The Nature of Stress

“I cannot and should not be cured of my stress, but merely taught to enjoy it.” —Hans Selye

The Nature of Stress

• Around 1960 Hans Selye proposed that stress is part of the human condition

• About 1990 the World Health Organization calls stress “a global epidemic”

• By the turn of the 21st century, stress has clearly become a way of life, although not necessarily a good one

The Nature of 21st Century Stress

• A 24-7 society where everything and everyone is accessible all the time
• The rapid rate of change, from technology to economics to family dynamics
• Growing threat of terrorism, global warming, other changing world dynamics
• Greater responsibilities and seemingly less freedom
• The number of stressors in our lives appears to be increasing
• The amount of leisure time appears to be decreasing

A Question of Poor Boundaries

• Poor boundaries are a big issue that tend to undermine our lives
• People have poor boundaries, thus adding fuel to the stress fire
• Boundaries between work and home
• Boundaries between technology and privacy
• Financial boundaries (massive credit card debt)
• Poor boundaries with television, Internet, food, relationships, etc.

A Question of Poor Boundaries (continued)

• Poor boundaries tend to be violated (making you feel like you are being walked over), hence making you feel victimized; another way to describe stress.
• As the saying goes: Once a victim, twice a volunteer. Learn from your experiences and strengthen you personal boundaries as needed so you don’t fall prey to “victim consciousness.”

The Nature of 21st Century Stress II
• Research now indicates a solid link between lifestyles and stress-related disease.

• As much as 70–85% of all disease and illness is stress-related, from the common cold to cancer, from herpes to hemorrhoids.

The Many Faces of Stress
• Because of the combinations of stressors, one’s personality, and one’s life experiences, stress becomes a complicated phenomenon. Despite these factors, the many means to cope with stress offer strategies for all these factors.

Popular Views of Stress
• Eastern philosophies have viewed stress as “an absence of inner peace.”

• Western culture has more recently viewed stress as “a loss of control.”

• It is also viewed as an inability to cope with problems.

Definitions of Stress
• Definitions of stress are often based on various disciplines of study (e.g., psychology, physiology, sociology, anthropology, theology, etc.)

• Consequently there are many different definitions of stress (e.g., loss of emotional control, wear and tear on the body, an inability to cope, an absence of inner peace)

Richard Lazarus’ View of Stress
• Stress is a state of anxiety produced when events and responsibilities exceed one’s coping abilities.

Hans Selye’s View of Stress
• Stress is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand placed upon it to adapt, whether that demand produces pleasure or pain.

A Holistic Medicine View of Stress
• Stress is the inability to cope with a perceived or real (or imagined) threat to one’s mental, physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being, which results in a series of physiological responses and adaptations.

The Stress Response
(Fight-or-Flight Response)
• Introduced by Walter Cannon in 1914
• A survival instinct to fight or run
• Meant for physical stressors (e.g., running from a burning building)
• It appears not to be meant for non-physical stressors such as never-ending traffic, unruly mother-in-laws or the roommate from hell

The Stress Response
(Fight-or-Flight Response)
(continued)
• Arousal also happens for nonphysical stressors (mental, emotional, and spiritual).
• No matter if the threat is real (car accident) or perceived (a noise at night), the stress response occurs.
• The stress response occurs in proportion to the perceived danger.

Stages of the Stress Response
• Stage 1: Stimuli received by brain through one or more of five senses.
• Stage 2: Brain deciphers stimuli (either a threat or as a non-threat)
• Stage 3: Body stays aroused until threat is over.
• Stage 4: Body returns to homeostasis once the threat is gone.
Symptoms of Fight or Flight

• Increased heart rate
• Increased blood rate
• Increased ventilation
• Vasodilatation of arteries to body’s periphery (arm and legs)
• Increased serum glucose levels

Symptoms of Fight or Flight (continued)

• Increased free fatty acid mobilization
• Increased blood coagulation and decreased clotting
• Increased muscular strength
• Decreased gastric movement
• Increased perspiration to cool body core temperature

Tend and Befriend Theory

• Theory introduced by Shelly Taylor and colleagues in 2000
• Women have a second stress response: Connectedness (an effective coping skill)
• Taylor believes it is hardwired into women’s DNA, and revealed through hormones
• It has also been referred to as “nest and nurture”
• Women still will fight or flee, if need be

Stress and Insomnia

• Estimates suggest that over 60% of Americans are sleep deprived.

