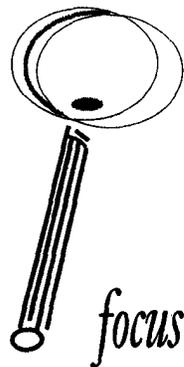


1

Understanding Stress



Learning Objectives

By the end of this chapter, you should be able to:

- Define *stress*, *eustress*, and *restress*.
- Describe the symptoms of stress and explain the danger of distress.
- Describe the four stages of burnout.

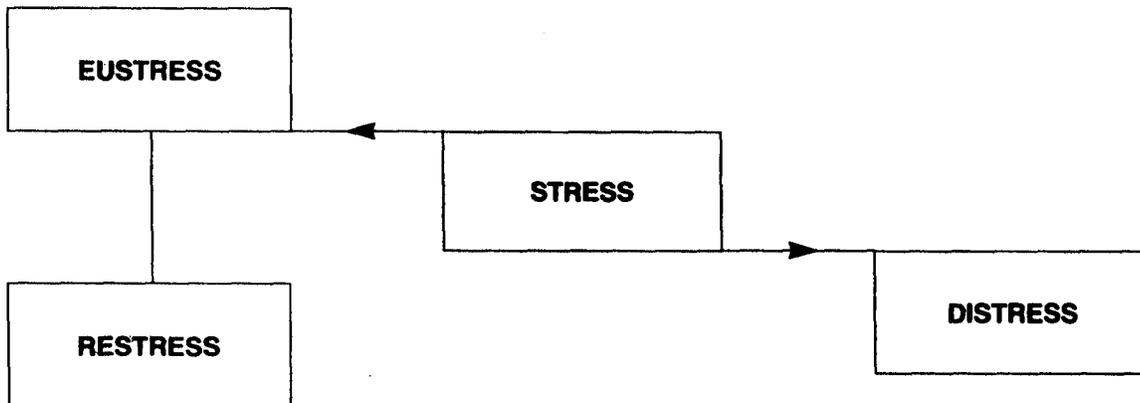
WHAT ARE WE TALKING ABOUT?

Stress: The word is used so often and for so many situations that it's sometimes hard to pin down what a person means when he or she says "I have a lot of stress" or "I'm stressed out." For some, stress can mean feeling tired and confused occasionally. For others, it can bespeak serious chronic anxiety. The fact that stress can come from many areas of our lives (work, home, community, friends, and extended families) can sometimes make us feel as though we're dealing with a moving target—or worse, that we are the target and the arrows are coming from every direction.

However, alleviating this thing called stress doesn't have to be daunting. You can start by considering what stress really is and how it affects you, for good (yes, good) and for ill.

Stress, in all its forms, is a specific condition. To manage the stress in our lives, we need not completely revamp the way we live. Chances are, the changes you would want to make are few and not terribly difficult to implement. They will, however, require your careful thought and planning and a consistent approach.

Stress is not necessarily harmful. It is a normal reaction, a biological fact of life. The amount of stress we experience within a time period and the way

E**xhibit 1-1****Development of Daily Stress Into Distress or Eustress**

we respond physically and emotionally determine whether stress becomes harmful.

Professionals who study and deal with stress management use three different terms to describe the way we experience stress, as seen in Exhibit 1-1. In their lexicon, *Eustress* is the euphoric sensation you might have after completing a difficult task. *Restress* refers to the energizing tension that physical exercise exerts on the body. If you're embarking on a stress-management program, you'll want to look at how to incorporate more of these two types of stress into your daily life.

The third term, *distress*, seems to capture the sense we invoke when we talk about being stressed and, for purposes of this course, it is what we mean when we refer to stress. *Distress* is the combination of our physical and emotional responses to outside pressure, characterized by anxiety, tension, and sometimes physical pain. These outside pressures can build up (as in an increasing sense of job dissatisfaction), or they might be repeated continuously over time (e.g., a workload that sometimes becomes excessive). Although we cannot eliminate *distress* from our lives, we can learn how to reduce it by handling stressful situations more effectively and by making changes in our daily routines that allow us to avoid some stressors.

The feeling of *distress* isn't always apparent at the outset of a stressful situation. To head off the buildup of stress in your life, it's important to recognize the early signs or symptoms. In this first chapter, we look at the physical symptoms of stress as well as some of the ways stress reveals itself in our actions, feelings, and overall outlook.

Another way you can begin managing the stress in your life is to think about the way you perceive stressors. The way you think of your circumstances and of yourself can greatly affect your approach to problem solving. We'll look at perception in this chapter and throughout the course.

THE STANDARD STRESS RESPONSE

Stress response is the clinical term for the way we react in a stressful situation. Under stress, our bodies usually experience a fairly standard response, consisting of ten physiological states.

