

Methods, Support, and Management of Stress

by Sophia Tutorial



WHAT'S COVERED

This lesson is going to cover the topic of stress management. Our discussion breaks down as follows:

1. Stress
2. Coping with Stress
 - a. Biofeedback
 - b. Social Support

1. Stress

Stress is a body's reaction to changes within a person's environment. Introducing a stressor into a person's environment causes them to react in certain ways. This is a normal reaction; it is a form of protection from potentially harmful situations in the short term. Stress in this kind of situation is called eustress, a good kind of stress. It helps to enhance a person's bodily functioning during a certain period of time, both mentally and physically.

 **EXAMPLE** If a person is physically in danger, then stress can be helpful because it triggers their fight or flight response, enabling them to get out of that situation. Another example would be if a person is taking a test, this heightened state of mental awareness and mental ability can potentially help them to perform better.

Long-term stress, however, can lead to many mental and physical problems like fatigue or irritability. It can lead to decreased mental functioning over a long period of time. Other physical problems can arise, including heart disease, because of increased blood pressure over time, ulcers, and decreased immunological functioning.

Now, this is particularly true today with the increased number of stressors all around us. Research has shown that people living in cities have much higher stress and anxiety levels than people who do not. They are more likely to develop mood or psychotic disorders, and experience a higher activation of the area of the brain called the amygdala, which is the area related to emotions.

2. Coping with Stress

Because of all of these new factors within the environment, it is important that a person learns proper **stress management**.

There are two major approaches to coping with stress:

- **Problem-focused coping:** Occurs when a person attempts to control the thing that caused the stress itself. This can be done by removing the stressor, like turning off a buzzing alarm, or by removing oneself from a stressful situation.

↪ **EXAMPLE** For example, if you can't turn off a fire alarm, you simply walk away so you don't have to hear the alarm.

- **Emotion-focused coping:** Attempting to control a person's own mental or emotional reaction to the stressor itself. This is particularly useful in a situation that can't be escaped when problem-focused coping will not work.



TERMS TO KNOW

Stress Management

Cognitive and behavioral skills that people learn for the purpose of reducing stress and its harmful effects

Problem-Focused Coping

Attempting to control the thing causing the stress itself

Emotion-Focused Coping

Attempting to control a person's mental and emotional reaction to a stressor

2a. Biofeedback

Understanding how your body is reacting to stressors can help you to control its reactions and reduce the amount of stress that you are experiencing. At its most basic level, this means being aware of when you're getting stressed out and taking action to reduce the bodily reaction.

↪ **EXAMPLE** For example, you may notice that you have an increased heart rate due to stress, and take a deep breath. Controlling your breathing helps to reduce the bodily reaction to stress.

This would be an example of **biofeedback**. Biofeedback is when a person gets information about their body's activities, and they can learn to control those reactions to prevent different problems or illnesses from developing. This has also been used to control a person's blood flow to the head, which can help to reduce the instances of migraines occurring.



DID YOU KNOW

At its most sensitive level, biofeedback has been used by Buddhist monks to actually control their body temperature. This means that they have such an awareness of their bodies that they are able to actually their temperature.



TERM TO KNOW

Biofeedback

Giving a person information about their body's activities

2b. Social Support

One of the most important correlations to stress is the **social support** that a person has around them. The more friends and family surrounding a person, the better that person is able to deal with stressful events around them. Those people provide an outlet to talk about that person's stressors and likewise commiserate about stressors in their own lives as well.

Social support also provides a person with a better feeling about themselves. More people around them means more people that are likely to point out the positive things about them and improve their sense of well-being. Social support has been helpful in the treatment of almost every mental disorder.



TERM TO KNOW

Social Support

The quality and amount of relationships that a person has with others



SUMMARY

Stress is the body's reaction to changes in a person's environment. Some of these reactions are useful to a person, but long-term stress can be harmful. Learning to **cope with stress** is very important. Two major approaches include problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping. You can also develop an awareness of your body's reactions to stress and take steps to control it when you notice those reactions, known as biofeedback. Social support can also be very helpful in managing stress, as well as other mental health conditions, by providing an outlet to discuss stressors and boost a person's sense of self.

Good luck!

Source: This work is adapted from Sophia Author Erick Taggart.



TERMS TO KNOW

Biofeedback

Giving a person information about their body's activities.

Emotion-Focused Coping

Attempting to control a person's mental and emotional reaction to a stressor.

Problem-Focused Coping

Attempting to control the thing causing the stress itself.

Social Support

The quality and amount of relationships that a person has with others.

Stress Management

Cognitive and behavioral skills that people learn for the purpose of reducing stress and its harmful effects.