

MANAGEMENT OF STRESSFUL SITUATION

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Stress is like a 'fire' and an inescapable part of modern life. It is the psychological and physiological reaction that occurs when an individual perceives an imbalance between the level of demand placed upon him and his capability for meeting that demand. Stress affects individuals physiologically, emotionally and behaviorally; and it is linked to several health problems, especially coronary heart disease. Any feeling of being excessively pushed or pulled, squeezed or stretched due to external or internal factors, needs to be recognized and causes identified-whether it is beneficial or destructive.

Various methods and programmes can help individuals to cope with stress in personal life and in work environment. Fitness programmes of 'Yoga' are especially helpful in this regard.

The word 'stress' is derived from the Latin word "Stringer" (to draw tight) and popularly used in the seventeenth century to mean 'hardship', 'straits' 'adversity' or 'affliction'. In physical science, the term stress refers to the internal force generated within a solid body by the action of any external force.

In ancient Greece, Hippocrates "The Father of Medicine", clearly recognized the existence of healing power of nature made up of inherent bodily mechanism for restoring health after exposure to pathogens. The nineteenth century French Physiologist Bernard enormously advanced the subject by pointing out that the internal environment of a living organism must remain fairly constant despite changes in the external environment.¹

Mankind has always tried to attain peace and happiness through all available means. The urgency of getting an ideal method of attaining mental peace has become great in view of tremendous increase in stress and strain of life especially in urban areas. The rapid industrialization and urbanization leading to excessive crowding, too much competition, excessive hurry and worry are some of the important factors which ultimately lead to mental and physical changes. Initially, a man tries to adopt himself to face such a strain.

At first he gets psychic changes such as irritability, nervousness, sleeplessness etc. If the process is not recognized and checked in time he gets some additional manifestations such as palpitation, increased pulse rate, rise of blood pressure etc. As these changes continue, he ultimately becomes a victim of one of the psychosomatic stress disorders such as hypertension, ischemic heart disease, peptic ulcer, diabetes mellitus, ulcerative colitis, bronchial asthma, thyrotoxicosis, migraine, rheumatoid arthritis etc. A victim to any one of these stress diseases depends upon his genetic factors, psychosomatic constitution and the various environmental factors, such as nutritional status, habit, climate, nature of work etc².

So every human being has his own understanding of stress, because all demands of adaptability do evoke the stress phenomenon. The term 'stress' has been used in so many different context that there is a confusion regarding the exact meaning of the term. Few definitions of stress are given below :

- (i) "Stress is a non-specific response of the body to any demand." (Selye, 1974)
- (ii) "Stress refers to physiological, behavioral and cognitive responses to events appraised as threatening or exceeding one's coping responses to events appraised as threatening or exceeding one's coping responses and options." (Lazarus, 1966)
- (iii) "Stress is defined in terms of tolerance, stressful environment which are those that are outside the normal tolerance limit of daily function at extreme level; stimulation might be perceived as pain." (McGrath, 1974)³

Perhaps, no other term in psycho- social research has been more difficult than stress. There is clearly no satisfactory definition of stress which encompasses the social, psychological and biological issues as they pertain to individual. Stress is multifaceted in nature and stress response arousal involves every set of organs and tissues in our body. Thoughts and feelings are clearly intertwined with these physiological processes.

Stress can be three kinds: **Anticipatory**, **Current** and **Residual** stress. **Anticipatory stress** increases sharpness and motivation. This stress can be positive but it can also interfere with life in present, as a person might give more attention to 'what might happen' than to 'what is happening'. **Current stress** occurs during an experience; for example, mental alertness in the midst of debate, the surge of energy in the final 100 meters of a race. Current stress, if harnessed effectively, is vital for optimal performance. **Residual stress** occurs after the experience has passed. The body remains in a state of alarm for some time after a near

collision on the highway, over stimulation, whether pleasant or unpleasant, can have the same effect.⁴

In today's world, everybody seems to be talking about stress not only in daily conversation, but also through television, radio and newspapers. Stress is a universal feature of life and no one can live without experiencing some degree of stress. One may assume that only serious or intensive physical or mental injury can cause stress. This is not true. In fact; travelling in a crowded bus /train or even sheer joy is enough to activate the body's stress mechanism to some extent. Right from the beginning of civilization, human organism is subjected to stressful event, and it is self-evident that birth itself is stressful like other biological milestones such as crowding and waking. Infants also experience stress on their own action in which aversive or defensive coping behavior (such as crying) appears. For the pre-school child, environment plays an important role in experiencing stressful events. Stressful experience may exert different effects at different ages. As the student is the pillar of the society, so here I want to mention the effect of stress upon them.

