

# PSYCHOTHERAPY AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

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A part of the challenges of daily life are hassles, irritants, stressors, life events and changes. A health promotion approach is utilized to address the prevention, management and early intervention for stress management and also to promote positive mental and psychological health. Health promotion is the science and art of helping people to change their lifestyle in order to achieve the optimal health level, reestablishing the harmony of each of the human existence levels.

## **Health promotion in different human existence levels:**

On the physical level, represented by the human body, harmony and balance can be achieved by doing regularly physical exercises, having a balanced nutrition, by avoiding excesses in eating habits and avoiding the consume of dangerous substances.

On the emotional level balance is achieved through proper stress management and assistance during the emotional crises.

On the social level (also part of the emotional level) harmony is achieved by building and maintaining a proper support network. This network is composed from friends, family members, colleagues or other members from various communities that can help you during difficult moments.

On the intellectual level (the concrete mental level) balance is established by having a general education and a continuous professional evolution, which is often accompanied by a defined, fulfilling and continuously developing career.

On the intuitive / creative level (or the intuitive mental plane) by re-establishing and continuing development of intuition, creativity and capacity of anticipation of future events.

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On the inner level balance can be attained through the recovery and future development of the self-esteem that leads to the capacity of dreaming and of transforming those dreams in reality. These projects will bring balance to our inner level if they will be directed to a universal good cause.

On a spiritual level, harmony will be reached by the presence of sentiments of love, approval and hope along with charity actions directed to helping every body around us.

### **Stages of the prophylaxis of getting ill:**

In the primary prophylaxis stage (suitable for the healthy and unstressed individual) the illness can be prevented before any unhealthy signs appear, the strategy consists of the following types of activities:

–Promotion of Health through: Physical exercise, Healthy Nutrition, Adaptability to unexpected and difficult conditions, Relaxation, Balance between work and family, Flexible work schedule, Attention paid to the growth of the children and The prevention of Illnesses care for the elderly parents, and adoption of children

-Preventing of getting hurt or intoxicated through Accidents investigations, Workplace monitoring for igienic conditions, Evaluations of professional and domestic risks. Preventing of getting ill through Stress management, Health education, stopping smoking, maintaining a proper weight, Evaluation of the illnesses risks (American Journal of Health Promotion).

In the secondary stage in the prophylaxis of getting ill (when a person reacts to a stressing event), it concentrates on the reestablishing health when physiological symptoms that occur before losing the health state or just after the beginning of the illness process.

In the third stage of prophylaxis (or the resistance to stress stage) the recovery of the persons which are already experiencing the resistance to stress stage is focused. Resistance to stress is characterized by the attenuation of the chronic stress symptoms as a response to a strong will that cause various hormones to be released in order to mask the stress responses. The purpose of the recovery is to bring the person in the second (reaction to stress) and then first category (Optimal health state). This can be achieved through Stress management, Restoration of the vitality consumed by stress,

Reestablish of the work – rest balance, along with the pleasurable activities and imposed activities balance, Recovery of the physiological reserves of the organism through a special nutrition program designed by specialists after the interpretation of the results of the clinic and Para clinic medical tests.

People that are getting through this stage have a physical and psychological healthy appearance. However this is artificially stimulated through the means of happiness hormones that are activated in order to mask an acute stress.

The main objective of the forth type of illness prophylaxis (or the stress induced breakdown) is to limit the consequences of the clinical effects which already appeared. This is achieved through self help and self care programs. Management of the handicap can be done through Modifications of the professional roles, Recovering and therapy centers at the workplace, Professional rehabilitation and help for professional recovery, Special assistance programs for those with long term handicaps and those with irreversible chronic diseases, and Careful monitoring of the industrial hygiene

### **Influence of stress on physical and psychological well being**

The influence of stress on physical and psychological well being is well documented. Stress has been implicated in heart disease, eating disorders, stroke, insomnia, ulcers, accident proneness, cancer, decreased immunity, chronic headaches, diabetes, depression, substance abuse, chronic pain, irritable bowel syndrome and chronic fatigue. In fact, estimates are that 50 to 80 percent of all physical disorders have psychosomatic or stress related origins (Rice, 1992).

### **What is stress?**

Stress is a complex, dynamic process of interaction between a person and his or her life. It is the way we react physically, mentally, and emotionally to the various conditions, changes, and demands of life. People react differently to Stress. How you react depends on your strategies for coping with Stress, your previous experience with Stress, your genetic makeup, and your level of social support and how you view your social support. The greatest factor, however, is how you perceive Stress and control its outcome. What is Stressful to one person may not affect another. Stress can result from a string of specific events, the general

conditions in your life, life cycle transitions and developmental stages, or conflict with your belief system.

## Signs of Stress

The signs of Stress can be physical or mental. Some people call this "storing" Stress in the body (physical) or in the mind (mental).

Common physical symptoms of Stress include:

- Rapid heartbeat.
- Headache.
- Stiff neck and/or tight shoulders.
- Backache.
- Rapid breathing.
- Sweating and sweaty palms.
- Upset stomach, nausea, or diarrhea.

