The old Roman saying...

“Mens sana, mens corpora” =  
A healthy mind, a healthy body

Perception of threat  
(basis for a transactional model of stress)

- Lazarus, a psychological stress researcher insisted on the idea of people & things can only become stressor when they pose a threat to human well-being
- Threat = physical harm / psychological in nature (> often)
- Perception of potential stressor = transaction

Evaluation of stimuli = threat appraisal process
- 3 appraisals of the potential stressor: primary, secondary & reappraisal
- When there is a potential stressor, primary appraisal determines whether it is a threat; concurrently the secondary appraisal determines whether one is capable of coping with the threat
- Both appraisals are reappraised and the brain determines whether the potential stressor is the real stressor
- This leads to whether there is stress response or not (if not perceived as real stressor)
Stress appraisal stages:

The importance of “stress” (Aldwin, 2007)

1. Intrinsically important (fundamental)
2. Relevant to psychosocial models of adaptation
3. Relevant to biomedical model of adaptation

Intrinsically important

- Stressful events are important to people both direct & indirectly)
- i.e. News on tv provide stressful info on stressful events (good news are not popular) of others (mostly important people / public figures / or others that may not be directly related to viewers)
- i.e. daily conversations are surrounded around “stressful stories” both minor & major – self, spouse, children, boss, colleagues, friends, traffic, job etc
- Interest in stress rooted in psychological / biological / social causes
Relevance of stress to psychosocial model of adaptation

• Early models of mental illness (MI) focus on internal processes as the source of psychological problems (individual’s “makeups” cause stress)
  • i.e Psychoanalysis – MI = unconscious conflicts between id, ego and superego from early childhood fixation in psychosexual stages (Sigmund Freud)
  • i.e Biomedical models – MI = imbalance neurotransmitter (low serotonin → depression)

• Sociologist & anthropologist – society & culture play major roles in provoking psychological distress & the way in which it is expressed
  • i.e mental illness differ between high vs low SES (role of environment; social structure)
  • i.e certain appropriate behaviour in one culture may not be acceptable in others (Margaret Mead, 1928)
  • Individual’s vulnerability is acknowledged (variability exists, socio-cultural environmental factors have their roles)

Relevance of stress to biomedical model of adaptation

• Basis: people become ill because of external agent (can be cured if the agent is known)
• Too simplistic!
• Many other factors affect health (environmental forces & physiological resilience)
  – More recent research focus on the roles of psychosocial factors ie stress, coping, social support, personality etc
Stress and health

- “Psychoneuroimmunology”: the field of study that examines the pathway that mediates stress & health
- Study the relationships between psyche (or the mind), the neuroendocrine system, & the immune system & the role of those relationships in health maintenance or vulnerability to illness

Psychoneuroendocrinology model of stress & health (Aldwin, 2007)

1ST Model: stress is assumed to activate –ve emotions, which affect neuroendocrine system, which in turn affects the immune system.
- Together, all these affect over all health
- This model was found to be TOO simplistic in explaining the relationships between all components involved
- Variations exist
The modified model implies that there may be other pathways that mediate the relationships between stress and the neuroendocrine system and the immune system.

- Maybe self factors (personality, social support)
- Current biology research promotes the role of cellular based mechanisms to reduce the effects of stress (involving heat shock proteins, DNA, free radicals, reactive oxygenating species etc)

**STRESS & Health**

- The holistic health movement by WHO: Health = a state of complete physical, social, & mental well-being, not merely the absence of disease
- The new holistic health movement believed that health is non static;
- It is a process of moving towards optimal functioning (an evidence of well-being); & not only limited to physical, social & mental dimensions
- Suggested additional dimensions: Physical, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual
Wellness & health

- Wellness = a state of optimal health
- Vigorous, vital, able to live life to its fullest
- 6 dimensions of health (inclusive of one's micro and macro environments)
- Physical, social, intellectual, emotional, spiritual, environmental/occupational

Stress never occurs in vacuum...

Stress & Wellness

- The amount of stress & one’s ability to handle it can be examined through one’s level of functioning across the 6 dimensions of health
How to identify stress

Think of the definition of stress as a “holistic transactions between stressor, perception and response.”

What could be the signs / symptoms that people are under stress?

Signs of stress

- Psychological
- Emotional
- Behavioural
- Physical
Psychological signs

• Inability to concentrate or make simple decisions
• Memory lapses
• Becoming rather vague
• Easily distracted
• Less intuitive & creative
• Worrying
• Negative thinking
• Depression & anxiety

Emotional signs

• Tearful
• Irritable
• Mood swings
• Extra sensitive to criticism
• Defensive

• Feeling out of control
• Lack of motivation
• Angry
• Frustrated
• Lack of confidence
• Lack of self-esteem

Physical signs

• Aches/pains & muscle tension/grinding teeth
• Frequent colds/infections
• Allergies/rashes/skin irritations
• Constipation/diarrhoea/IBS
• Weight loss or gain
• Indigestion/heartburn/ulcers

• Hyperventilating/lump in the throat/pins & needles
• Dizziness/palpitations
• Panic attacks/nausea
• Physical tiredness
• Menstrual changes/loss of libido/sexual problems
• Heart problems/high blood pressure
Behavioural signs

- No time for relaxation or pleasurable activities
- Prone to accidents, forgetfulness
- Increased reliance on alcohol, smoking, caffeine, recreational or illegal drugs
- Becoming a workaholic
- Poor time management and/or poor standards of work
- Absenteeism
- Self neglect/change in appearance
- Social withdrawal
- Relationship problems
- Insomnia or waking tired
- Reckless
- Aggressive/anger outbursts
- Nervous
- Uncharacteristically lying

The symptoms will often accumulate until the person is to take notice of them.

Symptoms are not supposed to be rationalized, if one is not sure – get medical advice.

It is often the behavioural symptoms that are noticed, as they are more obvious, but by this time stress has been going on for many months, maybe even a year or more.

About worry

- Almost everybody worries
- Can be a useful response to life, preventing us from being reckless and stimulating us to take control of a difficult situation.
- Some people worry a lot more than others, become a problem in itself.
- Worry is a learned/conditioned behaviour and many people spend a lot of time thinking about negative possibilities, mulling them over and developing exaggerated situations and options.
- Starting thoughts and sentences with "what if", "maybe" are all part and parcel of the worrier.
Different types of worry

- **FUTURE** - frequently focusing on fears for the future... things that very probably won't happen,
- **PRESENT** - concerns and worries about situations you feel powerless to change,
- **PAST** - concern about something that has already happened when there is often little you can do to alter it.
- Worry can stimulate the Fight or Flight response which is the body’s response to real or imagined danger and whilst effective in the short term, 'Fight or Flight' becomes damaging in the medium to long term.

The result is:

- disturbed sleep and eating patterns
- feeling of inability to cope
- loss of confidence
- difficulty in concentrating and making decisions
- headaches
- stomach upsets, feeling sick, butterflies
- emotional distress
- depleted immune system
- irritability
- feeling de-energised

Think....

- Stress is perceived in the mind, suffered in the human spirit, experienced via the emotions, expressed in behaviour, and "held" in the body.