



Workshops and Presentations Written Notes and relevant material

By Leigh Nomchong - Psychologist

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Please note that we have undergone changes over the years, hence our letter head can vary at times depending on when the workshop/presentation was run.

If you would like a work shop or presentation run for your organisation, or you would like more information, you can contact us below:

Address: The Specialist Centre, 107 Marconi Crescent Kambah ACT 2902

Telephone: 02 6231 2569 Fax: 02 6231 3775

Email: reception@nomchong.com.au

Web: www.nomchong.com.au

STRESS MANAGEMENT

- Heightening Your Awareness

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Nomchong & Associates Psychology

Clinical, Forensic and Organisational Psychology

The Specialist Centre, 107 Marconi Cres KAMBAH 2902 PH 02 6231 2569, Fax 02 6231 3775
www.nomchong.com.au PO Box 422 ERINDALE CENTRE 2903, ABN 38 313 375 814

Leigh W Nomchong – Clinical Psychologist

Specialisations:

Clinical Psychology
Forensic Psychology
Organisational Psychology
Management and Training.

Professional Associations:

Fellow, The Australian College of Clinical Psychologists (ACCP) and the National Vice President of the College.
Full Member, Australian Psychological Association (APA) and the National President of the APA.

Registration:

I am a registered psychologist in the ACT & NSW

Private Practice:

I have been in private practice for 17 years

DEFINITION

Everybody knows about Stress. We talk about it a great deal and its always in the media. We all know of friends and colleagues who suffer it. Yet when you ask what is stress you get a wide variety of answers which are much dependent upon the individual's own perception, experience, background, culture, age, sex and so on. In other words stress is different things to different people.

This wide variety of definitions is for a very logical reason. You see, stress is different for different people. And there is a good theory that explains this.

Yerkes Dodson Law or vs bad stress

This law denotes that stress is, initially, very good for you, but at a certain point, can become very bad for you. And the point where the demarcation between good and bad exists, can vary from time to time or situation to situation.

Inverted U hypothesis – Yerkes Dodson Law

DEFENCE MECHANISMS

Of course, we naturally develop mechanisms that help us cope with negative or bad stress. And these mechanisms vary from individual to individual. Here are some common ones that most of you will be familiar with:

- Taking holidays
- Playing sport or doing exercise
- Having a social life
- Using your support group
- Sleeping
- Eating out
- Etc

So there are many ways we can cope with the demands of stress. However, there are some ways that work better than others. Lets discuss some.

Support Structure: The more people you have around you supporting you, caring about you, being genuinely concerned over your welfare, the better you will cope with stress. The support structure significantly determines how you cope with stress when you get it.

Health: How fit you are, whether you exercise, how much adequate sleep you get and whether you suffer disease, will all determine how powerfully you will experience the deleterious effects of stress.

Perception: Whether an event or circumstance is stressful, demanding or overwhelming will be determined on how you perceive it. If something bothers you a great deal then your sensitivity to the stress of it is high. If you literally don't care, then the opposite is the case.

Control: An important aspect of dealing with stress is the feeling of having and emotional sense of control of your life.

Essentially, how stress affects you is directly determined by how you choose to see it. And you do have a choice.

DETECTING STRESS

Stress is invisible, subtle and incremental in its effect.

You can slowly build up very high levels of stress over time and not know it.

The body, being as sophisticated as it is, helps you ignore the tell tale beginnings and lets you keep on keeping on.

But eventually, the condition will creep up and the beginning signs will develop.

THE BEGINNING SIGNS OF STRESS

The beginning signs of stress are not what you think.

Many people say they are stressed, but often what they mean is that they are tired, fatigued, not sleeping well or cannot relax.

These are some of the beginning signs of stress, but they are often ignored and can be overcome with a good weekend or a good nights sleep or a short holiday. But such actions do not overcome the stress

The first signs of serious overstress are usually physical!

