



STRESS AND THE HEALTHWORKER.

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*“The greatest weapon against Stress is our ability to choose one thought over
another”.*

-William James

Stress is any situation in which a non-specific demand requires- an individual to respond or act (Selye, 1976). It involves physiological and psychological responses. Stress can lead to negative or counterproductive feelings or threaten emotional wellbeing. It can threaten the way a person normally perceives reality, solves problems, thinks in general, and a person's relationships and sense of belonging. In addition, stress can threaten a person's general outlook on life, attitude toward loved ones and health status¹.

There are many different things in life that can cause stress. Some of the main sources of stress include work, finances, relationships, parenting, and day-to-day inconveniences.

Stress can trigger the body's response to a perceived threat or danger, known as the fight-or-flight response. During this reaction, certain hormones like adrenaline and cortisol are released. This speeds the heart rate, slows digestion, shunts blood flow to major muscle groups, and changes various other autonomic nervous functions, giving the body a burst of energy and strength. Originally named for its ability to enable us to physically fight or run away when faced with danger, the fight-or-flight response is now activated in situations where neither response is appropriate—like in traffic or during a stressful day at work.

When the perceived threat is gone, systems are designed to return to normal function via the relaxation response. But in cases of chronic stress, the relaxation response doesn't occur often enough, and being in a near-constant state of fight-or-flight can cause damage to the body. Stress can also lead to some unhealthy habits that have a negative impact on your health. For example, many people cope with stress by eating too

much or by smoking. These unhealthy habits damage the body and create bigger problems in the long-term. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way one respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to our overall well-being.

Sometimes, the best way to manage our stress involves changing our situation. At other times, the best strategy involves changing the way one respond to the situation. Developing a clear understanding of how stress impacts our physical and mental health is important. It's also important to recognize how our mental and physical health affects our stress level.

Stress is not always easy to recognize, but there are some ways to identify some signs that one might be experiencing too much pressure. Sometimes stress can come from an obvious source, but sometimes even small daily stress from work, school, family, and friends can take a toll on our mind and body. If you think stress might be affecting you, there are a few things one can watch for: Psychological signs such as difficulty in concentrating, worrying, anxiety, and trouble remembering. Emotional signs such as being angry, irritated, moody, or frustrated. Physical signs such as high blood pressure, changes in weight, frequent colds or infections, and changes in the menstrual cycle and libido. Behavioral signs such as poor self-care, not having time for the things one enjoy, or relying on drugs and alcohol to cope².

Stress is different for different people, so it is important to address stress differently. We all face situations where we are so stressed out and feel so unbalanced that we tend to overlook all tasks that we know are important because we cannot manage a single thing. The reasons behind such issues are workplace stress. Working professionals carry this stress back to their family lives, where it starts affecting their behavior with family and friends. This study explains the impact of workplace stress on our lives. The simple trick is to maximize positive stress and reduce negative stress. For example, you are too busy to schedule one hour for exercise, so simply try taking stairs to your office instead of lift, if your office is near to your house try walking. Instead of treating things like they are adding more too your stressful life tries replacing it with things that soothes you³.

NEED FOR THE ARTICLE:-

“Stress is the trash of modern life, we all generate it, but if you don’t dispose it properly, it will pile up and overtake your life”.

Danzae Pace

Regardless of age, sex, ethnicity and religion, no one is immune to the burdens of stress. Statistics demonstrate the widespread prevalence of this state of mind. According to the American Institute of stress, about 33 percent of people report feeling extreme stress while 77 percent of people experience stress that

affects their physical health whereas 73 percent of people have stress that impacts their mental health and 48 percent of people have trouble sleeping because of stress. Unfortunately, for about half of all Americans, levels of stress are getting worse instead of better⁴.

The Global Organization for stress reports that, Stress is the number one health concern of high school students. 80 percent of people feel stress at work.

While stress is a significant problem in the U.S., the rest of the world is not immune to its harmful effects. Stress is a global problem with 91 percent of Australians feeling stressed about one or more important parts of their life, about 450,000 workers in Britain believing their stress was making them ill and 86 percent of Chinese workers reporting stress⁵.

Like any other country around the world, India is not lagging behind with stress levels in India remain very high compared to other countries. Almost 82% of India's population is suffering from stress and those in the sandwich generation (aged 35-49) are most affected with around 89% reporting some level of stress. These were the findings of the 2019 Cigna 360 Well-Being Survey-Well and beyond, a survey conducted by Cigna TTK Health Insurance. The survey cited work, health, and finance related issues as major causes of stress in the country⁶.

EFFECTS OF UNCONTROLLED STRESS:

Stress has a powerful impact on various aspects of our life—not only can it affect our mood, energy level, relationships, and work performance, stress can also cause and exacerbate a wide variety of health conditions. Persistent reactions to stress can lead to serious health problems, including:

CARDIOVASCULAR DISEASE, one study that tracked over 68,000 healthy adults for eight years found that those who reported feeling constantly under strain and unable to cope, among other symptoms of chronic stress, were likelier to die of cardiovascular diseases⁷. The results of another study associated chronic stress with a 40-60% increased risk of coronary heart disease⁸.

DIGESTIVE DISORDERS: The “brain-gut” connection has a two-way effect: digestive disorders can cause stress, and the negative effects of stress can cause and aggravate digestive disorders. Part of the fight-or-flight response’s job is to halt digestion so the body can focus its energy on dealing with the perceived threat. Prolonged stress, then, can disrupt the normal digestive function and cause bloating, pain, and discomfort⁹.

