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## **STRESS MANAGEMENT-A MAGIC MANTRA FOR A HEALTHIER LIFE**

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### **Abstract**

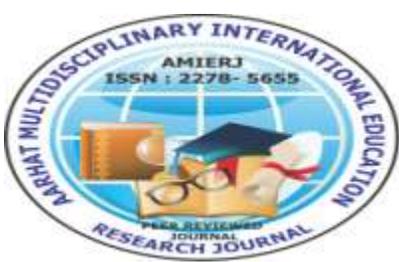
*“Don’t cry because it’s over, smile because it happened”-Dr. Seuss*

*Life itself is the most wonderful fairytale. It brings along a series of natural and spontaneous changes. But many of us spoil its charm by insisting on making things difficult. Instead of coping up with these changes, we start feeling the stress to accept and adopt these changes thereby making stress an unavoidable part of life. We all can visualize its threat in day to day life, workplace, in relationships making life all the more miserable. So, this has made this research all the more important through which effort has been made to find the reasons and ways to cope up with stress.*

**Keywords:** *Stress, Eustress, Alarm, Resistance, Exhaustion, Acute, Episodic, Chronic*

### **INTRODUCTION**

Today’s news includes round the clock coverage of natural and manmade disasters, Earthquakes and floods, Wars and terrorist attacks. Though T.V. is considered to be a source of entertainment but watching just 10 minutes of news can stress us. So we are all familiar with the word "stress". Stress is when we are worried about getting laid off our job, or worried about having enough money to pay our bills, or worried about our mother when the doctor says she may need an operation. In fact, to most of us, stress is synonymous with worry. If it is something



that makes us worry, then it is stress. If we were to ask a dozen people to define stress, or explain what causes stress for them, or how stress affects them, we would likely get 12 different answers to each of these requests. The reason for this is that there is no definition of stress that everyone agrees on, what is stressful for one person may be pleasurable or have little effect on others and we all react to stress differently. Your body, however, has a much broader definition of stress. To our body, **STRESS IS SYNONYMOUS WITH CHANGE**. Anything that causes a change in our life causes stress. It doesn't matter if it is a "good" change, or a "bad" change, they are both stress. When we find our dream apartment and get ready to move, that is stress. If we break our leg, that is stress. Good or bad, if it is a **CHANGE** in our life, it is stress. Even **IMAGINED CHANGE** is stress. If we fear that we will not have enough money to pay our rent that is stress. If we worry that we may get fired, that is stress. If we think that we may receive a promotion at work that is also stress (even though this would be a good change). Whether the event is good or bad, imagining changes in your life is stressful.

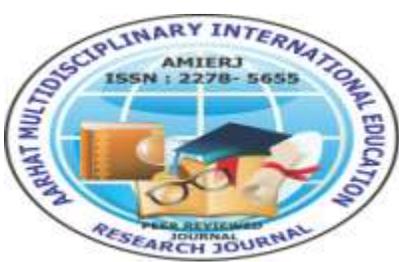
Anything that causes **CHANGE IN YOUR DAILY ROUTINE** is stressful.

Anything that causes **CHANGE IN YOUR BODY HEALTH** is stressful.

**IMAGINED CHANGES** are just as stressful as real changes.

- **We receive a promotion at work.**
- **Our car has a flat tire.**
- **We go to a fun party that lasts till 2:00 a.m.**
- **Our dog gets sick.**
- **Our new bedroom set is being delivered.**
- **Our best friend and his wife come to stay at your house for a week.**
- **We get a bad case of fever.**

All Of These Are Stress. The term "**stress**", as it is currently used was coined by Hans Selye in 1936, who defined it as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change". It was apparent that most people viewed stress as some unpleasant threat, Selye



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subsequently had to create a new word to distinguish stimulus from response. Stress was generally considered as being synonymous with distress and dictionaries defined it as "physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension". Thus, stress was put in a negative light and its positive effects ignored. However, stress can be helpful and good when it motivates people to accomplish more. Any definition of stress should therefore also include good stress, or what **Selye** called **Eustress**. For example, winning a race or election can be just as stressful as losing.