In the academic environment a lot of stressful situations are found. Society's academic environment among the students and even at the primary society's demand for higher education has created a highly competitive academic environment, and even at the primary grade levels, Children are pressured to do well academically to ensure college admission, Once in college the student is exposed to the possibility of graduate or professional courses. The students are expected not only to be successful in the chosen endeavor, but also to survive a number of psycho-social pressures. A student comes under multitude of forces with which he must interact and emerge unscathed, which may not always be the case. For many students, the academic atmosphere has led to dropping out of school, poor self-concept and more severe mental disturbances. For some students, suicide is the outcome of the low grades and failure.

All students have to face the demand of attaining high academic standard. During examination their average blood pressure rose from 118/58 to 152/113.⁵ Result suggests that before examination there is a raised anticipatory anxiety, perhaps boosted by a high work load. The approach of examination has an effect in term of psychoneurotic scores. In particularly, anxiety and obsessional score rises in the four month prior to examination.

How Yoga works in stresses: Modern material science has invited Atom Bomb, Hydrogen Bomb and poisonous gas which can destroy all animals, all human races from the surface of the globe in a few minutes. But modern Yoga Science of India has invited a very easy process

to save all human beings from senility, disease and untimely death and to extend human longevity over 125 years to 150 years by showing the pathway to a higher life , full of peace and bliss.⁶

In recent years there has been an intense search for non-medical measures not only to have control over these diseases, but also to mould his psychosomatic apparatus in such a way that he can boldly face the stress and strain in modern life without much difficulty.

If we look into the ancient past of mankind we can easily find out some of the methods described by the earlier philosophers, sages and spiritual leaders for maintaining tranquility of mind. Among them yoga seems to be the earliest and most effective method for providing peace and tranquility of mind.

Thus in the far East, especially in Japan, Zen meditation seems to be well developed method for attaining mental peace. The word 'Zen' is derived from Chinese word 'Chan' which has been derived from the Sanskrit word "*Dhyāna*". From this it becomes clear that along with Buddhism the principles of Zen which is nothing but a method of enlightenment traveled at first to China and then to Japan. This Zen meditation is practiced in most of the Buddhist temple in Japan.⁷

The people in general associate Yoga with some physical postures designed to promote physical well being. Many of them are not aware of *Yogāsanas*, *Yogic Kriyās* and *Prānāyāma* which have significant therapeutic value. Yogic postures also help in curing spondylitis, backache & chronic constipation etc.

In view of the growing recognition of the fact the *Yogāsana* and *Prānāyāma* lead to health, vitality and psychological poise and they have also been claiming attention from psychologists, psychiatrists, neurologists and also of those who specialize in some other branches of medicine. Certain Yogic practices are also being prescribed for reducing the incidence of heart attacks and as rehabilitation therapy for those who had suffered from cardiac trouble.

Of late professionals in some foreign countries have been evincing keen interest in yogic practices. A few selected *Yogāsanas* are now being taught to air pilots, business executives and factory workers to reduce their stress and improve psycho-physical efficiency. It is because of the growing popularity of Yoga that very large number of centers have been set up in India and abroad where regular training of practice of Yoga will be going on. Some reputed institutions in India attract a number of trainees from foreign countries. Kaivalyadhāma

is one of the few institutions in the country which has philosophic-literary and Scientific Research departments and carry on systematic research on the efficacy of Yogic therapy for treatment of various physical and mental disorders.⁸

Patañjali was the founder of the Yoga system and has expounded the meaning and purpose of Yoga very elaborately. But the word “Yoga” is not limited to Patañjali only and various philosophies and spiritual systems have used the term “Yoga” and tried to reinterpret the term in their own way. The differences in them may be considered to be superficial because the ultimate objective of practicing yoga is the same e.g. self realization. We find the exposition of Yoga viz. *Jñānayoga*, *Karmayoga* and *Bhaktiyoga* in *the Gita*. They all are the capable of leading one to the highest goal but their relevance in day to day life are also important which have been highlighted in this paper.

