

## Understanding Stress

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## What is Stress?

- Have you experienced stress?
  - Nervous before class presentation?
  - Cold hand on the first date?
  - Rapid heart beat during oral exam?
  - Excitement for your new job or new boyfriend?

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## What Makes You Stress?

- In a group of 5, do a little survey on the top five items that cause them stress
- Ask for the symptoms that they experience during those stressful events
- Write them down



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## So, what is stress?

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## Terminology

- **STRESSOR** is anything that causes stress



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- **STRESS** (Steward, 1997) :
  - Physiological → stress is 'rate of wear and tear on the body'
  - Psychological → stress is 'inability to cope with perceived or real threat to one's mental, physical, emotional and spiritual well-being, which results in a series of physiological responses and adaptations'

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- A stressor is anything that threatens, prods, scares, worries, or thrills a person
- Stress doesn't have to be the result of negative events
  - Getting married, having a child
  - First day of school or work
- Stress has an important function → help people function properly during change → help body easily deal with change

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- We face daily stress → but what if we are exposed to too many stressors and our body is under constant 'alert'?

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- The body does not distinguish a real threat from a perceived threat → when you walk pass a barking dog, your heart is racing even though the dog is not chasing you!
- Many parts of the body would slow down → to reserve energy and distribute blood to those parts that are in greater need → rapid heart beat, sweating, vision is clearer ... but you do not feel hungry

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## Perceived Stress

- It exists ... in your mind!
  - Examples?
- Often exists for a much longer time period than that caused by a real threat
  - Why so? Examples?
- It lasts longer because of the amount of internal dialogues in a person's head (Girdano, Everly & Dusek, 1997)

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- Perceived stressors → threats to security, self-esteem, way of life, or safety
- Consider: uncertainty and change in life
- Time to complete your **Assessment 1 – Perceived Stress Scale** (handout)

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## Stress Symptoms

- Obvious dangers and visible threats VS invisible, elusive or embarrassing day-to-day irritation
- Which one is more stressful?



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- **Tense Muscles: Sore neck, shoulders and back**
  - Result of injury or excessive stress
  - When under stress, muscles contract → pain
- **Insomnia**
  - Trouble falling asleep, staying asleep and early waking
  - Sleep in itself is not enough to combat stress → but our body need it

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- **Fatigue**
  - If a person wakes up from night sleep and feels exhausted
  - Most common complaints in medicine (McGuigan, 1999)
- **Boredom, depression, listlessness, dullness and lack of interest**
  - Constant stress → drain the energy

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- **Drinking too much**
  - Can be a sign of alcoholism or other problems
  - Inappropriate drinking can cause a whole new series of stressors
- **Eating too much or too little**
- **Diarrhea, cramps, gas, and constipation**
  - Digestive system → the best indicators of the amount of stress

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- High stress → intestines at low priority → blood is sent to those areas where it is needed more → affects the delicate balance of the intestines
- **Tics, restlessness and itching**
  - When under stress → reduce blood flow to the skin and affect the sensitivity to the large organ

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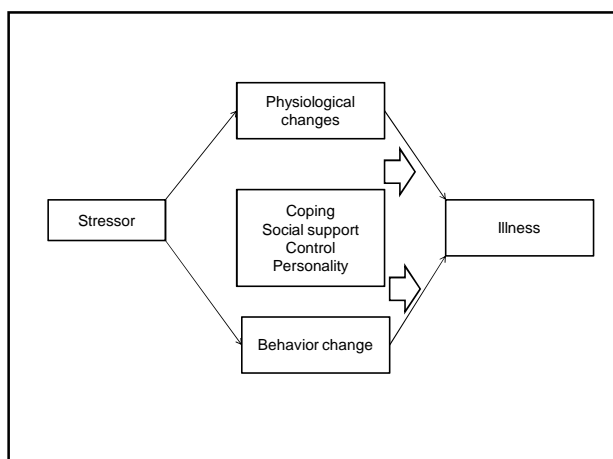
## Stress and Disease

- **Psychosomatic**
- **Psychoneuroimmunology**
  - The interaction of the conscious mind (psycho); the brain and central nervous system (neuro); and the body immune system
- **When under chronic stress → it changes the lining of the stomach wall → produce more gas and less protect the wall → irritation**

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- **Psychogenic Psychosomatic illness**
  - Under a great stress → blood pressure remains high → long-term problems (stroke, heart attack)
- **Somatogenic Psychosomatic illness**
  - Chronic stress → cause future problems by the effects of stress on the immune system → prone to bacterial or viral invaders
  - Final week!

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## The Nervous System

- Sympathetic Nervous System → prepares the body when it is under stress (or when the body perceives that it is under stress) → reserving the energy for critical functions



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- Symptoms → (Guyton, 1999)

- Increased blood pressure
- Increased blood flow to support large active muscles, coupled with decreased blood flow to internal organs not needed for rapid activity
- Increased total energy consumption
- Increased blood glucose concentration
- Increased energy release in the muscles
- Increased muscles strength
- Increased mental activity
- Increased rate of blood coagulation

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- Caffeine and nicotine can activate many of the previous symptoms → mimicking the SNS symptoms
- The body could 'never get back to normal'
  - One cigarette → increase blood pressure and heart rate for 15 minutes
  - Caffeine speeds up the system and sharpens mental activity → but two cups within two hours will have opposite effects

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- Parasympathetic Nervous System → allows the body to return to normalcy
  - Works depending upon the stressor → after the danger has dissipated
  - Brings the heart rate down and allows more blood flow to those part of the body that had a reduction during the stressors
- We need to *take time* to let the PNS bring our body system back to normal

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