**Eustress** can be defined as a pleasant or curative stress. Often, it is controlled stress that gives us our competitive edge in performance related activities like athletics, giving a speech, or acting. If you are involved in an oral interview for a job, you will benefit from a certain amount of stress. It is stress that provides you with focus and gives you your "competitive edge" that will help you think quickly and clearly and express your thought in ways that will benefit your interview process.

Unfortunately, Selye was not aware that stress had been used for centuries in physics to explain **elasticity**, the property of a material that allows it to resume its original size and shape after having been compressed or stretched by an external force. Similarly stress is a reaction of our body to sudden changes in the environment. Just like animals, people need extra energy to stay and fight or run away when faced with danger. Nowadays, people are not faced with the same dangers of long ago, like battling with wild animals to save their families. However, we are faced with situations that make our bodies react similarly, with faster heartbeats, tense muscles, increased blood pressure, and sweating. Such physical and emotional reactions help us by increasing our concentration and other bodily functions in order to prepare for a challenge. Our body releases hormones that increases our heart rate and breathing and provide a burst of energy. Nearly all body systems, such as heart and blood vessels, immune system, lungs, digestive system and brain prepare to cope with danger. This is known as "**fight – or – flight**" stress response. This response ranges from barely noticeable to very intense, depending on the situation. After meeting a challenge, the body relaxes as the heart rate, muscle tension, and blood pressure return to normal. This gives the body a chance to recover physically and for the person to feel emotionally rewarded for overcoming the challenge. **Selye in his research exposed**



animals to unpleasant or harmful stimuli such as injections, extreme cold and found that all animals showed a very similar series of reactions, broken into **three stages**.

**Stage one: alarm**--When the threat or stressor is identified or realised, the body's stress response is a state of alarm.

**Stage two: resistance**--If the stressor persists, it becomes necessary to attempt some means of coping with the stress. Although the body begins to try to adapt to the strains or demands of the environment, the body cannot keep this up indefinitely, so its resources are gradually depleted.

**Stage three: exhaustion** --In the final stage, all the body's resources are eventually depleted and the body is unable to maintain normal function. If stage three is extended, long term damage may result and can manifest itself in obvious illnesses such as ulcers, depression or even cardiovascular problems, along with other mental issues.

## **KINDS OF STRESS**

Stress management can be complicated and confusing because there are different types of stress--acute stress, episodic acute stress, and chronic stress -- each with its own characteristics, symptoms, duration, and treatment approaches. Let's look at each one.

**Acute Stress** The fact that people get a little sweaty and their heart beats faster before a presentation or a test is an advantage that helps them succeed. These types of situations are called "challenges", "good stress", or "acute stress." Acute stress is the most common form of stress. It comes from demands and pressures of the recent past and anticipated demands and pressures of the near future. Acute stress is thrilling and exciting in small doses, but too much is exhausting. Overdoing on short-term stress can lead to psychological distress, tension headaches, upset stomach, and other symptoms.

**Episodic Acute Stress** There are those, however, who suffer acute stress frequently, whose lives are so disordered that they are studies in chaos and crisis. They're always in a rush, but always late. If something can go wrong, it does. The symptoms of episodic acute stress are the



symptoms of extended over arousal: persistent tension headaches, migraines, hypertension, chest pain, and heart disease.

**Chronic Stress** When situations that cause physical and emotional stress reactions are non-stopping or perceived as non-stopping, the body never gets a chance to relax. This causes constant tense muscles and a “knotted” stomach. This type of situation is called “bad stress” or “chronic stress”. While acute stress can be thrilling and exciting, chronic stress is not. This is the grinding stress that wears people away day after day, year after year. Chronic stress destroys bodies, minds and lives.

### **CAUSES OF STRESS**

All stressed people do not share these symptoms and feelings. Our reaction to a potentially stressful event is different from anyone else's. Some people are naturally laid-back about almost everything, while others react strongly at the slightest hint of stress.

