



An Overview of Techniques to Combat Stress for Personal and Workplace Well-Being

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ABSTRACT

Stress and stress management are directly related to personal well-being and specifically to workplace well-being. Managing stress is all about taking charge: of the thoughts, emotions, schedule, and the way we deal with problems.

Stress in the workplace reduces productivity, increases management pressures, and makes people ill in many ways, evidence of which is still increasing. Workplace stress affects the performance of the brain, including functions of work performance, memory, concentration, and learning. This paper tries to explore various stress management techniques which would enhance the personal and workplace well-being of individuals. These tips would not certainly change the situation causing the stress, but they will, more importantly, enable to change the reactions and relationships to the stressful situations.

KEYWORDS : Stress, workplace, stress management

INTRODUCTION

Stress management refers to a wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's levels of stress, especially chronic stress, usually for the purpose of improving everyday functioning. In this context, the term 'stress' refers only to a stress with significant negative consequences, or distress rather than eustress, a stress whose consequences are helpful or otherwise positive.

Stress produces numerous symptoms which vary according to persons, situations, and severity. These can include physical health decline as well as depression. The process of stress management is named as one of the keys to a happy and successful life in modern society. Although life provides numerous demands that can prove difficult to handle, stress management provides a number of ways to manage anxiety and maintain overall well-being.

Despite stress often being thought of as a subjective experience, levels of stress are readily measurable using various physiological tests, similar to those used in polygraphs. Many practical stress management techniques are available, some for use by health practitioners and others for self-help, which may help an individual to reduce stress, provide positive feelings of being in control of one's life and promote general well-being.

The effectiveness of the different stress management techniques can be difficult to assess. Consequently, the amount and quality of evidence for the various techniques varies widely. Some are accepted as effective treatments for use in psychotherapy, while others with less evidence favoring them are considered alternative therapies. Many professional organizations exist to promote and provide training in conventional or alternative therapies.

There are several models of stress management, each with distinctive explanations of mechanisms for controlling stress. Much more research is necessary to provide a better understanding of which mechanisms actually operate and are effective in practice.

SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Stress symptoms include mental, social, and physical manifestations. These include exhaustion, loss of/increased appetite, headaches, crying, sleeplessness, and oversleeping. Escape through alcohol, drugs, or other compulsive behavior are often indications. Feelings of alarm, frustration, or apathy may accompany stress.

Stress hits all in life, and while a little stress is good — it keeps us focused and motivated — too much of it and it can grind our lives to a complete halt. Just as bad are unhealthy coping methods to deal with stress. Turning to food, alcohol or drugs often just turns one set of prob-

lems into another that can balloon out of control. It's better to avoid those unhealthy coping mechanisms from the start, and find good ways to keep stress under control.

Short-term (acute) stress is usually caused by a temporary situation or emotion that can be resolved quickly. Although the stressful feelings can be very intense, they usually disappear after a short time.

Long-term (chronic) stress is constant, relentless pressure that can last for months or years. Many situations or conditions can cause chronic stress. Type A personalities or high-pressure lifestyles can be major factors in causing chronic stress. Some people get so used to the stress that they can't even recognize it anymore. Chronic stress predisposes people to higher risks of depression, mental illness, high blood pressure and various other medical conditions.

Stress can be managed by identifying the sources, recognizing the reactions to the stress and changing the behavior. Taking stress management classes or rescheduling the work and personal lives can reduce stress. Having a supportive network of friends, family and professionals can also be useful in helping to reduce stress.

The reactions and behavior resulting from stress should be identified and understood. It is so important to recognize own stress profile and to understand our body, mind and reactions to stress. The body reacts in certain physical ways to stress, for example, symptoms like stomach pain, rapid heartbeat, muscle tension; indigestion, vomiting and headaches are common complaints.

The major stressors causing the problems are also to be identified. Knowing the stressors will help to find ways to manage stress. Feeling helpless is a sign of chronic stress. The feeling of overwhelming and fatigue, if left unchecked leads to depression. Hence ways to eliminate the stressors would help to cope with depression.

MANAGING STRESS

Changing the response to stress is also a powerful tool for managing stress. Having realistic expectations and understanding what an individual can and can't do will help let go of stressful ways of thinking and change their response to stress. Organization and planning ahead of time are ways to help manage stress. Flexibility and patience are keys to reducing stress. Also, putting everything in perspective will help to reduce anxiety and stress.

Stress can be reduced by incorporating physical activity such as exercising, walking, stretching and breathing techniques into the daily schedule. Learning relaxation techniques such as deep breathing will also increase the quality of life and be a helpful tool in managing stress

by relieving tension and calming the mind to feel more centered and focused. Taking time for oneself or a vacation is important for the mind, body and spirit. Time should be allotted for rest and recreation. Humor is a great form of therapy to reduce stress and decrease the risk of illness and disease.

