**Types of Stress**

Many people are unaware that there are two categories of stress: Eustress and Distress.

Eustress is the good stress that motivates you to continue working. Stress can be a motivator and provide incentive to get the job done. This "good stress" is what eustress can be identified as and some people enjoy it. Everyone needs a little bit of stress in their life in order to continue to be happy, motivated, challenged and productive. It is when this stress is no longer tolerable and/or manageable that distress comes in.

Bad stress, or distress, is when the good stress becomes too much to bear or cope with.

Tension builds, there is no longer any fun in the challenge, there seems to be no relief, no end in sight. This is the kind of stress most of us are familiar with and this is the kind of stress that leads to poor decision making. Physiological symptoms of distress include an increase in blood pressure, rapid breathing and generalized tension. Behavioral symptoms include overeating, loss of appetite, drinking, smoking and negative coping mechanisms.

Stress tolerance is the power to endure stress. If you feel stress, lose against or not all depends on your stress tolerance. A person's tolerance to stress is not only different according to the person but is also influenced by time and condition. So tolerance to stress may differ largely to the same person according to the time and condition in which it is experienced. Mainly, the personality and physique, environment and condition change the strength of tolerance to stress.

The trick to coping with stress is not to expect that you can eliminate it; but rather, to manage the symptoms of stress. Teaching you how to do that has become a multi-million dollar industry. But in the end, it all boils down to a few good tried-and-true skills you can learn and the willingness to work at it.

**Ways to Become Stress-Resistant**

* Stop feeling guilty.
* Be decisive.
* Avoid being a perfectionist.
* Set priorities for yourself.
* Stop procrastinating.
* Praise yourself.
* Live an optimal lifestyle.

**Stress and Cognitive Appraisal**

According to Richard Lazarus, stress is a two-way process; it involves the production of stressors by the environment, and the response of an individual subjected to these stressors. His conception regarding stress led to the theory of cognitive appraisal.

## What is Cognitive Appraisal?

Lazarus stated that cognitive appraisal occurs when a person considers two major factors that majorly contribute in his response to stress. These two factors include:

1. The threatening tendency of the stress to the individual, and
2. The assessment of resources required to minimize, tolerate or eradicate the stressor and the stress it produces.

In general, cognitive appraisal is divided into two types or stages: primary and secondary appraisal.

## Primary Appraisal

In the stage of primary appraisal, an individual tends to ask questions like, “What does this stressor and/ or situation mean?”, and, “How can it influence me?” According to psychologists, the three typical answers to these questions are:

1. "this is not important"
2. "this is good"
3. "this is stressful"

To better understand primary appraisal, suppose a non-stop heavy rain suddenly pours at your place. You might think that the heavy rain is not important, since you don’t have any plans of going somewhere today. Or, you might say that the heavy rain is good, because now you don’t have to wake up early and go to school since classes are suspended. Or, you might see the heavy rain as stressful because you have scheduled a group outing with your friends.

After answering these two questions, the second part of primary cognitive appraisal is to classify whether the stressor or the situation is a threat, a challenge or a harm-loss. When you see the stressor as a threat, you view it as something that will cause future harm, such as failure in exams or getting fired from job. When you look at it as a challenge, you develop a positive stress response because you expect the stressor to lead you to a higher class ranking, or a better employment.

On the other hand, seeing the stressor as a “harm-loss” means that the damage has already been experiences, such as when a person underwent a recent leg amputation, or encountered a car accident.

## Secondary Appraisal

Unlike in other theories where the stages usually come one after another, the secondary appraisal actually happens simultaneously with the primary appraisal. In fact, there are times that secondary appraisal becomes the cause of a primary appraisal.

Secondary appraisals involve those feelings related to dealing with the stressor or the stress it produces. Uttering statements like, “I can do it if I do my best”, “I will try whether my chances of success are high or not”, and “If this way fails, I can always try another method” indicates positive secondary appraisal. In contrast to these, statements like, “I can’t do it; I know I will fail”, “I will not do it because no one believes I can” and, “I won’t try because my chances are low” indicate negative secondary appraisal.

Although primary and secondary appraisals are often a result of an encounter with a stressor, stress doesn’t always happen with cognitive appraisal. One example is when a person gets involved in a sudden disaster, such as an earthquake, and he doesn’t have more time to think about it, yet he still feels stressful about the situation.

**Individual Differences – Stress Response**

We all know that each of us is a unique person, and that our personalities are so vast that more mysteries of the mind are still to be studied by psychologists. Everyone has his own life experiences, which can never be exactly the same as that of another person’s. While life experience is one of the major factors that affect stress response, an individual’s personality, as well as hardiness and self-efficacy levels greatly influence’s his or her methods on responding to stress.

