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COPING WITH AND MANAGING STRESS STYLES OF FRESHMEN PHYSICAL EDUCATION STUDENTS AT THE PE FACULTY IN NIS

INTRODUCTION

Stress is often neither positive nor negative. How people deal with or react to what they perceive as stress is what determines its effect on their lives. As has been stated, "It is often said that stress is one of the most destructive elements in people's daily lives, but that is only a half truth. The way we react to stress appears to be more important than the stress itself.

The effects of stress can be either positive or negative. Positively used, stress can be a motivator for an improved quality of life. Viewed negatively, it can be destructive.

It can be characterized by diverse reactions, such as muscle tension, acute anxiety, increased heart rate, hypertension, shallow breathing, giddiness, and even joy. From a positive perspective, stress is a force that generates and initiates action. Using Selye's definition, stress can accompany pleasant or unpleasant events. Selye referred to stress judged as "good" as eustress. This form of stress is the force that serves to initiate emotional and psychological growth. Eustress provides the experience of pleasure, adds meaning to life, and fosters an attitude that tries to find positive solutions to even complex problems. Eustress can accompany a birth, graduation, a new car, a new friend, accomplishment of a difficult task, and success in an area that has previously produced anxiety.

Distress, on the other hand, is stress that results in negative responses. Unchecked negative stress can interfere with the physiological and psychological functioning of the body and may ultimately result in disease or disability.

Stress also provides humans with the ability to respond to challenges or dangers. It is vital to self-protection and also serves as a motivator that enhances human ability.

A stressor is any physical, psychological or environmental event, or condition that initiates the stress response. A stress response can enhance and actu-

ally increase the level of either mental or physical performance. This response is referred to as the *inverted-U theory*. Not enough stress (hypo stress) may result in a poorer effort, but too much stress can inhibit effort.

Physical	Social	Intellectual	Emotional	Spiritual (values/morals)	Environmental
Bacteria	Embarrassment	Mental fatigue	Uncontrolled anger	Guilt	Noise
Drugs	Teasing	Overload	Unexpressed anger	Moral conflicts	Overcrowding
Smoking	Ridicule	Frustration	Inability to love	Lack of purpose in being	Poverty
Lack of sleep	Lack of social interaction	Mentally stagnant	Lack of love	Lack of philosophy of life	Temperature
Injury	Rejection		Poor self-esteem		
Sedentary lifestyle					

There appears to be an optimal level of stress that results in peak performance. An appropriate level of stress depends on the individual and the type of task. Table 1 lists some of the potentially positive outcomes associated with stress. Your body is constantly attempting to maintain a physiological balance. This balance is referred to as *homeostasis*. Any event or circumstance that causes a disruption (a stressor) in your body's homeostasis requires some type of adaptive behavior. Physiologically, whether a stressor is perceived as positive or negative, the body responds with the same three-stage process. This series of changes is known as the general adaptation syndrome (GAS).⁴ The three phases are alarm, resistance, and exhaustion.

The alarm phase occurs when homeostasis is initially disrupted. The brain perceives a stressor and prepares the body to deal with it, a response sometimes referred to as the *fight-or-flight syndrome*. The subconscious appraisal of the stressor results in an emotional reaction. The emotional response stimulates a physical reaction that is associated with stress, such as the muscles becoming tense, the stomach lightening, the heart rate increasing, the mouth becoming dry, and the palms of the hands sweating.

The second stage is resistance. In this phase the body meets the perceived challenge through increased strength, endurance, sensory capacities, and sensory acuity. Hormonal secretions regulate the body's response to a stressor. Only after meeting and satisfying the demands of a stressful situation can the internal activities of the body return to normal. Girdano and Everly state that short-term stressors, only a superficial level of energy is required, allowing deeper energy levels to be protected. Superficial levels of energy are readily accessible and easily renewable.

Unfortunately, all stress cannot be resolved with superficial energy levels. When long-term or deep levels of stress are experienced, the amount of energy available is limited. If sufficient stress is experienced for an extended period, loss of adaptation can result. Although some scientists believe that energy stores may be genetically programmed, all people can replenish their energy. Individuals have different levels of energy to deal with stressors.