**We tense up**

**We reach for something to eat**

**We get impatient**

**We get angry**

**We are reduced to tears**

**We give up**

**We let negative thoughts take over**

**We smoke**

**We turn to alcohol or other drugs**

But once we realize that we are stressed, it is important to figure out what is causing stress. What situations produce changes in our body, feelings, and behavior? A stressor is a situation that causes stress. It is important to identify what causes stress in order to try to control it. It is helpful to **classify the stressors into 3 categories:**

- **Accidental hassles**
- **Major life changes**
- **Ongoing problems.**



Accidental hassles are temporary but can cause significant stress. Examples are losing the house key, a flat tire, missing the bus, or getting a traffic ticket. Major life changes can include positive events as well as negative ones. Examples of positive events are marriage, graduation, starting a business, or the birth of a baby. Negative changes include events such as death in the family, losing a job, or divorce. Ongoing problems include stressful situations such as an unhappy marriage, unstable job, poor relationship with a family member or a coworker, or accumulating debt.

Some common categories and examples of stressors include:

- Sensory: pain, bright light
- Life events: birth and deaths, marriage, and divorce
- Responsibilities: lack of money, unemployment
- Work/study: exams, project deadlines
- Personal relationships: conflict, deception
- Lifestyle: heavy drinking, insufficient sleep
- Early life exposure (e.g. child abuse) can permanently alter an individual's stress respons
- Environmental: Lack of control over environmental circumstances, such as **food**, **housing**, **health**, **freedom**, or **mobility**
- Pushing Your Body Too Hard
- Use of Tobacco
- Hormonal Factors
- Taking Responsibility for Another Person's Actions
- Allergic Stress

## **SYMPTOMS OF STRESS**

Stress shows itself in a number of ways. An individual who is experiencing stress may develop the following symptoms:

### **1. Physiological Symptoms-**



**Brain overstress** - Fatigue, aches and pains, crying spells, depression, anxiety attacks, sleep disturbance.

**Gastrointestinal Tract** –, Ulcer, cramps and diarrhea, colitis, irritable bowel.

**Glandular System** - Thyroid gland malfunction.

**Cardiovascular** - High blood pressure, heart attack, abnormal heart beat, stroke.

**Skin** - Itchy skin rashes.

**Immune System** - Decreased resistance to infections and neoplasm.

### ***2. Psychological Symptoms:***

i. Stress can cause dissatisfaction

ii. High levels of stress may be accomplished by anger, anxiety, depression, nervousness, irritability, tension and boredom.

iii. Stress may lead to poor job performance, lowered self esteem, resentment of supervision, inability to concentrate, make decisions and job dissatisfaction.

### ***3. Behavioral Symptoms:***

i. Under eating or overeating

ii. Sleeplessness

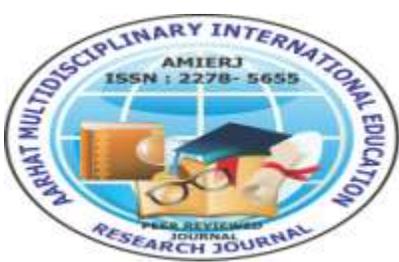
iii. Increased smoking and drinking

iv. Drug abuse

v. Nodding off during meetings or special gatherings

vi. Losing your sense of humour

vii. Moving in a tense and jerky way



viii. Reacting nervously or irritably to everyday sounds

ix. Absenteeism and turnover

x. Reduction in productivity

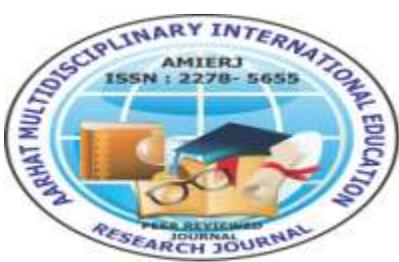
Stress is highly individualistic in nature. Some people have high tolerance for stress and thrive well in face of several stressors in the environment. In fact, some individuals will not perform well unless they experience a level of stress which activates and energizes them to put forth their best efforts. On the other hand, some people have very low level of tolerance for stress and they become paralyzed when they have to interface with routine everyday factors that appear undesirable to them. Most people are exposed too much higher levels of stress than they realize. Our level of stress in any situation depends on how we perceive it and how long it lasts.

