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HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

*I*n order to enjoy life one needs to be healthy. People who are not healthy are called sick. They cannot perform well and meet the various demands of life. Health is important for a person individually as well as socially. In order to be a productive member of society, we need an alert mind and an active body. The field of health psychology deals with psychological factors which are important in maintaining and fostering health and well being. Also, it explores the factors which lead to the condition of illness. This field has become very important in recent years. It has become increasingly clear that the life style or our ways of thinking and behaving are contributing to the health status of people. Experts think that the factors causing illness and death can be prevented with the help of exercise, proper intake of nutritious food, and changes in bad habits like smoking. This lesson will help you to understand the issues related to learning how to lead a healthy life and experiencing well-being.



OBJECTIVES

After studying this lesson, you will be able to:

- understand the concept of health and well-being;
- describe health promoting behaviours;
- learn about the threats to health; and
- familiarize yourself with life-style interventions necessary for fostering health and well being.
- explain coping and self-management skills to safeguard from unwanted sexual advances and other forms of abuse.
- differentiate between safe and unsafe sex.
- list the risks like RTI, STD, HIV/AIDS due to unsafe sex and other modes of transmission.



Notes

25.1 CONCEPT OF HEALTH AND WELL BEING

Health refers to a state of physical, mental and spiritual well being. Health should not be confused with absence of illness. It is a positive state. In addition to absence of illness, it incorporates thriving and coping. Health occupies a central place in the personal and social lives of the people. The quality of life of people in today's world is being challenged from many quarters which reflect on the poor health of the people. On the one hand the external environment is changing very fast. It demands coping with a number of environmental stresses. Also, these changes in social structure (e.g., disintegration of family and other social institutions), increase in competition and consumerism are contributing to increase in frustration, loneliness, conflict and loss of support. The result is that psychosomatic disorders are on the rise. An analysis of this scenario indicates that health and well-being are becoming casualties.

In today's busy life each one of us is experiencing a variety of tensions and stresses. Stress is now recognized as the silent killer. It has a negative effect on physical health as well as psychological well-being. Technically, stress refers to our response to events that are viewed as threatening and disrupting psychological functioning. The situations or factors in the environment that cause stress are called stressors. While the list of stressors can be very long, they can be grouped in four main categories: **Stressful life events** (e.g., divorce, retirement, pregnancy, death of a near and dear one, unemployment); **Hassles of every day life** (e.g., shopping, too many commitments, Commuting to work place in difficult situation); **Work related stress** (e.g., role ambiguity, unpleasant work environment, conflict with colleagues meeting targetes) and **Catastrophic events like disasters**. Stress is a potential source of health hazard for everybody but its effect depends on the degree of fit between person and environment. Also, people vary in certain dispositions like optimism, perception of control, health beliefs, emotional state, and personality pattern which may help or hinder coping with stress.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 25.1

1. List the main challenges that create threat to quality of life in modern life.
2. Give three examples each of (a) stressful life events, (b) daily hassles and (c) work related stresses.

In Indian thought the term swasth (healthy) means the state of 'being in oneself'. In other words it is an auto-locus person who can be called swastha. Ayurveda or the science of life often refers to a state of balance or appropriateness (Sama) as an important component of well-being and health.



25.2 HEALTH PROMOTING BEHAVIOURS

Achieving health requires following certain patterns of behaviour. The important behaviours are described below:

(i) Relaxation

Relaxation is very useful for stress reduction. Meditation which involves focusing attention on an object, word, or phrase has been found to have a calming effect. Another kind of relaxation is called progressive muscle relaxation. It involves systematically tensing and then relaxing the muscles while lying down or sitting comfortably. Yoga Nidra is also used for this purpose. **Relaxation often involves deep breathing. By holding one's breath for a few seconds and exhaling slowly.**

(ii) Exercise

Regular exercise helps in maintaining physical and mental health. It strengthens the heart and lungs and improves the use of oxygen by the body. Jogging, running, bicycling and aerobic exercise are quite useful to this end. The benefits include cardiovascular fitness and endurance, improved capacity for physical work, optimization of body weight, improvement of muscle tone and strength, control of hypertension, improved stress tolerance, and focusing of attention and concentration. In order to benefit from exercise it should be done regularly.

(iii) Weight Control

Regulation of food intake is determined by a complex system. In fact a set of biochemical processes control it. Poor regulation of food leads to high accumulation of body fat. The resulting obesity works as a risk factor because it increases blood pressure and cholesterol level. Obesity has been found to be a cause of early mortality. Genetic factors, and stress both are found to contribute to obesity. Weight control is very difficult. Dietary intervention is necessary but often insufficient for producing lasting weight loss. Fasting, yoga, surgery, use of appetite suppressing drugs are also used for this purpose. A multi-pronged approach to weight control is found better. Analysis of eating habits is used to make people aware of their eating patterns. The analysis of stimuli that affect eating provides insights to regulate eating. People are trained to modify the stimuli in their environment that have previously elicited and maintained over-eating. The patients are trained to control the eating process itself. Developing a sense of self control over eating contributes to weight control.