## Type A & Type B Personality

Famous researchers Friedman & Rosenman believed that people belong to either two basic types of behavior or personality: Type A and Type B. According to the researchers, a person with a Type A personality is competitive, desires to be recognized, longs for development and advancement, wants to achieve goals and therefore, tends to rush in order for him to finish the tasks assigned to him. He is typically active and alert both mentally and physically.

The person with a Type B personality is the complete opposite of the Type A person. Why? It's because the Type B personality includes the apparent lack of motivation, drive, urgency, competitive spirit, and even ambition or desire. The person with a Type B personality is described as calm, relaxed and non-competitive. A third type, Type C, is described as a personality which involves passion for work and desire to achieve goals (typical of Type A), but when faced with stress, the person becomes apathetic (typical of Type B).

### So What does This Have to Do With Stress Response?

In 1974, Friedman and Rosenman conducted a longitudinal study to prove their own theory of personality. The study involved 3200 male participants who were asked to answer questionnaires. Based on their responses, they were classified into three groups: Type A, Type B and Type C. The participants were then included in the second part of the study eight years later; that is, to know how they responded to stress in a matter of eight years. The results showed that 257 of all the participants had suffered from coronary heart diseases, a group of illnesses wherein stress is the most common cause.

What’s alarming is that 70% of the 257 participants had a Type A personality. This means that people who are classified in Type B respond to stress better than those in Type A.

## Hardiness

Another researcher, Suzanne Kobasa, initiated a study of hardiness, in which the “hardy personality” possesses the three C’s: Control, Commitment, and Challenge. According to Kobasa, hardy people reflect on themselves as the managers of their environment and not the other way around. Also, she argued that hardy individuals are committed to face problems and won’t stop until they find resolutions to these. In addition, hardy people view change not as a threat, but as a challenge.

In her study, Kobasa found out that hardy people rarely experience being ill compared to non-hardy individuals, which means that if a person is classified as a hardy individual, he can respond to stress in a more positive way in that his health is maintained rather than damaged.

## Self Efficacy

Coined by Dr. Albert Bandura, self-efficacy refers to the sum of the internal beliefs of an individual on their capacity to influence that have an effect on his life. In relation to stress, self-efficacy refers to how you perceive yourself in terms of dealing with stressful situations.

According to psychologists, high self-efficacy levels tend to decrease negative stress feelings due to the increase in the person's sense of control of the stressful situation. On the other hand, low self-efficacy levels may result to stronger negative feelings towards the stressful experience, and ultimately to inability to cope with the stress in a positive manner.

**General Adaptation Syndrome**

## In 1936 Hans Selye created the stress model "General Adaptation Syndrome", which thoroughly explains the stress response and how aging and disease are caused by chronic exposure to stress. The Observations by Selye

In his studies, Selye noticed that the body has been adapting to external stressors in terms of a biological pattern that is actually predictable, so that the internal balance, or homeostasis, would be restored and maintained.

In its attempt to retain homeostasis, the body makes use of its hormonal system, also known as the fight or flight response. With this response, you would notice how the body wants things to be resolved fast and easy, that’s why it already resorts to releasing hormones that would enable you to combat stress in the most immediate way possible. This struggle of the body against stress is the main theme of the General Adaptation Syndrome.

Another observation that Selye discovered was that even if one’s body wants to control or reduce the stress, it still has its limits. The limited supply of body’s energy to adapt to the stressful environment is even more compromised when the body is exposed to the stressor continuously.

## Three Phases of Stress Response

The General Adaptation Syndrome is a model that is comprised of three elements or phases which describe the body’s response to stress:

### 1. Alarm Stage

In this phase, the initial reaction of the body to stress is that it labels the stressor as a threat or danger to balance,that is why it immediately activates its fight or flight response system, and releases the “stress” hormones such as adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol. These hormones enable you to perform activities that you don’t usually do.

For instance, when one’s house is on fire, his body shifts to the alarm stage, his stress hormones released (particularly adrenaline) and then he lifts a very heavy appliance outside the burning house. But there’s a catch – your blood pressure starts to rise after a minute or less, which can predispose you to damage of the brain and heart’s blood vessels, putting you at risk to stroke or heart attack. The muscles you’ve utilized might also become painful due to tissue damage.

