

STRESS — HIDDEN ENEMY, POWERFUL FRIEND!

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Stress is the buzzword doing the rounds today, the malaise of modern living! The very word stress conjures up feelings of anxiety, tension, worry, panic and bodily sensations of muscles tightening, heart beating faster, breathlessness or sweating. It may also be an experience of being run down, chronically fatigued and struggling to cope with life and its demands. All these may be manifestation of stress.

WHAT IS STRESS?

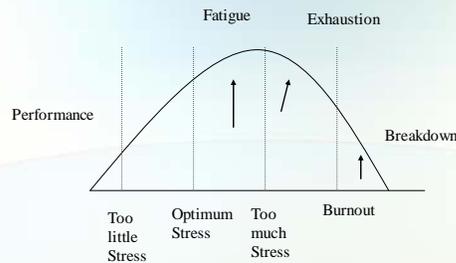
Stress is not something that is done to you. It is simply the body's reactions to situations that are frightening, confusing, exciting or tiring. These reactions can be physical, emotional and behavioral. Whether we feel stressed in a particular situation or not depends upon the **demands** made on us, the **resources or support** we have at our command and the **constraints** that limit our capacity to meet the demand.

ARE YOU STRESSED?

The answer may not be an easy one nor a clear 'yes' or 'no'. You may be stressed and may not even know it! Some people lead busy, active lives, rushing from one thing to another and yet never feel stressed out. They seem to thrive on it! Every problem, situation or a new task is a challenge to them and they take it on boldly, overcoming hurdles with panache. There are others who lead relatively quiet, uneventful lives with plenty of time on their hands, yet feel weighed down by nitty-gritties and cares of the world, stressed out, unhappy and struggling. Each one's experience or perception of stress may be unique depending upon his or her past experience, personality, temperament, attitude, expectations and coping abilities.

STRESS CURVE :

Stress Curve & Human Performance



UNDER STRESS – lethargy, boredom, frustration, loss of confidence, irritability, longer time to finish work.

OVERSTRESS – low concentration, worry, poor decision making, depression, low self-esteem, poor work quality, emotional outbursts, accidents, sleep problems, illness.

OPTIMUM STRESS – peak performance, good concentration, effective problem solving, high level of motivation, harmonious relationships, confident decision making, high self esteem, plenty of energy.

There is no life without stress. Some stress is essential for our existence and our growth, as a completely unstressed person faces no challenge, no motivation to grow or evolve and has no impetus for creativity or achievement. Lack of stimulation or absence of stress can lead to boredom and a lack of purpose in life. There are ups and downs in life which ultimately balance out and are manageable at the end of the day. Hence growth and performance always increase under levels of optimum stress. But when stress levels increase beyond this to alarmingly high levels, it becomes an impediment to performance and achievement with the person feeling stretched beyond his capacity, feeling physically and emotionally exhausted and frustrated. He or she is on a permanent 'overdrive' without results. Stress over and above this level leads to an inevitable breakdown and burn-out causing serious physical ailments, accidents, personality dysfunction, addictions and major or minor mental illnesses.

GOOD VS BAD STRESS :

Not all stress is bad. We sometimes hear people say 'I work better under pressure' or 'I thrive on competition'. There are others who endlessly crib about work pressures. What we need is a fine balance so that we feel stretched, but not so far that we might snap!

Some stress is definitely required to stimulate us to do the simple day to day tasks. Stress is not a pathological symptom. It is an essential feature of the mechanism which drives people. A healthy individual is never content to live life passively but is constantly striving to achieve his goals and dreams and the path may be

lined with thousand hurdles. The trick then is to fine tune our lives to strike that optimum balance between how much stress we can allow for ourselves and how to harness its innate motivating power to our advantage. To this extent how we cope with stress can tilt the balance. If we cope successfully it improves our performance and boosts our self confidence to achieve further. However, if the change/threat/stress is too intense or too sudden, it will be difficult to adapt quickly and coping becomes a Herculean task. Thus, *'good'* stress can turn *'bad'*. Mental training and habit control can keep bad stress under check and prevent it from ruining our lives. It is important to be aware of your own personal relationship to stress and come to terms with it, viz., *'effective stress management'*.

POSITIVE VS NEGATIVE STRESS

Stressors by themselves are neutral. The response to them is entirely dependent upon you - it is inside you, not the result of some outside force. It is in your power to face the challenge and see it through so that stress becomes a stimulus to your well being. You alone have the power and the ability to control whether your stress response will be positive or negative. If you are happy, optimistic and confident, even the stressful events may appear less traumatic. Your response will be positive and coping less strained. Situations may not be as stressful as the meaning you attach to it! So in reality, learning to manage stress in positive ways, learning to turn it off or to use it constructively in relationships can certainly turn it from a ***HIDDEN ENEMY TO A POWERFUL FRIEND!***