1. Increased blood pressure
2. Increased pulse rate
3. A heart-pounding feeling in your chest
4. Dilation of the pupils
5. Dry mouth
6. Increased perspiration, especially on the palms
7. Muscle tension
8. Fast, shallow breathing
9. Fatigue
10. Boredom

The first eight states can be minor and barely noticeable, yet they each take a small toll on us. If the stressful situation continues, then the last two states—fatigue and even a sense of boredom—may occur. (If you aren't aware of having experienced these states, it doesn't mean you're weird or superhuman or even different. It probably means that you have a high natural resistance to stress or that your stress response is less noticeable than others' reactions.)

These standard stress response states are called *nonspecific*; the body responds in the same way regardless of the stressful situation. All human beings experience these symptoms to some degree. Some are able to minimize the effects of the response to stress by using stress-reduction techniques. We'll discuss these coping abilities in Chapters 4 and 5. Some people, as we point out later, have tailored their stress response by changing their personal perspectives.

STRESSORS AND PERCEPTION

Almost any sort of situation—from driving in traffic to getting married—can be a stressor *if we perceive it* as such. For each of us, there are sets of circumstances that are perceived as stressful. For instance, bill-paying time may be stressful for some but merely routine for others. For most of us, the prospect of losing one's job is highly stressful, but a few brave souls see this sort of change as a chance to try something new. Obviously, it would not be possible to address every stressor that exists.

What we can address, though, is our perception of stressors. In fact, you will find that most of the answers to our problems with stress lie in our personal approaches to the concept of stress. Your perception of a situation, along with the way you use your personal arsenal of coping techniques, dictates the physical and mental outcome of the situation. To gain a better

foundation for learning coping techniques, it is helpful to study the stress response itself.

USING PERCEPTION: YOUR PERSONAL STRESS RESPONSE

The standard physical stress response described in the preceding section is common to human beings, but there can be great variation in the degree to which we resort to these response states. Your stress response is something you can modify-and even make work for you-if you perceive the benefit in doing so.

What allows the crucial field-goal kicker to overcome the fear of missing the uprights and kick for three points? What allows the experienced, confident driver to avoid crashing when her or his car has slipped out of control? And what permits the nervous actor to wow the critics on opening night? A little thing called *perception* makes the difference between these sorts of stress responses and other, less positive ones. How these individuals feel about and view the stressing situation and how they use that feeling is all-important. These people use heightened physical alertness to energize themselves and propel themselves to act and to achieve.

Adopting a certain perception of a given situation or belief is a task that requires conscious effort. As you go through your day, at work or at home, open your mind to new experiences.

UNDERSTANDING THE BIOLOGICAL REACTION TO STRESS

By recognizing and understanding the symptoms and effects of stress on the human body you'll be better able to assess the amount of stress in your life. Understanding how the physiological effects work with your emotional and mental state can be the first step toward effectively managing stress.

Hans Selye, former professor and director of the Institute of Experimental Medicine and Surgery at the University of Montreal, developed the concept of the *general adaptation syndrome* to explain the effect of stress on the body (Selye, 1974). In his model, as seen in Exhibit 1-2, stress plays itself out in three distinct stages.

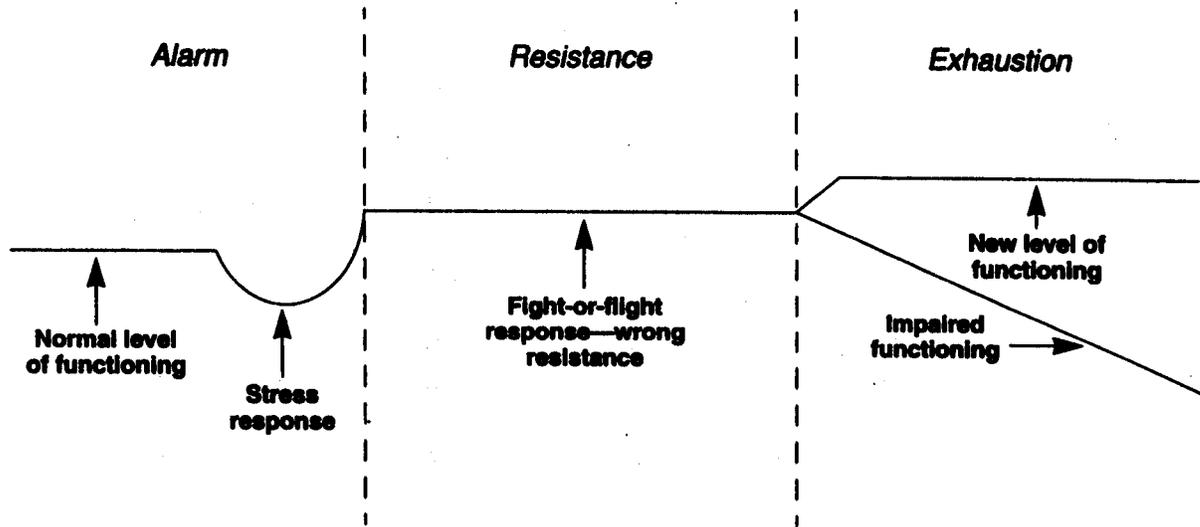
Stage 1: Alarm

Consider your initial confrontation with a stressful situation. It could be the first moment you learned that a close friend was in the hospital or the instant you found out that you received a poor review from your supervisor or immediately after a close call in traffic. Remember how that felt? Probably your initial response was not, "Well, this is quite a challenging situation I'm in, but if I take a step back I'll realize how to deal with it." More likely, your



Exhibit 1-2

General Adaptation Syndrome



pupils dilated slightly, and your muscles tensed for action. Selye called this natural response the "alarm stage." It causes our normal level of functioning—what the experts call *homeostasis*—to drop when we feel an attack is imminent. It is a natural and instinctive reaction in everyone.