***Autogenic training** is a relaxation technique developed by the German psychiatrist Johannes Heinrich Schultz and first published in 1932. The technique involves the daily practice of sessions that last around 15 minutes, usually in the morning, at lunch time, and in the evening. During each session, the practitioner will repeat a set of visualizations that induce a state of relaxation. Each session can be practiced in a position chosen amongst a set of recommended postures (for example, lying down, sitting meditation, sitting like a rag doll). The technique can be used to alleviate many stress-induced psychosomatic disorders.

***Cognitive therapy (CT)** is a type of psychotherapy developed by American psychiatrist Aaron T. Beck. CT is one of the therapeutic approaches within the larger group of cognitive behavioral therapies (CBT) and was first expounded by Beck in the 1960s. Cognitive therapy seeks to help the patient overcome difficulties by identifying and changing dysfunctional thinking, behavior, and emotional responses. This involves helping patients develop skills for modifying beliefs, identifying distorted thinking, relating to others in different ways, and changing behaviors.

Treatment is based on collaboration between patient and therapist and on testing beliefs. Therapy may consist of testing the assumptions which one makes and identifying how certain of one's usually unquestioned thoughts are distorted, unrealistic and unhelpful. Once those thoughts have been challenged, one's feelings about the subject matter of those thoughts are more easily subject to change. Beck initially focused on depression and developed a list of "errors" in thinking that he proposed could maintain depression, including arbitrary inference, selective abstraction, over-generalization, and magnification (of negatives) and minimization (of positives).

***Conflict resolution** is conceptualized as the methods and processes involved in facilitating the peaceful ending of conflict. Often, committed group members attempt to resolve group conflicts by actively communicating information about their conflicting motives or ideologies to the rest of the group (e.g., intentions; reasons for holding certain beliefs), and by engaging in collective negotiation. Ultimately, a wide range of methods and procedures for addressing conflict exist, including but not limited to, negotiation, mediation, diplomacy, and creative peace building. It may also be used interchangeably with dispute resolution, where arbitration and litigation processes are critically involved.

***Yoga nidra** or "yogi sleeps" is a sleep-like state which yogis report to experience during their meditations. The practice of yoga relaxation has been found to reduce tension and anxiety. The autonomic symptoms of high anxiety such as headache, giddiness, chest pain, palpitations, and sweating, abdominal pain respond well. Yoga nidra refers to the conscious awareness of the deep sleep state, referred to as "prajna" in Mandukya Upanishad.

***Nootropics**, also referred to as smart drugs, memory enhancers, neuro enhancers, cognitive enhancers, and intelligence enhancers, are drugs, supplements, nutraceuticals, and functional foods that improve mental functions such as cognition, memory, intelligence, motivation, attention, and concentration.

*** Biofeedback** is one method of learning to achieve relaxation, control stress responses, or modify the body's reactions through the use of monitoring equipment that provides information from the body which would normally not be available. This method is based upon the principle first advanced in the early 1960s that the autonomic nervous system (the part we don't consciously use) is trainable. Biofeedback is used by many practitioners for a variety of psychological and physical conditions. Because the technique involves the use of measuring devices, it can only be performed by a professional.

*** Imagery:** Imagery is the use of pleasant or relaxing images to calm the mind and body. By controlling breathing and visualizing a soothing

image, a state of deep relaxation can occur. This method can be learned by anyone and is relatively easy to try out.

*** Meditation techniques:** Ranging from practices associated with specific religions or beliefs to methods focusing purely on physical relaxation, meditation is one of the most popular techniques to achieve physical and mental relaxation. There are thousands of different types of meditation, and many can be learned on your own. The meditative state is one in which there is a deep centering and focusing upon the core of one's being; there is a quieting of the mind, emotions, and body.

*** Anger management:** is simply an aspect of managing stress, since anger in the workplace is a symptom of stress. Anger is often stress in denial, and as such is best approached via one-to-one counseling. Training courses can convey anger management and stress reduction theory and ideas, but one-to-one counseling is necessary to turn theory into practice. Management of anger (and any other unreasonable emotional behaviour for that matter) and the stress that causes it, can only be improved if the person wants to change - acceptance, cognitive, commitment - so awareness is the first requirement.

*** Transcendental meditation (TM).** TM has the goal of achieving transcendental consciousness (the simplest form of awareness). It is practiced for 15-20 minutes in the mornings and evenings and is relatively easy to learn. Numerous classes and teaching materials are available for beginners.

Another variant of a meditation technique has gained popularity in the U.S. since its description in the 1970s by Harvard physician Herbert Benson. This technique involves generation of the so-called **relaxation response** through the repetition of a word or phrase while quietly seated, 10-20 minutes per day. Designed to evoke the opposite bodily reaction to the stress response (or "fight or flight" reaction), this method carries no religious or spiritual overtones. Its value has been documented in the reduction of blood pressure and other bodily stress responses. Like other forms of meditation, it can be learned on one's own, but time and practice are required to elicit the desired relaxation state.

