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Concept of Stress Management

Introduction:

'The way your body responds to the demands of your life style' i.e., the effects of wear and tear on your body. Most people think of stress as a mental state but it is in fact, very largely, a physical condition. When a person is subjected to a stress- producing effect known as stressor (a challenge, pressure, stimulus, external influence, etc.) it is registered in the brain. The brain gives various parts of the body instructions for a chain of reactions known as stress reaction or stress response. Different People can tolerate different levels of stress. Each person needs to work on their own stress control techniques according to their tolerance levels.

Here are the first steps towards greater awareness of stress levels:

- How does stress affect you?
- Which stressors affect you particularly?
- How can you be more aware o your stress response?
- What is the strength and duration of your stress response?
- Which stress management techniques most suit you?

Definitions of Stress management

A set of techniques used to help an individual cope more effectively with difficult situations in order to feel better emotionally, improve behavioral skills, and often to enhance feelings of control.

Stress management encompasses a range of modalities designed to treat the physical and emotional toll of stress. The approaches used can include bodywork, meditation, counseling, energy work, and education.

Effect of Stress

Stress response:

The stress response can be described as a chain of reaction of changes within the body:

- Shallower, quicker breathing,
- Faster heart beat,
- Rise in blood pressure,
- Reduction in the blood supply to hands and feet,
- Increase in body's metabolism,
- Faster clotting of blood,
- Increased blood flow to the muscles,
- Reduction of blood supply to stomach and abdomen,
- Tensing of muscles,
- Sharpening of all senses,
- Reduction in the efficiency of the immune system.

Of course all these changes in the body also have an effect on the brain and this can cause an alert mental state, leading to:

- Faster activity of brain,
- Improvement of short term judgement,
- Faster decision making,

- Improved memory powers,
- Sharper focusing of the attention.

Positive effects of stress:

Stress is valuable under certain circumstances, e.g. sports, making speeches and taking examinations. The stress response puts people on their mettle, increase alertness, improves sight, strengthens muscles and reduces reaction times. The stress response increases our ability to stand and fight or turn and flee and to mobilize all our resources to achieve whatever we decide to do. Another positive is the zest that stress adds to life by stimulating the stress and the passions. Many people need challenge in their lives and would be unhappy without it. Stress only has a positive effect if it is not allowed to build up or feed on itself, i.e. if it can be worked off.

Negative effects of stress:

The negative effects of stress show particularly when a person allows stress to remain in the body, usually when a person allows stress to remain in the body, usually when there is no chance to take the necessary steps to release a stress response that is too strong or lasts too long.

The negative effects of stress show up in three ways in particular:

1. Unsuitable behavior
2. Lower energy and performance levels
3. Poorer health

Here are some examples of the negative effects of stress:

1. Unsuitable behavior
 - Loser behavior
 - Bad smoking, eating and drinking habits
 - More frequent mistakes
 - Less flexibility
2. Lower energy and performance levels
 - Reduced concentration
 - Increased forgetfulness
 - Poor judgement
 - Prone to feeling of tiredness
3. Poorer to health
 - Heart and circulatory diseases
 - Ulcers
 - Infectious diseases
 - Skin diseases

Stress Signals

1. Physical
 - Changes in breathing rhythm
 - Tense and aching muscles
 - Headaches
 - Sweating
 - Cold hands and feets
 - Changes in appetite
 - Stomach problems, heartburn
2. Mental
 - Lack of concentration
 - More frequent mistakes
 - Forgetfulness/ Absentmindedness
 - Tendency to over-react
 - Poorer judgement
3. Emotional
 - Irritation / Short Temper
 - Nervousness
 - Depression/Silence

- Emotional outbursts/Crying
- 4. Behavioral
 - Insomnia
 - Increased drinking and smoking
 - Absenteeism
 - Clumsiness

Ways of managing Stress:

1. Awareness of stress
2. Analysis and treatment of the actual stressor
 1. Take action
 2. Withdraw
 3. Do Nothing
 4. Adjust your attitude
3. Physical Fitness
4. A healthy diet
5. Relaxations

Step of stress management

1. Identify the sources of stress in your life

Stress management starts with identifying the sources of stress in your life. This isn't as easy as it sounds. Your true sources of stress aren't always obvious, and it's all too easy to overlook your own stress-inducing thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. Sure, you may know that you're constantly worried about work deadlines. But maybe it's your procrastination, rather than the actual job demands, that leads to deadline stress. To identify your true sources of stress, look closely at your habits, attitude, and excuses: Do you explain away stress as temporary ("I just have a million things going on right now") even though you can't remember the last time you took a breather? Do you define stress as an integral part of your work or home life ("Things are always crazy around here") or as a part of your personality ("I have a lot of nervous energy, that's all"). Do you blame your stress on other people or outside events, or view it as entirely normal and unexceptional? Until you accept responsibility for the role you play in creating or maintaining it, your stress level will remain outside your control.

Start a stress journal

A stress journal can help you identify the regular stressors in your life and the way you deal with them. Each time you feel stressed, keep track of it in your journal. As you keep a daily log, you will begin to see patterns and common themes. Write down: What caused your stress (make a guess if you're unsure).

How you felt, both physically and emotionally.

How you acted in response.

What you did to make yourself feel better.