Stage 2: Resistance

Because human beings are adaptive creatures, our bodies rally to resist this attack. You may have heard of the "fight-or-flight" instinct. This is the choice we face in the resistance stage. Our bodies are pushing beyond their normal level of functioning, using precious resources to deal with the stressor. We experience this resistance as an adrenaline rush, and we have one of three choices to make: We can flee if we view the situation as entirely too frightening to confront; we can endure, which amounts essentially to fighting our way past the harsh conditions; or we can learn to cope with the stressor head-on.

Resistance efforts directly affect our health and well-being. The decision to flee—for instance, staying in bed when you know the day's stressors are waiting outside—usually results in boredom, fatigue, and an insurmountable pile of tasks at the end of the day. It doesn't dispel your anxiety for the long term. On the other hand, the decision to "stay and fight" can be unhealthy, too, if you don't clearly map out a course of action or if you act hastily.

Improvement ensues from either changing the stressful situation or learning useful coping skills. For instance, if you cannot complete all your tasks in the time required, then learning to manage your time more effectively will help you handle your stressor. At the end of the day, your increased

productivity is augmented by a new-found ability: the ability to confront your stressors head-on, to handle them and move on. You actually establish for yourself a new level of functioning.

Stage 3: Exhaustion

Exhaustion occurs when we make a poor choice, when we choose hastily either to flee or to fight the stressors, without first thinking through our options. Perhaps we try to do too much, or perhaps we rush to reach work, only to miss the exit. You may have had days such as this, in which one mistake or mishap in the morning seems to lead to an irretrievably bad day full of mishaps. Sometimes the tendency to overcompensate for a stressful situation results in extreme exhaustion. This first appears as physical fatigue, as the effects of daily stressors wear on our abilities to resist. When resistance efforts do not keep stressors in check, both physical and emotional systems are affected. Your confidence may be undermined; complaining may seem like the only option.

Personal relationships can be tried during periods of exhaustion, and fatigue can hamper your body's immune reactions, leaving you more vulnerable to illnesses such as colds, flu, migraines, and ulcers, and even to cardiac symptoms. The onset of exhaustion is a signal that you are choosing the wrong resistance course and that a change of plan is in order.

Homeostasis: The Body's Goal

The body's natural tendency is to return to a normal, balanced state, what biology textbooks call *homeostasis*, the state in which glandular, nervous, muscular, and organic systems are doing exactly as much work as they need to do to keep the body functioning well. The body responds by either fighting or coping with a stress situation.

Using our intellect and perceptions, we may see that no harm exists. If we determine that the stressor is "safe," the adaptation syndrome is halted, and our bodies return to a normal level of functioning. However, if we perceive a stressful situation or danger, we stay in the resistance stage and attempt additional measures to cope with the stress. For example, as a struggling worker falls behind in, say, his monthly sales quota, a stressful situation develops. Homeostasis is not enough here; the employee has a choice to make. Should he flee by avoiding his work, letting it pile up on his desk, taking longer breaks, and taking sick leave? This temporary solution will relieve stress for the time being, but it soon will lead to a dangerous situation. Should he fight by attacking the pile, working through his breaks and lunch and staying late to reduce it? Should he try to do as much work as he can today, then relax tonight with a few drinks so he can sleep well? These measures may fulfill the quota (this time), but neither method is a good way to get the job done regularly, and each could have unhealthy consequences.

Alternatively, he could attempt to cope by discussing the pileup of work with his supervisor, seeking the supervisor's help in devising a way to complete the work with as little cost to the employee's well-being as possible.

This second choice of learned behaviors is obviously the more responsible and effective one. By acquiring the abilities to organize and to ask for help, this employee is already on his way to a personal solution for dealing with stress. He's probably also feeling the effects of eustress, that optimistic feeling of euphoria one gets from successfully coping with distress.

Differentiating between the three resistance choices—fighting, fleeing, and coping—is often a matter of perspective; what seems like fleeing to one person may be fighting for another. If you decide that your employment position no longer meets your needs and you leave that position, your supervisors may accuse you of fleeing the situation when, from your point of view, you're fighting—taking responsibility for what you want. Whatever the case, it is of prime importance that the resistance measures you choose regardless of what you call them—are the healthiest ones available and that they work for you.

