

Topic 14.3 – Stress and Illness

Stress-related diseases are those that surpass the stress response reactions of the body. When responses exceed the normal levels, they cause the body to become weak. At this point, the immune system becomes more fragile, thus exposing an individual to diseases. Diseases that are accelerated by stress, or whose symptoms are as a result of stress are called psychophysiological disorders. Psychological factors aggravate these disorders.

Furthermore, there are types of psychophysiological disorders, including cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, respiratory, musculoskeletal, and skin disorders. Cardiovascular and respiratory diseases are the most common psychophysiological disorders. Additionally, they have a significant health impact in contemporary society.

The immune system is a significant pathway through which illnesses can affect the body. It is made of different cells, which are adapted to their function, structures, and mechanisms that protect the body from harmful foreign materials. Although the immune system is responsible for preserving the body, it can function in an awry manner or be unable to function optimally. Over the years, research has shown that stress and a weak immune system are associated. Additionally, stress inhibits the ability of the immune system to protect the body, thus making an individual vulnerable to diseases. Cardiovascular diseases attack the cardiovascular system, which is made of the heart and circulatory system. These disorders are essential and are a leading cause of death in developed nations. Heart disease has different symptoms in men and women. Males experience pain in the stomach, shortness of breath, lightheadedness, chest pain, and increased sweating. On the other hand, females experience anxiety, nausea & vomiting, back pain, neck pain, dizziness, and shortness of breath. Having High blood pressure is a leading risk factor for heart disease. Risk factors of cardiovascular diseases are obesity, diabetes, poor diet, lack of education, old age, alcoholism, tobacco use, and level of income. Stressors aggravate cardiovascular diseases. Common types of stressors include domestic violence, poverty, disasters, and work pressure. Also, the

personality of an individual determines vulnerabilities to cardiovascular diseases, i.e., type A or type B. Type A includes individuals who portray an aggressive behavior. In contrast, type B individuals exhibit relaxed behavior. Research shows that there is a relationship between heart disease and depression.

Asthma is a respiratory disorder characterized by the blockage of the respiratory tract. The blockage is caused by inflammation of the windpipe, which leads to constriction of muscles. Symptoms include wheezing, coughing, shortness of breath, and pressure on the chest. An asthma attack can be triggered by air pollution, the presence of allergens, exercise, coldness, tobacco smoke, and infection of the windpipe. Also, the development of asthma is associated with the presence of stressors. The presence of stressors leads to increased vulnerability to the development of asthma.

Stressors commonly cause tension headaches. These are headaches characterized by pain on the sides of the head, poor vision, and pain in the stomach. Stress increases pain sensitivity, thus making tension headaches to worsen.

In summation, stress has been associated with increased vulnerability to diseases. It weakens the immune system. The thing that was interesting about this topic is that stress has a link with cardiovascular and respiratory disorders, which causes significant deaths in developed countries. One would think that developed countries can address psychophysiological disorders seamlessly due to advanced healthcare systems, but they are a great menace to the public.

Topic 14.4 – Regulation of Stress

Different approaches have been put forward to help patients cope with stress. The two main coping mechanisms are emotion-focused and problem-focused coping mechanisms. Emotion-focused coping mechanisms are those that focus on alleviating negative emotions that cause stress. On the other hand, problem-focused coping strategies focus on identifying a problem, developing possible solutions, and choosing the best alternative.

Perceived control plays an essential factor in determining the health of a person. People who believe in having control over the outcomes of specific events are less vulnerable to illnesses. People with higher perceived power can adapt to the presence of stressors. Also, control puts an individual in a position where he/she can successfully manage their health and adopt healthy lifestyles. People in higher social classes have better health compared to those in lower social levels. Evermore compared to the fact that those in high social quality can control their health outcomes as opposed to those in lower social classes.

Social support is a significant psychosocial factor that determines an individual's health outcomes. Social support comprises the relations a person develops with other members of society. These relations are essential because they help people cope better with health issues. For instance, people who lack social support are vulnerable to health issues compared to those with stronger social support.

Other techniques, which can be used to manage stress include exercise, relaxation response technique, and biofeedback. Activity is considered an excellent way to manage stress because it is beneficial for mental and physical health. Research shows that physically fit people are better positioned to combat diseases compared to people who do not exercise. People who engage in regular exercise can alleviate stress levels within a short period. The relaxation response technique is composed of four components, i.e., sitting upright in a relaxed position, being in quiet surroundings with eyes closed, repeating a word over and over again for relaxation, and allowing the mind to focus on exciting thoughts. Lastly, biofeedback is a technique that uses an electronic gadget to measure autonomic and neuromuscular activities. This feedback enables a person to adjust their behaviors to combat stress.

Stress regulation is essential because it ensures that a person can have better health and increased life expectancy. The issue that struck me the most is the biofeedback stress control technique. This technique is excellent, considering that most people today have adopted newer technologies. Lastly, I would find this six-week class too short but highly informative. I shared many things throughout the course that I can use to help me

lead a healthy life. For instance, I have realized that exercising is the best way to counter any diseases that may arise. Exercising would empower me to keep fit and choose a sustainable diet that would prevent many-body complications.