

Chapter 12 Psychology Notes

Stress

Stress is a part of Life

- Stress is discomfort, tension, and strain in response to a situation. We experienced stress to varying degrees in many aspects of our lives.

Stress is Physical and Mental

- Our body reacts to a stressful event. The major players are the hypothalamus and the pituitary, which control the endocrine system, and the adrenal cortex, which releases cortisol.

Cortisol

- A little stress can be a good thing. Cortisol helps the body use energy more efficiently. It's released during exercise and acute stress.
- However, cortisol causes vasoconstriction, increased blood sugar levels, and suppresses the immune system. If it stays at high levels over prolonged periods of time, it wastes muscle, lowers bone density, increases blood pressure, and suppresses the immune system.

The Effects of Stress

- Long term chronic stress leads to weight gain, increased risk of heart disease, decreased fitness, and susceptibility to illness.

Stressors

- Stressors are events that cause stress. They can be positive or negative and they can be of great or small magnitude.

Major Life Events

- Marriage, moving, a death in the family, changing jobs, divorce, major personal illness, the birth of a child, etc. are all considered major life events that are known to increase stress.
- The Social Readjustment Rating Scale (SRRS) is a 43 item questionnaire asking how many of these major events someone experienced in the last year. The number of events does predict stress related health issues.

Daily Hassles

- There are minor irritants, but a lot of minor events can add up and contribute to stress. When daily hassles are chronic and paired with major life events, they can become especially problematic.

Acute Stress

- When we are involved in a short term stressful situation, our bodies experience what is called General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS).

General Adaptation Syndrome

1. Alarm: The fight or flight response, cortisol levels rise
2. Resistance: Body is in a general state of arousal that allows it to cope with stress.
3. Exhaustion: Resistance breaks down, crash.

Means of Coping With Stress

- The next few slides will cover some ways to deal with stress and things that are associated with better coping.

Social Support

- People with more social connections live longer. Social support helps people cope with short term stress and major life events. People provide comfort, share resources, encourage us to get help, provide advice, etc.

Changing Behavior

- Problem focused coping is changing behavior to solve a problem that causes. We might start out avoiding a stressor, but that doesn't solve the problem.

Changing Thoughts

- One can restructure cognitions to help cope with stressors. Part of cognitive therapy.

Professional Help

- Seeking professional help can assist with the coping process if stress has led to psychopathology.

Spirituality and Mindfulness

- Religiosity is associated with lower levels of stress. Meditation can be practiced to help people cope with stressful situations.

Exercise

- Exercise can help with symptoms associated with stress, depression, and anxiety.

Individual Differences

- There are individual differences in hardiness and resilience. However, like many other things in life, experience and practice can help most people become more resilient.