Sage Patañjali state that yoga is a method by which the practitioner can control, alter and direct the *vṛttis*, the modification of mind thus allowed him to experience the inner self. However before this, he made another statement, which is mentioned in the *sūtra*—“*Atha yoga Anus'āsanam*”(Y.S.I:1). The word ‘*Atha*’ in the first *sūtra* implies that the discourse relating to yoga is being commenced. The word ‘*Atha*’ means ‘Right’ being.’ Generally, this *sūtra* has been translated as, “Now (begins) the systematic presentation of the discipline of yoga”. But the real meaning of this *sūtra* “yoga is a form of inner discipline”. *Anusāsanam* means discourse. The science of yoga delineated in this *sūtra* has been based on the instructions transmitted by the ancient sages. The word ‘*Anus'āsana*’ means ‘Discipline’ not the external, imposed discipline which follows the knowledge of the subtle, unmanifest and unknown areas of human personality.

The aim of study and practice in yoga is physical, mental and spiritual development through awareness of the infinite potential in man for knowledge, power and happiness. Relaxation, positive thinking, mental and physical health, dynamic self confidence, creative imagination, memory and will power are among the results greater understanding which comes when one turn one’s attention to reality as it is revealed through yoga psychology.

Sage *Pātañjali* has recommended eight stages of yoga decipline. *Yama, Niyama Āsana, Prāṇāyāma, Pratyāhāra, Dhāranā, Dhyāna and, Samādhi* are the eight accessories. Y.S.II:29.⁹ These are as follows:

(1)Yama :The word ‘yama’ represents the conscious endeavour on the part of the Yogi to

abstain from doing thing that keep his mind involved in the indiscriminate struggle for survival and satisfaction within the existing scale of values in life. Although the stress seems to lie on abstaining, which is a negative concept, the contents of the “abstinences” are sometimes positive. They are five in number:

- (i) *Ahimsā* means non-violence, abstaining from killing and hurting other beings.
- (ii) *Satya* is truthfulness and implies abstaining from telling lies and from falseness of any kind.
- (iii) *Asteya* means abstaining from stealing.
- (iv) *Brahmacarya*, means living in accordance with the standards of the goal of Yoga, which is union with God or with the ultimate reality, or the final direct knowledge thereof. Sexual union has been regarded as the most powerful diverting influence of this kind and has therefore been avoided by the serious fully committed Yogis. Brahmacarya therefore became synonymous with chastity or celibacy.
- (v) *Aparigraha* may be interpreted as “non-accepting of things and nonhoarding of things”. It is an attitude of mind that does not consider anything to be one’s own, even if one is using it and even if it seems to be essential for life.

(2) *Niyama*: Both *yama* and *niyama* are words derived from the same root “yam” which, as a verb, means to control, to tame. *Niyama* can be interpreted as “observance” and represents the Yogi’s progressive effort to observe certain principles that prepare his personality for achievements of a higher order. They are also five in number:

- (i) *Śauca* means purity and it is external as well as internal. The Yogi has to strive for pure thinking , speaking and acting, to keep his body clean, see to the purity of his food, act from pure motives and clean his mind of sensuality and urges.
- (ii) *Santoṣa* is contentment. It expresses the willingness of the Yogi to accept and face reality as it is without being elated or depressed by it . He has to bear equally pleasure and pain, gain and loss, fame and concept, success and failure, sympathy and hostility. He must be able, if necessary; to reduce his needs to the bare necessities of life.
- (iii) *Tapas* means traditionally “austerity” and introduces into the practice of Yoga forbearance, fasts and other ascetic practices that help to reduce the Yogi’s dependence on things that cannot be altogether avoided, but should not become desirable *for* their own sake. In this

way he increases his self-control.

(iv) *Svādhyāya* is self-development or self-education and points to the necessity of continuous study, constant learning and development of one's intelligence and higher mental faculties.

(v) *Īś'varapraṇidhāna* may be interpreted as "constant thought of the Divine" (Surrender to the Lord). It is an admonition to be constantly aware that there is the transcendent, which the Yogi may not yet have experienced, but which is his goal and which should therefore be constantly in his mind, accompanying all his *thoughts* and actions.

