Stress Management Techniques for Healthy Living and Professional Excellence

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Abstract: Exercise can be an effective component of a stress management program, and all types of exercise can be beneficial for stress management. Exercise programs consistent with the current recommendations to improve health can be prescribed to manage stress. Fitness professionals should recognize that it might be necessary to refer a client to a psychologist or other health care provider to help develop strategies for managing stressors that produce chronic and acute episodic stress. Stress is neither possible nor desirable as stress is an important stimulus of human growth and creativity as well as an inevitable part of life.

Keywords: Stress; Stages of stress; Symptoms of stress; Benefits of yoga

I. INTRODUCTION

In an age of a highly dynamic and competitive world, man is exposed to all kinds of stressors that can affect him in all realms of life. Hans Selye first introduced the term stress into life science. The term stress is derived from the Latin word Stringere, which means “to be drawn tight.” Stress is a complex, dynamic process of interaction between a person and his or her life. Stress can affect one’s health, work performance, social life, and the relationship with family members. The stress response is a complex emotion that produces physiological changes to prepare us for flight-or-flight, to defend ourselves from the threat or flee from it. Eminent behavioral scientist Stephen Robbins defines stress as that which arises from an opportunity, demand, constraint, threat, or challenge, when the outcomes of the event are important and uncertain. Stress can also be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even injury. Hence we can say that stress is a silent killer, and prolonged exposure to stress may exert harmful effects on physical, psychological, and behavioral well-being of an individual.

Stress is what you feel when you have to handle more than you are used to. When you are stressed, your body responds as though you are in danger. It makes hormones that speed up your heart, make you breathe faster, and give you a burst of energy. This is called the fight-or-flight stress response.

Some stress is normal and even useful. Stress can help if you need to work hard or react quickly. For example, it can help you win a race or finish an important job on time.

But if stress happens too often or lasts too long, it can have bad effects. It can be linked to headaches, an upset stomach, back pain, and trouble sleeping. It can weaken your immune system, making it harder to fight off disease. If you already have a health problem, stress may make it worse. It can make you moody, tense, or depressed. Your relationships may suffer, and you may not do well at work or school.

Many people don’t think about stress management unless they’re already on the verge of burnout. With our busy lives, it doesn’t always seem obviously important to take on the practice of stress management before a worn-out body or an overly taxed psyche force the issue. However, developing healthy stress-relieving habits really does pay off in the long run. Not only does a regular stress management practice stave off the negative effects of stress, but it can also bring positive outcomes like increased productivity, better health and more happiness in general.

Impact of Stress

One of the studies quoted that stress-related disorders evolve gradually through four recognizable stages. First, psychological changes such as anxiety, irritability, and insomnia arise, due to over-stimulation of the sympathetic nervous system. In the second stage symptoms such as high blood pressure, elevated heart rate, and increased intestinal motility surface. In the third stage, a more profound physical or biochemical imbalance sets in, while in the final fourth stage, irreversible symptoms that often require surgical or long-term management appear. Increased sympathetic activation and the release of stress hormones, including adrenaline, lead to increases in heart rate, blood pressure, breathing, body temperature, and muscle tension. In contrast, the relaxation response has been proposed as an antidote to stress; relaxation decreases heart rate, breathing, body temperature, and muscle tension.
Similar to stress in the workplace, college students are also often impacted by stress. Academic stress can result from many different imperative stressors, such as final grades, term papers, examinations, and excessive homework. Stress has exhibited a negative correlation with cognitive performance, thus negatively impacting academic performance.

Stages of stress

Stress is a Sudden Biological Change. It has become the curse of 21st century and is silent killer in the modern world. Stress is the greatest danger to the information era. Stress is the priceless poison for human life in the universe. It can disturb any one’s physical, mental, emotional and behavioral balance. Stress can damage different parts of human body from muscles to tissues and blood vessels. It can speed up pulse rate and respiration. It can raise blood pressure and body temperature. It can also interfere with the body metabolism, digestion, appetite, sleep, sexuality and even fertility.

Stress can damage different parts of human body. Occupational stress includes the environmental factors or stressors such as work overload, role ambiguity, role conflict and poor working conditions associated with a particular job.

There are three stages a person goes through while suffering from stress.

**Alarm stage**

This stage experiences an over acting of the sympathetic nervous system wherein adrenaline and cortisol increase and blood flows away from the brain to the muscles. As a result, dendrites shrink back in the brain to moderate the flow of information, slowing or closing down the nonessential body functions. The whole body starts preparing itself to fight against the reason of stress. The fear, excitement or pressure is evident on the sufferer’s face.

**Resistance stage**

In this stage, the body keeps making continuous efforts to cope with stress and therefore feels run down and the person starts feeling irritated, over reacts to minor situations and gets mentally and physically weak. Psychological, physical and behavioral changes are also clearly visible.