### 2. Resistance Stage

After the body has responded to the stressor, it is more likely that the stress level has been eradicated, or simply reduced. What happens next to the fight or flight response is that you body’s defences become weaker, as it needs to allocate energy to the repair of damaged muscle tissues and lower the production of the stress hormones.

Although the body has shifted to this second phase of stress response, it remains on-guard, particularly when the stressors persist and the body is required to fight them continuously, although not as stronger as it could during the initial response.

### 3. Exhaustion Stage

During this phase, the stress has been persistent for a longer period. The body starts to lose its ability to combat the stressors and reduce their harmful impact because the adaptive energy is all drained out. The exhaustion stage can be referred to as the gate towards burnout or stress overload, which can lead to health problems if not resolved immediately.

All in all, the General Adaptation Syndrome model by Hans Selye presents a clear biological explanation of how the body responds and adapts to stress.

##### **CAUSES OF STRESS**

##### Catastrophes:

Are unpredictable, large scale events such as terrorist attacks and natural disasters that nearly everyone sees as threatening. Although people often provide one another with aid as well as comfort after such events, the health consequences can be significant.

About 52 studies of catastrophic floods, hurricanes, and fires, found in disaster’s wake, rates of psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety rose an average 17%. In all the cases studied, health consequences often come only after prolonged stress.

##### Significant Life Changes:

The second type of life event stressors is a personal life change, leaving home, the death of a loved one, the loss of a job, a marriage or divorce. Life transitions and insecurities are often felt during young adulthood. Some psychologists study the health effects of life changes by following people over time to see if such events cause illnesses. Others compare the life changes recalled by those who have or have not suffered a health problem, such as a heart attack.

A review of these studies by the U.S. National Academy of Sciences revealed that people recently widowed, fired, or divorced are more vulnerable to disease. A study of 96,000 widowed people confirmed the phenomenon, their risk of death doubled in the week following their partner’s death. Experiencing several crises puts one even more at risk.

##### Daily Hassles:

Our happiness tends to stem less from enduring good fortune than from our responses to daily events, an A on an exam, a gratifying letter, your teams’ winning the big game. Everyday hassles may be the largest sources of stress.

Daily hassles include, rush hour traffic, aggravating roommates, long lines at the store or bank, too many things to do, and misplacing things. Although some people can simply shrug them off, others are driven up the wall by such hassles. In fact, 6 in 10 people say they feel great stress at least once a week.

Over time, these little stressors can add up and take a toll on our health and well-being. Hypertension or high blood pressure rates are high among citizens of urban or ghettos, where the stresses that come with poverty, unemployment, single parenting, and overcrowding are part of daily life for some people.

Frustration:

This occurs in any situation in which the pursuit of some goal is thwarted. In essence, you experience frustration when you want something and you can’t have it. Everyone has to deal with frustration virtually every day. Fortunately, many frustrations are brief and insignificant. You may be quite upset when you go to a repair shop to pick up your ailing DVD player and find that it hasn’t been fixed as promised. However, a week later you’ll probably have your DVD player back, and the frustration will be forgotten.

Of course, some frustrations can be sources of significant stress. Failures and losses are two common kinds of frustration that are often highly stressful. Everyone fails at least some of his or her endeavors. Some people make failure almost inevitable by setting unrealistically high goals for themselves. For example, many business executives tend to forget that for every newly appointed vice president in the business world, there are dozens of middle-level executives who don’t get promoted. Losses can be especially frustrating, because people are deprived of something that they’re accustomed to having. For example, few things are more frustrating than losing a dearly loved boyfriend, girlfriend, spouse, or parent.

Pressures:

This involves expectations or demands that one behaves in a certain way. You are under pressure to *perform* when you’re expected to execute tasks and responsibilities quickly, efficiently, and successfully. For example, stand-up comedians are under intense pressure to make people laugh. Pressures to *conform* to others’ expectations are also common in our lives. Teenagers are expected to adhere to their parents’ values and rules.

## Motivational Conflicts

Sometimes the urge to do something worthy or good or pleasurable is directly opposed by the fact that it involves pain or inconvenience or hard work. Then the organism is in conflict between two opposite motives. That is one form of *motivational conflict* called an *approach/avoidance conflict*. One may also feel torn between two different pleasures. Or one may be forced to choose between two pains. Each of these is a classic *motivational conflict.*

1. Approach/avoidance conflicts. The organism is attracted and repulsed by the same stimulus or situation.

2. Approach/approach conflicts. The organism is forced to choose between two different desirable stimuli.

3. Avoidance/avoidance conflicts. The organism is forced to choose between two different undesirable alternatives.

Avoidance tendencies tend to grow *stronger* as an event approaches. This has implications you can observe in your own life. A distant event such as a dentist appointment might seem desirable, and you make plans for it. But as the day approaches, the event seems less desirable, or you are more inclined to avoid it. This can happen with desirable goals as well as things you would rather avoid: it is called "getting cold feet."

