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## UNIT-23 STRESS MANAGEMENT

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## **23.0 LEARNING OUTCOME**

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After reading this Unit, you should be able to:

- Explain the meaning of stress and its consequences;
- Illustrate the potential sources of stress; and
- Describe the different approaches toward managing stress.

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### **23.1 INTRODUCTION**

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Stress is a product of busyness of modern life. Tim Newton (1995) refers to stress as "an epidemic plaguing modernity". It has assumed grave dimensions ever since the emergence of industrialism. From being a subject, which was barely a reference a century ago, it has become so prevalent that for most people in the capitalist world, it is unavoidable. Our concern in this Unit is with how this has come about, and with the ways in which employees are said to feel and cope with stress. It is important to monitor stress levels, analyse coping strategies and learn how to become stress-fit through a range of stress management techniques. Stress is an additive phenomenon. It builds up overtime. Stress is quintessentially a problem that must be borne by management and those in senior positions, whether captains of industry or leaders of government.

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## 23.2 MEANING OF STRESS

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Stress is a "dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraint or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important" (Robbins, 2001).

Beehr and Newman (1978) define stress "as a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterised by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning". According to Winfield, Bishop and Poter "stress is essentially a psychological condition induced by external conditions that release or restrict certain chemicals in the brain; this in turn can lead to psychological change in the individual resulting in change of behaviour. It is associated with the psychological perception of an individual about the pressure of contingencies. A pioneer of research on stress has seen it as a response, not, as the environmental stimulus, or as a situation where the demand exceeds the individual's abilities to cope. For Seyle (1945), there are three stages in the experience of stress:

- (i) Alarm: The individual has lowered resistance when he or she is in a state of psychological disequilibrium, which does not permit the individual to co-exist conformably within the environment.
- (ii) Resistance: The individual adapts to the stimulus, which permits him or her to eventually return to a state of psychological equilibrium.
- (iii) Exhaustion: It results when the willingness and ability to adapt to the stimulus collapses. This will result in 'giving up' or resigning oneself to the inevitable and lead to damage psychological and physical health.

It may be mentioned here that stress is not necessarily bad in itself; it has positive value. It offers an opportunity for potential gain. Stress in a positive context induces employees to rise to the occasion and perform at their best. For example, when an employee undergoes annual performance review at work, he often feels stressed because he faces opportunities, constraints and demands. A good performance review may reward him a promotion and reaching a higher salary. On the contrary a poor review may prevent him from achieving the promotion and higher station in life. An event that causes constant worry to one can be a very useful challenge to another. When we are under stress, our awareness, our senses and our mind are sharpened. We know many people who work best under stress because they do not permit stress to create anxiety in them.

### **23.2.1 Negative Implications of Stress**

Tim Newton observes ‘Stress appears almost as a necessary kind of comfort discourse, a tranquillizer to cope with the diversity of competing messages about the truth of this world, and the dreadful uncertainty of our times. The stress discourse reassures us by explaining how it is normal to feel stressed in these conditions, and it provides strategies to help us cope with them by being vigilant and stress-fit’ (Newton, 1995). Stress at work and job stress are a chronic disease caused by conditions in the workplace that negatively affect an employee’s performance and his health. Work related stress in the life of organised workers, consequently affects the health of the organisation. Negative implications of stress for the organisation may be identified as under:

- (a) Physical: (i) Poor performance resulting in fall in the quality and quantity of work, (ii) Absenteeism at work, (iii) Negative fallout of business.

- (b) Social: (i) Increase in social tensions, (ii) Resistance to social change, (iii) Withdrawal from normal social networks
- (c) Psychological (i) Deterioration in morale, (ii) Hurdles in effective communications (iii) Irrational judgements about others (iv) Sense of distrust and alienation.
- (d) Behavioural : (i) Poor decision making and its implementation (ii) Accidents in workplaces (ii) Loss of potential human resources

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### **23.3 SOURCES OF STRESS**

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One source of rise in stress is related to rapid pace of change. Stress, anxiety, depression, phobias, all are part of the accepted fallout of the 'business' of modern life, in which technology, far from freeing time for leisure, only seems to accelerate the pace. To Giddens, stress could be seen as in part a consequence of the increasing uncertainty of modern life. As Giddens (1991) points out, we no longer have clear sources of authority, such as those traditionally provided by religious authorities. Instead there is an "indefinite pluralism of expertise" which "some individuals find it psychologically difficult or impossible to accept." By Giddens' account, the problem of stress is likely to appear as fundamentally social, moral and institutional.

