

# The Nature of Stress

KIN/HS 169

*“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 21<sup>st</sup> 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 your personal boundaries as needed so you don't fall prey to "victim consciousness."

### The Nature of 21<sup>st</sup> 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