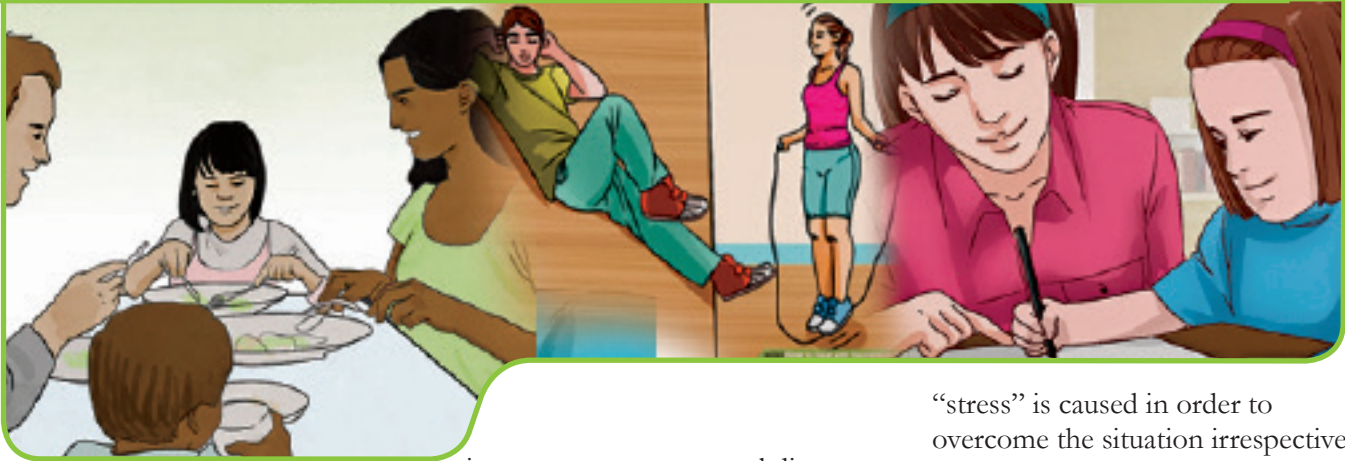


Mental Stress and ways of overcoming it

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Our ancestors led a very simple life and were happy with what they had. Today we lead a very busy life which is not at all peaceful. This change in the social order has strongly affected the health of the people. The non-communicable physiological diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure, heart diseases, cancer as well as mental diseases such as stress, depression, anxiety and mental confusion can be considered as the adverse consequences of this change in the society. A physical disease at most times show symptoms and gets cured or may become complicated. Even though mental diseases mainly do not show clear symptoms they also get cured. But similar to physical diseases mental diseases also may gradually get complicated and become chronic. However due to wrong views and attitudes mental diseases are discussed and talked about very minimally.

Mental tension or “stress”

is a very common mental disease condition of the modern day. Tension is a condition that arises and disappears in all of us now and then. We experience stress when facing interviews, competitive examinations, sport competitions, when entering married life, at the birth of a baby or when facing sad situations such as a death in the family. In all these situations

“stress” is caused in order to overcome the situation irrespective of whether successful or not. Once the “tension” is over “stress” leaves us and we become normal.

However if tension or stress continues to last for a long period it can be considered as a disease. We can define stress as a situation or an incident which causes an uneasiness or discomfort in an individual. The incident may be





very serious or minor. However what is important is not the incident or the situation, but the discomfort or uneasiness it causes. Let us consider a very simple example to understand this. Some individuals fear to face examinations. They consider it as an impediment to their future progress. Even though it has brought about negative effects (harmful effects) on such an individual, another individual may consider it as an opportunity to show his capabilities and a way to progress. Here the “stress” situation which had ill effects on one person, has not affected the other person in a similar way. Especially when a certain task has to be completed within a specific time frame or time range, “stress” affects the person. According to the available data, 58% of men and 67% of women are reported to be under stress. In certain situations stress can yield favourable results.

It can help to face challenges and achieve targets. Stress situations may be categorized as either positive or favourable stress, and stress which has ill-effects as negative stress. Positive stress may be called fruitful or useful stress. Stress is necessary to keep our nervous system alert. It is necessary to be alert when threatened or challenged. As an example when all eight runners taking part in a final 100 meter race are competent, only three will win the race. For this purpose not only

do they have to possess physical prowess but also should be able to actually perform the task. So they have to possess an alert nervous system and also a “stress” that helps it. Negative stress or stress which is not useful has adverse effects on our health in three ways. The first of these is that it has adverse effects on our immune system. It is the immune system which helps to prevent certain diseases or helps to get cured fast. Information obtained through research has



shown that negative stress can aggravate both non communicable and communicable diseases.