For Cooper, stress is seen as the product of an interaction between individual needs and resources and the various demands, constraints and facilitators within the individual's immediate environment. Cooper (1986) presents comprehensive overview of both the causes of work stress and the organisational and individual problems, which may arise when the individual worker experiences those stressors. The medical terminology adopted by Cooper facilitates the task of sanitising organisation life by implying that both

the individual and the organisational outcomes of stress are self-evidently pathological and thus in need of treatment rather than illumination.

Robbins's model (this model adopts the transactional perspective found in many 1980s models of stress) identifies three sets of factors: Environmental, organisational and individual that act as stressors. These are briefly discussed as follows:

### **23.3.1 Environmental factors**

Economic uncertainty does influence the stress levels among the personnel in the organisation. For example, when the economy is contracting, people become increasingly anxious about their security. Likewise political uncertainty, such as, political threats and changes, can be stress inducing. Technological uncertainty can also cause stress because innovations, such as, computers, robotics, automation are a threat to many people.

### **23.3.2 Organisational Factors**

Pressures to avoid mistakes or complete tasks in time, work overload, unpleasant co-workers and an insensitive boss in the organisation can cause stress among the employees.

Lack of social support from colleagues and poor interpersonal relationships can cause much stress. Similarly excessive rules and lack of participation in decisions that affect an employee are instances of structural variables that might cause stress. Some chief executive officers establish unrealistic pressures to perform in the short run, impose excessively tight controls, and routinely fire employees who do not come up to their expectations.

### **23.3.3 Individual Factors**

Individual factors, such as family issues, personal economic problems, marital difficulties and discipline troubles with children are examples that create stress for employees. Some people have wants that always seem to exceed their earning capacity.

### **23.3.4 Individual differences**

It is already stated that some personnel thrive on stressful situations while they overwhelm others. At least five variables – perception, job experience, social support, belief in locus of control, and hostility have been found to be relevant moderators (Robbins, 2001).

There is ample evidence to suggest that stress can be either a positive or a negative influence on employee performance. For many people, low to moderate amounts of stress enables them to perform their jobs better, by increasing their work intensity, alertness, and ability to react. However, a high level of stress, or even a moderate amount sustained over a long period, eventually takes its toll, and, performance declines. The impact of stress on satisfaction is far more straightforward. Job-related tension tends to decrease in general job satisfaction.

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## **23.4 CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS**

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A manager or an employee in an organisation who is experiencing a high level of stress may develop high blood pressure, ulcers, irritability, difficulty in making routine decisions, loss of appetite, accident proneness, and the like. These can be subsumed under three general categories, physiological, psychological, and behavioural symptoms.

#### **23.4.1 Physiological symptoms**

The early research led to the conclusion that stress could create changes in metabolism, increase heart and breathing rates, increase blood pressure, bring on headaches, and induce heart attacks. However, the link between stress and particular physiological symptoms is not clear.

#### **23.4.2 Psychological Symptoms**

Job-related stress can cause job-related dissatisfaction. Job dissatisfaction, in fact, is “the simplest and most obvious psychological effect” of stress. But stress shows itself in other psychological states – for instance, tension, anxiety, irritability, boredom, and procrastination. The research suggests that when people are placed in jobs in which there is lack of clarity as to the incumbent’s duties, authority, and responsibilities, both stress and dissatisfaction are caused.

#### **23.4.3 Behavioural symptoms**

Behaviourally related stress symptoms include, changes in productivity, absence, and turnover, as well as changes in eating habits, increased smoking or consumption of alcohol, rapid speech, fidgeting, and sleep disorders.

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### **23.5 PRACTICE OF STRESS MANAGEMENT**

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Evidence of the medically damaging symptoms of work stress necessitates applying the treatment of stress management. Stress management is increasingly drawing attention of the management experts not only as a remedial measure but also as a way to resource management. If the work place can be made a little more lovable the increase in the achievement of the organisation may be many time more. If group stress can be removed



by introducing group discussions and recreational facilities a long lasting team spirit may get developed.

There are mainly three forms of stress management practice: employee assistance programmes (EAPs); stress management training (SMT); and stress reduction or intervention (SI). (Murphy, 1986).

### **23.5.1 Employee Assistance Programmes**

The first of forms of stress management practice is employee assistance programmes (EAPs) which refers to the provision of employee counselling services by an organisation. The forerunner of EAPs was the counselling programme undertaken at the Hawthorne works of the Western Electric Company in Chicago in 1936 with a single counsellor and ended in 1956 with five counsellors.

