

Stress and Anxiety Management



Prevention and Health Education Unit
Prepared by Licensed Health Educators

Objectives:



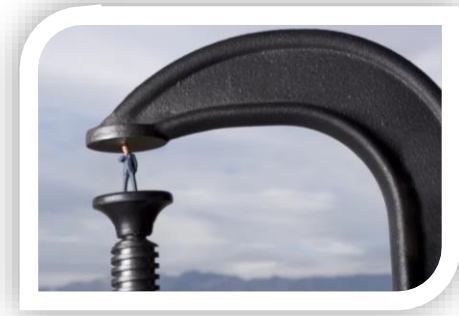
- Define what is stress and anxiety

- Identify the signs and symptoms.

- Differentiate what is a response to stress versus what is anxiety.

- Propose alternatives for managing stress and anxiety.

Stress is...



Stress is a normal psychological and physical reaction to the demands of life.

It is activated by events or situations from the outside that demand our attention.

Our nervous system identifies the situation as a threat, so it activates all the functions of the body to preserve survival.

We can experience stress regardless of age, gender, ethnicity, or economic status.

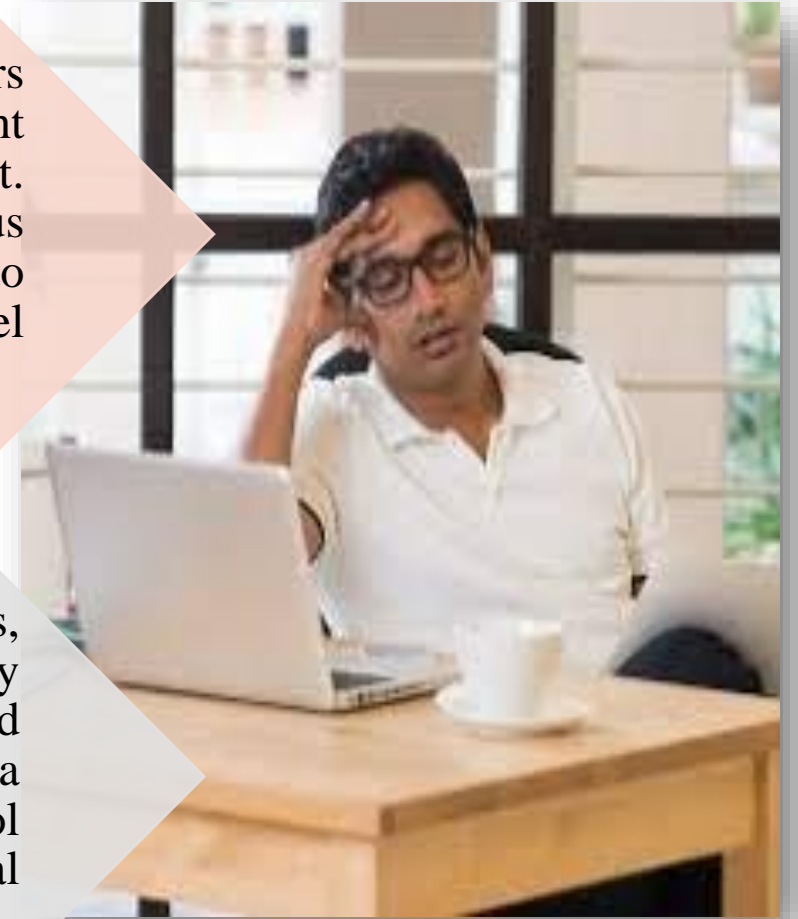
A situation does not have to be physically risky to activate the stress response. The pressures of daily life can also activate it.

Stress is not always negative, even in a stressful situation a person may acquire new coping strategies.

Two main types of stress:

Acute stress

- It affects in the short term and disappears quickly. You can feel it when you fight with your partner or avoid an accident. This helps you react to dangerous situations. It also happens when you do something new or exciting. All people feel acute stress at one time or another.



Chronic stress

- It stretches out for weeks and even months, due to problems such as debt, an unhappy marriage, or workload. You can get so used to chronic stress that you don't realize it's a problem. If you don't find ways to control stress, it can cause physical and mental health problems.

How to recognize what is typical and what is not

- We live in a world with high family, work and social demands, which gives way to a pace of life with constant challenges.
- To this is added the exceptional moment we are experiencing as a result of COVID-19. The pandemic has generated great uncertainty about the present, the future, health, the economic situation and well-being in general.
- For many, the pandemic has posed a threat to their life projects and has altered their daily routines. Probably, the usual ways in which stressful moments of life were handled have been affected.



The biological response to stress:

Although the human being has mechanisms to cope with it, the impact of stress will depend on individual perception.

In a stress situation, each person can react differently depending on factors such as personality, previous experiences, their social support networks, their physical health, among others.