THE WAY STRESS BUILDS

When you have a bad day—you wake up feeling tired, you arrive late to work because of traffic, you find the copy machine broken when you really need it, you miss lunch, or you have an argument with a coworker—the stress of the day goes home with you. You may need peace and quiet once you get home, or you may arrive home grumbling and snapping at your family or roommates. It takes conscious effort to avoid taking your personal stressors to work and your work stressors home. It takes practice to learn how to turn off the stresses from another part of the day.

Often, stress builds from small matters. You may not recognize the symptoms right away, but by recognizing your physical and emotional stress symptoms, you can head them off before they become too much to handle alone. Think of your body as a teapot. Stress builds in much the same way that heat rises within a teapot. When enough of this heat or stress has accumulated, something must be released. The teapot spouts steam. The human body releases stress through physical changes or manifests it in various symptoms. The following is a discussion of some typical reactions to prolonged stress.

Physical Changes

The first, most visible symptom of stress is usually one or more of the physiological reactions listed earlier. Many people experience fatigue as a signal that stress is mounting. You may awaken feeling tired, or you may feel tired by midmorning or afternoon, yawning as the day's stress wears you down. Some people experience fatigue in the evening, after work, and they forgo activities they usually enjoy, ones that might even relieve some of their stress.

How do you know whether you are fatigued as a result of stress or are just plain tired? The fatigue from stress is different from feeling tired after a good day's work or after vigorous exercise. It is more debilitating, and you'll

probably feel unsatisfied. Fatigue often is accompanied by an emotional downturn. Sometimes it results in a lack of sleep or disturbed sleep over several days. You'll know fatigue has hit if the emotionally drained feeling starts to be a 24-hour-a-day experience.

Performance Changes

Once your physical well-being has been undermined, you may find your confidence slips. Next, your performance may begin to slide, perhaps in just small ways at first. For instance, a stressful situation may cause you to forget your keys to the office. More often, though, performance changes occur over longer periods, and effectiveness on the job decreases proportionally to an increase in stress. You may forget assignments or appointments, or the quality of your work may gradually slip.

As stressors increase, it may be difficult for you to take on a new responsibility because it is an added stressor. You may find yourself accepting a project and not getting to it on time or at all. You may think you are procrastinating and avoiding work, but actually your body is casting its vote: It knows when it has enough to handle and so, though your intellect will accept a new project, your body will refuse to let you move forward and attempt it.

Your stress situation is serious if you find yourself underperforming in a skill in which you are normally proficient. First, you probably find your error rate increasing slightly. Then your good judgment fails and your confidence slips further. Finally, others begin to notice that you are not as reliable as you used to be.

Work Avoidance

Work avoidance is another sign that stress is mounting. You may find yourself arriving late, taking long lunches, and finding ways to leave early. Only you know whether missing work is justified, but having to convince yourself that it is justified is a good indication that job-related stress is affecting your productivity.

Lifestyle Changes

Lifestyle considerations include the pace at which you live, where you live and with whom, your recreational choices, your diet, your level of involvement in a community, and your contact with friends and family. Perhaps you've found that you cannot fit exercise into your schedule anymore. Maybe you skip meals, working through lunch, for instance, or just snacking at dinnertime. You may find yourself sleeping longer each night or needing naps, or you may not be able to sleep through a whole night and find yourself up early every morning. A hectic business travel schedule may continually interfere with family time for rest and relaxation. Many people devote a great deal of attention to planning their professional lives but fail to do the same in their personal lives. Your time away from work is every bit as important as the time you spend pursuing your career and duties.

Two other situations that may indicate problems are frequent changes of job and of residence. In today's highly mobile society, many employers report that they expect a career professional to move on every three years. Although this is anticipated in the business world, as career professionals we should think carefully before we pull up roots and change jobs. Such changes affect our health and the health of our families.

Many people smoke cigarettes to help them relax. If you smoke, your smoking habits are an excellent barometer for stress. Have you taken up smoking? Are you smoking again or smoking more? Do you feel you have to light up before a meeting? Do you find yourself responding to a stressful situation by relaxing with a cigarette afterward? The long-term health risks of smoking are well documented but, in the short term, subtler health changes due to smoking may reduce your ability to cope with stress. Nicotine, for example, acts as a stimulant, increasing blood pressure and respiration, responses that may make a smoker jittery.

Dietary Changes

Changes in diet can be both a symptom and a cause of high stress levels. These changes can take the form of overeating or not eating enough of the foods that would give you the energy you need. For example, Chuck used to eat lunch regularly with his coworker Polly. During tax time last year, however, Polly began canceling her luncheons with Chuck, telling him that she was just too busy. When Chuck suggested that they have a working lunch at his office, Polly brought only an apple. Lately, Chuck has noticed that Polly uses the vending machines for a quick snack on her way out the door, and they no longer have lunch together. Do you have any of these symptoms, indicating that your eating habits have been affected by the stress you are suffering?

