

5. Stress Management Techniques

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The word 'stress' itself has got emotional loading. The moment an individual speaks about having stress the listener gets an impression 'oh the person is in distress having problem'. But it is not a fact. One must understand that stress does not always mean distress. There is difference between these two terms. 'Stress can be explained as perturbation of body's homeostasis where homeostasis is a state of balance among all physiological systems which body needs to survive. Hans Selye an important personality in the history of stress has pointed out that 'stress' is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand." He explained that the responses of the body are general in nature as they cannot differentiate between good or bad stress.

'Distress' on the other hand is a persistent stress that is not resolved through coping or adaptation processes. It blocks individual's creativity and there is slow or rapid retardation in his/her productivity. Hence to draw conclusion that person is distressed when he complaints about stress is not correct.

Today stress has become synonymous to life. It will not be an exaggeration to say that the day is not far away when stress will become pandemic. Because right from childhood period to old age people complaint about stress. We use in our everyday language the word stress to describe the conditions like anxiety, problem, confusion, worries etc. A child is stressed when not allowed to play, an adolescent is stressed when he cannot decide his future goal, an adult is stressed due to problems related to his family, occupation, and social environment. Old age can be taken as a bundle of stress due to loneliness, financial crunches, physical illnesses and various other stressors. Hence everyone is under stress for some or other reason.

Stress Management

The focus in this chapter will be on how to reduce or overcome stress. It is detrimental for both mental and physical health when it gets acute. According to Richard Lazarus stress is of two types-eustress (good stress) and distress (bad stress). As a eustress it is not very harmful rather to some extent it may act as motivation. And when it turns into distress it blocks individual's productivity. He is not in position to decide how to cope with his stress and no control is left over the prevailing situation.

First and foremost person must try to understand the source of stress. As soon as he gets an answer then he tries to cope with the stressful situation. When coping mechanisms act in a successful manner then stress automatically gets resolved. Stress management techniques will be quite helpful. One must be aware that stress cannot be avoided rather it can be managed. There are various sources in the environment which make individual stressed and strained. Example- disturbance in homeostasis, physical illness, physical disability, frustration, conflict, pressure, family environment and too much involvement in changing the behavior of others instead of modifying his own behavior.

The symptoms may be revealed in the form of physical, psychological, cognitive, emotional and behavioral symptoms. Example: difficulty in breathing, chest pain, rise in blood pressure, poor attention, memory disorientation, irritability, depression, loneliness, loss of emotional control, loss of appetite, increased alcohol consumption are some of the common symptoms of stress.

Effect of stress: It is better to know how stress affects a person. Generally, stress is considered as having negative connotation. But this is a myth. Stress does not always function in a negative way. In the beginning it has been mentioned that stress functions as a motive as well. If we are totally stress-free then it will make us non-functional. Hence it acts as a motive to perform any action. For ex. stress to achieve good score and high rank in examination make the students prepare hard and study

seriously. Similarly, if there was no stress to earn for one's livelihood then no one would have bothered to do job. Stress is a state that helps to act according to the demand of situation. In this way some amount of stress is necessary to carry on our life.

On the contrary if stress becomes acute then it will harm individual's well-being, both physically and mentally. One gets stuck and does not know how, where and when to react to come out of the stressful situation. Such stress needs to be resolved because if it is not resolved then he will fail to adapt himself in the prevailing situation and this might hamper his adjustment. In everyday life person face many challenges due to stressful situations. These challenges can be met by adopting certain stress management techniques.

An important point to be mentioned here is generally stress reduction and stress management are used as having same meaning. But they are not the same. There is a sharp difference. You may take it as two sides of the same coin. The focus in stress reduction is on preventing stress by altering the external circumstances. The goal is to lower the amount of stress by minimizing the sources of stress (stressor). It aims to eliminate or reduce the external factors which is causing stress. For example, changing the workload, delegating task and improving time management. Whereas stress management emphasizes on adapting to stress through internal strategies. Its approach is to improve overall well-being. The focus is on coping or handling the stress in more effective manner rather than removing it entirely. There is involvement of techniques that helps to manage the response towards stressful events. For ex. practising yoga. deep breathing, meditation and taking help from professionals. The conclusion drawn from above description is, it is a truth that stress cannot be avoided but at the same time it is also a truth that it can be managed. And for its management certain techniques are to be followed. In the following section our main concern will be on different techniques of stress management. Some of The Important Techniques Can Be Discussed Under Following Headings:

5.1 Different Techniques of Stress Management:

- **Exercise:** Regular exercise for 30 minutes to one hour daily is essential for mental and physical health. Physical activities help to reduce stress hormone (endorphins) and as a result it boosts mood and person's stamina improves to handle stress.
- **Deep breathing:** At the time of stress when deep breath is taken then to some extent stress reduce. In deep breathing diaphragm is raised and when breath is released the diaphragm is relax. This helps to calm down the nervous system and person feels relaxed. So, it is an important technique in managing stress,
- **Progressive muscle relaxation:** This technique requires to sit on a chair in comfortable position, take deep breath and let it out slowly. Repetition of this act for several times helps muscle to relax. As stress and anxiety are mostly accompanied by muscular tension so when muscular tension is released then stress also is reduced. Voluntary relaxation of certain muscles in body helps a lot to reduce stress.
- **Balanced and nutritious diet:** Nutritious food and balanced diet helps in mental and physical well-being. Nutrition is needed as it increases energy level and stabilize the mood. If not paid attention on this then energy level goes down and person always feels stressed and irritated. Hence to manage stress emphasis should be on proper healthy diet.
- **Massage therapy:** Good massage at least three to four times a week will promote relaxation. Due to this tensed muscle, low mood gets a boost and it maintains to ease the stress.
- **Mindfulness meditation:** Mindfulness refers to a state of mind achieved by focusing one's awareness on the present moment. In mindfulness meditation person's focus is on being intensely aware of what he/she is sensing and feeling at present without judgment or interpretation. It can be practiced daily for ten to twenty minutes. As exercise relates to body fitness and helps to make body

healthy, mindfulness meditation is like a fitness routine for brain that keeps brain healthy.

- **Visualization:** It is a simple technique which helps to create a strong mental image of some future event. Sometimes imagining calmness and happy incidences helps mind and body to relax. The skill of visualization helps to recall or form mental image to make them perceptible to mind or imagination. It is quite helpful in creativity and achieve goals.
- **Increased tolerance for ambiguity:** Many time people is in a state of ambiguity. Changes are occurring every day and people sometime do not find well defined path to achieve the goal. During such situation his tolerance level lowers down and he feels stressed. This technique helps to overcome state of uncertainty by managing stress caused due to ambiguity. He/she become more tolerant and try to reduce the ambiguity as and when possible. This increased tolerance level will be effective in stress management.
- **Cognitive behavioral technique:** This involves effort to change thinking patterns. Individual recognize that stress is due to distortion in thinking process. The technique helps to reevaluate the problem in the light of reality. He can get better understanding of other people's behavior and motive. Preparing a list, recording of unproductive thoughts, creating replacement thoughts, often reading the prepared list and on realization of its irrelevancy and try to replace it are the few steps to be followed in CBT. This process is quite helpful in making the person stress- free.
- **Journaling:** It refers to recording the feelings and thoughts of the day on a paper. He/she can express his emotions and identify the recurring thoughts which are contributory factors of stress. When the problems are written on paper then one gets clear understanding of the problem and will find path to effective solution. After sometime they observe their personal growth and how stress is being managed. In this way slowly and gradually stress is reduced.
- **Talking to someone:** Talking about stress and problem either to a friend or family member helps to reduce stress. Individual manage stress by free and frank

talks with someone on whom he can rely. Sharing with friend and others provide support in feeling more relaxed.

- **Gratitude practice:** Stress can also be managed by focusing on positive aspects of life. Appreciating someone for small help, grateful to a friend, thinking about at least one good thing that has happened throughout the end of day, thanking nature, remembering God and being thankful for all He has given- all are grateful practices which brings happy note to a person and helps to manage and reduce stress.
- **Having realistic expectations:** If expectations are set beyond reach then it will trigger stress. It is necessary to make realistic expectations keeping in mind the resources and one's own limits. This helps to focus upon right action to be done to achieve the goal in a better manner. This can be possible only when proper goal within limits is set by an individual. False commitments must be avoided and develop courage to say 'no' when he feels work is beyond reach and he is overworked.
- **Reframing problems:** It means to see the problem from different perspective. There is general tendency to take problem in negative ways. And due to this problem-solving ability slows down. In contrast when person change his perspective in positive direction, which is called as reframing the problem, then it enhances the ability to handle the stressors which is causing stress. The moment it enhances there is fair chance that stress will be managed by finding out appropriate solutions.
- **Avoid controlling others:** Every person has their own way to think, perceive and act. Trying to control their unique behavior will surely rise the level of stress. In similar way one must never try to control the events that surround them as far as possible. It may be avoided by just questioning oneself 'Is this my problem'? If answer comes as 'no' then just get out of it and stress will reduce in short period of time. One must try to accept the situation as it is as far as possible

unless and until he/she feels that they can solve the problem in an easy way. This is the easiest way to manage stress.