Figure 2. *The general adaptation syndrome (GAS).*

Homeostasis	Alarm	Resistance	Exhaustion	Death	Recovery
All systems reactive to everyday stressors in a balanced and healthful manner.	Perception of stressor. Slight drop in homeostasis as the mind and body temporarily lose balance.	Adaptation resources are mobilized to combat stressor. Endocrine system comes into play.	Adaptation and energy stores depleted. Replenish and body will return to homeostasis.	If stressor (injury or illness) is too traumatic or if stressors cause wear and tear on the body over a long period without balanced management.	Stress situations that are well or partially managed result in a complete or partial return to homeostasis and normal functioning.

Figure 3. *Positive Outcomes of Stress*

Mental	Emotional	Physical
Enhanced creativity Enhanced thinking ability Greater goal orientation Enhanced motivation	Sense of control Responsiveness to environment Improved interpersonal relationships Improved morale	High energy level Increased stamina Flexibility of muscles and joints Freedom from stress-related disease ¹

SOURCES OF STRESS AND WARNING SIGNS

Most stressful situations fall into one of three categories. They include (1) harm-and-loss, (2) threat, and (3) challenge.

Examples of harm-and-loss situations are the death of a loved one, loss of personal property, physical assault, physical injury, and severe loss of self-esteem. Threat situations may be real or perceived as menacing and can range from being caught in traffic to being unable to perceive an event. Threatening events tax a person's ability to deal with everyday life. Threat stressors are any

stressors that result in anger, hostility, frustration, or depression. Challenge situations are catalysts for either growth or pain. These stressors often involve major life changes and include such events as taking a new job, leaving home, graduating from college, and getting married. Challenge events are usually perceived as being good but involve stress because they disrupt homeostasis and require considerable psychological and physical adjustment.

Some indicators of excessive distress include the following:

- Chronic fatigue, migraine headaches, sweating, lower back pain, sleep disturbances, weakness, dizziness, diarrhea, and constipation
- Harder and/or longer work or study while accomplishing less, an inability to concentrate, general disorientation
- Denial that there is a problem or troubling event
- Increased incidence of illness, such as colds and flus, or constant worry about illness or becoming ill; overuse of over-the-counter drugs for the purpose of self-medication
- Depression, irritability, anxiety, apathy, a; overwhelming urge to cry or run and hide, feelings of unreality
- Excessive behavior patterns, such as spending too much money, drinking, breaking the law. and developing addictions
- Accident proneness
- Signs of reclusiveness and avoidance of other people
- Emotional tension, "key up" feeling, easily startled, nervous laughter, anxiety, hyperkinesia, and nervous tics.

Factors Effecting a Stress Response

As mentioned earlier, the criteria for a stressful event and the response to that event for any person are unique to the individual. Figure 4 provides an overview of the complexity of the stress experience and some of the many moderating effects. For instance, a dysfunctional home life (an alcoholic parent, difficult divorce, or extreme poverty) may contribute to a personality that is more susceptible to difficult events, such as poor grades or a failed relationship. This combination of inadequate preparation for life along with an event that is perceived as personal failure will be more likely to lead to depression anxiety, or anger than in a person whose background has instilled a deep sense of self-worth and meaningfulness.

<p>Mental</p> <p>Short-Term Effects Poor memory Inability to concentrate LOW creativity Poor self-control Low self-esteem</p> <p>Long-Term Effects Bouts of depression Mild paranoia Low tolerance for ambiguity Forgetfulness Inability to make decisions/quick to make decisions</p>	<p>Physical</p> <p>Flushed face Cold hands Gas Rapid breathing Shortness of breath Dry mouth</p> <p>Hypertension Coronary disease Ulcers Migraine/tension headaches Strokes Allergies</p>	<p>Emotional</p> <p>Irritability Disorganization Conflicts Mood swings Chronic sleep problems Acid stomach Overindulgence in alcohol, drugs, food</p> <p>Overweight/underweight Drug abuse Excessive smoking Ineffective use of work/leisure time Overreaction to mild work pressure</p>
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Figure 5

<p>Personal Qualities that Influence Stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Personality type • Self-esteem • Locus of control • Demographic characteristics