## **STRESS MANAGEMENT**

The good news is that one can learn ways to cope with stress and to reduce the amount of stress in our life. As we know that stress has got a number of negative consequences for the individuals that is why every individual should take personal responsibility for reducing his or her stress level. There are a number of ways by which a person can avoid stressful conditions, change them, or learn to cop with them. Some of these ways prove to be quite unhealthy like **smoking, drinking, taking pills, lashing out, angry outbursts, physical violence**,etc. but we need to work out certain healthy stress reducing strategies such as:

**1. Avoid controllable stressors:** The first step is to learn to recognize when you're feeling stressed. Early warning signs of stress include tension in your shoulders and neck, or clenching your hands into fists. The next step is to choose a way to deal with your stress. One way is to avoid the event or thing that leads to your stress--but often this is not possible. A second way is to change how you react to stress. This is often the best way. . For instance, if shopping with your spouse stresses you, then agree not to shop together!

**2. Plan major lifestyle changes:** Forget the traditional Indian attitude of “Whatever will be, will be” rather plan in advance, so that we can confront them with confidence when they occur.



**3. Realize your limitation:** Learn how to say NO to new responsibilities that you are not sure you can fulfill. An individual should become assertive. It is easier to refuse to do something than to get caught in the middle of something you cannot accomplish. It is healthier for you and fairer to the persons involved in the extra responsibilities.

**4. Time Management:** Most of the people are very poor in managing their time. They don't know that what must be done and when it would be desirable to do so. The result of poor time management is feeling of work overload, skipped schedules and tension. A few of the well known time management principles are:

- i) Preparing a daily list of activities to be attended to
- ii) Prioritizing activities by importance and urgency.
- iii) Scheduling activities
- iv) Knowing your daily schedule

**5. Improve communication:** You can significantly prevent relationship stress at home and at the workplace if you listen carefully, smile, admit if you are wrong, give compliments, and express your feelings and thoughts assertively.

**6. Share your thoughts:** Share your thoughts with a spouse, a parent, a child or a friend. Get advice! Ponder it and follow it if it makes sense. They may see a way out of your stressful situation that you might not have thought of.

**7. Develop a positive attitude:** Without a positive approach to life, preventing and managing stress is very difficult. If you think you are not in control, you are setting yourself up for failure and more stress.

**8. Reward yourself:** Treat yourself as you successfully overcome challenges. Part of this reward should involve relaxation such as a vacation for big achievements or special treats for smaller ones.

**9. Eat and sleep well:** A good night's sleep and nutritious meals can help you develop a healthier lifestyle that is conducive to less stress.



**10. Readjust life goals:** Because of the severe competition in life to go ahead, most individuals set very high standards and goals for themselves. These high expectations and limited resources to reach such expectations result in stress. Accordingly, every person must readjust his goals and make sure he has the ability and resources to reach such goals.

**11. Relaxation techniques:** Every individual must teach himself to reduce tension through relaxation techniques such as Yoga, Meditation, Hypnosis and Biofeedback.

**i) Exercise:** Exercising is one of the most effective ways of preventing and managing stress. Start by being more physically active and exercise every other day for at least 30 minutes.

**ii) Relax with deep breathing:** This is a normal body reaction to stress: take a deep breath. By repeatedly inhaling slowly through your nose, holding the breath for a few seconds, then exhaling through your mouth, you can counteract the fast, shallow breathing associated with stress.

**iii) Relax by clearing your mind:** As you take a break in a quiet place, force your mind to relax by focusing on one peaceful image or thought. You can also fool your mind by thinking and visualizing your favorite moments, such as a tranquil Caribbean vacation or fishing in a creek.

**iv) Relax your muscles:** Stress causes the muscles to become tense. Tightening and relaxing different muscle groups is one way of relaxing the muscles. As you practice this exercise, concentrate as you tighten a muscle for few seconds, then relax slowly and feel the difference.

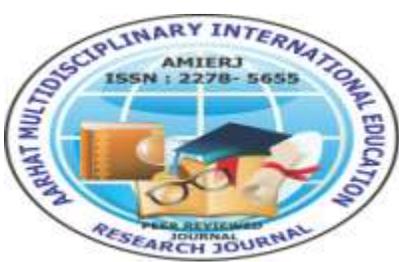
**v) Relax with stretching and exercising:** Stretching the muscles is another normal way for the body to react to stress. Stretching exercises can be done anywhere and anytime. If possible, exercising is also a great way to stretch the muscles while at the same time taking the mind off the stressor.