You also may notice signs of Stress in your thinking, behavior, or mood. You may:

- Become irritable and intolerant of even minor disturbances.
- Feel irritated or frustrated, lose your temper more often, and yell at others for no reason.
- Feel jumpy or exhausted all the time.
- Find it hard to concentrate or focus on tasks.
- Worry too much about insignificant things.
- Doubt your ability to do things.
- Imagine negative, worrisome, or terrifying scenes.

Feel you are missing opportunities because you cannot act quickly.

Stress is a fact of everyday life - a fact you cannot deny. Any change in your life demands that you adapt to it. Most people think of all **stressful** occurrences as being negative in nature (**dis-stress**), such as physical or psychological injury, illness, or the death of a loved one. However, **stress can** also be positive in nature. For example, falling in love, changing jobs, getting a new home or a promotion are stressful situations, which, if properly managed, are positive and motivating.

Stress management refers to various efforts used to control and reduce the tension that occurs in these situations.

Stress management involves making emotional and physical changes. The degree of stress and the desire to make the changes will determine the level of change that will take place.

### **Stress Management Strategies**

The following are tips on how to maintain a healthier lifestyle and to prepare you to cope with the stress of everyday living.

1. Structure each day to include a minimum of 20 minutes of aerobic exercise.
2. Eat well balanced meals, more whole grains, nuts, fruits and vegetables. Substitute fruits for desserts.
3. Avoid caffeine. The substance may aggravate anxiety, insomnia, nervousness and trembling.
4. Reduce refined sugars. Excess sugars cause frequent fluctuation in blood glucose levels, adding stress to the body's physiological functioning.
5. Reduce alcohol and drugs. These substances may add to headaches and swelling, decrease coping mechanisms and add to depression.
6. Get a least 7 hours of sleep nightly.
7. Spend time each day with at least one relaxation technique - imagery, daydreaming, prayer, yoga or meditation.
8. Take a warm bath or shower.
9. Go for a walk.
10. Get in touch! Hug someone, hold hands, or stroke a pet. Physical contact is a great way to relieve stress.

### **Stress in Family**

Perhaps the first thing to realize about stress is that it's not always a bad thing to have in families. In fact it can make family life exciting--being busy, working, playing hard, competing in contests, being involved in community

activities, and even arguing when you don't agree with other family members. Stress means change. It is the force exerted on a family by demands.

If we think of a bridge, stress results from putting weight on the bridge. This usually can be managed since the supports under the bridge are designed to withstand pressure (or stress) from traffic on the bridge. This assumes that the supports are in place, and are numerous and strong enough to withstand stress on the structure, even over time.

Sometimes in a family, this is not true. The structure can't hold up under the pressure and there is a crisis. Since the supports are not strong enough to withstand the pressure, the structure collapses. This can happen to families just as it happens to bridges.

Stress, therefore, is simply pressure put on the family. It results from change and can be good or bad. Crisis, however, is a point of acute imbalance between pressure and supports. This imbalance is so severe that the family structure collapses and is immobilized for a time. The family can no longer function. For a time no one goes to work; no one cooks or even wants to eat; and no one performs the usual family tasks.

### **Habilitation**

It has been estimated by WHO that around 5-7% of the world's population have a physical sensory and/or mental impairment leading to disabilities of various degrees. The international year of disabled people in 1981 followed by a decade of the same topic, created a growing awareness that people with a disability should have equal rights and opportunities to other citizens of a nation. Several governments and humanitarian organizations have taken up the challenge of rehabilitation in developing countries.

### **Relieving Stress:**

One of the first skills to learn in managing Stress is how to relieve Stress with healthy coping strategies. Many of these coping strategies can be done with little

or no instruction. No one coping strategy is preferable; you need to find the one that works the best for you. Using them regularly is the key. They include:

- **Physical activity.** Physical activity can reduce Stress and the Stress response. Aerobic exercise—the kind that increases your heart rate, such as walking, running, bicycling, or swimming—is especially useful for counteracting the harmful effects of Stress. Stretching is also a good way to relieve muscle tension. Regular, moderate physical activity may be the single best approach to managing Stress. For more information about becoming more active, see the topic Fitness.
- **Writing.** There is increased evidence that writing about Stressful events and circumstances can help relieve Stress and improve diseases that Stress may affect.<sup>2</sup> Write for 10 to 15 minutes a day about Stressful events and how you felt.
- **Talking about your feelings.** By expressing your feelings to others (in a positive, respectful way), you will be able to understand and cope with them better.
- **Laughing and crying.** Laughing and crying are natural ways to relieve Stress and release tension. They are both part of your emotional healing process.
- **Finding an activity that you enjoy.** A meaningful activity helps relieve tension. This can be a hobby, such as gardening, or a creative activity, such as writing, crafts, or art. Playing with and caring for pets also can help you relax.

### **Body-centered relaxation**

Body-centered relaxation skills that help the body relax are useful for those who experience mainly physical symptoms of Stress. These skills include:

- [Breathing exercises](#), such as roll breathing.
- [Progressive muscle relaxation](#), which reduces muscle tension by relaxing individual muscle groups.
- [Massage](#), such as a [shoulder and neck massage](#).
- [Aromatherapy](#), which uses the aroma-producing oils (essential oils) from plants to promote relaxation.

