released in response to being frustrated or interrupted or challenged or uncomfortable
- If fight or flight becomes part of every day life, hormones are eventually depleted causing adrenal fatigue

General Adaptation

- When pushed to extremes, animals react in three stages
 - Alarm Phase
 - Initial reaction to stressor
 - Resistance Phase
 - Increased resistance as animal adapted or coped with stress
 - Exhaustion Phase
 - Resistance declines substantially



Based on stress experiments by Hans Selye, 1974

Adaptation and Burnout

- In business, the exhaustion phase is known as burnout
 - Wall Street trading floor example
 - First experiences on the floor are stressful and do not get great returns
 - Adaptation to the stress allows good decisions and high returns, but requires high energy
 - Exhaustion sets in and motivation drops, resulting in fewer good returns

Thought and Interpretation

☞ Stress is subtle

- Work overload
- Conflicting priorities
- Inconsistent values
- Conflict with co-workers or family
- Unpleasant environments or situations

☞ Mental effort is diverted to handle the stress, reducing performance, and creating unhappiness

A Matter of Judgment

- ☞ To become stressed, you must
 - Feel threatened by the situation
 - Doubt your capability and resources are sufficient to meet the threat
- ☞ Perceived threat is rarely physical
 - Threat to social standing or other people's opinion of us
 - Career prospects
 - Deeply held values
 - Trigger response from past threat

A Matter of Judgment

- How stressed someone feels depends on how much damage they think the situation can do them and how closely their resources meet the demands of the situation
- One thought can have multiple interpretations
- Each interpretation can have either a more positive or negative impact

Putting 3 Together

- ☛ Fight or Flight is the same as the Alarm Phase
- ☛ Mental response through thought and interpretation triggers the same physiological reaction as fight or flight and the Alarm Phase
- ☛ All three can create one response
 - Negative consequences occur

Stress and Health

Behavioral Effects of Stress

- Under pressure, people tend to drink or smoke or get immediate chemical relief
- May not exercise or eat well
- Reduction in sleep and quality of rest
- Rarely make preventative health appointments (i.e. dental, yearly exams)

Physiological Effects of Stress

Heart disease

- Raised heart rate
- Higher blood pressure
- Tension on arteries leads to damage
- Damage can create scar tissue, which thickens artery walls reducing the supply of blood and oxygen to the heart
- When real physical threat occurs, higher likelihood of a heart attack



Physiological Effects of Stress

- ☞ Damaged immune system
- ☞ Intensify symptoms in autoimmune diseases like arthritis
- ☞ Headaches (pain)
- ☞ Intestinal discomfort or malfunction
 - Bowels programmed to shut down
- ☞ Links to cancer
- ☞ Mental health problems
 - Anxiety
 - Depression
- ☞ Reduced libido
- ☞ Fatigue
 - Fibromyalsia
 - Chronic Fatigue Syndrome

Take stress seriously!!!

Stress and Performance

Pressure can be positive

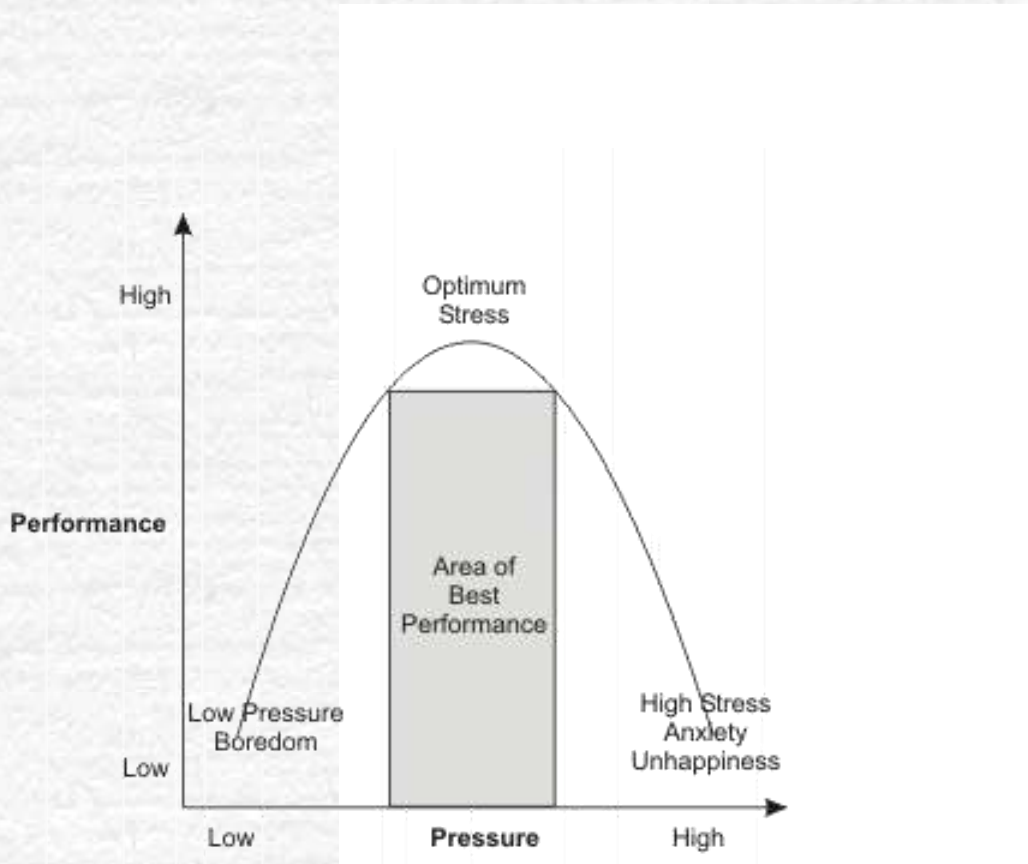
- To win a race
- Accomplish an important goal