2. Look at how you currently cope with stress

Think about the ways you currently manage and cope with stress in your life. Your stress journal can help you identify them. Are your coping strategies healthy or unhealthy, helpful or unproductive? Unfortunately, many people cope with stress in ways that compound the problem.

3. Learning healthier ways to manage stress

If your methods of coping with stress aren't contributing to your greater emotional and physical health, it's time to find healthier ones. There are many healthy ways to manage and cope with stress, but they all require change. You can either change the situation or change your reaction. When deciding which option to choose, it's helpful to think of the four As: avoid, alter, adapt, or accept.

Since everyone has a unique response to stress, there is no "one size fits all" solution to managing it. No single method works for everyone or in every situation, so experiment with different techniques and strategies. Focus on what makes you feel calm and in control.

Stress management strategy:

The Four A's

- Change the situation:
 1. Avoid the stressor.
 2. Alter the stressor.

- Change your reaction:
 1. Adapt to the stressor.
 2. Accept the stressor.

Avoid unnecessary stress:

Not all stress can be avoided, and it's not healthy to avoid a situation that needs to be addressed. You may be surprised, however, by the number of stressors in your life that you can eliminate.

- Learn how to say "no" – Know your limits and stick to them. Whether in your personal or professional life, refuse to accept added responsibilities when you're close to reaching them. Taking on more than you can handle is a surefire recipe for stress.
- Avoid people who stress you out – If someone consistently causes stress in your life and you can't turn the relationship around, limit the amount of time you spend with that person or end the relationship entirely.
- Take control of your environment – If the evening news makes you anxious, turn the TV off. If traffic's got you tense, take a longer but less-traveled route. If going to the market is an unpleasant chore, do your grocery shopping online.
- Avoid hot-button topics – If you get upset over religion or politics, cross them off your conversation list. If you repeatedly argue about the same subject with the same people, stop bringing it up or excuse yourself when it's the topic of discussion.
- Pare down your to-do list – Analyze your schedule, responsibilities, and daily tasks. If you've got too much on your plate, distinguish between the "shoulds" and the "musts." Drop tasks that aren't truly necessary to the bottom of the list or eliminate them entirely.

Alter the situation

If you can't avoid a stressful situation, try to alter it. Figure out what you can do to change things so the problem doesn't present itself in the future. Often, this involves changing the way you communicate and operate in your daily life.

- Express your feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering you, communicate your concerns in an open and respectful way. If you don't voice your feelings, resentment will build and the situation will likely remain the same.
- Be willing to compromise. When you ask someone to change their behavior, be willing to do the same. If you both are willing to bend at least a little, you'll have a good chance of finding a happy middle ground.
- Be more assertive. Don't take a backseat in your own life. Deal with problems head on, doing your best to anticipate and prevent them. If you've got an exam to study for and your chatty roommate just got home, say up front that you only have five minutes to talk.
- Manage your time better. Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. When you're stretched too thin and running behind, it's hard to stay calm and focused. But if you plan ahead and make sure you don't overextend yourself, you can alter the amount of stress you're under.

Adapt to the stressor

If you can't change the stressor, change yourself. You can adapt to stressful situations and regain your sense of control by changing your expectations and attitude.

- Reframe problems. Try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup, listen to your favorite radio station, or enjoy some alone time.
- Look at the big picture. Take perspective of the stressful situation. Ask yourself how important it will be in the long run. Will it matter in a month? A year? Is it really worth getting upset over? If the answer is no, focus your time and energy elsewhere.
- Adjust your standards. Perfectionism is a major source of avoidable stress. Stop setting yourself up for failure by demanding perfection. Set reasonable standards for yourself and others, and learn to be okay with "good enough."
- Focus on the positive. When stress is getting you down, take a moment to reflect on all the things you appreciate in your life, including your own positive qualities and gifts. This simple strategy can help you keep things in perspective.

Accept the things you can't change

Some sources of stress are unavoidable. You can't prevent or change stressors such as the death of a loved one, a serious illness, or a national recession. In such cases, the best way to cope with stress is to accept things as they are. Acceptance may be difficult, but in the long run, it's easier than railing against a situation you can't change.

- Don't try to control the uncontrollable. Many things in life are beyond our control— particularly the behavior of other people. Rather than stressing out over them, focus on the things you can control such as the way you choose to react to problems.
- Look for the upside. As the saying goes, "What doesn't kill us makes us stronger." When facing major challenges, try to look at them as opportunities for personal growth. If your own poor choices contributed to a stressful situation, reflect on them and learn from your mistakes.
- Share your feelings. Talk to a trusted friend or make an appointment with a therapist. Expressing what you're going through can be very cathartic, even if there's nothing you can do to alter the stressful situation.
- Learn to forgive. Accept the fact that we live in an imperfect world and that people make mistakes. Let go of anger and resentments. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.

Conclusion:

It may seem that there's nothing you can do about your stress level. The bills aren't going to stop coming, there will never be more hours in the day for all your errands, and your career or family responsibilities will always be demanding. But you have a lot more control than you might think. In fact, the simple realization that you're in control of your life is the foundation of stress management.

Pratik P. Valand
Dixit Street,
Brahmanwada,
To.Borsad, Ta:Borsad
Dist:Anand ,Pin:388540
Email:valandpratik111@gmail.com
Mob: 96629 99094