CHAPTER V

APPROACHES TO MANAGING STRESS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

In the previous chapters, a detailed discussion on the concept of stress has been discussed. In this chapter we shall attempt to summarise the stress coping strategies that are in vogue.

Generally speaking, there are two major approaches to dealing with stress. First the individual strategies, which tend to be ways of coping with stress that has already occurred. The second general approach is to develop a more pro-active set of strategies at the organizational level. The idea behind these organisational strategies is to remove existing or potential stressors and thus, like preventive medicine, prevent the onset of stress for individual job holders.

According to Selye,¹ there are quite a lot of combating systems medically administered. Starting from endorphins, to the significant

discoveries of tranquillisers and psychotherapeutic chemicals have been very effective in combating mental disease. These have reduced the number of Institutionalized mental patients to an unprecedented low. Also worth mentioning are the enormously potent anti-ulcer drugs that block the pathways through which stress ulcers are produced. Stress research, however has not limited itself to the area of medicine. Increasing attention has been given to the development of psychological techniques and behavioural codes that anybody can use, after suitable instructions, to adjust to the particular demands made in by his life”.

In conformity with the objective of this study, Non-Medial Approaches to the coping strategies of stress alone have been considered for discussion.

5.2 ABILITY TO COPING STRATEGIES

Salvatore R. Maddi and Suzanne C. Kobasa² have investigated the factors causing some people to be exhausted and drained by stressful events and others to be stimulated and challenged by them. The ability to handle stress, they found, was a function of the four characteristics listed as follows.

MADDI AND KOBASA’S FOUR CHARACTERISTICS OF STRESS MANAGEMENT

Personal style and personality (how one tended to perceive, interpret and respond to stressful events).

Social Supports (the extent to which family, friends, co-workers, and others provided encouragement and emotional support during stressful events).

Constitutional predisposition (how robust and healthy one’s body seemed to be in terms of inborn physical construction).

Health practices (the extent to which one stayed in good physical condition through exercise avoiding destructive behaviour like smoking).

In their research, the highlight was a personality dimension which they called “hardiness”. Individuals having the three characteristic of commitment, control and challenge led the individuals high in hardiness to think about stressful events in optimistic ways and to act decisively toward them – thus changing them in a less stressful direction. This transformational coping process served them well in managing their organisations and at the same time reduce the likelihood of illness in both the short and long run individuals low in hardiness on the other hand,
tended to think pessimistically about stressful events and took evasive action to avoid contact with them. In doing so, they were less effective managerially and much more likely to experience health problems.

Although Maddy and Kobasa refer to hardiness as a "personality" characteristic – and personality is notoriously difficult to change – they are optimistic about people’s ability to increase their hardiness and offer some specific suggestions for doing so. Similar approaches are used in coping skills training, programs in which people learn to recognize and cope with situations that cause them to feel helpless.  

5.3 NON-MEDICAL STRESS COPING STRATEGIES OF STRESS

1. Physical Fitness

Today, it is not whether you win or loss, but whether you get some exercise that counts. People of all ages are walking, jogging, swimming, riding bicycles or playing softball or tennis in order to get some exercise to combat stress.

Improving fitness is one step in handling stress. People who exercise and strengthen their cardio vascular systems and increase their endurance are less susceptible to illness caused by stress.

2. **Relaxation**

Training in relaxation techniques can also diminish the effects of stress. Relaxation training is a popular method in which people learn how to relax their muscles. For examples, starting with the feet and working toward the head. Deep breathing can also lower tension.

3. **Meditation**

Another technique is meditation, in which individuals assumes a comfortable position, close their eyes, and attempt to clear all disturbing thoughts from their minds. Meditation involves muscle and mental relaxation; the person slowly repeats a peaceful phrase or word or concentrates on mental picture in a quite location. There is some research evidence that much meditation can have a desirable physical\(^4\) and mental\(^5\) impact on people.

4. **Bio-feedback**

It is a technique to help people learn how to detect and control physical changes (such as high blood pressure) that may be linked to stress. Earlier, it was thought that people could not control their involuntary

---


nervous system which in turn, controls internal processes such as heart beat, oxygen consumption, stomach acid flow, and brain waves. There is now evidence that people can exercise some control over these internal processes; thus bio-feedback may be helpful in reducing undesirable effects of stress.⁶

In the light of these possibilities, a distinct voice cautions the need for non-fragmented, holistic approach to managing stress. Hans Selye⁷ points out that possibilities offered by Eastern sages in coping stress should not be discounted or underestimated merely because science cannot explain them; they worked for so long and in so many forms that we must respect them". Among so many approaches offered by eastern sages, yoga stands out distinctly and fills the space with great dignity and authority.

5.4  YOGA – THE HOLISTIC MEDIATOR

The term yoga is being used quite extensively these day to encompass a variety of practices for different ends. Physical exercises, certain vows and constraints, meditation, attitudinal transformations towards work and results there of are some of them, widely propagated and practiced. What is important to remember is that yoga is not restricted to

physical body as is commonly understood nowadays. Yoga goes beyond
the body, and deals with the human mind.

Yoga addresses the immutable link between the body, the breath and
the mind, recognising that any conscious attempt to modify one of these
factors can be used as an agent for comprehensive change in the entire
system. The kind of practice must grow out of the specific conditions and
circumstances of the individual.

Patanjali, offers eight aspects of yoga, in order to reduce the
impurities to enable the mind free from stress. In yogic thought, the layers
of the body were visualised in an increasing order of priority of functions.
These proceeded from the outside to the inside, from the grosser to the more
subtle, from the harder to softer, from the less vital to the more vital, from
the material to the less material.

Patanjali’s scheme of things envisages the following:

Yam - Niyam - Asan - Pranayama - Pratyahara -
Dhara - Dhyana - Samashaya - Asthi - Akarna

Yama – Niyama – Āsana – Prānāyāma
Pratyāhāra – Dharana – Dhyāna – Samādhyāyah
Astou Angani | Yoga Sutra II - 29.
It means

1. yama - Concerns our behaviour towards others and towards our environment
2. Niyama - Our personal disciplines
3. Āsana - Use of the body
4. Prānāyāma - the practice of regulating the breath
5. Pratyahāra - is about withdrawing the mind from its subservience to the senses.
6. Dhāranā - Focusing the mind on a particular object
7. Dhyāna - Stabilising the focus of the mind - an un-interrupted state of concentration.
8. Samadhi - The pure awareness of the object – state of freedom.

According to PATANJALI if these eight aspects forms part of a person’s life, it will act as a deterrent against the impact of stress.

5.5 CONCLUSION

In this chapter many non-medical tools capable of combating stress has been reviewed. Along side the jurisdiction and understanding of the holistic stress coping Life Style possibilities suggested by Sage Patanjali has also been taken for discussion.