Weiss has provided a detailed critical analysis of counselling and argues that EAPs enshrine a convenient managerial ideology (Weigg, 1986). EAPs take holistic view of the employee so that he or she can seek advice on almost any issue. It can enable employees to have an easy access to trained counsellors getting personal insight and practical solutions.

### **23.5.2 Stress Management Training**

Stress management training (SMT) refers to training courses designed to provide employees with improved coping skills, including training in techniques such as meditation, bio-feedback, muscle relaxation and stress inoculation (Newton, 1992). This method which has grown in popularity in recent years is designed to relieve tensions and reduce frustrations. By helping their employees to learn Stress Management skills, organisations promote workforces who are committed to being effective copers, the

definition of which is directly related to their job performance. Through an introduction to stress concepts, the employee is taught to be wary of getting stressed.

### **23.5.3 Stress Intervention**

The third form of SM practice is stress reduction or intervention (SI). This SI form, however, appears only as a prescription by a small number of researchers, and has received little application as an SM practice (Murphy, 1982). More or less explicit feeling rules are made and generally they are already part of some professionals, especially helpers. For example, police officials are taught and trained to curb their anger when under provocation, and doctors are supposed to react coolly and dispassionately to whatever ailments their patients bring. Indeed, the fact of being professional has come to imply a set of rules about doing a job at an emotional distance from the customer or customer with heavy sanctions against getting “too personally involved.” That is theory. However, some feeling rules are likely to be highly resistance to change.

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## **23.6 STRATEGIES TO MANAGE STRESS**

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It is already stated that high levels of stress or even low levels of stress sustained over long period of time can impair employee performance, and thus requires action by management. What management considers as “a positive stimulus that keeps the adrenalin running” may be seen as “excessive pressure” by the employee. The following discussion has been influenced by J.E. Newman and T.A. Beehr (1978) and J.M. Ivancevich and others.

### **23.6.1 Individual Strategies**

Individual approaches or strategies that have been found quite effective in reducing stress include: (i) implementing time management and delegation techniques, (ii) increasing physical exercise and practicing deep breathing and relaxation skills, and (iii) expanding the social support network.

Studies have revealed that Yoga has cured or helped control several stress related diseases – reducing blood pressure, controlling asthma and neuroticism (Ivanicavich, Matteson Friedman, 1990).

A proper understanding and use of basic time management principles can help personnel better cope with job tensions. Some well-known time management principles are: (i) making a daily list of activities to be accomplished; (ii) prioritising activities in order of importance and urgency; (iii) scheduling activities according to the priorities thus set, and; (iv) knowing one's daily cycle and handling the most demanding parts of the job during the high part of the cycle when one is most alert and productive (Haynes, 1985).

Physical exercise including practice of deep breathing and relaxation skills increase heart capacity, lower at-rest heart rate, provide a mental diversion from work pressures, and offer a means to "let off steam" (Keily, Hodgson, 1990). Research also supports that having friends, family, or work colleagues to hear problems can help better cope with tension.

### **23.6.2 Organisational Strategies**

A few contributors to stress arise from organisational structure and management. Organisational strategies that have proved effective include: improved personnel selection and job placement, use of realistic goal setting, redesigning of jobs, increased

employee involvement, improved organisational communication, and establishment of wellness programmes.

It is seen that individuals with little experience tend to be more liable to stress. While management should not restrict hiring only experienced individuals with an internal locus, such individuals may adapt better to high-stress jobs and perform those jobs more effectively. Similarly individuals perform better when they have specific and challenging goals and receive feedback on how well they are progressing toward these goals. The use of goals can reduce stress as well as provide motivation.

Management should also consider redesigning of jobs. This gives employees more responsibility, more meaningful work, more autonomy, and increased feedback and can reduce stress because these factors give the employee greater control over work activities and lessen dependence on others.

Therefore an organisation should establish a strategy for managing stress as part of an employee health and performance improvement policy.

Management should also consider increasing employee involvement in decision making. By giving these employees voice in those decisions that directly affect their job performances, management can increase employee control and reduce this role stress. Given the importance that perceptions play in moderating the stress-response relationship, management can also use effective communications as a means to shape employee perceptions and outlook.

