

The Ultimate Guide for Eliminating Stress and Anxiety

The term stress was borrowed from the field of physics by one of the fathers of stress research Hans Selye. Even hearing the word makes people feel anxious!

There is a general acceptance that being “stressed” is one of today’s lifestyle problems and it’s not going away in a hurry. However, the word was actually coined in the 1930’s.

While being “stressed” is not a new condition, we might ask ourselves, “Do we really know how to deal with it, in our increasingly stressed-out society?”

There are many definitions of stress. Until we can clearly define stress, it is difficult to measure it and until we measure it, we cannot deal with it.

Descriptions are plentiful. Two simple definitions are:

“Physical, mental, or emotional strain or tension.”

“An automatic physical response to challenges or any situation that requires us to adapt or change.”

Are we talking about “acute” stress (a one-off event), or “chronic” stress (an ongoing situation or an accumulation of many stressful events)?

A definition of chronic stress is:

“...wear and tear on the body and mind caused by life’s many changes and demands. It is affected by both the environment and the make-up of the individual in the environment.” *Vincent Cornell, in “Sorting out stress”, Grant Brecht. (1996)*

Another popular definition of stress is:

“A condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilise.” Source: www.stress.org/daily-life

SOME KEY FACTS ABOUT STRESS:

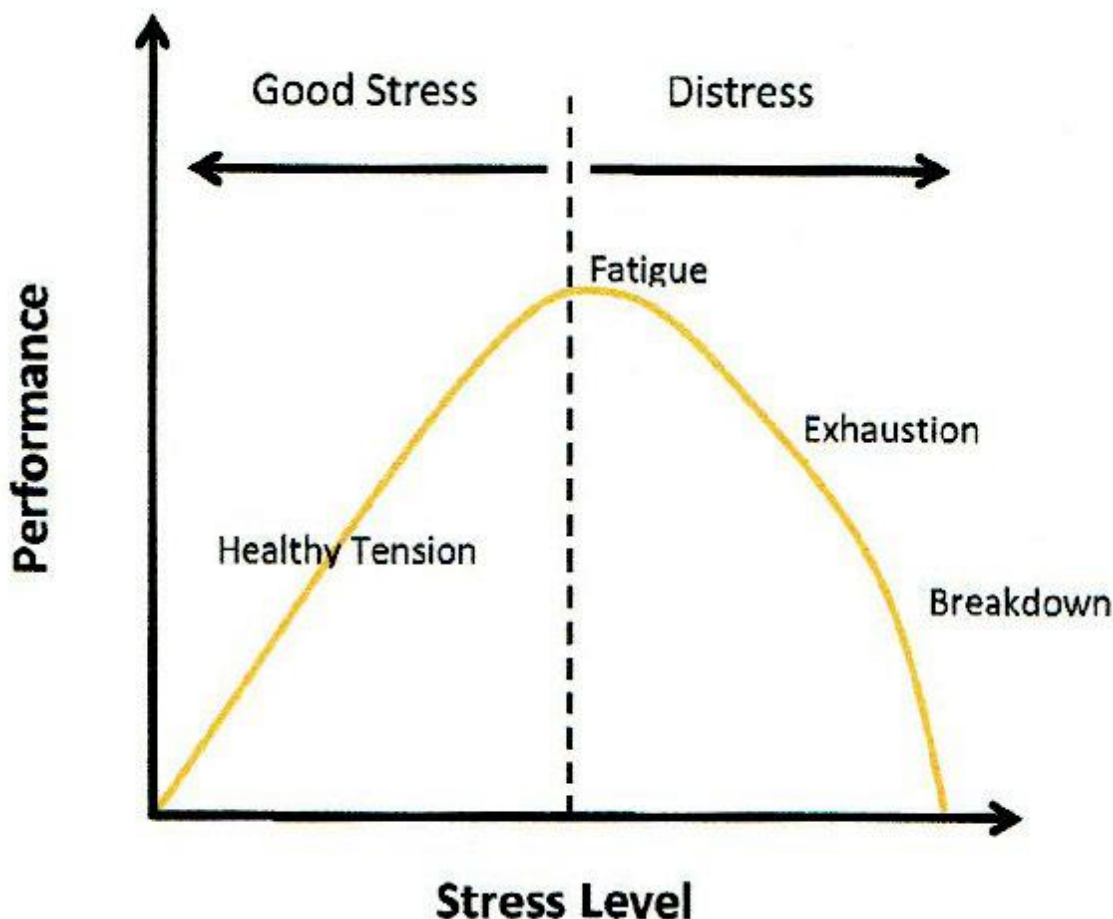
- Stress is closely linked to, and overlaps with, anxiety and depression.
- Stress is both a cause and an effect.
- Most people connect “stress” with “distress”.
- Our perception of what is stressful is largely affected by our attitudes and beliefs.
- Stress can be experienced as acute or chronic.
- Stressors may be ‘macro’ (caused by one major event) or ‘micro’ (an accumulation of many ongoing factors).
- We respond to stress in different ways.
- Too much bad stress can kill.