**Exhaustion stage**

If a student is preparing for his exam and despite of every possible effort, he is not able to relate to his studies, he is bound to get stressed. The stress could reach a height where he/she may feel completely exhausted and helpless to the extent of committing suicide. This is the exhaustion stage.

**Signs and Symptoms of Stress**

If exposure to stressors continues for a longer period of time, chronic health problems can develop, such as:

**Psychological and emotional**

- Feeling heroic, invulnerable, euphoric
- Denial
- Anxiety and fear
- Worry about safety of self and others
- Anger
- Irritability
- Restlessness
- Sadness, grief, depression, moodiness
- Distressing dreams
- Guilt or “survivor guilt”
- Feeling overwhelmed, hopeless
- Feeling isolated, lost, or abandoned
- Apathy
- Identification with survivors

**Cognitive**

- Memory problems
- Disorientation Confusion
- Slowness of thinking and comprehension
- Difficulty calculating, setting priorities, making decisions
- Poor concentration
- Limited attention span
- Loss of objectivity
- Unable to stop thinking about the disaster
- Blaming

**Behavioral**

- Change in activity

- Decreased efficiency and effectiveness
- Difficulty communicating
- Increased sense of humor
- Outbursts of anger, frequent arguments
- Inability to rest or “letdown”
- Change in eating habits
- Change in sleeping patterns
- Change in patterns of intimacy, sexuality
- Change in job performance
- Periods of crying
- Increased use of alcohol, tobacco, or drugs
- Social withdrawal, silence
- Vigilance about safety or environment
- Avoidance of activities or places that trigger memories
- Proneness to accidents

**Physical**
- Increased heartbeat, respiration
- Increased blood pressure
- Upset stomach, nausea, diarrhea
- Change in appetite, weight loss or gain
- Sweating or chills
- Tremors (hands, lips)
- Muscle twitching
- “Muffled” hearing
- Tunnel vision
- Feeling uncoordinated
- Headaches
- Soreness in muscles
- Lower back pain
- Feeling a “lump in the throat”
- Exaggerated startle reaction
- Fatigue
- Menstrual cycle changes
- Change in sexual desire
- Decreased resistance to infection
- Flare-up of allergies and arthritis
- Hair loss

**Positive Effects of Stress Management**

The following are some reasons why:

- **Your Health:** Excessive stress really can lead to poor health outcomes, from relatively minor things like headaches and digestion problems in the short run to major conditions like heart disease, high blood pressure and stroke after years of unmanaged stress.
- **Your Looks:** Many stress relievers can also make you healthier and even more attractive. For example, taking care of your body by getting enough sleep can make you more productive and healthier, and can help you better manage stress, as well as staying off dark circles under the eyes and a poor complexion. Also, eating right can keep your blood sugar levels even, keeping your emotions in check and making you more resilient to stress, as well as helping you stay in your ‘skinny jeans’ or favorite tee-shirts from college. Getting regular exercise can help you blow off steam when you’re frustrated and keep your body fit and toned.
- **Increased Productivity:** Simply put, when you’re not stressed, you can be more productive because you’re more focused. Therefore, it really pays to keep stress to a minimum. Certain stress relief habits naturally make you more productive. Power napping, for example, can help you catch up on sleep and be more focused and productive, making less sleep stretch further. Being organized can also help you save time and money in the long run, reducing stress and helping you to be more productive in virtually every area of your life. Even limiting caffeine can help, improving your sleep and helping you feel less stressed at the end of the day. Finally, having the right attitude is
actually a habit that can be learned. Being an optimist can benefit you in many areas of your life, helping you let failures roll off your back and actually enabling you to achieve more!

- **Your Happiness:** Some stress relief practices just bring more joy. If you want to enjoy life more, you’ll want to adopt some of these stress relievers, and the fun will come more easily. Caring for pets, enjoying music, dancing while you clean, working more laughter into your life, maintaining a supportive circle of friends, and even having sex are all fun activities that double as great stress relievers for various reasons. Read more about them and how they can help you, and remind yourself that you’re never too busy to include these activities in your lifestyle—
  they’re stress management techniques!

- **Your Stress Levels—Of Course!:** The desire to avoid walking around feeling stressed-out is, in itself, a good reason to bone up on stress management. Certain general techniques that primarily just relieve stress (rather than serving some secondary function) are more than worth adopting because, when you’re less stressed, you enjoy life more. Some of the best stress management techniques available include meditation, journaling, PMR, guided imagery, and good old breathing exercises. Read more about the benefits of each, and choose a few to try, and you won’t have to let stress sap you of energy, productivity and enjoyment of life again!