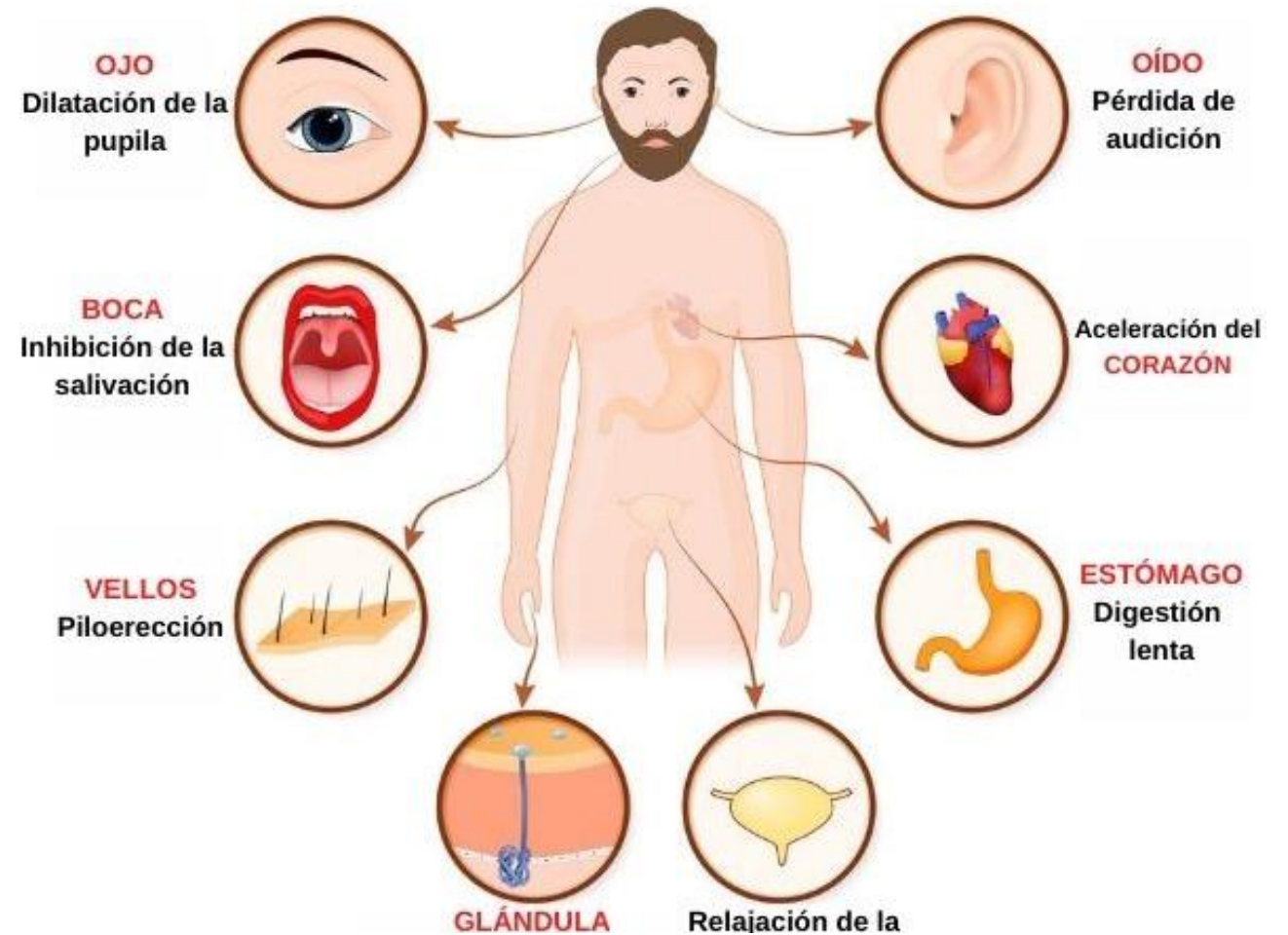
That perception determines what the neurobiological response to stress will be. If we are subjected to very intense, repetitive stress, if it is perceived as unpredictable or uncontrollable, it can have important consequences for our health, especially for the brain.

If stress is not managed in time, it can trigger other diseases such as high blood pressure, heart rhythm disturbances and other mental health diagnoses such as generalized anxiety, depression, obsessive behaviors, among others.