Some people suffering from stress add certain kinds of food to their diet. Many drink caffeinated beverages, and some increase their sugar intake to get a quick burst of energy during morning and afternoon lulls. Although the caffeine and sugar may provide energy quickly, the effect isn't long-lasting, and it is common to feel a physical letdown after the energy effects wear off. We will discuss diet in more detail in Chapter 6.

Sleeping Pattern Changes

One of the more debilitating symptoms of stress is disruption of sleep patterns. Some who find it difficult to unwind after a stressful day experience difficulty falling asleep or develop light sleep patterns, never relaxing enough to fall into a deep, refreshing sleep. Nightmares can be a symptom of stress, replaying the tensions of the day. In some more extreme cases, insomnia can result from stress. Physiologically, one's body is so wound up from the tension the stress creates that he or she is unable to relax and drift into sleep. Psychologically, one's mind is so preoccupied with the stressor that he or she is unable to drift into a subconscious state. Each of these sleep problems interferes with rejuvenation of the mind and body, which is needed for managing the next day.

Psychological Changes

Physical and psychological symptoms of stress go hand in hand. Have you noticed any of these feelings?

- *A sense that everything is falling apart:* The source of stress may be so great that you feel helpless to prevent disasters from occurring. This thought that nothing could be worse occurs for many who undergo prolonged stress.
- *Fear of being alone, with others, or in new places:* Meeting or talking with others can be stressful. When you are already stressed, these situations magnify the stress and exacerbate an aversion to interacting with others. Conversely, you may feel the need for constant companionship to divert your attention from your stress.
- *A constant craving for activity and stimulation:* You may try to escape your stress by being perpetually in motion or by constantly delving into new projects or opportunities. These attempts at diversion are often unsuccessful.
- *A sense that something has to be done right now, but it is not clear what:* This thought is characteristic of the person who likes to divert his or her attention from his or her main stress. The feeling that "something must be done" is a mental alarm related to the thought that you are in a hopeless situation.
- *Getting upset by seemingly little things that you realize should not be getting to you:* These feelings often obscure the fact that what's really upsetting you is some larger source of stress.
- *Recognizing that you are often tense:* This overall tense feeling is very common when you are under stress. You feel pressure from every possible situation and become hypersensitive when any problem arises.
- *A sense that something dreadful is going to happen:* When you are under stress you may feel as if danger is looming around every corner. There may be no logical reason for this dread, and this in turn seems to heighten the stressful experience.
- *A sense of resentment that you seem to work under much more pressure than other people in your environment:* You may feel as if you have been given more work than others and may take it out on them.
- *A perception that your thoughts are jumbled so that you don't know what to do first when tackling problems:* You may be so overwhelmed by your stress that you look at a problem and say to yourself, "Where do I begin?" This can result in procrastination.

If stressors continue, these feelings can evolve into more serious emotional changes. With increasing stress, you are likely to feel worried, depressed, or otherwise "down" about new and different situations. You may feel tired and lethargic, as you would with simple physical changes but, in an emotional upheaval, you would have difficulty knowing *why* you feel tired and lethargic. You may be unable to explain mood swings.

In the workplace, you may find yourself blaming others—your supervisors, employees, coworkers, or the whole organization—for mistakes or situations over which neither they nor you had any control. Emotional rifts are

not easily explained, and they are nearly impossible to control without serious attention to the underlying problem.

Attitude Changes

The psychological effects can lead eventually to changes in your attitude about yourself and your abilities, about your work and its demands, about the world around you. Stress can erode your confidence to the extent that you become convinced that to try any harder would be futile.

Emotional tranquility erodes under stress. Feelings of irritability, nervousness, and anxiety develop as stress builds. You may become irritated about the file you cannot find or with the secretary for making clerical errors. You worry as you enter a staff meeting, nervous about the barrage of criticism you may receive for the budget excesses.

Cynicism is a more serious attitudinal change. It indicates that the stress has mounted, and you can no longer maintain a tactful and diplomatic demeanor when faced with work problems. There are literally hundreds of things about which one may be cynical, but it is very difficult to measure your own level of irritability as that would require more objectivity than most of us have. Relying on a trusted friend to help you check up on your attitude can be very useful. We will discuss support groups further in Chapter 5.

DANGER SIGNALS OF DISTRESS IN THE WORKPLACE

Anyone can undergo the kinds of changes that accrue from prolonged stress, but when do these changes or symptoms become dangerous? When is there real potential for harm? The line between stress and distress varies from person to person. To generalize, distress is created when stress builds up and becomes overwhelming and unbearable, causing us to choose more escape activities than healthy, coping behaviors. The danger signals, or indicators, of distress in the workplace include withdrawal, serious illness, and increased absenteeism.

Withdrawal

When stress continues unchecked, you may become emotionally distant from others and try to avoid work responsibilities. This is what psychologists have called *withdrawal*. When feeling overwhelmed, many people want to shut down to avoid additional stimulation. This is a natural self-preservation mechanism, but allowing it to continue over a long term is unhealthy. The longer a person remains withdrawn, the less able she or he is to improve her or his circumstances.