(iv) Diet

A healthy diet should be a goal for every one of us. Studies indicate that dietary



habits are critically involved in the development of diseases like cancer, hypertension and cardiovascular diseases. Low fat and low-cholesterol diet reduces the incidence of cardiac disease. **Dietary control involves meal planning, cooking methods and eating habits.** It has been noted that intervention with family is useful for promoting and maintaining dietary change.



INTEXT QUESTION 25.2

1. Fill in the blanks:

- (a) Relaxation involves _____ breath, holding _____ and _____ slowly while relaxing the muscles.
- (b) Developing a sense of _____ over eating _____ to weight control.
- (c) The dietary control involves _____ planning, _____ methods, and _____ habits.

Attending to Health Problems

It is very important to attend to your health problems in time. The matter of prime importance in any health matter is that it should be attended to without delay, as sometimes a problem may progress fast. Once a complaint or a symptom is noticed in the body whether physical or mental. It should be reported to a qualified medical personnel. You should proceed to take the necessary corrective steps at the earliest as per his consultation and guidance.

Positive Emotions

It is often said that a smiling face indicates happiness and mental health. It is true, but it misses one important information- that experiencing positive emotions like love, affection, interest, empathy, forgiveness, gratitude etc. contribute to one's state of health and well being. Recent studies indicate that the experiences of various positive emotions enhance the status of one's health. It is, therefore, important to discover, arrange and create opportunities for experiencing positive emotions in everyday encounters.

25.3 THREATS TO HEALTH

It must be clear by now that many of the diseases and threats to health which ultimately reduce longevity are related to the ways we behave and conduct



ourselves. In order to ameliorate such conditions we need to adopt a life-style consisting of certain do's and don'ts. Unfortunately, people develop habits that often create problems. They indulge in many self destructive behaviours. Some of the important ones which increase the risk for health are as follows.

1. **Alcohol and Drug Use:** In the modern period these are the most common health impairing habits. Taken in an overdose they can immediately kill people. The addiction to alcohol and drugs often damage the respiratory system, intestine, liver in particular and other bodily systems in general. The thinking capacity and decision making also get affected. Alcohol, in particular adversely affects liver and may produce cirrhosis.
2. **Smoking:** Studies clearly show that the chances of lung cancer and heart disease go high among the smokers. Smoking leads to chronic bronchitis and respiratory disorders. Interestingly the dangers of smoking are not confined to the smokers alone. The spouses, family members and co-workers who live with smokers are also prone to a variety of health disorders. Accompanied by over-weight and stress, smoking becomes more dangerous.
3. **Use of Tobacco:** In India tobacco is used in many ways. People eat raw tobacco, smell it and chew it with paan leafs. The studies indicate that use of tobacco is related to mouth cancer. It adversely affects oral hygiene and may even involve gums and teeth.
4. **Poor Nutritional Habits:** In recent years there has been an increase in following poor dietary practices. Use of junk food (fast food!) and eatables which are imbalanced in terms of cholesterol, fats, calories etc. have become the order of the day. Awareness needs to be generated in public about benefits of eating raw food and lot of fruits. The meals should be programmed for healthy living. In order to experiment with new taste, people often go for nutritionally imbalanced food. Uncontrolled food may lead to obesity.
5. **Lack of Exercise:** Modern life values, white collar jobs increasingly lead to sedentary life. They lack time and skills for exercise. Healthy body requires adequate exercise for the entire body. On account of laziness, time pressure and ignorance about the body system many people avoid exercises. As a result the body becomes weak and sick and premature ageing begins.
6. **Unsafe Sex: HIV (Human Immunodeficiency Virus) and AIDS (Acquired Immune Deficiency Syndrome)** is a fatal disease found among drug users (by needle sharing), homosexuals, and people engaging in sexual intercourse with a number of partners. It is estimated that approximately 6.5 million people have died because of AIDS. Following transmission, the virus grows rapidly and spreads throughout the body. The person infected by



this virus suffers from many abnormalities including neuro-endocrine and cardiovascular functioning.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 25.3

Match the two lists of factors causing illness and nature of illness:

- | | |
|---------------|-------------------------|
| 1. Alcohol | (a) respiratory disease |
| 2. Smoking | (b) intestinal illness |
| 3. Junk food | (c) HIV/AIDS |
| 4. Unsafe sex | (d) obesity |

25.4 INTERVENTIONS FOR PROMOTING WELL BEING

Living long, and having a productive and healthy life is a dream for everybody. We can learn about it from the people who have been successful in attaining this enviable goal. Looking at people with such successful ageing, we notice that they were clearly different from the rest in terms of three factors viz.- diet, physical activity, and involvement in community life. In particular, these people preferred leafy green and root vegetables, fresh milk, fresh fruits and eat low to moderate amount of food. They maintain low to moderate levels of daily calorie intake. They also engage in physical activity and walking on a regular basis and they continue with their involvement in family and community affairs.