ACCELERATED AGING: Elissa Epel, a professor at the University of California, has focused much of her research on the relationship between stress and telomerase (the enzyme associated with aging). Her studies show that people with chronic stress in their lives, such as mothers with chronically ill children, have

markedly shortened telomeres¹⁰. In fact, one landmark study found that these women aged on average ten years faster than women who did not perceive chronic stress in their lives¹¹.

DECREASED IMMUNE FUNCTIONING: Since the 1980s, research has found that stress can negatively affect the immune system. The American Psychological Association suggests that one cause of stress that might be most intricately linked to immune function is loneliness—people who don't have a support system to lean on in stressful times wind up getting sicker more often¹².

According to the Heart Math Institute, other effects of stress include weight gain and obesity, headaches, irritability, diabetes, and insomnia among other¹³.

Stress at work is very common—the fight-or-flight response reserved for true threats can often be triggered by a demanding manager or an upcoming deadline. Stress can lead to burnout—emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and a sense of low personal accomplishment that leads to decreased effectiveness at work. For example, in a recent study from the prestigious Journal Archives of Internal Medicine, over 45% of practicing physicians are experiencing at least one symptom of burnout, which can lead to dangerous mistakes and lapses in judgment that could affect a patient's health. A similar pattern of burnout is undoubtedly found in many other occupations, demonstrating the importance of stress management in the workplace¹⁴.

There's a silent killer in our workplace. Everybody who has ever held an occupation has eventually felt the pressure of work-related stress. Any job can have distressing or stressful elements, regardless of whether we love what we do. For the time being, one may encounter pressure to meet deadlines or to satisfy a difficult commitment. In any case, when work pressure gets ceaseless, it tends to be overpowering and unsafe to both physical and emotional health.

Unquestionably, stress can be one of the most daunting and dangerous obstacles to employee engagement in the work environment. As per a 2017/18 Labor Force Survey (LFS), an absolute of 15.4 million working days have been lost due to work-related stress, depression or anxiety.

Taking into account that workers generally get paid for days off, the money related misfortune because of stress-related issues is huge. Besides, it creates the impression that such issues are on the ascent, as well, with approximately 1,700 individuals per 100,000 workers answered to be experiencing pressure, wretchedness or uneasiness in 2017/18, contrasted with an expected 1,400 of every 2005/06¹⁵.

HOW TO OVERCOME STRESS AT WORKPLACE:

1. **Track your stressors.** Keep a journal for a week or two to identify which situations create the most stress and how you respond to them. Record your thoughts, feelings, and information about the environment, including the people and circumstances involved, the physical setting, and how you reacted.
2. **Develop healthy responses.** Instead of attempting to fight stress with fast food or alcohol, do your best to make healthy choices when you feel the tension rise. Exercise is a great stress-buster. Yoga can be an excellent choice, but any form of physical activity is beneficial. Also make time for hobbies and favorite activities. Whether it's reading a novel or playing games with your family, make sure to set aside time for the things that bring you pleasure. Getting enough good-quality sleep is also important for effective stress management. Build healthy sleep habits by limiting your caffeine intake late in the day and minimizing stimulating activities, such as computer and television use, at night.
3. **Establish boundaries.** In today's digital world, it's easy to feel pressure to be available 24 hours a day. Establish some work-life boundaries for yourself. Although people have different preferences when it comes to how much they blend their work and home life, creating some clear boundaries between these realms can reduce the potential for work-life conflict and the stress that goes with it.
4. **Take time to recharge.** To avoid the negative effects of chronic stress and burnout, we need time to replenish and return to our pre-stress level of functioning. This recovery process requires "switching off" from work by having periods of time when you are neither engaging in work-related activities, nor thinking about work. That's why it's critical that you disconnect from time to time, in a way that fits your needs and preferences. Don't let your vacation days go to waste. When possible, take time off to relax and unwind.
5. **Learn how to relax.** Techniques such as meditation, deep breathing exercises, and mindfulness (a state in which you actively observe present experiences and thoughts without judging them) can help melt away stress. Start by taking a few minutes each day to focus on a simple activity like breathing, walking, or enjoying a meal. The skill of being able to focus purposefully on a single activity without distraction will get stronger with practice and you'll find that you can apply it to many different aspects of your life.
6. **Talk to your supervisor.** Employee health has been linked to productivity at work, so your boss has an incentive to create a work environment that promotes employee well-being. Start by having an open conversation with your supervisor. The purpose of this isn't to lay out a list of complaints, but rather to come up with an effective plan for managing the stressors you've identified, so you can perform at your best on the job. While some parts of the plan may be designed to help you improve your skills in areas such as time management, other elements might include identifying employer-

sponsored wellness resources you can tap into, clarifying what's expected of you, getting necessary resources or support from colleagues, enriching your job to include more challenging or meaningful tasks, or making changes to your physical workspace to make it more comfortable and reduce strain.

7. **Get some support.** Accepting help from trusted friends and family members can improve your ability to manage stress. Your employer may also have stress management resources available through an employee assistance program, including online information, available counseling, and referral to mental health professionals, if needed. If you continue to feel overwhelmed by work stress, you may want to talk to a psychologist, who can help you better manage stress and change unhealthy behavior¹⁶.

CONCLUSION:

Therefore, the evidences from the studies above clearly indicate that stress due to the workplace is one major reason for psychological, physical, emotional, and behavioral distress. The medical personnel(especially Nurses) are more prone to stress and its effects due to long working hours, shift duties, extra duties, night duties, low pay scale, less yearly offs, and pressure of dealing with human lives. In this perspective, the investigator has planned to write an article on stress and its associated issues among the healthcare personnel especially nurses.

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