The withdrawing employee tries to avoid additional assignments, fellow employees (especially his or her supervisor), and other possibilities for confrontation. You may know of an employee who stays in the office all the time and does not socialize with other employees. Such a person will go out of his or her way to avoid the boss, will not volunteer for projects, and often will leave meetings early or not show up at all. In effect, he or she is saying either

"I can't cope and I don't want your help" or "I'm fine and I don't need your help." The danger in either of these messages is that help is being denied, which is a serious mistake. People can adopt this pattern in their personal lives also, avoiding other people and responsibilities by hiding safely at home.

Withdrawal is a serious emotional change. A person goes from being alive and open to life to avoiding and escaping from it. It is a danger signal that may indicate a need for professional help. It can lead to psychological depression and even to suicide. A withdrawing person may believe that life is too painful or has lost its meaning.

Illness

As the term *stress* has become more popular, it often is blamed for a wide variety of illnesses. Everything from backaches to cancer has at some time been attached to the term *stress-related*. High levels of stress have been known to cause sudden death in patients with cardiac complications, but no other illness can be convincingly traced to *distress*.

However, we do know that stress plays at least a part in many illnesses. Stress can cause fatigue, and this can contribute to immune system deficiencies. Stressful times can cause aches and pains, and these may cause you to give up exercise routines that help keep you healthy.

Moreover, as stress levels increase, your ability to pay attention to safety decreases, and the chance of having a serious accident increases. After the death of a loved one, it is not uncommon to have a car accident. It also is not unusual for a person who is under extreme stress at work to have accidents at home.

Increased Absenteeism

What starts as occasional work avoidance may turn into a pattern of increased absenteeism. Think back over the last year. Have you been out sick, legitimately or otherwise, one day per month? Are you seeking medical attention more frequently? These may be signs that a distressful situation, either at work or at home, is taking a serious toll on your work life.

For some parents, absenteeism stems from their children's health rather than their own. Illnesses can be prevented by adequate coping abilities, but children have underdeveloped skills in this area (compared with adults). If you find yourself home from work frequently because your child is ill, think about whether stress is affecting your family's life. You may bring too many stresses home from work each day. Children can detect your stress and internalize it. Consider whether you have family problems that *you* are managing well but that your children are not yet equipped to handle.

Substance Use

As job-related stress increases, many workers turn to caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, or other drugs to relieve the pressures, especially at deadline time. The line between substance use and abuse can be very fine, especially when you are under stress. Often, family, friends, and coworkers know before you do

when you've crossed that line. (Our discussions of support systems and networking, in Chapter 5, can be valuable in this setting.) Substance abuse indicates that you cannot handle the pressures in your life and are willing to jeopardize your health, safety, and security.

ARE YOU BURNING OUT?

Burnout is the gradual wearing down of a person's physical and psychological resources. If the stressors are not identified so that they can be avoided or managed, or if the person is not compensated for the toll, he or she burns out.

There are days, certainly, when each of us feels as if we are burning out. Experts who deal with stress management call this *situational burnout*. We wear down our day's, week's, or month's resources and feel frazzled, exhausted, and unable to cope with anything else. To recuperate, we must leave the stressful situation for a while and rest until we feel ready to return. Many companies insist that employees take all the vacation time allotted them and give some executives more vacation time to provide the necessary rest and relaxation. On returning from vacation, we are generally refreshed and intellectually alert again. The experience of situational burnout is similar to long-term burnout in organizations and families, but long-term burnout can go on for years and requires more than rest and quiet to be reversed.

People often burn out in a particular role (as a parent, an employee, board member, etc.). They feel worn out in a specific role yet enjoy other roles in their lives. Single parents can feel burned out at home and yet enjoy success and accomplishment at work. Employees who are burning out may drag their heels at work only to go home and enjoy playing with the kids and performing tasks around the house. Any role is prone to burnout if distress and environmental pressures exist.

If burnout is permitted to continue over an extended period, say for a year or more, it can spill over from one part of life to others, so that other roles that once offered joy and relief no longer do. Burnout can lead to clinical depression. The advanced stages can spread through a department, an organization, or a family, rendering the entire unit ineffective.

Four Stages of Burnout

The four stages of burnout--facing reality, frustration, stagnation, and apathy--are related to the general adaptation syndrome described earlier, as seen in Exhibit 1-3.