- [Yoga, tai chi, and qi gong](#), which are forms of exercise and meditation. They generally require initial instruction.

### **Mindfulness activities**

Mindfulness activities help relax the mind and are often combined with body-centered relaxation exercises.

- [Autogenic training](#) is used to return the body to a normal state after the Stress response.
- [Self-hypnosis](#) can open the mind to suggestions that can relieve Stress or change the way a person responds to Stress.
- [Meditation](#) focuses your attention on feeling calm and having a clear awareness about your life.
- [Guided imagery](#) (visualization) is a method of using your imagination to help you relax and release tension caused by Stress. Your body responds to the images in your mind. Use these simple [imagery exercises](#) for relaxing or renewing your energy when you need to relax.
- [Music therapy](#) can relax your body, improve your mood, and change the pace of your day.
- [Humor therapy](#) is becoming widely accepted as a tool for reducing Stress and boosting the body's immune system.

### **Breathing exercises for relaxation**

The way you breathe affects your whole body. Full, deep breathing is a good way to reduce tension, feel relaxed, and reduce [Stress](#).

#### **Roll breathing**

The object of roll breathing is to develop full use of your lungs and get in touch with the rhythm of your breathing. It can be practiced in any position, but it is best to learn it lying on your back, with your knees bent.

1. Place your left hand on your abdomen and your right hand on your chest. Notice how your hands move as you breathe in and out.

2. Practice filling your lower lungs by breathing so that your left hand goes up when you inhale and your right hand remains still. Always inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth.
3. When you have filled and emptied your lower lungs 8 to 10 times, add the second step to your breathing: inhale first into your lower lungs as before, and then continue inhaling into your upper chest. As you do so, your right hand will rise and your left hand will fall a little as your abdomen falls.
4. As you exhale slowly through your mouth, make a quiet, whooshing sound as first your left hand and then your right hand falls. As you exhale, feel the tension leaving your body as you become more and more relaxed.
5. Practice breathing in and out in this manner for 3 to 5 minutes. Notice that the movement of your abdomen and chest is like rolling waves rising and falling in a rhythmic motion.

Practice roll breathing daily for several weeks until you can do it almost anywhere, providing you with an instant relaxation tool any time you need one.

### **Clearing your head**

Clearing your head is good for relieving neck tension or when you have too much on your mind.

1. Begin with several very slow neck rolls. With your chin on your chest, or close to it, roll your head up and to the right, slowly inhaling until your head is leaning back and your chin is pointing towards the sky. If you have arthritis of the neck ([cervical spine](#)) or other diseases of the spine, do not point your chin to the sky.
2. Hold your breath for just a few seconds in this position.
3. As you roll your head down, slowly exhale until your chin is back on your chest.
4. Repeat, this time rolling your head to the left.

### **Neck (cervical spine) symptoms in rheumatoid arthritis**

When [rheumatoid arthritis](#) affects the neck joints, particularly those located at the top of the spine, spinal cord complications can occur.

- Bones affected by rheumatoid arthritis may dislocate and press on the spinal cord.
- Pressure can cause numbness, pain, tingling, weakness, loss of bowel or bladder control, and unusual head and neck sensations.
- Pressure may also obstruct blood flow through the blood vessels in the spinal cord.

Neck pain along with weakness, numbness, or tingling of hands, feet, legs, or arms is the most common symptom of possible pressure on the nerve (compression of the spinal cord). Although compression of the spinal cord is fairly rare, if untreated it can lead to paralysis.

### **Progressive muscle relaxation**

The body responds to [Stress](#) with muscle tension, which can cause pain or discomfort. Progressive muscle relaxation reduces muscle tension and general mental anxiety. Progressive muscle relaxation often helps people get to sleep.

### **Meditation**

Meditation is the practice of focusing your attention on feeling calm and having a clear awareness about your life. During meditation, you may focus on a single image, sound, mantra (words spoken or sung in a pattern), or your own breathing. Or, you may not focus on a single purpose but rather may try to let all thoughts, feelings, sounds, or images just pass through your mind.

Meditation usually involves slow, regular breathing and sitting quietly for 15 to 20 minutes. It can produce a state of relaxation that reduces heart rate, slows breathing, and lowers blood pressure.

### **Massage therapy**

Massage involves applying pressure to the soft tissues of the body, such as the muscles. The theory is that massage may be helpful in reducing tension and pain, improving circulation, and encouraging relaxation. Massage is usually done by applying pressure with the hands, but it can also be done using the forearms, elbows, or feet. Massage techniques can affect the muscles, circulation, nervous

system, and other systems of the body. There are at least 80 different types of massage. Some are gentle, and some are very active and intense.

Deep tissue massage is more active and intense. It is used to treat long-lasting (chronic) muscle tension. Slow strokes are applied (with the fingers, thumbs, and elbows) using intense pressure to reach deeper layers of the muscles than those reached with a Swedish massage technique.

Some people feel that massage works because the touch is healing. Touch also communicates a sense of caring.

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