

Analyze the
physiological and
psychological
reactions to stress



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Physiological and Psychological Reactions to Stress Nordqvist (2009) defines stress in simplest terms as “ anything that poses a challenge or a threat to our well-being”. Stress is a result of physical and emotional nervousness and anxiety that a person suffers due to pressures from people living in his surrounding or events happening in his life. It results in tension, touchiness, lack of concentration, nuisance, bad temper, and a number of physical indications. We say that we are stressed out when we feel that things are becoming too much uncontrollable. We become overworked with finding solutions and start wondering if we can at all deal with the strain imposed upon us. No matter what the intensity of stress, its victim reacts to it physically and emotionally. This paper is going to elaborate:

a) Physiological reactions to stress, and

b) Psychological reactions to stress

Physiological reactions to stress include high blood pressure, gastrointestinal problems, fluctuations in the chemical composition of body fluids, insomnia, addiction to smoking or alcoholism, and other illnesses. Individuals are apt to show different levels of these physiological responses to a particular stressor (Koslowsky, 1998, p. 90). When an individual is undergoing a stressor, such as, being jammed up in traffic when an exam is going to start in a few minutes, an increased heart rate occurs as a stress-response due to the discharge of certain hormones, like adrenaline and cortisol, into the blood. The individual's respiratory system takes in extra oxygen. Blood gets thickened and is directed more toward imperative muscles which become tightened in preparation for some unexpected action. When the individual comes out of the stressor, heart rate reduces allowing blood to come to its normal constitution and hormone level gets down to normal.

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All of these physiological stress-reactions are not independent. These depend on psychological responses, that is, orders given by the nervous system or the sensors of the body. When an individual senses that he is in stress, his brain sends orders through neurons or nerve cells to different parts of the body which brings about changes in the physiology. The individual jammed in traffic senses that he is in great stress, his nervous system accepts these signals and passes them over to the neurons which make the body function accordingly. He tends to be irritable and there is an intense startling response. Another psychological reaction is suffering through nightmares and repeated thoughts or flashbacks about the stressor. Under a stressor like the death of a relative, the psychological responses may include getting shocked, angry, searching for the loved one's face in crowd, feeling guilty and sad, and then eventually accepting the grief (Articlebase, 2010).

In conclusion, an individual shows a variety of physiological and psychological responses to stress, ranging from little distress to exaggerated anxiety followed by increased heart rate, blood pressure, facing difficulty in sleeping and staying asleep, and so on. Psychological and physiological reactions are co-related. One initiates the other. It is normal for the nervous system to accept stress stimuli and make the body organs respond respectively. The situation becomes worrisome when these responses do not seem to calm down when the stressor is over or when they calm down too soon. In both cases, professional help must be looked for by the victim of stress.

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