*Vacillation* (going back and forth) is common in situations of motivational conflict. If you are attracted to a person (an approach tendency) but feel shy and inhibited (an avoidance tendency) you may "go back and forth" a lot, in your thoughts, feelings, and behaviors. First you lean one way, then the other. This phenomenon is also found in control systems where opponent processes are used. In that context, it is called *oscillating* instead of *vacillating*. All control systems oscillate when trying to mediate between two opposing forces, and vacillation is one example.

*Approach/avoidance* conflicts cause an animal to be torn between opposite forces. Animals caught between strong but opposite drive states may vacillate, going first one direction then the other. Or they may perform displacement activities as discussed in Chapter 8. Displacement activities appear to express nervousness or divert attention from a conflict.

*Approach-approach* conflicts involve a choice between two desirable goals when you can only have one. Sitting in front of a display of merchandise, when you can only afford to buy one thing, you may find yourself engaged in a displacement activity such as scratching your head. The conflict between large late rewards and short early rewards is a form of approach/approach conflict.

*Avoidance-avoidance* conflicts involve choosing "the lesser of two evils." Animals caught between a fire and a river must choose which to face. They are likely to show signs of distress, jumping around, pawing the ground, or vocalizing until they plunge into the river. Strong motivational conflicts are also accompanied by signs of *autonomic* nervous system arousal: sweating, nervousness, blushing, and defecating. Rat researchers commonly count rat droppings as a way of quantifying (attaching a number to) the level of anxiety in rats.

# Stress, Illness, and the Immune System

The immune system is a collection of billions of cells that travel through the bloodstream.  They move in and out of tissues and organs, defending the body against foreign bodies (antigens), such as bacteria, viruses and cancerous cells.

When we’re stressed, the immune system’s ability to fight off antigens is reduced. That is why we are more susceptible to infections. The stress hormone corticosteroid can suppress the effectiveness of the immune system.

Stress can also have an indirect effect on the immune system as a person may use unhealthy behavioral coping strategies to reduce their stress, such as drinking and smoking.

Stress is linked to: headaches; infectious illness (e.g. ‘flu); cardiovascular disease; diabetes, asthma and gastric ulcers.

## Stress and Illness

Stress responses have an effect on **digestive system**. During stress digestion is inhibited. After stress digestive activity increases. This may affect the health of digestive system and cause ulcers.  Adrenaline released during a stress response may also cause ulcers.

Stress responses increase strain upon circulatory system due to **increased heart rate** etc. Stress can also affect the immune system by raising blood pressure.

**Hypertension** (consistently raised blood pressure over several weeks) is a major risk factor in coronary heart disease (CHD) However, CHD may be caused by eating too much salt, drinking too much coffee or alcohol.

Stress also produces an increase in blood cholesterol levels, through the action of adrenaline and noradrenaline on the release of free fatty acids. This produces a clumping together of cholesterol particles, leading to clots in the blood and in the artery walls and occlusion of the arteries.

In turn, raised heart rate is related to a more rapid build-up of cholesterol on artery walls. High blood pressure results in small lesions on the artery walls, and cholesterol tends to get trapped in these lesions (Holmes, 1994).

Stress can also have an **indirect effect** on illness as it is associated with all manner of bad habits (coping strategies), for example smoking, drinking alcohol to excess, poor diet due to lack of time, lack of exercise for the same reason, lack of sleep etc.

All of these are likely to have an adverse effect on a person’s health so could cause some of the ill-effects attributed to stress per se.

## Stress and Immune Function

Short term suppression of the immune system is not dangerous.  However, chronic suppression leaves the body vulnerable to infection and disease.

A current example of this is **AIDS** - Acquired immune deficiency syndrome. Here the immune system is suppressed leaving the vulnerable to illness. Stress would just lead to frequent illness and infections.

Stress responses increase strain upon circulatory system due to increased heart rate etc.  This may increase a person’s risk of developing disorders of the heart and circulation e.g. **coronary heart disease** (CHD).  Individuals with type A personality have a greater risk of developing CHD.

Stress responses have an effect on digestive system. During stress digestion is inhibited. After stress, digestive activity increases. This may affect the health of digestive system and cause **gastric ulcers.**