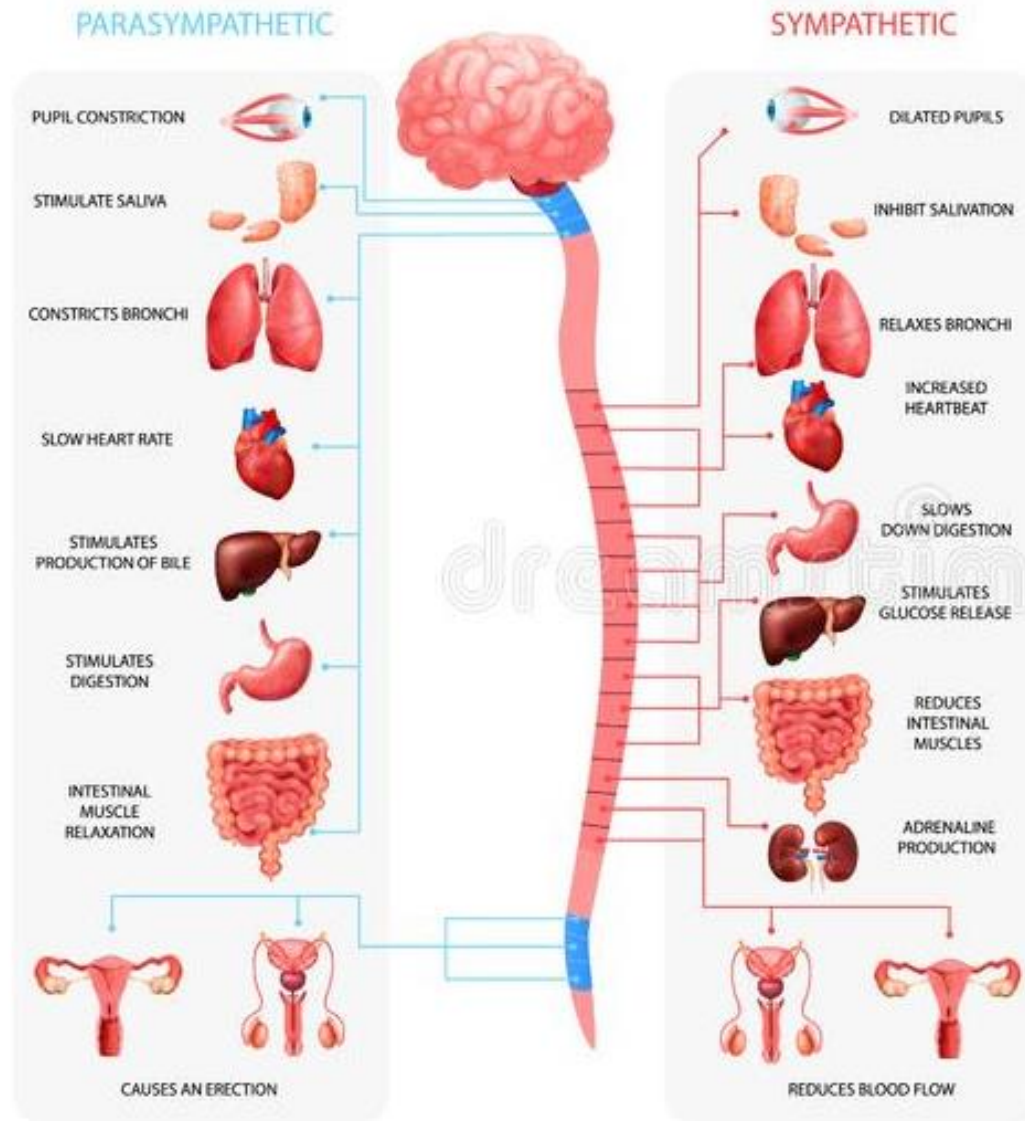
Body's reaction to a stressful situation

- The body identifies that there is a threat, so it prepares to react in such a way that it can survive the stressful event or moment.
- Among them the answers can be: run away, fight, freeze, avoid or submit.
- The body inhibits certain functions to save the energy needed to react.
- The person responsible for activating everything is the Central Nervous System.



The Central Nervous System...

Parasympathetic System, shows how to activate the different parts of the body while the person is at rest or when they feel relaxed.



Sympathetic System, shows how it activates the different parts of the body while the person is in a stressful and threatening situation (fight, run away, freeze, avoidance or submission).

At the body level you can experience...



Diarrhea or constipation



Shaking or cold sweat on the hands



Headache, back pain and stiffness

Others effects:



Anxiety



Mood changes



Substance abuse



Respiratory problems

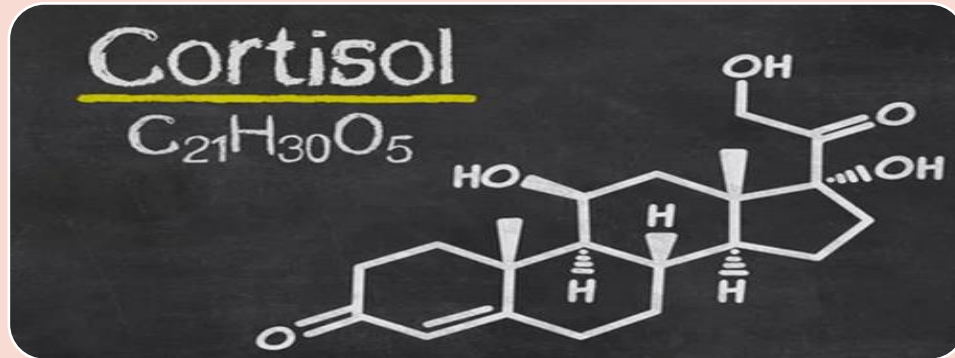


Chest pain



Decreased sexual appetite

Hormonal level...