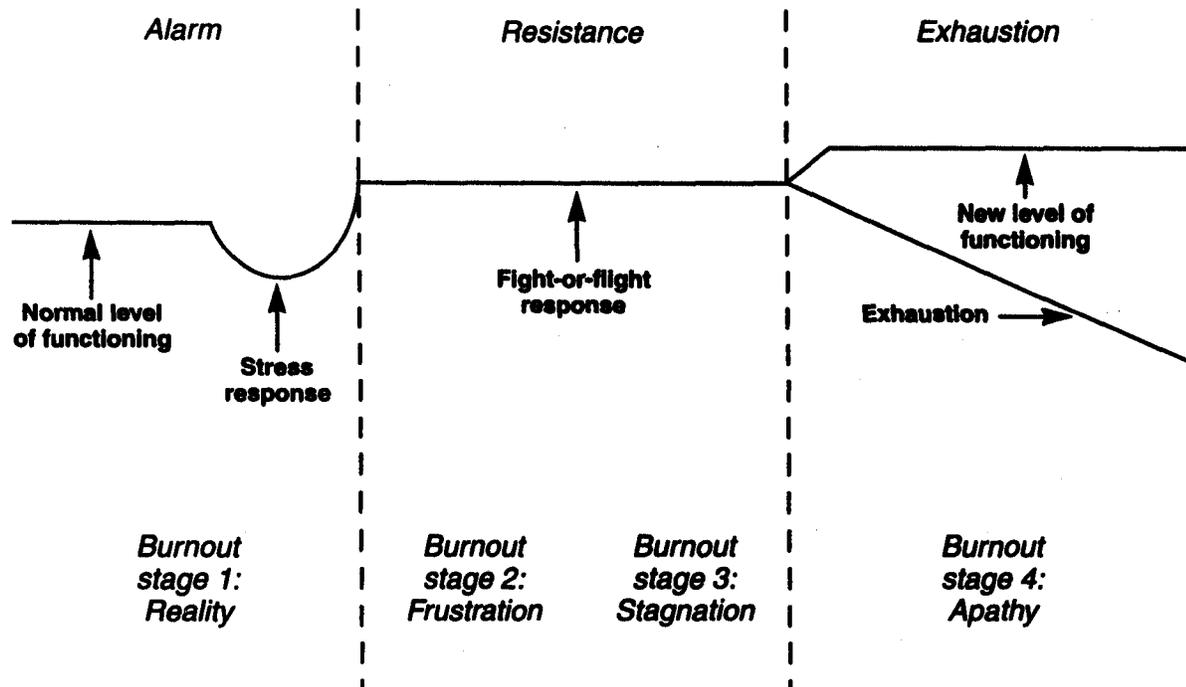
Stage 1: Facing Reality

People generally assume a new task with enthusiasm. It is not long, however, before the bubble of enthusiasm bursts and we learn what it really takes to accomplish the task. The realization of what it will take is, in itself, stressful.



Exhibit 1-3

Relationship Between the General Adaptation Syndrome and the Four Stages of Burnout



If we perceive this as a large stressor, this realization sounds an alarm, as in the general adaptation syndrome.

We can burn out in any area of life, personal or professional, as the distress and environmental pressures build. We may be surprised, for instance, by how little we can actually afford to buy with our paycheck, or we may discover that politics play an extremely important role in promotions and that we don't like the politics. Success also demands adjustments and can cause burnout. That great promotion brings added stresses, responsibilities, and higher performance anxieties. In the personal arena, the care and responsibility of a child may be an enormous shock to first-time parents. These realities, harsh or pleasant, are experienced as stress and, unless properly managed, they can undermine our enthusiasm for, and commitment to, the task. If we do not adjust our expectations and routines to the reality of our situation, we start to feel the second stage of burnout-frustration.

Stage 2: Frustration

A person who is burning out feels frustrated when attempting to accomplish tasks. This frustration continues as one tries to remedy the situation (as with using resistance measures in the second stage of the general adaptation syndrome). For example, to complete a heavy workload, an employee may stay

late, complaining about the company overloading her yet feeling guilty that she cannot reach the company's unrealistic goals. Another example is that of the person who, in frustration, buys items on credit to have what he or she wants now and to avoid confronting his or her financial truth.

However, we cannot hide from reality, regardless of the resistance measures we employ; with time, disappointment and other symptoms set in and erode our effectiveness in our personal and professional roles. Next, our attitude shifts from one of confidence to one of self-doubt, and our performance at home or work starts to decline. Family or workplace arguments begin as a result of increased distress.

Stage 3: Stagnation

The third stage of burnout, stagnation, is more serious and indicates trouble. At this point, people are still in the resistance stage of the adaptation syndrome, but resistance measures are not working. They keep trying other measures, usually ineffective ones. As frustration becomes unbearable, people start to retaliate, taking their frustrations out by various methods on themselves, their families, their work, their bosses and coworkers, and the company. Their productivity takes a noticeable decline as they spend more time away from work through sick leave or work avoidance. Employees expend energy blaming their bosses and the organization, feeling paranoid that someone has a grudge against them, and spreading cynicism through the company. Stagnating parents feel that they cannot possibly succeed so they stop trying. Work, laundry, and unbalanced bank statements pile up. Family and professional problems develop.

People can stagnate in a role for a long time. Their good ideas are undermined by negative feelings, negative comments, and negative efforts; and errors in judgment become more noticeable. People who are burning out manage to get by, but they become cynical and not very productive in the area of their lives in which the burnout is occurring. Some people stagnate for years, never reaching the fourth stage of burnout-apathy.

