

Stress Related Factors in Women

Dr. Sunil Jacob

Associate Professor, Department of Chemistry, Catholicate College, Pathanamthitta

Dr. Tharamma George T

Associate Professor, Mount Tabor Training College, Pathanapuram

ABSTRACT

We are not born with stress – it is largely cognitive, or learned. As a newborn becomes a child and faces the challenges of learning to walk and talk and eat by himself and, later, of going to school with other children, learning how to count and write the alphabet, each new challenge presents a potentially stressful situation until he learns that he has the resources to handle it. The same is true for adults, especially women. This study revealed that a number of factors are to be considered to control stress in women like commitment, challenge, good nutrition, regular exercise, adequate sleep, social support, and self-awareness

I. INTRODUCTION

We are not born with stress – it is largely cognitive, or learned. As a newborn becomes a child and faces the challenges of learning to walk and talk and eat by himself and, later, of going to school with other children, learning how to count and write the alphabet, each new challenge presents a potentially stressful situation until he learns that he has the resources to handle it.

The same is true for adults, especially women. Each new stage of life – getting a job, getting married, having a baby, seeing children leave for college, watching parents enter old age, deciding to retire – presents us with change, and change typically causes us to feel stress until we adapt and develop the resources to deal with it.

Stress is our body's response to change. We react to physical stresses, such as extreme hot and cold, and emotional stresses, such as the loss of a job or loved one. Stress is not simply an emotional response, but a physiological one. When we send out a stress signal to the body, hormones are released, causing digestion to slow, blood sugar levels to rise and the heart to pump more blood to the muscles, thereby increasing alertness and energy. This is an important function when dealing with a threatening situation that requires us to act fast.

These same hormones, however, will gradually wear down the body if called upon too frequently. The accumulation of everyday stresses places a strain on the body and can ultimately lead to symptoms such as stomach problems, susceptibility to colds and infection and exacerbation of inflammatory conditions and autoimmune disorders.

Symptoms of stress

It's easy to maintain a healthy balance when things are going our way. Yet, when conditions are a bit overwhelming, we tend to inadvertently let stress wreak havoc on our bodies. There are some symptoms we can look out for to spot the onslaught of stress and bring us back to a more conscientious frame of mind. Symptoms of stress include chronic anxiety and depression, irrational behaviour, a short temper, loss of appetite, muscle pain, headaches, poor concentration, fatigue, disrupted sleep, skin problems and upset stomachs. It is important to manage these symptoms in order to avoid more serious health complications.

How stress affects a woman's body

Studies reveal that a woman's hormone levels fluctuate during puberty, pregnancy, menopause and her monthly menstrual cycle. These hormonal changes leave women especially vulnerable to stress and its symptoms. Stress has been known to cause heavy menstrual bleeding and lack of bleeding, endometriosis and fertility problems in women.

Heart disease is the number-one killer of many women of the modern era and the most prevalent consequence of stress. Stress causes high blood pressure, which compels the heart to work double time, increasing the risk of strokes, heart attacks, kidney failure and diabetes. A Canadian Study published in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* in October of 2007 indicates that heart attack survivors with chronic stress appear to be more likely to have a second heart attack, die of heart disease or be hospitalized for chest pain.

Studies also show that stress can cause backaches, insomnia, weight gain and weight loss, stomach cramping and bloating and the loss of sexual desire.

Findings of this study

Women are the worriers and often do not make time to manage their health and take care of themselves.

(i.) Stress may lead to many health problems like:

- Headaches
- Back pain
- Fatigue
- Upset stomach and more severe problems, such as GERD and colitis
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Heart problems

(ii.) Women and Hormones

Women often use relationships as a tool to manage stress. A woman who is in the midst of a crisis is much more likely than a man to phone her sibling or get together with a friend. Women create social alliances that provide a framework of support they can lean on during bad times.

Earlier people used to think there was a difference in the amounts of cortisol released during a stressful situation in women. The thinking was women released more of this hormone, and that produced all sorts of nutty theories about why women are so emotional. But recently it was found that there is no consistent difference in cortisol production at all between men and women. It really all comes down to the hormone called oxytocin.

In women, when cortisol and epinephrine rush through the bloodstream in a stressful situation, oxytocin comes into play. It is released from the brain, countering the production of cortisol and epinephrine, and promoting nurturing and relaxing emotions.

(iii.) Stress related factors

From this study it has been found that there are number factors which lead to stress related situations in women. They are:

- Financial problems
- Nervous system which goes into stress
- Individual differences in genetics and brain chemistry
- Psychological factors involved in emotional and cognitive thinking factors
- Life changes, like moving to a new house, marriage or relationship breakdown
- Work place stress
- Work-related factors, including unemployment and boredom
- Personal relationships
- Differences in personality
- Perceived threat, as different people perceive things in different ways

(iv.) Recognizing Stress

Short-term reactions to stress include faster heartbeat, increased sweating, rapid breathing and tense muscles. Long-term responses may include digestive problems, fatigue, increased blood pressure or headaches. A person may also experience psychological responses such as fear, worry, depression, irritability or despair. Ongoing stress may lead to substance abuse and compulsive behaviors, such as eating disorders, excessive gambling or overspending.