<p>Antecedents to Stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stress markers • Family background • Neighborhood • Cultural expectations • Home relationships 	<p>Life Stressors</p> <p>Physical</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Noise • Light • Vibration <p>Psychosocial</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Role ambiguity • Role conflict • Role overload • Personal conflict 	<p>Perceptions of Events</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Thoughts about events 	<p>Responses to Stress</p> <p>Physiological</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cardiovascular • Biochemical • Gastrointestinal • Musculoskeletal <p>Psychological</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depression • Anxiety • Job satisfaction • Anger Behavioral • Inability to work • Inefficiency • Arguments 	<p>Consequences of Stress</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Health/illness • Personal/work effectiveness • Social interaction
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Factors that Act at Stress Mediators

- Family support
- Social support
- Work support
- Faith/religion
- Personal time
- Exercise/health habits

This provides a partial explanation why some individuals are able to manage the loss of job or loved one, whereas others are not. In reality, poor grades may be the result of poor study habits, an undiagnosed learning behavior, or inadequate sleep and a failed relationship may be simply a poor match, bad timing, or immaturity. In the "wrong" combination or interpretation of events, however, undesirable consequences may result. This is why, when engaging in stress management, it is important to be aware of and use a variety of approaches. Providing a one-size-fits-all answer is not adequate.

DEALING WITH STRESS

All events in life precipitate a reaction. How people react or respond to situations is individual. Coping is the effort made to manage or deal with stress. Coping is independent of outcome—it does not mean that an individual will experience success.

Dealing successfully with stress may require using a variety of techniques (Figure 6). Because stress-related responses are based primarily on mental perceptions, developing coping strategies that achieve desirable results may need to originate with a change in attitude or outlook. If specific situations or people are perceived as disruptive, one solution is to avoid the situation or person. Although there are no easy answers, there is always some kind of answer or solution. When dealing with a stressor reaches a point where it seems there are no solutions, the tension from the situation is also increasingly detrimental. It may then become necessary to consider changing attitudes, goals, and values.

The changes PE faculty students in Nis worked out upon thorough and all-encompassing discussions, workshops and individual research studies include the following:

- Seeking the help of a professional counselor is frequently beneficial when attempting to resolve particularly stressful situations
- It provides ways to recognize some of the positive and negative behaviors that can be used to deal with stress

- Learning about and using relaxation techniques can help alleviate or even prevent detrimental effects associated with stress

- Engaging in positive self-talk and relabeling negative experiences, for example, viewing difficulties as "challenges" rather than as problems, are positive steps in reducing stress-related disorders

- Eating well, taking time to enjoy life, laughing, exercising, and living in the present all reduce stress

- Stress can be handled effectively when individuals work on developing all of their abilities to the fullest, when they develop a lifestyle that is compatible with personal values, and when they develop realistic expectations for themselves

- Working toward these goals is how a wellness lifestyle is established.

- Successful coping includes being aware of incidents and situations that are perceived as being stressful

- Recognition of stressors means awareness of how your body responds to stress

- Recognition requires continuous monitoring of your body and mind for evidence of excessive stress.

Successful coping takes real effort. One suggestion is to focus on the signals the body is sending when experiencing stress and then to think back to the event or situation that might have triggered those feelings. Another suggestion is to recreate a recent event that has been stressful. After visualizing the episode, you can write down six ways that the outcome could have been different—three with a worse outcome and three with a better outcome. The latter will increase awareness of how to better handle similar situations in the future. A last suggestion is to try something new. The idea is to be challenged and to meet that challenge successfully. Trying something new and meeting the challenge reinforces the sense of being able to deal with life successfully.

The following are guidelines established after an extensive questionnaire filling by PE freshmen students of PE faculty in Nis for effectively dealing with potentially harmful stress:

- Schedule time effectively.

- Practice good time management techniques by using time wisely. This means taking time out for yourself every day and scheduling work when you are usually at peak ability

- Set priorities.

- It is necessary to know what is important to you.

- Do not attempt to work on four or five projects simultaneously. Keep efforts focused on one or two major items.

- Establish realistic goals.
- Goals must be achievable. Do not establish impossible expectations and then become frustrated when they are not accomplished as quickly as you would like.
- Write down long-range goals and then establish checks for keeping you on track and monitoring progress.
- Short-term goals help you see how you are moving toward your goal and provide rewards as you advance toward success.
- See yourself as achieving the goals.
- Visualize yourself as being successful. Go over in your mind what it will look and feel like to accomplish the goal.
- Give yourself a break. Take time every day to exercise and relax.

