

PLAIN TALK

ABOUT

*A 19 year old girl learns her boyfriend has been killed in an auto accident.

*A businessman loses an important business deal to his competitor.

*An athlete receives first place award for his efforts in a track event.

*A 15 year old boy approaches a girl to ask her out for the first time.

STRESS

What do all of these people and situations have in common? Stress. This may surprise you because the last two situations both involve happy events. The fact is that it doesn't matter whether the situation is pleasant or unpleasant, according to Hans Selye, M.D. What counts is the intensity of the demand it places on you to readjust. Dr. Selye, a Montreal, Canada, physician and author of several books on stress, calls these incidents "stressors."

He states that the physical reaction of the body to stress is basically the same, regardless of the stressor. Furthermore, he feels that the only complete freedom from stress is death. Humans thrive on stress because it makes life more interesting.

No matter what you are doing, you are under some amount of stress. Even while you sleep, your body must continue to function and react to the stress imposed by dreaming. Stress comes from two basic forces—the stress of physical activity and the stress of mental/emotional activity. It is interesting to note that stress from emotional frustration is more likely to produce disease, such as ulcers, than stress from physical work or exercise. In fact, physical exercise can relax you and help you deal with mental stress.

Stress or Distress

Then would it be true to assume there is no such thing as bad stress? Dr. Selye feels that there is a type of stress that can be harmful. He calls it distress. Distress is continual stress that causes you to constantly readjust or adapt. For example, having a job you do not like can be constantly frustrating, and frustration is "bad" stress. If this distress lasts long enough, it can result in fatigue, exhaustion, and even physical or mental breakdown. The best way to avoid it is to choose an environment that allows you to do the activities you enjoy, that are meaningful to you. Your friends, your work, and even your future mate can be sources of challenging good stress or harmful distress.

Dr. Selye also believes that the absence of work is not necessarily a way to avoid stress. An example of this is the retired person who has nothing to do. Boredom then becomes an enemy capable of causing tremendous distress. Work is actually good for you as long as you can achieve something by doing it. It will only wear you out if it becomes frustrating because of failure or a lack of purpose.

To avoid distress, you should seek work or tasks that:

- a. You are capable of doing
- b. You really enjoy
- c. Other people appreciate



Regardless of the source of stress, states Dr. Selye, your body has a three-stage reaction to it.

Stage 1-Alarm

Stage 2-Resistance

Stage 3-Exhaustion

In the alarm stage, your body recognizes the stressor and prepares for fight or flight. This is done by a release of hormones from the endocrine glands. These hormones will cause and increase in the heartbeat and respiration, elevation in blood sugar level, increase in perspiration, dilated pupils, and slowed digestion. You will then choose whether to use this burst of energy to fight or flee.

In the resistance stage, your body repairs any damage caused from the stress. If, however, the stressors does not go away, the body cannot repair the damage and must remain alert.

This plunges you into the third stage-exhaustion. If this state continues long enough, you may develop one of the "diseases of stress," such as migraine headaches, heart irregularity, or even mental illness. Continued exposure to stress during the exhaustion stage causes the body to run out of energy, and may even stop bodily functions.

Since you cannot build a life completely free from stress or even distress, it is important that you develop some ways of dealing with stress.

Getting a handle on Stress & Distress

Recognizing that stress has a lifelong influence on you, what can you do about handling it? Doctors have come up with a few suggestions on how to live with stress.

1. Work off stress--If you are angry or upset, try to blow off steam physically by activities such as running, playing tennis, or gardening. Even taking a walk can help. Physical activity allows you a "fight" outlet for mental stress.

2. Talk out your worries--It helps to share worries with someone you trust and respect. This may be friends, family member, clergyman, teacher, or counselor. Sometimes another person can help you see a new side to your problem and thus, a new solution. If you find yourself becoming preoccupied with emotional problems, it might be wise to seek a professional listener, like a guidance counselor or psychologist. This is not admitting defeat. It is admitting you are an intelligent human being who

knows when to ask for assistance.

3. Learn to accept what you cannot change--If the problem is beyond your control at this time, try your best to accept it until you can change it. It beats spinning your wheels, and betting nowhere.

4. Avoid self-medication--Although there are many chemicals, including alcohol, that can mask stress symptoms, they do not help you adjust to the stress itself. Many are habit-forming, so the decision to use them should belong to your doctor. It is a form of flight reaction that can cause more stress than it solves. The ability to handle stress comes from within you, not from the outside.

5. Get enough sleep and rest--Lack of sleep can lessen your ability to deal with stress by making you more irritable. Most people need at least seven to eight hours of sleep out of every 24. If stress repeatedly prevents you from sleeping, you should inform your doctor.

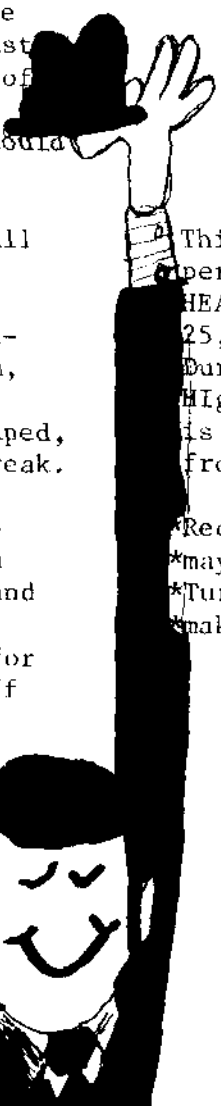
6. Balance work and recreation--All work and not play can make Jack a nervous wreck. Schedule time for recreation to relax your mind. Although inactivity can cause boredom, a little loafing can ease stress. This should not be a constant excuse, but occasionally, you deserve a break.

7. Do something for others--Sometimes when you are distressed, you concentrate too much on yourself and your situation. When this happens, it is often wise to do something for someone else, and get your mind off of yourself. There is an extra bonus in this technique--it helps make friends.

8. Take one thing at a time--It is defeating to tackle all your tasks at once. Instead, set some aside and work on the most urgent.

9. Give in once in awhile--If you find the source of your stress is other people, try giving in instead of fighting and insisting you are always right. You may find that others will begin to give in, too.

10. Make yourself available--When you are bored and feel left out, go where the action is! Sitting alone will just make you more frustrated. Instead of withdrawing and feeling sorry for yourself, get involved. Is there a play or musical coming up? Chances are they will need help backstage. Get yourself back there and somebody will probably hand you a hammer or paint brush.



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*Recognizing stress as an ongoing part of life
*may well be the first step in dealing with it.
*Turn stress into a positive force and let it
*make life more interesting.