Excess stress can seriously interfere with your ability to perform effectively and can affect your health, vitality and peace-of-mind, as well as your personal and professional relationships. That's why it's so important to recognize the signs of stress and learn to manage the stress in your life.

Ongoing stress may lead to issues such as:

- Depression
- Anxiety
- Substance abuse
- Compulsive behaviors, such as eating disorders, excessive gambling or overspending

(v.)The effects of stress

The study found the common effects of stress are that:

- Feel unusually sad or cry a lot
- Are excessively anxious
- Can't concentrate
- Worry constantly about trivial matters
- Have trouble sleeping
- Feel tired all the time
- Find it difficult to do your job or get along with family and friends
- Are irritable or angry

(vi.)How to overcome stress?

The study showed that stress can be managed by eating a balanced diet that is low in fat and high in complex carbohydrates. Caffeine tends to aggravate stress, so it should be consumed in moderation. Exercise and relaxation are also important components to managing stress.

(vii.)Factors to be considered to reduce stress in women

This study arrived at many aspects which aggravate stress in women. Some of the most common factors to be considered to control stress in women are:

- **Commitment**

Individuals who demonstrate a strong sense of commitment to work, family or volunteer efforts possess control over stress. They believe in themselves and their interests enough to work at them; they are active and productive at work without sacrificing similar activity in the community and at home.

- **Challenge**

Change is most satisfying when the individual chooses to change and sees change as a stepping stone, not a stumbling block. Each change may present opportunities to grow, develop and move in new directions that were not apparent earlier. Hardy individuals not only survive, but thrive on the challenge that change brings.

- **Conditioning**

Women can condition themselves against the stress of change. The psychologically hardy person subscribes to healthy habits and beliefs to help them weather the effects of change. One can reduce stress hardness by developing this practice.

- **Good Nutrition**

Women are often likely to skip meals, binge or eat unhealthily when they feel stressed. Yet, this is a time when healthy eating is important to build up those nutritional reserves that will allow one to remain well under stress.

- **Regular Exercise**

It's easy to blow off exercise, but it may be the one thing that can remain consistent during times of change. The physical and psychological benefits of regular physical activity help us women to cope with the stress of change by enhancing the mental sharpness and endurance as well as releasing endorphins, the body's natural painkiller and mood relaxer.

- **Adequate Sleep**

Women often lose sleep when we are faced with significant change in our lives. Even if we cannot get a full night's sleep, it is important that at least take rest throughout the day.

- **Social Support**

Having lasting and satisfying relationships with others who can provide help and support when we need it is critical during times of change. Most of the time, just talking about the change with someone helps, even if we are not looking for solutions.

- **Self-Awareness**

The truly successful and healthy woman is one who really knows herself at all levels and understands one's individual strengths and weaknesses. She knows those personality factors that can't be changed and those skills, social and professional, on which to capitalize.

- **A Healthy Perspective**

It's important to accept change and stress as a part of life. Sometimes a sense of humour can help the woman to see the lighter side of a situation to keep things in perspective.

II. CONCLUSION

Change is inevitable in each of our lives and usually beyond our control. Whatever the change, it usually results in stress of some sort. How you feel about yourself and how well you adjust to your situation are indicators of your ability to handle change.

There are many positive aspects to getting on top of change. We have to develop a sense of control over the change, which helps us to manage other aspects of our life. We can achieve a sense of empowerment in making everyday decisions. On balance, most people find that change provides additional stimuli for growth and the losses can be offset by the opportunities change can bring.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Life events, perceived stress and depressive symptoms in a physical activity intervention with young adult women. *Mental Health and Physical Activity*, Volume 5, Issue 2, December 2012, Pages 148-154. Maureen O'Dougherty, Mary O. Hearst, Moin Syed, Mindy S. Kurzer, Kathryn H. Schmitz.
- [2]. Daily stress presleep arousal, and sleep in healthy young women: a daily life computerized sleep diary and actigraphy study. *Sleep medicine*, Volume 15, Issue 3, March 2014, Pages 359-366. Katja Winzeler, Annette Voellmin, Valérie Schäfer, Andrea H. Meyer, Christian Cajochen, Frank H. Wilhelm, Klaus Bader
- [3]. Does the level of physical exercise affect physiological and psychological responses to psychosocial stress in women? *Psychology of Sport and Exercise*, Volume 14, Issue 2, March 2013, Pages 266-274 Sandra Klaperski, Bernadette von Dawans, Markus Heinrichs, Reinhard Fuch.
- [4]. Working memory is differentially affected by stress in men and women. *Behavioural Brain Research*, Volume 241, 15 March 2013, Pages 144-153. Daniela Schoofs, Stephan Pabst, Matthias Brand, Oliver T. Wol