(3) *Āsana* means "position", "posture". For efficient Yoga practice it is essential to be able to assume a stable and agreeable position when training the mind so that the mind is free from bodily interference, which normally compels one to move or change position. In India since time immemorial it has been a cross-legged position. It has several varieties of which the lotus posture (*Padmāsana*) is the most impressive one.

(4) *Prāṇāyāma* : It is the control of the process of breathing. It is usually done in the position chosen for Yoga practice. It regulates breathing and its rhythm, especially by slowing it down and also by introducing longer breaks between the phases of breathing. Since there is a close connection between the flow of respiration and the dynamics of the mind, the help which can thereby be obtained in establishing some balance of mind, enhancing its clarity and capacity for observation, is considerable.¹⁰

Various breathing techniques, particularly yogic breathing, *Kapalbhati*, *Bhrāmari* and *Ujjāyi* provide tranquility to mind and by providing rhythm remove anxiety and stress situations by not giving undue importance to minor things or attaching himself to petty things in life.

(5) *Pratyāhara* means "withdrawal". It is the first purely mental step in this system of Yoga, aiming preparation of the stage of mind for spiritual vision. A mind is made clear and calm by *prāṇāyāma*. It is purified by withdrawing its attention from the activity of the senses which normally constantly fill it with images derived from external objects. The withdrawal of attention from the senses cuts off the flow of perceptions created by external objects. The mind can then be trained in the succeeding steps of the path, which involve the technique of opening it to inner vision.

(6) *Dhāraṇā* means concentration and its aim is to bring about “one-pointedness” (*ekāgratā*) of the mind, which can then stay focused on one particular object of its experience in a way unknown to the mind when it operates on the level of sense data. This concentration also results in a degree of understanding and comprehension of the chosen object that eventually penetrates into its very essence or nature. The power of concentration on objects objectively and balancing one’s thoughts gives inbuilt power to strengthen one’s mind reduces the failure i.e. frustration, anxiety and relative stress.

(7) *Dhyāna* may be translated as contemplation or absorption or meditation. It is reached when concentration becomes spontaneous. It is then a natural process for the mind of the Yogi, just as thinking is natural for everybody else, so that no special effort is needed to embark on it. At this stage the penetration of the essence of the object of contemplating becomes complete. This technique then enables the mind to approach reality which is the suprasensory and supraintellectual and direct way of cognition. This leads to the final achievement. It provides a powerful anti-stress weapon to the Yogi, as the prayer and faith, it is proved, provide relief from stress and anxiety and help a person to equilibrate his thought-process. Faith, it has been experienced, is also a silent healer in respect of many diseases and more so in case of psychosomatic disorders.

(viii) *Samādhi*: *Samādhi* is the manifestation of the object of meditation (YS,III-3). It is the crown of Yoga endeavors in Patañjali’s system. It is the fully conscious and “factual” unification of the Yogi’s vision or cognitive capacity or mind itself with the heart of reality in its wholeness which sets him free.¹¹

Samādhi is the ultimate state of mind which corresponds to the self actualization stage of the need triangle as envisaged by the famous western psychologist Maslow.

Yoga can play an important role throughout the world. In fact, Yoga is defined as science of mental control. It not only helps one to control one’s mental state, but also to improve one’s personality and behavior, if it is practiced regularly from childhood. In middle and old age groups if appropriate Yogic practices are continued it may delay the aging and degenerating process, with the result that person may remain active and energetic for a considerably longer period of life.

Thus, for maintaining a good physical and mental health, one should adopt all the three types of Yogic practices, namely *Āsanas*, *Prāṇayāma*, and meditation. All these should be

continued daily in the morning or evening about half an hour or so.

Yoga is a means of vehicle through which man can easily climb up the ladder of his progress. In fact, the enormous latent energy that would be let out after all these Yogic practices should be properly channelized through *karmayoga*, *bhaktiyoga* or *jñānayoga* so as to enable one to serve humanity in the best possible manner. There is no doubt that it would ultimately lead to universal Harmony.

Āsana, *Prāṇāyāma* and Meditation would be much better safer if one learns them from trained Yoga teachers directly rather than from published articles or books. Usually one starts with selected physical postures for a period of 15 minutes, followed by breathing exercises for 5 minutes and then Meditation for 10 minutes everyday¹².