COMMON SIGNS

- Development of lots of colds and flu (stress is an immuno suppressant)
- Increase in headaches
- Reduction in concentration, attention span, memory performance
- physical symptoms including rashes, ringing in the ears, fatigue, vision problems
- Disrupted or poor quality sleep
- Increased intensity of pre existing conditions such as migraine headaches, infections, dermatitis
- Vomiting or nausea
- Sore Jaw or chipped teeth (from grinding teeth at night)
- Hair loss
- Tinnitus

Of course, there are psychological signs:

- Mood swings, irritability, lack of tolerance
- Increased levels of depression
- Increased levels of anxiety
- Increased levels of phobias.
- Feelings of being overwhelmed circumstances
- Again, poor sleep
- Inability to cope
- Difficulty taking on new ideas or understanding new concepts

PHYSIOLOGICAL CONDITIONS RELATED TO STRESS

- Irritable Bowel Syndrome - abdominal pain, loose stools, reflux.
- Esophageal reflux – where the sphincter muscle on top of the gut does not close properly and will dilate uncontrollably
- Post Traumatic Stress Disorder - this is much used courts, this is characterised by the re-experiencing of an extremely Traumatic event accompanied by symptoms of increased arousal and by avoidance of stimuli associated with the trauma.
- Adjustment Disorder - a Person with an Adjustment Disorder is someone who has not adapted well to one or more stressors that have occurred in the previous three months.

THE DIRECTION THAT STRESS TAKES

Stress almost always manifests itself in your weakest link.

This means that when you are under a lot of stress and have been so for some time, then you will notice it in areas where you have a sensitivity or pre existing weakness.

For example, if you had injured your ankle when you were small, then later in life, when under a lot of stress, that same ankle will start to hurt or swell, resulting in you developing a limp. Yet the condition was resolved a long time ago. Its stress operating at the weakest link.

It is in this regard that most people are diagnosed as having stress by their doctor because they attended for treatment of a rash that was not going away, or nausea that kept coming back (and there was no other cause), recurring headaches etc. The presenting symptoms were one thing, but the cause was another.

TREATMENT

The role of treatment varies according to the extent that the person is disaffected.

In severe situations, extended time off work, medication and intense therapy is needed.

In the more common instance, some short time away from work, some changes at home and office and an appreciation of the ways the person normally behaves and the role of change.

TREATMENT TECHNIQUES

- **CBT** (Cognitive Behavioural Therapy) focuses on changing the way a person thinks about themselves, work, home and life.
- **Strategies** are often suggested, such as good diet, exercise, time out, learning to plan ahead etc
- **Psychodynamic Therapy** is more about experiential learning and change and is very good for those who are not in touch with their feelings.
- **Medication** is often used to treat related symptoms to stress such as anxiety and depression, disturbed sleep and nausea.
- **Others** include Hypnosis, relaxation therapy, alternative medicine (herbal etc), acupuncture etc

CAUSES OF STRESS

As I said before, stress is a matter of interpretation, and so what causes stress to you will be different to other, but most will agree that the demands of living in our society can be very stressful

- Paying Mortgages
- Money
- Taxation
- Terrorism
- Work Pressures
- Crime – ever been robbed?
- Family pressures – got kids?

It all can be overwhelming and stressful, and it contributes to that incremental build up of stress in our lives.

STRATEGIES

There are some strategies that are generally accepted as being very useful in minimising the amount of negative stress that we suffer.

- **Exercise:** If this could be put in a pill it would be the most widely prescribed medication in the Western Hemisphere. Do more exercise, at least 30 minutes per day for 5 days a week.
- **Diet:** We are what we eat. If you eat highly processed foods such as fast food and tv dinners, there is a very good chance you will fatigue easily, not sleep well, put on weight, develop a sugar addiction and be prone to stress.
- **Sleep:** Anyone can work for long periods with little or insufficient sleep and still achieve things, but eventually you will develop a sleep debt. When you have a sleep debt each subsequent sleep is less refreshing and your ability to perform is continually diminished.
- **Vitamin Supplements:** Often stress interferes with the digestive system's ability to absorb nutrients and one theory suggests that a way to approach this is to super saturate the digestive system with nutrients, vitamin supplements being one way of doing that.

SUMMARY

The reality of life is that we make our own reality.

How life affects us is strongly determined by our attitude, values and perception.

The stress in our life is determined by how we choose to see it, and whether we do something about it!

Oh, one last thing!

Happiness is not a destination that you arrive at!

Its a state of mind!