CAN STRESS BE A POSITIVE THING?

Stress in itself is not a problem. It is not what happens to the individual, but how he or she reacts to it. If we see a challenge as a threat, then stress becomes negative.

But not all stress is bad. Positive stress (“eustress”) can help us rise to a challenge, stimulate us and spur us on to greater achievements that will bring satisfaction to our lives. Think of all the stories where a surge of adrenaline has helped people perform feats of seemingly impossible strength in situations of danger. Up to a certain level, the stress response can help us finish urgent tasks, meet work deadlines, and increase our efficiency and performance. Negative stress (“distress”) leaves us feeling overwhelmed and out of control. The latter is commonplace in today’s busy world.

Figure 1: Yerkes Dodson performance curve (Adapted from P. Nixon; Practitioner, 1979)



As tension mounts, performance can increase to an optimal level. If stress or tension continue past this level, performance and comfort will decrease. Kelly McGonigal (2013) reports on research that provides a strong argument for having stress in our lives.

There is a quite simple measure of stress illustrated by following equation:

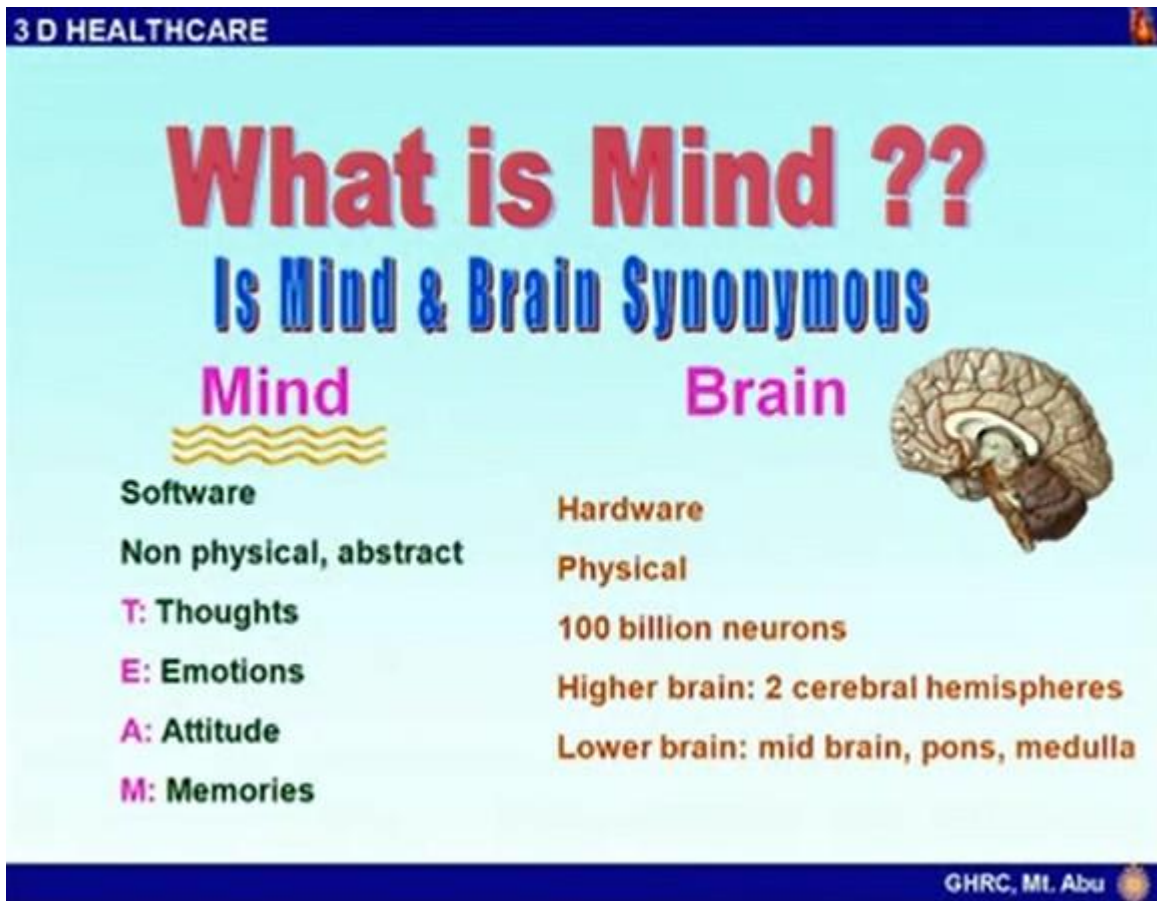
$$STRESS = \frac{\text{Pressures (external and internal)}}{\text{Inner Strength}}$$

If the outcome of this equation is less than zero, then we are fine. Only when this value is greater than one, we have a problem. It means that our inner strength is not able to cope with pressures.

