

FOCUS ON VOCABULARY AND LANGUAGE

Debt piles up. Deadlines loom. . . . your mood turns sour. Starting college or university brings many changes and can be very stressful. Some students owe more and more money (*debts pile up*), become nervous as the due date for papers and projects gets nearer (as *deadlines loom*), have anxiety about forming new relationships, and have to deal with family responsibilities. This and other daily hassles (such as being *stuck in traffic* or *late to class or work*) can make a person very unhappy (*his or her mood turns sour*); such cumulative stress can result in physical ailments, headaches, disrupted sleep patterns, increased risk of serious illness, or even death.

Stress: Some Basic Concepts

Stress is a slippery concept. The term **stress** is often used to describe a stimulus (a threatening or challenging event) or a response (fear or anxiety). Most psychologists refer to the former as a *stressor*, the latter as a *stress reaction*, and they use the word *stress* to refer to the entire process of evaluating and dealing with threatening events. Thus, stress is not a simple or easily understood construct (*it is a slippery concept*).

Stressors—Things That Push Our Buttons

Experiencing *a cluster of crises* . . . puts one even more at risk. Important and significant changes in our lives are other types of life-event stressors that increase the probability of health problems. If a number of these events occur close together (*a cluster of crises*), people become more vulnerable to disease.

. . . *daily hassles* . . . Small, routine, annoying events and the little things that go wrong every day (*daily hassles*) can have a cumulative effect on health and well-being. Some people can handle these daily hassles (*they shrug off such hassles*), while others are severely distressed by these inconveniences. Continual daily hassles can lead to mental, physical, and emotional exhaustion (*they take a toll on health and well-being*).

. . . *stretching to make ends meet*. . . Some people experience daily hassles with harsher consequences. For example, they have to survive on low wages, they have to budget money and resources to cover expenses (*stretch to make ends meet*), they attempt to raise children without a spouse (they are *solo parents*), and so on. Any of these stressors can result in high blood pressure and other health problems.

Stress Reactions—From Alarm to Exhaustion

Your heart rate zooms. According to Selye's **general adaptation syndrome** (GAS), there are three phases in our response to stress: alarm reaction, resistance, and exhaustion. During the first phase, the sympathetic nervous system responds rapidly; your heart rate quickly increases (*zooms*), blood is directed to the muscles, and you experience the weakness associated with being startled. You are now ready to fight or cope with the stressor (the resistance phase); if the situation is not resolved soon, you will experience exhaustion (the third phase).

Stress Effects and Health

Stress and Cancer

There is a danger in *hyping* reports on attitudes and cancer. One problem with overstating (*hyping*) the relationship between attitudes and cancer is that some cancer victims may feel that they have somehow caused their sickness. The biological factors involved in the disease cannot be eliminated (*derailed*) by believing good health is due to a healthy character (the “*wellness macho*” attitude). Nor is it appropriate to blame (*lay a guilt trip on*) those who develop the illness. As Myers notes, we should be aware of the fine distinction (*thin line*) that separates science from desperately hopeful beliefs (*wishful thinking*).

Stress and Heart Disease

Moreover, not one of the “*pure*” Type Bs—the most mellow and laid-back of their group—had suffered a heart attack. Researchers have identified two personality types: **Type As** are reactive (*easily angered* or *hot-tempered*), competitive, verbally aggressive, highly motivated, always rushed, and lacking in patience (*they are “combat ready”*); **Type Bs** don’t get mad as easily (are *mellow*) and are easy-going (*laid-back*), patient, understanding, and noncompetitive. The most prototypical (“*pure*”) Type Bs were the least likely to be afflicted by **coronary heart disease** (*heart attacks*).

But *after that initial honeymoon period, researchers wanted to know more*. The discovery of the relationship between personality type (A or B) and health and well-being aroused much research interest. However, once the initial excitement abated (*after that initial honeymoon period*), other investigators started more detailed research, asking questions about the specific mechanisms involved in personality type and risk of disease.

Human Flourishing

Coping With Stress

When later placed in another situation where they *could* escape the punishment by simply *leaping a hurdle*, the dogs cowered as if without hope. In Seligman’s experiments, because dogs learned that nothing they did had any effect on what happened to them (***learned helplessness***), they would not make even a minimal effort, such as jumping over a small barrier (*leaping a hurdle*), to escape being shocked. People, too, who feel they have no control over what happens to them, may become depressed and feel hopeless and helpless. Such perceived loss of control predicts health problems.

We consumers can be *staggered by too many choices*. When we have too many options to pick from, we can feel overpowered and confused (*we can be staggered by too many choices*). Having to select one item from many possible items (the *tyranny of choice*) creates unhappiness because we may feel deprived by not having chosen one of the alternatives.

Success requires enough **optimism** to provide hope and enough **pessimism** to *keep us on our toes*. A certain level of pessimism may force us to be attentive and focused (*it keeps us on our toes*). Believing and hoping that everything is going turn out for the best (*unrealistic optimism*) can lead us to ignore the dangers that exist (*can blind us to real risks*).

(*Photo caption*) . . . *Laughter among friends is good medicine*. This old saying proposes that mirthful humor may be good for our health. Some research has shown the beneficial effects of laughter, which appears to act as a block or buffer against stress-induced problems.

The researchers then took a cold, hard look at the results, . . . Taking a *cold, hard look* at something means looking at it objectively and realistically. In research on resistance to cold viruses, researchers found that healthy volunteers who had the most social ties were less likely to catch a cold and produced less mucus. This was an important result. The researchers looked carefully at the findings (*they took a cold, hard look at them*) and, as Myers humorously notes, *the effect of social ties is nothing to sneeze at* (that is, social support promotes stronger immune functioning and is therefore worthy of consideration). In addition, research shows that social support calms the cardiovascular system, lowering blood pressure and stress hormones.

Close relationships offer an opportunity for “*open heart therapy*,” a chance to confide painful feelings. Research has shown that those with close, supportive friends and family tend to have fewer health problems and live longer. One reason for this may be that trusting relationships provide the opportunity to talk about our problems and feelings and, just as “open-heart surgery” can save lives, having someone to talk to can be a form of “*open-heart therapy*.”

Managing Stress Effects

Many of them had, quite literally, *run away from their troubles*. Many research studies have shown the beneficial effect of **aerobic exercise** on depression and anxiety. In one study, women who engaged in a program of aerobic exercise that included running or jogging showed a substantial reduction in depression. As Myers humorously puts it, they had, in reality, *run away from their problems (troubles)*.

(Photo caption) The mood boost. Regular exercise increases longevity and cardiovascular fitness, reduces anxiety and depression, and enhances positive emotional states (*it boosts our moods*). So the popular trend toward being more physically active has many benefits.