Besides these, organisationally supported programmes, that focus on the employee's total physical and mental condition can reduce largely employee's stress and achieve higher employee performance. For example, these programmes may provide workshops to help

employees quit smoking, control alcohol use, lose weight, balanced diet, and develop a regular exercise programme.

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## **23.7 MANAGING STRESS: ANCIENT INDIAN APPROACHES**

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Psychologists have shown keen interest in the age-old techniques prescribed in the ancient Indian scriptures. Hindu psychology lays stress on the development of will, and on the individual's potential power of bringing out his inner strength. The Hindu psychological technique essentially has two aspects: one is the *realisation* of the supreme goal of life, and the other, is the cultivation of *detachment*.

According to the Bhagavadgita “the mind is restless and difficult to control”; but through practising ‘Karmayoga’ one can cleanse the mind of its accumulated stress. When the Karmayog relinquishes attachment both to action and its fruit, he ceases to have likes, dislikes, and is therefore no longer swayed by the feelings of stress and frustration. It is through the constant practice of maintaining evenness of mind with reference to action one may perform, every moment of life, and under every circumstance are becomes a Karmayogi (Radhakrishna, 1990). Tensions result when the mind suffers from indecisiveness in relation to varying and conflicting emotions. Therefore one should work with a perfect serenity indifferent to the results.

Some important stress management techniques, which have been emphasised in the ancient Indian scriptures, are discussed below.

### **23.7.1 ‘Yoganidra’ (Meditation)**

In most cases, standard management prescriptions cannot bring about mental relaxation, primarily because individuals have worries at the back of their minds even when they

attempt to relax, physically. An employee may lie down on bed or take rest apparently quite for couple of hours but he may have a racing heart. Even during sleep, his mind may remain in an unconscious state. It is the three-fourth of the mind that remains in the unconscious form. The unconscious mind is the storehouse of many contradictions. Therefore, it is important to find a solution to this problem. Indian yogis have recommended a few dynamic and strategic techniques for reducing stress.

Yoganidra or 'meditation' is a yogic tool for mind management; it takes care of both internal and external relaxations because it aims to reach the inner self by going beyond the physical and mental planes. Yoganidra is an approach that links up an individual's conscious awareness with the transcendental body. In fact, Yoga means unison and 'nidra means the purest form of relaxation. Yoganidra is, in this sense, a total relaxation with complete awareness about one's spiritual origin. This complete self-awareness empowers the mind to joyfully face the odds of any work environment and reduces tensions and stresses of the employees.

In yoganidra, the posture is Shavasana, i.e., the posture of sense withdrawal. In this posture one lies on his back with arms little away from the body and with legs slightly apart. The whole body has to be in a relaxed state but one must not sleep. Once the body becomes steady and relaxed the practitioner goes for breath awareness, i.e., the practitioner continuously watches the cyclical movement of the breath between the throat and naval. Next step is to make a "sankalpa", a target to be attained at the end. One should repeat this sankalpa with unchanged words each time one practices Yoganidra. Once sankalpa is made practitioner visualises different parts of his body in a systematic fashion- from fingers to toes, from right hand side to left hand side. By doing, so one slowly becomes aware of the life force moving within so that the physical relaxation

becomes a completely harmonised one. The practice ends with a mental repetition of the words of the starting sankalpa. The practitioner sits up and breathes deeply. The best time for doing Yoganidra is just before going to bed or in the morning.

Thus the strength of Yoganidra lies in its unification of physical relaxation with mental relaxation. The posture of 'shavasana' is to help physical relaxation. When the mind is directed to feel different parts of the body and to watch the normal breathing from navel to nostril, it helps the body to relax without disturbing the awareness. During Yoganidra, the heart rate slows down a little, the breathing rate goes down, the muscle tension is reduced and the blood levels of lactate and cortisol which are associated with anxiety and stress decrease.

### **23.7.2 Practice of 'Rajyoga'**

'Rajyoga' is another technique for reducing mental stress. It is an eight-tier system of practice developed by Indian yogis. In the first part of Rajayoga, the purification of mind is stressed. This is to be achieved by abstaining from forceful possession and pleasure, by following the path of truth and nonviolence and by solemnly rejecting any gift. For example, if we do not accept any gift and follow the path of honesty, business ethics will get intermingled with work culture in a spontaneous and natural way. Thus, the first step of Rajyoga, if practiced with sincerity and zeal, cannot only purify the minds of individuals but also clean the collective mind of an organisation.