The second way by which negative stress affects health is that it can lead people to harmful behavioural patterns. Some people when faced with problems find it difficult to solve them and indulge in risky behaviour such as smoking, consuming alcohol or use “drugs”, and thereby cause harm to their health. This is a fine example for the above mentioned inappropriate risky behavior. Also some people respond to negative stress by being violent. It is a well known fact that such people bring their work place problems to their homes and indulge in violence in their homes and disturb the domestic peace. Similarly some people take problems of home to their office. Psychiatrist world over believe that all are subjected to mental pressure during some situations, specially so as a child, school going stage and as youth. This mental stress may arise by external and internal changes in ourselves or the stress may be caused by teachers and provocations by fellow students.

Mental stress is also caused due to



changes that take place during our life time. We must get adapted to these changes. Otherwise we will get stressed. Therefore a person may get stressed due to the inability to face change to suit the new situation.

It is necessary to adapt to the new situation in a new way. It is necessary not to have a rigid stance but be flexible. We can take aging as an example. Some people find it difficult to face aging and adapt accordingly.

Another example is the birth of the first child for the mother. It is a novel experience for a woman and some women are subjected to mental stress after child birth.

Thirdly we have to face various challenges during our life time. These challenges may be personal or may be related to our professional life. As an example let us consider a fighter pilot. He has to drop bombs on enemy territory while piloting his aeroplane. It is not possible to avoid the wrath of the enemies in this instance. It will cause a great deal of mental stress for him to bomb and destroy, enemy camps while at the same time saving his own life. Interpersonal relationships also cause stress. It is seen prior to the beginning of a relationship, during the maintainance of the relationship and when a



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relationship is terminated.

When attempts are made to begin a relationship, stress is caused in determining the way in which to win the relationship. Also stress arises during maintenance of the relationship and fulfilling the duties and obligations specially when various limits are imposed due to the relationship. Most of us may have experienced the hurt and the tension caused when a relationship breaks down and ends unexpectedly. It is possible that stress may bring about mental, physical and behavioural changes in the day to day living.

Among the mental changes the following may be included

- Decrease in the ability to remember
- Difficulties in concentrating on a particular subject
- Frequent occurrence of fearful thoughts
- Difficulties in taking correct decisions and arriving at conclusions
- Frequent occurrence of negative thoughts
- Frequent weeping
- Getting angry very fast
- Feeling of isolation
- Sense of frustration and difficulty to feel care free and light
- Being engulfed by indifference and stress

Physical and bodily changes

- Frequent aches and pains
- Chest pain and increased heartrate or feeling so
- Indigestion (stomach pain or uncomfortable feeling after meals)

- Vomiting/Nausea
- Dizziness
- Headache
- Feeling weak
- Irregular bowel movements
- Irregular menstrual cycle
- Diminished interest in sex
- Decrease or increase of blood sugar levels

Cognitive Changes

- Changes in the way of thinking
- Changes in behaviour and daily routine and activities
- Either decrease in food intake or

restlessness are the determining facts for to mental stress.

Mental stress affects all organs of the body. The effects on the heart, brain and stomach (digestive system) are harmful to the entire body. Due to these a person may get subjected to heart attacks, stroke, ulcers in the stomach, cancers, diseases of muscle and bone and immune deficiency.

It is possible to diagnose stress by the physiological and mental changes in a person. Stress helps to find out how the body functions.



excessive eating

- Sleeplessness or sleeping throughout the day
- Desire to isolate oneself and live alone
- Neglecting or avoiding responsibilities
- Addiction to alcohol or narcotics

Biological research has shown that excessive fear, intense sadness and

Though most people believe that the body and the mind function independently of each other, “stress” shows that they function in a similar manner. This is why the body and the mind are seen as the two sides of the same coin. The latest view is that the body and the mind are bound together and function as a unified system. This is the reason why another

system known as the PNI (Psycho Neuro Immune) system is now being discussed. This is known as the mind-neuro-immune system, a result when a person suffers stress condition, his immunity is said to decrease. Accordingly when a

will be shocked with fear. However it is possible to train a person to go near such a bomb and inactivate or defuse it. Similarly it is possible to train a person to tolerate stress.

We can train our children to

exams without difficulty through proper organization. Hence our message here is that management of stress is possible.

It is possible to rid oneself of stress by running, walking, by taking deep long breaths, yoga or through other exercises. Through these it will be possible to get mental and physical relief. Relief is also possible by discussing problems with people we trust, by participating in work along with the family-wife and children



person is stressed, his mind, nervous system and immune system are seen to function together.

Though not indicated in the term PNI there is another aspect to this condition. That is the hormonal system. However instead of naming it as the PNI, it is better to name it as PNHI.

It is difficult for a person suffering with stress to realize that he is stressed. Such a person has to be assessed through the answers he gives to a specially designed questionnaire.

Any person can be trained to resist stress. For example, if any one of us is handed over a live bomb, we



face examinations and withstand any stress condition. We have to teach them the technique of examinations. In addition to teaching them the subject matter it is necessary to train them in the way of writing answers. It is necessary to train them to face

(having meals together, watching TV etc) Another special requirement is time management. It would be possible to avoid stress, by not only to carryout the duties in the office, diligently but also by carryout household work, ensuring sleep, rest, and enjoying the 24 hour day.

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