WHERE DOES THE STRESS COME FROM?

Before we go further in to dealing with stress, let us understand where the stress comes from.

Figure 2: Connection between Mind and Brain



Courtesy CAD Program. Brahmakumaris International University, Mt. Abu, India.

The quality of every single thought we have, decides the state of our mind. We need to understand connection between Mind and Brain. The above figure shows us that the relationship between Mind and Brain is like Software and Hardware. The Brain can not function without the software, the Mind. The abbreviation of four components of mind is TEAM. If we have a positive TEAM, we are stress free and will enjoy the life to it's full potential. However, if the TEAM is negative, then no matter what we do, we suffer. Negative TEAM ensures that we have already lost the game of life even before it starts.

When we are experiencing Stress, we always look for help outside. This strategy does work to some extent. However, considering figure 2 above, we always must work within to have a positive TEAM.

Let us now have a look at both type of strategies that can help us deal with Stress from within.

ONE OF THE MOST IMPORTANT TOOLS IN MANAGING STRESS AND ANXIETY IS MEDITATION:

Meditation, like yoga, has been used for centuries as a spiritual practice, to silence the inner and outer world and attune one's connection to the spiritual world. It is based in mindfulness.

In today's world, meditation is most popularly used as a form of stress management and as a relaxation technique. Despite the vast number of studies that demonstrate the benefits of meditation for stress, pain, and chronic illness (Harvard Health, 2014), people often speak of meditation as a 'should' (as in "I should meditate more").

The truth is, many of us are intimidated by common misconception that meditation means that one must sit up straight and 'stop thinking'!

However, there is a tremendous variety in the forms and styles of meditation. Some examples include mindfulness meditation, breath-focused meditation, walking meditation, guided imagery meditation, mantra, or sound focused meditation, etc. There is no "best" form of meditation aside from what you feel is most suited to you as an individual. Jon Kabat-Zinn, a leading authority on mindfulness, defines it as:

"Paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and non-judgmentally." It is the practice of bringing your complete attention to the present in an open, interested, and receptive way.

Being mindful has many benefits, including:

- Being fully present.
- Experiencing unpleasant thoughts and feelings in a safe way.
- Becoming aware of what you are avoiding.
- Being more connected to self, others, the world.
- Increasing self-awareness.
- Becoming less easily disturbed by, and reactive to, unpleasant experiences.
- Learning the difference between you and your thoughts.
- Having more direct contact with the world rather than living through thoughts.
- Learning that everything changes, including thoughts and feelings.
- Having more balance and less emotional volatility.
- Experiencing more calm and peacefulness.
- Developing self-acceptance and self-compassion. (Adapted from Harris, 2007.)

SOME OF THE OTHER TOOLS WHICH CAN BE USED FOR REDUCING STRESS ARE:

At Mental Level:

1. Changing our thinking.
2. Making worry work for you.
3. Introducing Positivity.
4. Positive Psychology exercises.
5. Practicing Mindfulness.
6. Hypnosis (<https://www.stress.org.uk/Self-hypnosis.aspx>)
7. Guided imagery and creative visualisation (www.youtube.com/watch?v=jciE4nNAOLw).

Life management:

1. Simplifying Life
2. Life Balance – pleasure versus purpose orientations
3. Personal Organisation – organise your mind
4. Routines and rituals – habits
5. Flow and creativity

THE MOST IMPORTANT MANTRA TO REMEMBER IS, EACH ONE OF US IS IN CONTROL OF OURSELVES. WITHOUT OUR APPROVAL NOTHING CAN HAPPEN WITHIN US, AT MENTAL OR PHYSICAL LEVEL. EVEN WHEN WE FLICK THE FINGER, WHO US IN CONTROL OF THIS ACTION AND WITHOUT WHOSE PERMISSION THIS ACTION CAN NOT HAPPEN? THE ANSWER IS ME. WE MUS TAKE OWNERSHIP OF EACH ACTION WE PERFORM AND IT'S CONSEQUENCES.

Let me show you the path ahead in a very caring, confidential, and non-judgemental way of dealing with Stress and Anxiety in life.

Visit my website at www.healthwellnessmentor.com for a free 60-minutes obligation free consultation to explore further.

References:

1. Understanding stress for you and your client – Wellness Coaching Australia
2. 3-Dimensional Healthcare Program for Healthy Heart (based on revolutionary concept of Soul-Mind-Body-Medicine concept).