The second part of Rajyoga is the regular practice of internal and external cleanliness, mental happiness and worship (niyama). In fact, external cleanliness can also help in cleaning the internal dirt. For example, if we can keep the workplace neat and clean we are sure to get a positive response from all the individuals. These positive interactions can be beneficial for both organisation and its employees.

Yogic posture and controlled breathing ‘asana’ ‘pranayama’ are the third and fourth parts of Rajyoga. Importance of these two is clear from the fact that our body is the store house of energy and the purpose of breathing is to intake this energy from the environment. A controlled and systematic breathing can help us in generating more energy and vitality which can be channeled in multiple directions for more creative works. These also help in reducing mental stresses.

The practice of withdrawal of mind from external stimulators (pratyabhara) is the fifth part of Rajyoga. It equips the mind to be delinked from the stressor so that the very cause of stress can be removed.

The sixth part of Rajyoga is the practice of conceptualisation. By this is meant the act of concentrating waves of thought on a particular issue. In conceptualisation, basic objective is to concentrate on a single idea disallowing multitudes of waves that break up on the shore of the mind. If this objective is achieved, the mind works with complete awareness, perfection and unattachment. Continuation of this act of conceptualisation for at least one hundred and forty four seconds is known as concentration or meditation (dhyan).

When one realises this stage, this becomes the seventh part of Rajayoga. At this state the mind becomes free from stresses and strains, free from mental dirt, free from the reactions of the past happenings. This free mind is what we call as the purified mind, the mind that can establish creative link between conscious and unconscious states. Of course, there is another stage in rajyoga which is aimed at realising the oneness in the universe.

The study conducted by Carrington and Ephren (1975) reveals that if practiced under an experienced guide meditation can make positive changes to the inner and outer states of an individual. They noted better stability and steadiness of mind, greater tolerance,



greater independence, less paranoid tendencies, decreased psychosomatic conditions and freeing blocks in the creative energy.

*Yama* and *Niyama*, the first two steps of Rajayoga are purificatory processes for higher mental development. “Non-violence, truthfulness, non-stealing, continence, internal and external purification, contentment, and self-control constitute ‘yama’ and ‘niyama’; ‘asana’, the practice of posture of relaxation or non-tension; and ‘pranayama’, the breathing exercises, aim at releasing the neuro-muscular system and pacifying the restlessness of the mind; ‘dharana’, the practice of concentration, and ‘dhyana’, the practice of meditation, aim at the development of will-power; ‘dhyana’ strengthens the conviction that man is basically divine, and develops the perception to realise the self” (Dhan, 1998)

Moderately strenuous exercises, yogas reduce mental tensions and stress. Factors like eating and drinking habits, social relationships and the pattern of work interact with one another to determine the level of health.

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## **23.8 CONCLUSION**

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We find that employee stress is an increasing problem in organisations. The existence of work stress, however, does not mean lower performance. The study findings indicate that stress can be either a positive or negative influence on employee performance. However, a high level of stress, or even a moderate amount of stress sustained over a long period, eventually takes its toll and can lead to reduced employee performance. The foregoing pages examine the place of role stress and the interaction of personality and job environment. Further pages examine individual and organisational approaches as well as ancient Indian strategies toward managing stress.

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## 23.9 KEY CONCEPTS

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- Asana:** Yogic posture is known as ‘asana’ in Sanskrit. Ancient Indian Yogis believed in compatible existence of man and nature. Asanas seek to restore lost balance by restoring calm and energising the body.
- Depression:** It implies a severe mental disorder involving overwhelming sadness that arrests the entire course of a person’s life. Depression is different from a general feeling of sadness. It is a pathological condition which requires immediate medical attention. Depression does not respond to palliatives.
- Dhyana:** Meditation is known by the Sanskrit term, dhyana. Dhyana literally means concentration. Dhyana illumines the soul and clears confusions and disillusionments resulting there from.
- Pranayama:** Breathing exercises are known by the Sanskrit terminology, ‘Pranayama’. The word means the life force or the vital force in humans. It is believed that breath control leads to mind control and sense control which imparts balance too life.
- Stimulant:** It leads to physiological and mental arousal in the central nervous system. It makes the individual perform effectively, for the time that the person is stimulated by responding to a drug, behaviour, prevailing circumstances etc.

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## 23.10 REFERENCES AND FURTHER READINGS

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### **23.11 ACTIVITIES**

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- 1 How are opportunities, constraints, and demands related to stress? Give an example of each.
  - 2 What can management do to reduce employee stress? Briefly discuss ancient Indian practices of stress management.