

## Stress Management For Good Physical And Mental Health

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*Stress can have a negative impact on just about every part of your body. It can suppress your immune system, cause a heart attack, or stroke, increase your risk of cancer, delay wound healing, promote inflammation, cause you to gain weight, impair your memory, cause depression, exacerbate diabetes and worsen your sexual function. Stress also makes you age faster....Dean Ornish MD : The Spectrum*

Stress is a physical or emotional reaction / response to any kind of change which may be external, internal or both. External pressure for example can be due to job stress, competition, challenges or frequently changing government policies etc. Internal pressure is mainly due to negative thoughts, fear, and anxiety. There is a individual variation in stress response. Many people have inner strength or resilience to manage day to day stress and cumulative stress well. People who have learned to manage stress also minimize the effect of stress. Those who do not have good inner strength and who have not learned the management of stress suffer a lot because of stress.

Whenever there is stress, brain tells the body to release some chemicals so that the body is ready for the fight or flight reaction to deal with immediate danger.

For a short period this is a life saving mechanism but if the stress continues and becomes chronic, the same chemicals become harmful to the body and the mind. Human brain is developed or advanced in such a way that merely imagining a stressful event will cause the body to react in a way as if the event is actually happening. So our body responds to the way we think, feel, imagine and act.

Both negative and positive life events cause stress. Death of loved ones, unwanted pregnancy, divorce, physical illness, mental disorder, financial problems and positive events like marriage, childbirth etc also cause stress.

There are three types of stresses: (1) Basic stress or day to day stress for example, traffic jam, shortage of fuels, gas, drinking water, load

shedding etc. (2) Cumulative stress: stress of several months duration, often not easily recognized and harms the person with physical disease, and mental disorders. (3) The third type of stress is called critical incident stress or traumatic stress. Its onset is sudden and unexpected because of the events outside the range of normal experience. Disasters whether man made or natural and sexual assault are the common causes of traumatic stress.

Chronic stress constricts blood flow to the brain, which lowers overall brain function and prematurely ages your brain<sup>1</sup>.

Common physical symptoms of stress: There are wide ranges of physical symptoms that can mimic many physical illnesses. Nausea, stomach upset, hand tremors, sweating, diarrhea,

dizziness, chest pain, back pain, headache, palpitation, rapid breathing, increased blood pressure reading and sleep disturbances are a few of them

Cognitive symptoms of stress: slowed thinking, impaired decisions making and problem solving abilities, confusion, poor concentration, poor calculations , distressing dreams and low attention span are some of them.

Emotional symptoms of stress: Anxiety, fear, guilt, feeling lost, abandoned and isolated, worry, anger, irritability, depression and emotional numbness are common.

Out of these emotional symptoms, anger is a very powerful emotion. If the person can remain calm and quiet when he is angry, anger does not harm the person. But this is very difficult without learning and practicing anger management. Anger alone can cause many physical and mental health problems.

It is well known that stress can cause heart burn, peptic ulcer, colitis, high blood pressure, heart attack, some skin disorders, rheumatoid arthritis, suppression of immune system and low resistance to pain. Whether stress acts as precipitating factor or has a role in the etiology is however uncertain. Stress reduction is important for the recovery of illness. Cumulative stress is also known to cause depression, addictions to alcohol and illegal drugs, and compulsive behaviour like over eating, over working and bullying.

Role of stress in health and disease is a new concept since around 1980. Dr. Dean Ornish was the person to show that changing your life style changes your genes –“turning on” disease preventing genes and “turning off” genes that promote breast cancer, heart disease and other illnesses <sup>2</sup>.

Dr. Dean Ornish in the same book says that” stress can have a negative impact on just about every part of your body. It can suppress your immune system, cause a heart attack, or stroke, increase your risk of cancer, delay wound healing, promote inflammation, cause you to gain weight, impair your memory, cause depression, exacerbate diabetes and worsen your sexual function. Stress also makes you age faster”.

Research has shown that an individual who learns stress management, gains a tremendous number of benefits compared to people who

have not learned stress management. Stress management lowers blood pressure, reduces incident of heart attack, boosts immune system, improves sleep pattern, reduces back pain, reduces muscle tension, anxiety and depression, and lowers the risk of developing certain psychosomatic diseases.

The National Institute of Mental Health conducted a study earlier this year on the effects of meditation and found that continuously chanting or repeating a mantra can reduce cholesterol levels, prevent plaque formation in the arteries, and control high blood pressure – all of which have the potential to stop a heart attack

Swami Ramdev claims that *Kapalbhati pranayama* has immense potential to keep away diseases and ensure healthy living for persons of all ages from young children to old people. There are thousands of followers of swami Ramdev and many of them confirm that they have benefitted by *pranayama* practice.