Negative pressure

- Social inter-relationships are too complex not to be damaged by an aggressive approach
- Passive or withdrawn response to stress means we may fail to assert our rights

Pressure and Performance



The Inverted-U relationship between pressure and performance

- Expressed in the “Inverted-U” diagram for stress management
 - As pressure increases, we enter the area of best performance
 - Mind gets crowded with too much pressure and performance suffers

Stress and Performance

- Stress reduces people's ability to deal with large amounts of information
- Decision-making and creativity are impaired
- Stressed people will persist in a course of action even when better alternatives are available
- Anxious people need less pressure
- Calm people may need more pressure

Entering a State of “Flow”

- When in the area of best performance
 - You are in a **state of flow** when you are *“being completely involved in an activity for its own sake. The ego falls away. Time flies. Every action, movement, and thought follows inevitably from the previous one, like playing jazz. Your whole being is involved, and you’re using your skills to the utmost.”* - Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, Chicago University

Getting into the Flow

- ✓ Create opportunities for periods of deep concentration
 - Work from home
 - Set aside parts of the day for quiet
 - Delegate activities
 - Implement stress management techniques

3 Stress Management Approaches

☞ Action-oriented

- Seek to confront the problem causing stress, changing the environment or situation

☞ Emotionally-oriented

- Do not have power to change the situation, so we change our interpretation of the situation and the way we feel about it

☞ Acceptance-oriented

- We have no power or emotional control, so we focus on surviving the stress

Action-Oriented Approach

- ☞ Gather data
- ☞ Formulate a plan
- ☞ Implement the plan
- ☞ Evaluate the progress
- ☞ Adjust as needed

☞ Helpful Articles on mindtools.com

- Coping with Work Overload
- Survive Stress of Problem Jobs
- Deal with Problem People
- Manage Environmental Stress
- Manage Performance Stress
- Avoid Burnout

Emotionally-oriented Approach

- Less attractive than action-oriented
- Without power to affect external change, you must change internally
- Learn about emotions
- Heal your emotions
- You cannot control feelings, but you can control the emotions (actions based on feelings)

Acceptance-Oriented Approach

- So little power for change, survival is the only option
- First stage involves accepting lack of power
- Build buffers against stress
- Employ relaxation techniques
- Do whatever you must to survive the situation with minimal negative impact on yourself (your health)

Building Defenses Against Stress

- Identify your stressors
- Adopt a healthy lifestyle
- Exercise
- Develop a support network
- Balance work and personal endeavors
- Rest, relaxation, and sleep
- Manage chemical stress
- Minimize environmental stress
- Participate in enjoyable pastimes

Combat Environmental Stress

- ✓ Enough privacy
- ✓ Furniture is comfortable
- ✓ Space is well lit (not too bright or direct)
- ✓ Air quality is good (without pollutants)
- ✓ Reduction of clutter
- ✓ House
- ✓ Car
- ✓ Work
- ✓ Hobby space
- ✓ Restaurants
- ✓ *If it isn't right, change it or leave!*

Combat Chemical Stress

- ✎ Eliminate chemicals from your life as much as possible
- ✎ Purify what you put into or on your body
 - Water, food, air, lotion, shampoo, sunscreen, soap
- ✎ Use non-harmful elements for cleaning
 - Aromatherapy oils
 - Simple soaps
 - “Seventh Generation” products
- ✎ Detox your body of chemicals

Relaxation Techniques

- Imagery for Mental Stress Reduction
- Meditation
- Self-Hypnosis
- Music
- Physical Relaxation
- Yoga
- Relaxation Response
- Deep breathing
- Biofeedback equipment
- Being around calm, positive people
- Prayer

Imagery

- ☞ With imagery, you substitute actual experience with scenes from your imagination. Your body reacts to these imagined scenes almost as if they were real.
 - Beach, mountains, sanctuary
- ☞ To relax with imagery, imagine a warm, comfortable, safe and pleasant place, and enjoy it in your imagination.
- ☞ Imagery can be shown to work by using biofeedback devices that measure body stress. By imagining pleasant and unpleasant scenes, you can actually see or hear the changing levels of stress in your body change.

Meditation

➤ Sustained concentration

- Start by relaxing muscles in the feet and working your way up (tense, then relax)
- Focus on an object, sound, words, verse, or image – clear the mind of all else
- Focus on breathing (deep and slow)
 - Consider counting the breaths
- Ten or twenty minutes should do it

Self-Hypnosis

- Often uses affirmations (positive rational thinking to counter stress)
- Let waves of relaxation wash down over your body
- Make suggestions
 - I am feeling comfortable and relaxed.
 - I am becoming more relaxed and more comfortable
 - Use the prepared affirmations
- OR Listen to therapeutic hypnosis recordings

Music

- Listen to relaxing music while you relax
- Relaxationtapesmusic.com (store)
- Relaxation.clara.net (reviews and links to stores)
- Classical, Indian pipes, whatever strikes a chord of relaxation within you

Ultimate Stress Solutions

Prayer

- If stress is about being unable to handle what life throws at you, connect with the One who has the power to handle it all

Choice

- Accept responsibility for the construct that is your life
- You created it, so you can change it.