- **Maintaining sense of humour:** A person with humorous nature seldom falls prey to stress. Those who exhibit positive behavior and is happy and like to enjoy life can overcome their stress than persons with negativity and who finds no happiness in life. Sense of humour is a great source of stress management. Some of the examples of humour are describing something funny that has happened in life, watching funny movies, laughing at oneself on silly behavior, cracking jokes and so on. But one must keep in mind laughing at or making fun of others is not good humour. The jokes or remarks that hurts other's sentiment will increase stress due to hot exchange of words on the issue and create unhappiness. Good and healthy humour is effective stress management technique.
- **Time management:** Time management is coordination of tasks and activities to maximize the effectiveness of an individual's efforts. Proper time management helps to achieve more in less time, while poor time management piles up the work and functions as a key source of stress. Continuous work without rest makes the person tired, resulting in being burnt out easily. It is necessary to make a reasonable time schedule which not only defines the work hours but also leisure time – time for their own enjoyment. This will enable them to work with more enthusiasm and less boredom. The environment will be stress free, keeping them both mentally and physically fit to do any type of work.
- **Setting boundaries:** Setting the boundary is to take work which is in one's limits. Only such works must be accepted which they can perform in the stipulated time. Over commitment needs to be avoided otherwise frustration, conflict, confrontation creep in very soon. Under such conditions, work cannot be performed in the required manner. The factors like praise, hurt, disappointing oneself or others must not come in their way of commitment for any type of work. One must learn to set boundaries with positive attitude and good relationships. They must also learn to say 'No' if not able to perform the task.

- **Prioritization of work:** To meet the daily challenges of life one must focus on preparing a schedule of work, which will include the task to be done first and those which can be done afterwards or avoided altogether. The difficult tasks should be given priority to be done in the early hours when an individual is fresh and energetic. The urgent and important task must also be given priority to be completed first. Afterwards, the tasks which are not very urgent and important can be worked on. Some tasks can be dropped altogether and put in the last section of the schedule. Such management proves very helpful because when difficult and urgent tasks are completed, a person feels relaxed, and tries to complete the rest of the tasks with more ease and in a more comfortable manner.
- **Hobbies and recreation:** Giving time for recreation and hobbies helps a lot in maintenance of stress. Taking out time from the daily busy schedule and enjoying the leisure period in reading books, drawing, painting, walking, talking, or rather doing anything which is their hobby, helps a lot in overcoming burnout and thus reduces stress. For stress management, it is necessary to recognize when an individual is stressed out. As soon as this realization happens, one must take a compulsory break and engage in some recreational activity. Therefore, hobbies and recreation are a great source of stress management.
- **Delegating tasks:** Taking too much responsibility and work on oneself will surely produce stress. This can be reduced by dividing the work and delegating it to different people. For example, a boss can list the task, assign a certain time for completion of each task, make schedules, plan out the budget, and then delegate the work amongst their colleagues. Thus, the burden of work will not come down on any one person. Everyone will perform their role, and the work will be completed in the scheduled time. This is a very important technique of stress management.
- **Reduce perfectionism:** To reach the level of perfectionism is in itself a very stressful thing. No one can be perfect. One must try to perform the act without having the stress to reach the highest level. To set high expectations, being

dissatisfied with achievement and taking small mistakes as huge failures are the precipitating factors of stress. One can only try their best and realize that no one can be 'Number One' every time and everywhere. The moment an individual overcomes the tension to be perfect, stress gets managed.

- **Avoid Self-medication:** People try to avoid stress sometimes by taking medicines on advice from the pharmacist or on their own. Some may even indulge in alcoholism. But this is an unhealthy method of dealing with stress. It is always advisable to take medicines on the advice of a physician or in acute case from a psychiatrist. Consuming drugs or alcohol alleviates stress for a temporary period. In the long run stress may be compounded by such temporary reliefs, resulting in difficult to manage the stress.
- **Try to be assertive:** It is advisable to not 'give up' easily. Sometimes one must assert on his thinking and opinion in a reasonable manner. This is a very practical approach towards stress management because to 'give up' will inculcate an impression that the individual is not capable of handling the situation on their own. However, it is also necessary that assertiveness should not go to an extent that it gives rise to aggressiveness, where the individual reacts against the situation or the people causing stress. The stress can be resolved by showing calm and polite assertiveness. This will reduce stress and enhance self-respect.
- **Changes in life style:** It is necessary to understand that faulty lifestyle is an important source of stress. Sleeping till late in the morning, sleep deficiency, piling up work, workaholic are some of the common faulty life styles. Such habits need to be changed, instead, one should follow a disciplined routine lifestyle. This includes sound sleep, trying to finish work in the stipulated time, getting up early in the morning, avoid screen time till late in the night etc. Such changes in the lifestyle will make the person understand his faulty behavior, which they will try to correct, thus reducing stress.
- **Nurturing oneself:** Self nurturing includes rest and relaxation after work. This should be incorporated in the daily life schedule. It helps to recharge the body

and one can work with less stress and more enthusiasm after relaxing for some time.

