

FOCUS ON VOCABULARY AND LANGUAGE

Debt piles up. Deadlines loom. . . . your mood may turn sour. Starting college or university brings many changes and can be very stressful. Some students owe more and more money (*debt piles up*). As the due date for papers and projects gets nearer (*as deadlines loom*), students can become nervous. They may feel anxious about forming new relationships and having to deal with family responsibilities. These 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 may turn 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 threatening or challenging event, or the physical or emotional response to that event. Most psychologists refer to the former as a *stressor* and the latter as a *stress reaction*; 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 (*stress 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—for example, involuntary job loss (*being fired*), being widowed, or getting divorced—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 (*daily hassles*) can have a cumulative effect on health and well-being. Some people can handle these *daily hassles* (they can *shrug them off*), while other people are severely distressed by these inconveniences. The impact of daily hassles can be particularly troublesome for people who don't earn enough money to cover their expenses between the days on which they receive payment for their work (*Americans who wake up each day facing budgets that won't stretch to the next payday*), as well as those who are raising children without a spouse (*solo parenting*). Continual *daily hassles* can accumulate and have adverse effects on physical health and mental well-being (*they can take a toll*).

Stress Reactions—From Alarm to Exhaustion

Your heart rate *soars*. According to Hans 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 (*soars*), blood is directed to your muscles, and you experience the weakness associated with being startled or frightened (*you feel the faintness of shock*). 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 having a positively focused attitude (*a determined spirit*) or by avoiding stress. Nor is it appropriate for those who develop the illness to blame themselves or for their loved ones to feel responsible for causing the disease. As Myers notes, *we should be aware of the thin line* (fine distinction) *that divides science from wishful thinking* (desperately hopeful beliefs).

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. In contrast, **Type Bs** do not get angry as easily (*they are mellow*). They are also 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 a great deal of attention (*provoked enormous public 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.

Type A individuals are more often “combat ready.” Research has shown that Type A individuals are physiologically more reactive, competitive, lacking in patience, verbally aggressive, and ready to fight (*they are more often “combat ready”*) than Type B individuals. When stressed, their sympathetic nervous system operates to increase the levels of cholesterol and fat in the blood; in addition, their negative (*toxic*) emotions, especially anger, make them more likely to develop heart disease (they are more *coronary-prone*).

As others have noted, *rage “seems to lash back and strike us in the heart muscle”* (Spielberger & London, 1982). Those who are emotionally volatile and get angry very easily are much more likely to suffer from heart attacks than more even-tempered or less emotional individuals. Extreme anger (*rage*) seems to retaliate (*lash back*) and attack normal cardiac functioning (*strike us in the heart muscle*).

Depression is disheartening. To *dishearten* means to cause dejection and loss of hope. But, in this context, Myers is using components of the word to emphasize that depression poses risks for heart disease (*depression is dis – heart – ening*). Following a heart attack, people with high depression scores are more likely to develop further heart problems than their low-scoring counterparts. Thus, depression is bad for the heart (*it is disheartening*)—and it can even be deadly (*lethal*).

Coping With Stress

Personal Control, Health, and Well-Being

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 Martin Seligman's experiments, dogs learned that nothing they did had any effect on what happened to them (*learned helplessness*). Consequently, later when they could escape the shock, they would not make even a minimal effort—for example, jumping over a small barrier (*leaping a hurdle*)—to escape being shocked. Further, they tended to cringe and recoil (*cower*) as if without hope. Similarly people who feel they have no control over what happens to them (*no personal control*) may become depressed and feel hopeless and helpless (may feel *passive resignation* or *learned helplessness*). Studies have shown that such perceived loss of control can predict health problems. But, increasing *self-control* can improve health and morale (*self-esteem* and *self-confidence*). As researcher Ellen Langer notes, "*perceived control is basic to human functioning.*"

This *tyranny of choice* brings *information overload* and a greater likelihood that we will feel regret over some of the things we left behind. Some researchers believe that today's Western culture provides us with too many alternatives to choose from (*an "excess of freedom"*). Thus, when we have too many options to pick from (*the tyranny of choice*), we can feel overwhelmed by the amount of data and facts we have to deal with (we suffer from *information overload*). The result can be decreased life satisfaction, increased depression, and the inability to take action (*behavior paralysis*).

Is the Glass Half Full or Half Empty?

Success requires enough optimism to provide hope and enough pessimism to *keep you on your 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 to turn out for the best (*unrealistic optimism*) can lead us to ignore the dangers that exist (*excessive optimism can blind us to real risks*).