**vi) Relax with massage therapy:** Stress can cause muscle knots in the back, hands, and different muscle groups. A massage therapist can help loosen this tension. Make sure to tell your massage therapist which massaging strokes make you feel good.

**12. Count to ten:** This makes you stop and relax before you react to the stressful situation

**13. Take hot baths or showers to help you relax**

**14. Listen to good music**



**15. Ask for help:** Ask for help in doing things that might overwhelm you. You will be surprised to find that most people genuinely like to help out. Remember, chances are that some of the people around you have had similar problems and might have found a solution for a particular problem.

**16. Find professional help if needed:** Some people are stressed in situations that feel normal to others, such as walking alone at night, flying, being in rooms with lots of people, or giving a public speech. Avoiding these situations may not be possible. In such situations, confronting these fears and conquering them is a good alternative. Professional help may be needed to control these stressors.

**Preventing stress** is easy with some changes in lifestyle and a more positive attitude. When stressful situations are encountered, several techniques can be adopted for making the body and mind relax. *The changes won't happen overnight*, but new tools to cope with stress are within your reach. Take action today. By trying these techniques you may be able to reduce unneeded stress and enjoy life to its fullest. The *payoff* of managing stress is peace of mind and perhaps a *longer, healthier life*.

### **Conclusion**

It is important and necessary to *consciously* become aware of, know and practice these attitudes and behaviors. This can be accomplished by reading these steps once a day, everyday.

**A**wareness, acceptance and acknowledgment of stress indicators (symptoms) and stressors (causes).

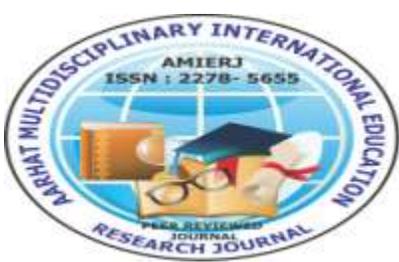
**B**reathing, (natural rather than forced, reversed or jammed) plays an important part in managing stress.

**C**hoice gives us the feeling of taking control of our life, celebrate the days of our life.

**D**irection and discipline give us a sense of accomplishment, and feeling good about ourself.

**E**xpression of feelings, emotions and thoughts. Do not act on one's own feelings. Just express how we feel (in physical terms) if we are not sure of the emotional words.

**F**eelings, emotions and stress are body responses.



*Grounding in our body offers you the ability to respond realistically to the here-and-now situation.*

*Hourly assessment of ourself and our body is helpful in determining **stress indicators** and **stressors**.*

*Invest in ourself.*

*Journal keeping is essential to uncover our profile of **stressors**.*

***Killer stressors** are: resentment, self-pity, frustration and negativity. Life producing **stressors** are: realistic goals, appreciation of self and others, and diversification of thoughts and actions.*

*Let go of our negative **stressors** (thoughts, feelings, emotions) by accepting them.*

*Monitor our **stress indicators** and **stressors**.*

*Nutrition that is adequate is a valuable tool to emotional and physical health, and well being.*

*Options are necessary to keep motivated.*

*Personal stress profile will help us uncover our **stress indicators** and **stressors**.*

*Quiet time for relaxation and rejuvenation.*

*Reach out to someone, know that we are not alone even though we feel alone.*

*Set realistic goals that are derived from past experiences and gave us feelings of well-being.*

*Take control of our life.*

*Unrealistic goals are to be avoided.*

*View our life as a process of being and becoming.*

*Watch our attitude, breathing, environment, and nutrition and make them positive and natural.*

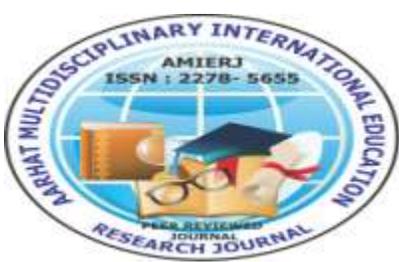
*Xtra time for oneself.*

*Your environment must be free of **stressors** such as: fluorescent lighting, dirty ventilation, and sick buildings.*

***Z - This is the first day of the rest of our life, we be the artist, the creator of our canvas and paint a picture of joy and passion***

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