*Sudarsan Kriya (SK&P)* and accompanying breathing techniques of Sri Sri Ravisankar ( Art of living) demonstrated a 68-73% ‘ success rate in treating people suffering from depression regardless of severity of depression. Substantial relief was experienced in three weeks of practice and by one month patients were considered to be in remission. At three months follow up patients remain asymptomatic and stable.

Dr Janakiramaiah MD. Ph.D of NIMHANS Bangalor after conducting several of these studies concluded that ‘ *Sudarshan Kriya*’ has remarkable therapeutic effects and clinically feasible and effective. It has the potential to become a first line treatment of dysthymic disorder [chronic mild depression] patients and possibly in mild and moderate forms of major depressive disorder.( Therapeutic Efficacy of *Sudarsan Kriya Yoga (SKY)* <sup>3</sup>.

Swami Ramdevji and Acharya Balkrishna in a book ‘ *Yog in synergy with medical science*’ mention that “ practice of Yog, Pranayam and meditation reduce mental stress and stress hormones and increases the secretion of beneficial hormones like enkephalins and endorphins, and balance sympathetic and parasympathetic system. This has a favorable effect on the body and the person becomes disease-free.” According to them “ Body is not merely physical, it has non- physical aspects like

consciousness and mind that all depends on the vital force Prana; life cannot exist without it .... Oxygen plays an essential role in all chemical and metabolic processes in the body right down to the level of DNA.....Through different pranayams oxygen intake into the body is manipulated..... Pranayama provides optimum oxygen to the blood cells and is a scientific way of giving mobility and energy flow to the internal parts of the body. Pranayam helps in having a healthy and worry free life."

**Mindfulness:** The mind spends most of the time lost in fantasies and illusions, reliving pleasant and unpleasant experiences with eagerness and fear. As we are mostly lost in such thoughts, we are unaware of what is happening now. For example, while brushing our teeth, taking bath or eating our meals, we are thinking something else mostly about the past experiences or the future plans. We all know that present moment is the most important moment, but we mostly either live in the past or in the future.

Jon Kabat – Zinn in his book – *Wherever You Go There You Are* says "Mindfulness is an ancient Buddhist practice and has been called the heart of Buddhist meditation. Mindfulness means paying attention in a particular way: on purpose, in the present moment, and nonjudgmentally"

**Breath and Mind:** When the mind is peaceful and calm, the breath is regular but whenever anger hatred or fear arises respiration becomes rapid, heavy and rough. So our respiration alerts our mental state. Breathing serves as a bridge between mind and body. Joan Z Borysenko in her book *Inner Peace for Busy People* says " Breathing is the single most important skill for calming body and mind. Breathing is the only autonomic function over which we also have conscious control."

**Management of stress:** Open your heart with someone whom you trust. Sharing ones problems and difficulties with someone who can listen, keep them confidential and support is important. Nepalese, unless specifically asked do not like to share their hardships, difficulties and problems to other people. Counselors and clinicians have to specifically ask questions to explore such issues. Sharing the problems

reduces the clients stress and helps to find the way out or the solution.

**Face the problems :** Facing difficulties and problems is the necessary prelude to tackling them. Facing difficulties is rarely as alarming in practice as it is in our imaginations, and avoiding them only perpetuates the difficulties. Over 95% of what we worry about never happens.

**Manage time:** One of the greatest sources of stress is over commitment or poor time management. A common time management mistake is to try to use our memory to keep track of too many details. Practice of making a to-do list daily before starting the day and review of this list at the end of the day helps to manage time and avoid commitment. Learn to say no when you already have lots to do, or prioritize which one to do first and which can wait for the time being .If you try to work putting extra hours, that will disturb the overall balance increasing your stress.

**Meditation :** Meditation reduces stress and enhances brain function. The benefits of meditation go far beyond stress relief. Studies have shown that meditation improves attention, reduces depression and anxiety and protects the brain from cognitive decline associated with normal aging.

## REFERENCES:

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2. Dean Ornish , MD. *The Spectrum.* Ballantine Books New York 2008; pp 115.
3. B.L. Meti et. al. *Therapeutic Efficacy of Sudarsan Kriya Yoga (SKY) in Dysthymic Disorder* NIMHANS Journal Jan 1998 pp 21-28)