Based on researches of a wide variety, it is being felt that ensuring health and wellness is possible with the help of adopting certain preventive strategies. A brief description of these strategies is given below:

- (i) **Primary Prevention:** It tries to reduce or eliminate the occurrence of preventable illness and injury. It involves helping people learn about behaviour and health, promoting motivation and necessary skills to practice healthy behaviour, and modifying poor health practices. It also involves generating awareness about immunization.
- (ii) **Secondary Prevention:** The major goal of this kind of prevention is to decrease the severity of illness which a person suffers. With the help of early detection, using diagnostic tests that screen the disease, steps may be taken for cure. People can learn methods of self-examination of body parts, and functioning of various organs, that may help in prevention of disease.



- (iii) **Changing the Life Style:** It must be noted that medicine alone is not sufficient to cure disease, when life style is faulty. It is necessary to understand that the way we think and the way we behave are interrelated. Mind and body both go together. The various types of illnesses are often caused by our beliefs and habits. In achieving the optimum state of health it is important to achieve the harmony of body and mind. It is with this in view that Ayurveda, the Indian system of medicine, suggests that health and well being depend upon proper Ahara (diet), Vihar (recreation), Achara (conduct) and Vichara (thought). The key principles that need our attention in these areas are as follows.

Ahara (Diet)

- Vegetarian food is safe and invigorating for the body.
- Fresh fruit and green vegetables rich in fiber contents, honey and curd provide vitamins, antioxidants, iron etc. necessary for health.
- Avoidance of food having opposite effects (e.g., hot milk and ice cream should be avoided).

Achar (Conduct)

- Daily routine should be organized according to season.
- Drinking lot of water, regular massage, exercises and yogic asanas help to keep body fit and active
- Develop skills for proper time management.

Vihar and Vichar (Recreation and Thought)

- Develop accommodative intellect, acceptance of criticism, understanding of the emotional needs of others.
- Practice self control and one should not be driven by lust and greed.
- Should not be dominated by negative emotions like fear, anger, jealousy and worry.
- Develop enduring friendships and social relations.
- Developing awareness of self, connectivity with others and spiritual inclination.



INTEXT QUESTIONS 25.4

1. What are the important factors found in the people who show successful ageing?



2. Enumerate steps for primary prevention.
3. Describe the components of Ayurvedic view of life-style.

**WHAT YOU HAVE LEARNT**

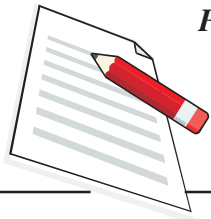
- Health is important for a person individually as well as socially. It consists of a state of physical, mental and spiritual well being.
- Contemporary life is full of stressful experiences in the context of family, economy, work and environment.
- Major stresses are categorized as stressful life events, hassles of everyday life, work related stress and catastrophic events.
- Health promoting behaviours include relaxation, exercise, weight control, and diet. One must attend to health problems by proper diagnosis. Positive thinking have a positive effect on health.
- Threats to health include alcohol and drug use, smoking, tobacco, poor nutrition, lack of physical exercise and unsafe sex.
- Successful ageing is related to moderate eating habits, physical activity and community work.
- Prevention can occur at primary and secondary levels. However changing the life style plays a key role.
- According to Ayurveda, attention must be paid to diet, recreation, conduct and thought.

**TERMINAL EXERCISE**

1. Discuss the concepts of health and well being.
2. What are the factors that should be considered for promoting health?
3. Mention some of the threats to health.
4. Suggest some information for promoting health.

**KEY TO INTEXT QUESTIONS****25.1**

1. Changes in environment, disintegration of family, competition, loneliness.



2. (a) death of spouse, unemployment, loan
(b) commuting to work place, collecting water, sending children to school.
(c) work over load, role ambiguity, time pressure

25.2

- (a) deep, breath, exhaling
- (b) control, contributes
- (c) meal, cooking, eating

25.3

- (1) b (2) a (3) d (4) c

25.4

1. diet, physical activity, involvement in community life.
2. learning about health, promoting motivation, skills to practice health behaviour, modification of poor health practices.
3. Ahar (diet), Achar (conduct) and Vihar and Vichar (recreation and thought).

HINTS TO TERMINAL EXERCISE

1. Refer to section 25.1
2. Refer to section 25.2
3. Refer to section 25.3
4. Refer to section 25.4