**Yoga**

Rapidly emerging in the Western world as a discipline for integrating the mind and body into union and harmony, when adopted as a way of life, yoga improves physical, mental, intellectual, and spiritual health. Yoga offers an effective method of managing and reducing stress, anxiety, and depression, and numerous studies demonstrate the efficacy of yoga on mood-related disorders. Currently, treatment for anxiety and depression involves mostly psychological and pharmacological interventions; however, mind-body interventions are becoming increasingly popular as a means to reduce stress. Yoga, a form of mind-body exercise, has become an increasingly widespread therapy used to maintain wellness, and alleviate a range of health problems and ailments. Although yoga has been practiced for over 5000 years, it has only recently gained popularity in the United States and Europe. In America, the yoga market emerged as a 5.7 billion dollar industry in 2008, an increase of 87% from 2004. The practice originated in India and has been implemented to alleviate both mental and physical ailments including bronchitis, chronic pain, and symptoms of menopause.

**Effect of Yoga in Stress**

A growing body of research evidence supports the belief that certain yoga techniques may improve physical and mental health through down-regulation of the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis and the sympathetic nervous system (SNS). The HPA axis and SNS are triggered as a response to a physical or psychological demand (stressor), leading to a cascade of physiologic, behavioral, and psychological effects, primarily as a result of the release of cortisol and catecholamines (epinephrine and norepinephrine). This response leads to the mobilization of energy needed to combat the stressor through the classic fight-or-flight response. Over time, the constant state of hypervigilance resulting from repeated firing of the HPA axis and SNS can lead to dysregulation of the system, and ultimately diseases such as obesity, diabetes, autoimmune disorders, depression, substance abuse, and cardiovascular disease. Studies also show that yoga decreases levels of salivary cortisol, blood glucose, as well as plasma renin levels, and 24-hour urine norepinephrine and epinephrine levels.

Yoga significantly decreases heart rate and systolic and diastolic blood pressure. Studies suggest that yoga reverses the negative impact of stress on the immune system by increasing levels of immunoglobulin A as well as natural killer cells. Yoga has been found to decrease markers of inflammation such as high sensitivity C-reactive protein as well as inflammatory cytokines such as interleukin-6 and lymphocyte-1B. These studies suggest that yoga has an immediate quieting effect on the SNS-HPA axis response to stress. While the precise mechanism of action has not been determined, it has been hypothesized that some yoga exercises cause a shift toward parasympathetic nervous system dominance, possibly via direct vagal stimulation. Shapiro et al noted significant reductions in low-frequency heart rate variability (HRV)—a sign of sympathetic nervous system activation—in depressed patients following an 8-week yoga intervention. Regardless of the pathophysiologic pathway, yoga has been shown to have immediate psychological effects: decreasing anxiety and increasing feelings of emotional, social, and spiritual well-being. Several literature reviews have been conducted that examined the impact of yoga on specific health conditions, including cardiovascular disease, metabolic syndrome, diabetes, cancer, and anxiety.

**Effect of Yoga on Positive Health**

The study of Galantino et al published a systematic review of the effects of yoga on children, contributing to the large body of research evidence attesting to the positive health benefits of yoga. Many of the studies compared yoga to other treatment modalities, most commonly to exercise, meditation, and traditional medicine. However, little has been written about what distinguishes yoga from other treatments. Yoga has recently been found to have beneficial effects on blood glucose levels in individuals with diabetes and other chronic health conditions. Yoga has been shown to be effective in relieving symptoms of mental illness including depression, anxiety, obsessive-compulsive disorder, and schizophrenia. Overall, the studies comparing yoga and exercise seem to indicate that, in both healthy and diseased populations, yoga may
be as effective as, or better than exercise at improving a variety of health-related outcome measures, including HRV, blood glucose, blood lipids, salivary cortisol, and oxidative stress. Furthermore, yoga appears to improve subjective measures of fatigue, pain, and sleep in healthy and ill populations.

II. CONCLUSION

Exercise can be an effective component of a stress management program for many individuals and should be recommended to help those who are dealing with acute, acute episodic, or chronic stress. An advantage of incorporating exercise into a stress management program compared with other stress management techniques is the well-documented physical and psychological health benefits of exercise. However, it is important to remember that exercise is only one component of a stress management program, and there might be situations that require assistance beyond the expertise of a fitness professional, especially in working with individuals who are experiencing acute episodic or chronic stress. Although exercise might be effective in helping an individual feel calmer who is dealing with these types of stress, it will not solve the problem of major chronic or regular stressors. It may be necessary to refer these individuals to resources who can help them to address their stressors, such as a psychologist or other health care providers.

Actually yoga combines several techniques to combat stress. Yoga provides a combination of benefits such as breathing exercises, stretching exercises, fitness program, and meditation practice and guided meditations all in one technique. That is powerful, that is very powerful! Even for people who have physical limitations yoga can be very beneficial just by practicing the breathing techniques, the meditation and the guided meditation. Just by doing this you can have great benefits with the practice of yoga. So in conclusion yes yoga can be a great remedy for stress and can offer some stress relief. Yoga has combined set of principles and exercises that can greatly benefit you and help you to deal with stress.

III. REFERENCES