(Photo caption) *Laughter among friends is good medicine* The old saying "*laughter is the best medicine*" 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. Those who have a good sense of humor and can find something funny in stressful life events tend to be healthier and may live longer.

Social Support

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, the researchers found that healthy volunteers who had the most social ties were less likely to catch a cold and, if they did catch one, they produced less mucus. This was an important result. The researchers looked carefully at the findings (*they took a cold hard look at them*). After controlling for age, race, sex, smoking, and other health habits, they found that people with close social relationships were healthier. Social support appears to increase immune system functioning (*it seems to reboot our immune system*).

The effect of social ties *is nothing to sneeze at!* Myers is being humorous here. The expression "*that is nothing to sneeze at*" indicates that something (for example, an object, event, or accomplishment) is not minor or insignificant—and, of course, people with colds tend to *sneeze* a lot. In research on resistance to cold viruses, the finding that healthy volunteers who had the most social ties were less

likely to catch a cold and, if they did, produced less mucus is not an insignificant result (*is nothing to sneeze at*). In addition, research shows that social support calms the cardiovascular system, lowering blood pressure and stress hormones.

Finding Meaning

Close relationships offer an opportunity for “*open heart therapy*”—a chance to *confide* painful feelings and *sort things out* (Frattaroli, 2006). 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 feelings and things that upset us (*things that push our buttons*). We also may have an opportunity to solve our problems (*sort things out*) by sharing with others. Just as “open-heart surgery” can save lives, having someone to talk to can be a form of “*open heart therapy*.” It is good for our physical and mental well-being (confiding is good for the body and the soul).

Managing Stress Effects

Aerobic Exercise

(*Photo caption*) *The mood boost* Regular exercise increases longevity and cardiovascular fitness, reduces stress, anxiety, and depression, and enhances positive emotional states (*it boosts our moods*). So, the popular trend toward being more physically active has many benefits. When our vigor and enthusiasm for life are low (*when energy or spirits are sagging*), exercise can help enliven our day (*it can reboot the day*).

Many of them had, quite literally, *run away from their troubles*. Many research studies have shown the beneficial effect of **aerobic exercise** on stress, 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 troubles* (problems).

Happiness

Randy says he survived his life stressors by *seeing the “silver lining in the cloud.”* The saying “*every cloud has a silver lining*” suggests that adverse events or bad situations can have positive or good aspects to them. Randy has experienced many traumatic and stressful events in his life but he seems to be able to recover physically and emotionally (*he bounces back from serious losses*). In addition, he is able to find something of value in even the worst situations (*he sees the “silver lining in the cloud”*). He is a consistently positive person and he always expects that things will get better (*he is a happy person with endless optimism*); his outgoing, cheerful personality can cheer up those he encounters (*it can light up a room*).

The Short Life of Emotional Ups and Downs

(*Photo caption*) *Take heart!* If you tell someone to “*take heart*,” you are encouraging that person to be optimistic or hopeful. Our emotional fluctuations (*ups and downs*) tend to even out (*balance out*) over time—our bad mood one day will probably dissipate by the next day (*our gloom nearly always lifts*) and we may even experience a better-than-usual good day (*tomorrow will be a new day*). A particularly stressful event, such as the end of an intimate relationship (*a romantic breakup*), may leave us hurt and sad (*we may feel that our heart has broken*). But, as time passes, we usually start

to feel better (*eventually the wound heals*). So, even when negative events make us feel bad (*drag us down*) for extended periods of time, we should remain optimistic and hopeful (*take heart*) because our bad mood eventually ends.

Wealth and Well-Being

These findings *lob a bombshell at modern materialism* . . . The contemporary tendency to accumulate money and possessions (*modern materialism*) in industrialized and wealthy countries has not resulted in greater happiness. This finding challenges and destroys (*lobs a bombshell at*) the myth that riches (*wealth*) bring happiness and social well-being.

Close-Up: Want to Be Happier?

Off your duffs, couch potatoes! In *Close-Up: Want to Be Happier?*, Myers lists a number of research-based suggestions for elevating our moods and creating more contentment and fulfillment with our lives. One recommendation is to become more physically active (*join the "movement" movement*). A vast amount of research shows very clearly the benefits of regular aerobic exercise in terms of better overall health, higher levels of energy, and lower levels of anxiety and depression. Myers advises sedentary people (*couch potatoes*) to get out of the sitting position (*get off your duffs*) and start exercising regularly.