

LESSON 29

STRESS AND YOUR HEALTH

SUMMARY

These days the life has become fast and the pressures are so many that we are in a stressful situation in some or the other way. Also, we are not able to manage our stresses effectively. So, one should know what are the sources of stress and how to deal with them.

Concept of Stress

Stress means pressure and an uneasy experience. The causes of stress can be - self, other individuals around you and your environment.

Stress need not necessarily always be negative. A little bit of stress helps us by motivating to perform well. Thus, stress has both positive and negative dimensions. The positive aspect of stress is termed as “eustress” meaning stress producing positive results. The negative dimension is called “distress”. The negative dimension of stress or distress often causes unpleasantness and leads to poor performance.

Reactions to Stress

The reactions to stress can be classified into the following categories:

Physiological Reactions: rapid pounding of heart and pulse, muscles becoming tense, dryness

of the throat or mouth, feeling sick in the stomach, trembling etc.

Generally, it is the vulnerable and weak bodily system that gets affected by stress first. The resulting symptoms are therefore called psychosomatic reactions.

Affective Reactions: These reactions are emotional responses. People suffering from stress get affected quickly and manifest symptoms of anxiety, depression, anger, irritability and having poor control over the emotions.

Cognitive Reactions: poor concentration, inability to learn anything new with same speed and efficiency, forgetting, inability to take proper decision that too in time, confusion, gate crashing of ideas, and negative or unhealthy thoughts.

Behavioural reactions: crying, talking incoherently, irrelevant speech, hitting, and bashing or banging etc.

Stressors

Stressors are events and situations to which people must react. These stressors are perceived as mild and motivating for some and moderately or severely stressful for others. They affect well-being of people. The common stressors include the following - Boredom, loneliness, Frustration, Conflicts Competition, Increased

responsibility Divorce, separation and death of loved ones, Trouble in interpersonal relations such as parents, in-laws, friends, boss, servants, Sexual difficulties and guilt feelings, Changes in the financial status, Change of residence, Payment of loans etc.

Stress reactions are the physical, psychological and behavioural responses (such as nausea, nervousness and fatigue) which people display in the face of stressors. Mediating factors such as the circumstances in which stressors take place and each person's characteristics, makes people more or less sensitive to stressors. Stress tolerance varies across individuals. We can always reduce the stress. Stress can act as a promoter of self-understanding.

Sources of Stress

Sources of stress can be classified into four categories, which are as follows:

Family: If you are experiencing stress because one of your family members is seriously ill, then the source of your stress is family. The other familial stresses include financial difficulty, quarrel between spouses (husband & wife) etc.

Occupational/Educational: For a student stress may be the examination, stay in hostel etc. A teacher who is not teaching well may add to the stress. Poor pay, over demanding boss, uncooperative co-worker and

subordinates, poor working conditions are some of the occupational stressors experienced by the people.

Personal: Personal stresses are many. A personal stress is often caused by feelings of inadequacy, inferiority and insecurity.

Environmental: Unexpected natural calamities such as fire, famine, earthquake, tsunami, floods etc. are environmental stressors. Crowd, poor sanitation and pollution are also sources of environmental stress.

Stress and Health

Indications are there that 75% of human diseases are caused by the stress experienced by people. During stressful period, anxiety and nervousness are quite common symptoms. When these become intense, phobia may develop. Some of the common phobias are:

Social phobia—fear of addressing public audience (e.g., Stage fear).

Claustrophobia—fear of closed places.

Anxiety refers to a vague unpleasant feeling of impending threat and danger. A person with severe anxiety will always be worried, unclear, confused and indecisive. Sometimes excessive anxiety may lead to speech problems like stuttering and stammering. Urinary problems like bed-wetting are commonly seen among children.

Stress and the Immune System –

Stress can weaken the immune system and can make us victim of many diseases. If the stress is for a shorter period there is not much damage, but if the stress prolongs, it results in serious illnesses such as cancer, heart disease, headache, asthma and peptic ulcer.

Stress and Health Problems

Stress can lead to certain cardiac problems like hypertension, angina and heart attacks. Eating disorders can also be caused due to preoccupation with stressful situations. Sleep disorders can also occur due to stress. The most common stress related health problems are cold and headache. Psychosomatic diseases like peptic-ulcer, asthma, essential hypertension (high BP), are also caused by stresses.

Stress Relief: In severe cases of stress, an individual must consult the psychologist for immediate help. Mild to moderate stress can be easily relieved through different way such as: regular physical exercise, relaxation, meditation, thinking positively, seeking social activities, certain management techniques like time –management, stress reduction programmers etc. Medication such as stress drugs must be used only in severe cases and under medical supervision.

Evaluate Yourself

1. Discuss different reactions such as physiological, psychological etc. to stress.
2. What are the different sources of stress?
3. Define social phobia and claustrophobia?