Stage 4: Apathy

Apathetic people just go through the motions. They accept the status quo, do not take risks, do not apply for promotions. Their apathy precludes their getting involved in any practice that would further their careers. In burnout, apathy, though it may look like merely an attitude problem, mirrors the stage of exhaustion in the general adaptation syndrome. Apathetic workers are interested only in keeping things stagnant and safe; they make sure the paychecks come and things are okay at home, expending the least effort required. Eventually, some may withdraw from work and social activities. They become disillusioned with life. Ambition is the most evident casualty of apathy.

A burned-out person is withdrawn from life and refuses to be helped or denies the need for help. In contrast, the retiring person is withdrawing for a while to prepare for and plan a different kind of life.

The Difference Between Stress and Burnout

The difference between stress and burnout is one of degree and duration. As we mentioned earlier, we all experience stress every day, but burnout occurs when the stress turns to distress and continues, gradually undermining our confidence and ability to do a task well. Burnout develops in a progressive behavioral pattern, usually spread over a 12- to 18-month period, and it is associated initially with decreased effectiveness in a particular role.

Assessing Burnout

Do you recognize yourself, a family member, or a fellow employee as someone experiencing any of the four stages of burnout? Do you think you are burning out or are you just swinging through stressful situations that you need to handle more effectively? Wherever you stand, this course can be your first effort at learning how to manage your stress. Although the major emphasis of this course is on managing stress while maintaining productivity, the author has designed it also to help you to manage stress so that you can avoid burnout.

If you are truly concerned about your own, your family's, or your organization's susceptibility to burnout, take additional measures. Enroll in a burnout prevention workshop. See a career counselor who is skilled in preventing burnout in professional and personal matters. Consider discussing the problem with your boss or with someone in human resources: Certainly talk about this with your partner and children. Above all, take care of yourself. Families and managers have a responsibility to help you avoid burnout, but only you can prevent it. Stress-management practices are addressed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

SUMMARY

In this chapter, we have discussed the different types of stress and how to recognize stress in yourself and others. Stress in itself is not harmful; it is an everyday occurrence. How we *perceive* stress determines how it affects us. The key to managing stress lies in preventing it from becoming distress. Turning stress into eustress or restress is the desired effect.

Uncovering stress in yourself or others often is difficult, and it is important to learn what the symptoms and signs are. It is useful to know the ten physical states of the standard stress response. The general adaptation syndrome comprises four stages through which the body passes when under stress. Finally, the physical symptoms and danger signals mentioned in this chapter will help you recognize stress more easily and, ultimately, manage it more effectively.



Review Questions

1. Managing the stress in our lives can seem like a daunting task because: 1. (c)
 - (a) there are so many methods from which to choose.
 - (b) it is so time-consuming.
 - (c) it originates in so many areas in our lives.
 - (d) there are so many theories surrounding it.

2. *Eustress* is best defined as: 2. (a)
 - (a) a euphoric sensation that follows completion of a task.
 - (b) a euphoric sensation that follows a close call, such as a disaster averted.
 - (c) distress.
 - (d) stress one brings on oneself.

3. Effective response to stress depends on: 3. (a)
 - (a) your perception and possession of an arsenal of relief techniques.
 - (b) coping and managing time.
 - (c) learning about your personality type.
 - (d) overriding the fight-or-flight instinct.

4. The general adaptation syndrome explains: 4.(d)
 - (a) perception as a human reaction.
 - (b) the effects of stress on the mind.
 - (c) the effects of stress on productivity.
 - (d) the effects of stress on the human body.

5. In the second stage of the general adaptation syndrome, a person is most likely to exhibit which symptom? 5 . (c)
- (a) Alarm
 - (b) Exhaustion
 - (c) Resistance
 - (d) Eustress
6. The difference between fatigue and being tired is that: 6. (a)
- (a) fatigue is an emotionally drained state and being tired is mainly a physical state.
 - (b) fatigue is a physiological symptom of stress and being tired is not related to stress.
 - (c) fatigue occurs in burnout only and being tired is a normal situational response.
 - (d) fatigue is a psychological state that precedes being tired.
7. One performance change that can result from stress is: 7. (b)
- (a) extreme fatigue.
 - (b) slipping in a skill in which you are usually competent.
 - (c) taking along lunch.
 - (d) becoming belligerent with coworkers.
8. The line between substance use and abuse is best determined by: 8. (d)
- (a) you alone.
 - (b) learning your employer's policies regarding smoking.
 - (c) asking your employer for an assessment.
 - (d) seeking the views and support of friends or family.
9. Some danger signals of distress are: 9. (b)
- (a) work avoidance and eating junk food.
 - (b) withdrawal and frequent illness.
 - (c) asking for help too often.
 - (d) maintaining productivity in only one area of work.
10. In the fourth stage of burnout, a person is likely to be: 10. (c)
- (a) excitable but very unproductive.
 - (b) uncontrollably depressed.
 - (c) quiet and reclusive, with little ambition.
 - (d) argumentative.