Sri Surnath, in his work entitled *Scientific Yoga*, suggests yogic remedies for certain physical and mental ailments. He does not cite any authority. Perhaps, his suggestions are based on his experience.

When a person feels tension or discomfort in any part of his body during meditation he should think of the reverse. If one feels hot, he should think of coldness. If there is pain he should think there is no pain.

When one person has excessive anger upset mood he should take ten deep breaths slowly inhaling and exhaling through the nostrils. Retention of breath is prohibited.

One feels nervous tension due to sex desire. If there is no chance of sex gratification, such person should practice meditation through the *chakras*.

Some person may be strong unnecessarily due to sexual urge. In this situation he should take ten deep breaths inhaling and exhaling slowly without retaining breath. Then he should lie on his back and withdraw the inner muscles of the anus.

In case of nervous, tension, anxiety or diseases like cancer one should practice meditation through the *chakras*. This practice revitalizes the cells and tissues, rebuilds them. He also suggests the taking of ten deep breaths in the morning exhaling in a rhythmic manner. He also lays stress on auto-suggestion. Before going to work, a person is advised to think like this –‘I shall be calm in my work, or in any other circumstances’. These auto-suggestions should be repeated several times in a day. In the event of tense moment, he should sit or stand calmly for a short moment, and say “my mind is being unnecessarily agitated. Let my

mind be cool, let my nerves be cool and let me have correct judgment and assessment of the issue.”¹³

Dealing with stressful situation:

In course of dealing with stressful situation, we should follow some stress Management strategy.

Not all stress can be avoided. It is not healthy to avoid a situation that's needs to be addressed. We may be surprised, however, by the number of stressors in our life that we can eliminate. So, we can follow the following Situation.

Avoid the stressor:

- a) **We can learn how to say 'no'**-we should know our limits and stick to them. Whether in professional or personal life, we should refuse to accept added responsibilities.
- b) We should **avoid those people who** consistently causes stress in our life.
- c) We should **control of our environment. We should avoid hot button topics.**
- d) **We should pare down our to- do list.** We can analyze our schedule, responsibilities and daily tasks. If we have got too much on our plate, distinguish between the 'should' and 'must'.

e) **2) Alteration of the situation:**

- a) If we cannot avoid stressful situation we should alter it.
- b) We can express our feelings instead of bottling them up. If something or someone is bothering us, we can communicate our concerns in an open and respectful way. If we don't voice our feelings, resentment will built and the situation will likely remain the same.
- c) **To be willing to compromise.** When we ask someone to change their behavior, we should have willing to do the same.
- d) **To be more assertive.** We don't take a back seat in our own life. We can deal with problems head on, doing our best to anticipate and prevent them.
- e) Poor time management can cause a lot of stress. So we should **to manage our time better.**

3) To adapt the stress: If we can change the stressor, we can change our self. We can

adapt to stressful situation by changing our expectations and attitude. In such case we should follow the following points:

- a) **To reframe problems:**-We can try to view stressful situations from a more positive perspective. Rather than fuming about a traffic jam, we can look at it as an opportunity to pause and regroup and listen to our favorite song or enjoy.
- b) **Adjusting attitude:** If we see good think about our self we will feel good. The reverse is also true. We can eliminate words such as “always”, ”never”, “should” ,and “must”.

Now we see what point should accept the stressor:

- a) Accept the things what we can't change.
- b) We should not try to control the uncontrollable situation.
- c) To share our feelings with a trusted friend or make an appointment.
- d) To learn to forgive. Free yourself from negative energy by forgiving and moving on.
- e) To make time for fun and relaxation. If we regularly make time for fun and relaxation, we shall be in a better place to handle life's stressors when they inevitably come.

Healthy way to relax and recharge:

1. Go for a walk.
2. Spend time in nature.
3. Call a good friend.
4. Sweat out tension with a good workout.
5. Write in our journal.
6. Take a long bath.
7. Light scented candles.
8. Watch a comedy.
9. Get a massage.
10. Take a warm cup of coffee or tea.
11. Play with a pet.
12. Listen to music.

13. Work in our garden

Self medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress but the relief is only temporary. We should not avoid or mask the issue at head. We should deal with problems with a clear mind. Yoga's benefits are so numerous; it gives a high payoff for the amount of effort involved.

Notes and References

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