A major contributor to stress is the pressure associated with time constraints. By effectively using time, you can eliminate a great deal of stress. For the college student, effective use of time is crucial, especially when working and attending school at the same time. Procrastination can add to stress and undermine academic work, personal relationships, and work efforts. Good time management can contribute to feelings of personal satisfaction through appropriate prioritizing, scheduling, and completing personal responsibilities.

CONCLUSION

Certain behaviors or habits can unnecessarily rob you of time that can be used more effectively. These include the following:

1. **Workaholism.** *Workaholism* is spending excessive amounts of time working, even though the activity may not be productive. Generally, people who engage in workaholic behavior like to work long hours and do not use time-saving techniques. They also may become over involved in unimportant tasks that eat at their time, requiring them to use extra time to accomplish important tasks.

2. **Time juggling.** Time jugglers constantly over-schedule themselves, often making promises to be in more than one place at a time. Because it is frequently impossible to do several things at once or be two places at the same time, this behavior often results in important activities being neglected.

3. **Procrastination.** Procrastinators consistently put off until later things that could just as easily be done now. Some procrastinators choose the simplest of two tasks to do now so that really important ones are avoided until the last possible minute, when the pressure is on.

4. Perfectionism. Perfectionists go beyond trying to do one's best to the point where only perfect will do. Because the concept of "perfect" may vary from one person to the next, this behavior rarely results in a sense of accomplishment and the inability to achieve impossible goals contributes to feelings of dissatisfaction and failure.

5. **“Yesism.”** *Yesism* is the inability to tell anyone - “no.” Often, extremely nice people suffer from this condition because they don't like to disappoint others or fear being rejected, even at their own expense. Although difficult to overcome, many of the aforementioned characteristics can be moderated if you are determined to do so. More effective suggestions for appropriate use of your time are as follows:

1. Organize and write down realistic goals and priorities. Current activities should be assessed as to whether they are essential, important, or trivial. Ask yourself the question, "When does the task have to be completed?" Write down the priorities for the next day before going to sleep each night and rank them in order. This provides a night to "sleep on them." They can then be approached systematically, according to need, the next day.

2. Develop a time framework. To help alleviate stress, establish the amount of time to be spent on each activity. Some tasks cannot be completed in a day's time. If this is the case, estimate the days or weeks required to complete the task. This is especially important in accomplishing long-term commitments. Allotting blocks of time each day of each week helps to alleviate the extreme pressure of completing a difficult task in a short time. For example if a term paper is due at the end of a semester, you can spend a certain number of hours each week working on the paper. You can establish goals for the completion of the paper with a reward for yourself each time a goal is achieved. Another example is to study each course every day by allotting a specific time to read and review the subject material covered in class.

3. Know where and when you can best complete a task. Know the circumstances under which you function best. Is it easier for you to concentrate if you work in the library or the dorm room? Where will you have the least interruptions? Do you concentrate best in the morning, afternoon, or evening?

4. Establish priorities. To find time for everything that must be done, you have to know your priorities. Tasks can be divided into those that must be done immediately, those that can wait a brief time, and those that are not essential to accomplish. Once priorities are established, start with the highest priority item and work through the list.

5. Ask for help if responsibilities become overwhelming. Say "no" when there are too many tasks to handle. Do not feel guilty about saying "no," this

only adds more stress. For example, if sorority or fraternity demands are too great, either ask others to share the workload or refuse the responsibility.

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ABSTRACT

Stress is frequently viewed as an enemy. This is a misconception. Stress is often neither positive nor negative. Selye referred to stress judged as "good" as eustress. Distress, on the other hand, is stress that results in negative responses. Unchecked negative stress can interfere with the physiological and psychological functioning of the body and may ultimately result in disease or disability. A stressor is any physical, psychological or environmental event, or condition that initiates the stress. The body responds with the same three-stage process. This series of changes is known as the general adaptation syndrome (GAS). The three phases are alarm, resistance, and exhaustion. It is interesting to note that PE students form their own stress coping styles in the mental, emotional and physical areas. Results are enhanced activities, sense of control and high energy level. Both male and female students show similar patterns of behaviour in stressful situations but female students show more interest in sporting activities when in stress-related situations.

Key words: coping distress, eustress, general adaptation syndrome (GAS), relaxation techniques, STRESS, stressor.