• Emotional stress is thought to be the primary cause of insomnia.

• “Sleep stealers” also include menopause, jet lag, caffeine, shift work, meds, repeated cell phone use.

Stress and Insomnia (continued)

Improved “sleep hygiene” habits include:

• Meditation
• Minimize/avoid caffeine after 6:00 p.m.
• Engage in a regular fitness program
• Keep a regular sleep cycle
Stress and Insomnia
(continued)
Improved “sleep hygiene” habits include:
• Create and maintain a sleep-friendly environment (e.g., room temperature and darkness).
• Avoid watching television before bedtime.
• Minimize/avoid evening cell phone use.

Stress and Insomnia
(continued)
Remember this:
Sleep is not recognized as an effective relaxation technique due to the procession of unconscious thoughts (dreams) that can trigger the stress response while sleeping.

Three Types of Stress
• Eustress: good stress (e.g., falling in love)
• Neustress: neutral stress (e.g., earthquake in remote corner of world)
• Distress: bad stress (e.g., death of a close friend); acute stress (high intensity, short duration); chronic stress* (low intensity, prolonged time)

* Seems to cause the most problems with disease and illness

Three Types of Stressors
1. Bio-ecological Influences
   (e.g., solar flares, SAD)
2. Psychointrapersonal Influences
   (e.g., relationships, self-esteem, ego, etc.)
3. Social Influences
   (e.g., urban sprawl, traffic, politics, etc.)

Stress in a Changing World
• Technostress
• College Stress
• Occupational Stress
• Seniors: The Stress of Aging

Stress in a Changing World (continued)

Technostress
• Poor boundaries
• Privacy issues
• Ethical issues
• Compromised family time
• Computer dating?
• Outdated software

Stress in a Changing World (continued)

College Stress
• Living conditions (roommate “from hell”)
• Professional pursuits
• Academic deadlines
• Financial problems (loans)
• Lifestyle behaviors
• Sexuality/intimacy issues

Stress in a Changing World (continued)

Occupational Stress
• Commuting/traffic
• Working conditions (The boss “from hell”)
• Clients/customers “from hell”
• Lack of good benefits
• Lack of employer loyalty
• Job security issues

Stress in a Changing World (continued)

Stress and the Retired Population
• Financial security issues
• Social support issues
• Health issues
• Medicare, Social Security issues
• Raising grandkids

Wellness Paradigm
Wellness Paradigm (continued)

• The integration, balance, and harmony of the mind, body, spirit, and emotions for optimal well-being, where the whole is considered greater than the sum of the parts.

One Approach to the Wellness Paradigm

A Holistic Approach to Stress Management

• To deal effectively with stress, all areas must be addressed equally to integrate, balance, and give harmony for optimal well-being

An Effective Holistic Approach to Stress Management Includes:

• Physical well-being, the ability of all the body’s physiological systems to function optimally
• Mental well-being, ability to gather, process, recall, and communicate information

An Effective Holistic Approach to Stress Management (continued)

• Emotional well-being, ability to recognize, feel, and control the entire range of human emotions
• Spiritual well-being, the evolution of higher consciousness through relationships, values, and purpose in life

What Is Holistic Stress Management?

• To live in the present moment
• To integrate, balance, and harmonize all aspects of mind, body, spirit, and emotions
• To move from a motivation of fear to a motivation of love/compassion
• To unite the conscious and unconscious minds
• To balance the power of ego with the purpose of soul
“If you’re looking for fast acting relief, try slowing down.”

—Lily Tomlin