Definition Of Health And Stress, Stress Management

Understanding Health and Stress

Health is defined by the World Health Organization (WHO) as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, not merely the absence of disease or infirmity. (Melissa Conrad Stoppler, n.d.). Stress can be viewed as a physical, mental, or emotional influence that results in bodily or mental tension. Stress can be induced by external factors such as one's environment, psychological state or varied social situations. Stress may also be internal: one's health. It is common for stress to prepare the body for a 'fight or flight' response associated with the release of the hormone adrenaline and also cause one to seek out social interactions and close connections with other people associated with the effects of oxytocin; this is because human beings are social beings by nature and tend to draw towards others in times of need.

Stress Levels: Can Some Stress Be Good?

It appears to be a common misconception that all stress is bad and stressful situations are always negative; however, this is not a complete view of stress and it is important that people change their minds on how they view stress to aid their effectiveness in these stressful situations, as expressed by Kelly McGonigal in her TED Talk: "How to Make Stress Your Friend".

Stress, to a great extent, is a normal part of everyday life and the human body is uniquely designed to respond and adapt to these changes that come with stress. Positive stress ("eustress") is the kind of stress associated with greater responsibility such as getting a new job or raising a new family; keeping us alert and ready to avoid danger and generally improving our effectiveness in handling these situations by enhancing our awareness of these situations. Adversely, stress becomes negative ('distress') when a person faces nonstop challenges without relief or breaks between challenges (Jennifer Robinson, 2017). The resultant effect of this is that a person becomes overworked and stress-related tension builds. (Jennifer Robinson, 2017). Most people recognize stress only as "distress".

Stressors: What Are the Major Causes of Stress?

Stressors are events or conditions in your surroundings that may trigger stress. (Staff, 2019). Stressors are usually events or external environments that a person perceives to be demanding, challenging or a threat to one's safety and comfort. Stressors may either be external or internal.

The most common external stressors can be found at home, the workplace, school settings and social situations. They may be positive or negative. One's immediate environment plays a key role and it is vital to note how we respond to our environment and understand the effect it has on us in order to make appropriate adjustments if required. Most people have difficulty adapting to new conditions and as such, unplanned events serve as a major stressor, as well as impending deadlines, huge workloads and demanding superiors in the workplace or academic setting. Relationships often act as a source of stress as well.

Internal stressors are induced from within the individuals and are highlighted by how our fears, uncertainties and beliefs may shape our experiences such that a continued pessimistic state leads to negative stress if left unchecked.

Other stressors may include health, finances, legal struggles, etc. It is important to be able to identify one's stressors for effective stress management.

Effects of Negative Stress

The effects of negative stress can be grouped into major categories: physical, emotional, mental and symptoms which influence behavioural patterns.

Physical effects of negative stress include chest pain and heart palpitations, insomnia, headaches, aches and tense muscles, high blood pressure, rapid weight gain/loss and hair loss.

Negative stress also has emotional implications such as mood swings, becoming easily agitated and frustrated and constantly feeling like one has no control. Negative stress is also affiliated with self-image issues such as low self-esteem and feelings of worthlessness. High stress levels may lead to anxiety and depression.

The mental/cognitive expressions associated with negative stress may include inability to focus, constant worrying, pessimism, forgetfulness and disorganization and poor judgement. (Casarella, 2019)

Due to these effects people may exhibit more nervous behaviours, avoid responsibilities and may turn to drugs and alcohol to cope with the stress (these are destructive ways of managing stress).

Effective Stress Management

The Four A's of stress management

1. Avoid unnecessary stress
2. Alter the situation
3. Adapt to the stressor
4. Accept the things you cannot change (Robinson, Melinda Smith, & Robert Segal, 2019)

Healthy stress management involves keeping a positive attitude and accepting that there are things beyond one's control. It is also important to be assertive as opposed to being aggressive or passive in expressing oneself. In terms of addressing the physical symptoms, relaxation techniques such as mediation and yoga yield positive results; as well as regular exercise to equip the body better to reduce the physical damage of negative stress. Improved eating habits and better time management also generally improve an individual's effectiveness. (Smitha Bhandari, 2018). Understand personal limits and decline requests that are overly demanding.

It is imperative to avoid destructive coping mechanisms and seek for healthier practices and social support.

Effective stress management helps to break the hold of stress to lead a happier, healthier, and overall more productive life. (Robinson, Melinda Smith, & Robert Segal, 2019) The ultimate goal is a balanced life, with enough time for work, relationships and leisure. Effective stress management makes it possible to achieve set goals in a healthy and relaxed state, only giving in to the effects of positive stress that drives one to action.

References

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