- **Adequate Sleep:** To manage stress, 7 to 8 hours of sleep per night is essential. Cortisol is an important stress hormone the level of which rises high in lack of adequate sleep and when he/she get up there is feeling of tiredness and lethargies. Taking caffeine products just before going to bed may be simulating factor to disturb sound sleep. It becomes easy for those to handle the challenges of everyday life who take adequate sleep. The individual will be less stressed and act in a cool and calm manner. This happens because the nervous system gets time to rest which promotes healthy mind and shows less stressed behavior.
- **Healthy Diet:** Healthy diet functions as an energizer and helps to manage stress. Too much sugar, fat, caffeine consumption may cause many diseases and illnesses. Immune system weakens and stress as well as anxiety increases. As such diet promotes health and general well- being so it is considered as one of the important techniques in stress management.
- **Yoga and Tai-Chai:** Yoga is a process of full coordination of all the limbs of body and mind. By practicing certain asanas with its simple and technical knowledge, mind and body are freed from stress. It enhances self-realization as well as mental and physical health. Muscle gets relaxed, mind become peaceful and immune system gets strengthened. Practising yoga under the observation of a trainer is quite beneficial for managing stress. Tai Chai also promotes stress management. This practice involves series of slow gentle movements and physical postures, a meditative state of mind and controlled breathing. It originated in China as an ancient martial art. It improves cardiovascular function, reduces blood pressure and increases the blood flow. Hence both of these practices function more or less in the same manner as stress rejection.
- **Aroma Therapy:** This therapy makes use of plant oils of lavender, rose, peppermint etc and it is either applied on the skin or used for massage and

inhalation. The person feels emotionally relaxed, cortisol (stress hormone) decreases and this improves sleeplessness.

- **Guided Imagery:** It is a type of relaxation technique which uses mental visualization to create a calm and peaceful experience. This focuses on activating the brain's relaxation response. When a person imagines peaceful and beautiful scenes, then brain acts in such a way that one is actually experiencing the scene. This helps to distract the person from stress.
- **Connecting with loved ones:** Person enjoys interacting with loved ones. This has soothing effect on mind. The old experiences are shared, childhood days are remembered, good days are recapitulated and problems are shared. All these reduce stress. Family members, friends, teachers and any one with whom they enjoy to interact may be called as loved ones who help in stress management.
- **Joining Support groups:** The support groups are family members, neighbors, friends, NGOs etc. Visiting place of worship, volunteering to engage in any type of social organization, becoming members of a club- all these will surely help in stress management. One must never avoid the group interaction and must join any support group which they prefer. Interaction with these groups in a friendly and regular manner reduces stress.
- **Spending time in nature:** Taking few minutes to appreciate the beauty of nature helps to shift focus from stress. Gardening, watering plants, walking near rivers or lakes, exercising outdoors in fresh air all enhance mood. Spending time in park, listening to chirping birds, observing colours in nature, sitting under a tree- all are the examples of spending time with nature. These have proved to be beneficial for mental and physical well-being.
- **Space organizing:** It means to keep the surroundings neat and clean. If regularly individual spends some time in arranging the workplace, study area, bedroom and assign specific space for documents and other personal belongings like bag, key, mobile, wallet etc. then stress will become less. If it is not kept in arranged manner, then unnecessary stress will increase.

- **Quieting reflex:** It is six second mini relaxing technique designed to counteract emergency stress reactions. During stress heart rate and blood pressure rises, muscle gets tensed and breathing becomes shallow. Quieting reflex reduces heart rate, promotes deep breathing and muscles get relaxed. It is a type of relaxation technique.

5.2 To Conclude:

stress management helps in physical, emotional, cognitive and behavioral adjustment.

Few changes in lifestyle, enjoying nature's beauty, giving time on oneself, application of different relaxation techniques and keeping contact with loved ones have wonders in making life stress free.

5.3 Things to Know:

The 5 'R's of stress management are Rethink, Relax, Release, Reduce and Reorganize.

In a nutshell rethink your situation, take out time to relax, release your tension in a healthy way, reduce stressors as far as possible and reorganize the responsibilities you have.

The 5 'A's of stress management are Avoiding, Altering, Adapting, Accepting, Active.

5.4 Points to Remember:

Seven healthy tips are being given for reducing stress:

- Take care of yourself
- Avoid drug and alcohol

Stress Management Techniques

- Engage in self- relaxation
- Seek out social support
- Take breaks when needed
- Show gratitude to others
- Connect with others socially. If the individuals pay attention on these then it will be quite helpful in stress management.