*** Progressive muscle relaxation:** Progressive muscle relaxation is a method developed in the 1930s in which muscle groups are tightened and then relaxed in succession. This method is based upon the idea that mental relaxation will be a natural outcome of physical relaxation. Although muscle activity is involved, this technique requires no special skills or conditioning, and it can be learned by almost anyone. Progressive muscle relaxation is generally practiced for 10-20 minutes a day. As with the relaxation response, practice and patience are required for maximum benefits.

*** Qigong:** The martial art qigong is an ancient Chinese health-care system that combines physical training (such as isometrics, isotonic, and aerobic conditioning) with Eastern philosophy and relaxation techniques. Some forms are practiced while standing, sitting, or lying down; others involve structured movements or massage. Over Learning qigong involves time, commitment, patience, and determination, and learning from a master or group is advisable.

*** Yoga:** There are many forms of yoga. It is an ancient Indian form of exercise based upon the premise that the body and breathing are connected with the mind. The practice of yoga is thought to be over 5,000 years old. One goal of yoga is to restore balance and harmony to the body and emotions through numerous postural and breathing exercises. Yoga, which means "joining" or "union" in Sanskrit, has been called the "search for the soul" and the "union between the individual and the divine." Among the benefits of yoga are increased flexibility and capability for relaxation.

*** Tai chi:** Like qigong, tai chi is a Chinese martial art. It has been termed a kind of "meditation in motion" and is characterized by soft, flowing movements that stress precision and force. Also known as tai chi chuan, this method is thousands of years old. As with qigong, training from a master is necessary to learn the art of tai chi.

*** Relaxation technique** (also known as **relaxation training**) is any method, process, procedure, or activity that helps a person to relax; to attain a state of increased calmness; or otherwise reduce levels of

anxiety, stress or anger. Relaxation techniques are often employed as one element of a wider stress management program and can decrease muscle tension, lower the blood pressure and slow heart and breathe rates, among other health benefits.

***Spa** is associated with water treatment which is also known as balneotherapy. Spa towns or spa resorts (including hot springs resorts) typically offer various health treatments. The belief in the curative powers of mineral waters goes back to prehistoric times. Such practices have been popular worldwide, but are especially widespread in Europe and Japan. Day spas are also quite popular, and offer various personal care treatments.

* **Somatics** is a field which employs holistic body-centered approaches to assist people in integrating and transforming self through movement and awareness practices intended to promote psycho-physical well-being. The field contains distinct disciplines, each with its own educational and/or therapeutic emphasis, principles, methods, psychology and techniques.

The term is derived from the word "Somatic" (Greek "somatic", soma: "living, aware, bodily person") which means, pertaining to the body, experienced and regulated from within. The concept of soma posits that neither body nor mind is separate from the other; both are part of a living process. A fundamental principle is that growth, change, and transformation are always possible at any age.

A **stress ball** is a malleable toy, usually not more than 7 cm in diameter. It is squeezed in the hand and manipulated by the fingers, ostensibly to either help relieve stress and muscle tension or to exercise the muscles of the hand. There are many types of stress balls. Many are a closed-cell polyurethane foam rubber. This type of stress ball is made by injecting the liquid components of the foam into a mold. The resulting chemical reaction creates carbon dioxide bubbles as a byproduct, which in turn creates the foam.

Stress balls, especially those used in physical therapy, can also contain gel of different densities inside a rubber or cloth skin. Another type uses a thin rubber membrane surrounding a fine powder. The latter type can be made at home by filling a balloon with baking soda. Some balls similar to a foot bag are marketed and used as stress balls.

Time management is the act or process of planning and exercising conscious control over the amount of time spent on specific activities, especially to increase effectiveness, efficiency or productivity. Time management may be aided by a range of skills, tools, and techniques used to manage time when accomplishing specific tasks, projects and goals complying with a due date.

- There are many ways to tame stress. Some tips to tame stress:
- Perform "deep breathing" exercises.
- Lie face down on the floor and begin breathing deeply and slowly, with the hands resting under the face.
- Sit in a reclining chair.
- Try progressive muscle relaxation or "deep muscle" relaxation. Progressively tense and relax each muscle group in the body.
- Meditate by sitting quietly with eyes closed.
- Exercise regularly or take up yoga.
- Consult a psychologist about the use of biofeedback.
- Make time for music, art or other hobbies that help relax and distract.
- Learn to identify and monitor stressors.
- Make a list of the important things needed to handle each day. Keep an eye on things that might suggest we are not coping well.
- Keep a list of the large and little hassles in a day versus the major stressful events in life.
- Avoid using caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, junk food, binge eating and other drugs
- Get the right amount of sleep.
- Cultivate a sense of humor; laugh.
- Don't run from the problems. This only makes them worse.
- Talk to family members and friends to get out of stress.

CONCLUSION

Stress can cause severe health problems and, in extreme cases, can cause death. Health professionals should also be consulted before any major change in diet or levels of exercise. We do have control over the stress and choices we make in our lives. It sometimes takes a little practice and effort to put some of these techniques into play in our life. But once we do so, we may be pleasantly surprised at the positive benefits received.

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