As in everything in life, hormonally we need a balance. Cortisol, known as one of the stress hormones, is necessary to regulate numerous functions, but when its production increases steadily and its balance is broken, it can alter the immune system and processes as important as neuroplasticity.

Neuroplasticity could be defined as the brain's ability to change and adapt to new experiences. Thanks to it we are able to adapt, learn from new situations and face adverse circumstances. When we face situations of chronic stress, it acts by reducing neuroplasticity and therefore affects the way we deal with problems.

What is anxiety?

It is generated from the response we have to moments or circumstances that generate stress.

It often includes a persistent feeling of mistrust, insecurity or fear that does not go away.

Symptoms can interfere with daily activities, such as performing at work, school, and relationships.

It is constant, even if there is no immediate threat.

It is a complex clinical diagnosis that can include generalized anxiety disorder, panic attacks, and phobias.

The most commonly used treatments for anxiety disorders are psychotherapy, medication, or a combination of both.



What are anxiety disorders?



Anxiety disorders are conditions in which anxiety does not go away and can get worse over time. Symptoms can interfere with daily activities, such as performing at work, school, and relationships.

Types of Anxiety Disorders

Generalized anxiety disorder

- People with this disorder worry about common problems such as health, money, work, and family. But your worries are excessive and you have them almost every day for at least 6 months

Panic disorder

- People with panic disorder suffer from panic attacks. These are sudden and repeated moments of intense fear with no apparent danger. Attacks come on quickly and can last for several minutes or more

Phobias

- People with phobias have an intense fear of something that poses little or no real danger. Your fear may be of spiders, flying, going to crowded places, or being in social situations (known as social anxiety)

Some causes of stress and anxiety can be...

Loss of job or income

Waiting for something or having to make an important decision

Uncertainty about how long the pandemic will last

Worry about getting sick or infecting others

Feeling insecure (physical, emotional, social or environmental)

Feeling that you do not fulfill your different responsibilities (financial, social, interrelational)

Feeling bored or isolated from loved ones

Thoughts of guilt, worry, or fear

Fear of catastrophe or running out of essential supplies

Any unexpected situation (some diagnosis, death of a loved one, violence, etc...)

What can we do to manage stress?

Put some structure into your day

- During the day balance between work and rest periods. Try to regulate the hours of sleep, the moments to prepare and consume your food, the space for personal care, work or study hours, the moments of physical activity and distraction.

Limit media exposure

- Choose and be careful about the type of content you follow. Avoid exposure to rumours, false information or violence.

Stay busy

- Identify some activity or new project that occupies your time and mind. A distraction can take you away from the cycle of negative thoughts that fuel stress and anxiety.

What can we do to manage stress?

Try to focus on positive thoughts

- Choose to focus on the positives in life instead of thinking about what causes you stress. One option may be to start each day by writing down 3 things you are grateful for.

Keep hoping

- Try to accept changes when they come and consider another perspective. What would happen if behind what is happening there is an opportunity for progress?

Use your moral and spiritual values as support

- Your beliefs can give you strength, comfort, in difficult times. Remember that there may be options for managing your mood.

Set priorities and don't procrastinate

- Many times, procrastinating or not planning increases the feeling of tension, stress or anxiety. Start with what is within your power to resolve, have conversations, seek information, and do your best to alleviate your situation.

What can we do to manage stress?

Connect with people

- Find some way to connect each day, even for a moment, with your loved ones. One option is connections via messages, video calls or virtual meetings, or activities abroad.

Do something for others

- Doing community service contributes to our well-being and improves our self-concept. You can volunteer for a charity or help people in your neighborhood. For example, taking an older adult to the pharmacy, the supermarket or helping them with cleaning their home.

Eat healthy food

- Food's high in fiber, antioxidants, and vitamins help you feel better and have more energy. Avoid foods high in fat, salts, sugars, caffeine and processed foods. These can cause long-term development of diseases or conditions such as diabetes, hypertension and insomnia. Avoid the consumption of alcohol, cigarettes or stimulant drugs.

Move

- Giving the body movement helps to relax the points where tension usually accumulates (neck, upper back, lower back, shoulders). Exercising routinely will strengthen your heart, normalize your blood pressure as well as blood glucose. Walk, dance, swim, or do whatever you like for 20 minutes, 3 or 4 times a week.

Other options...

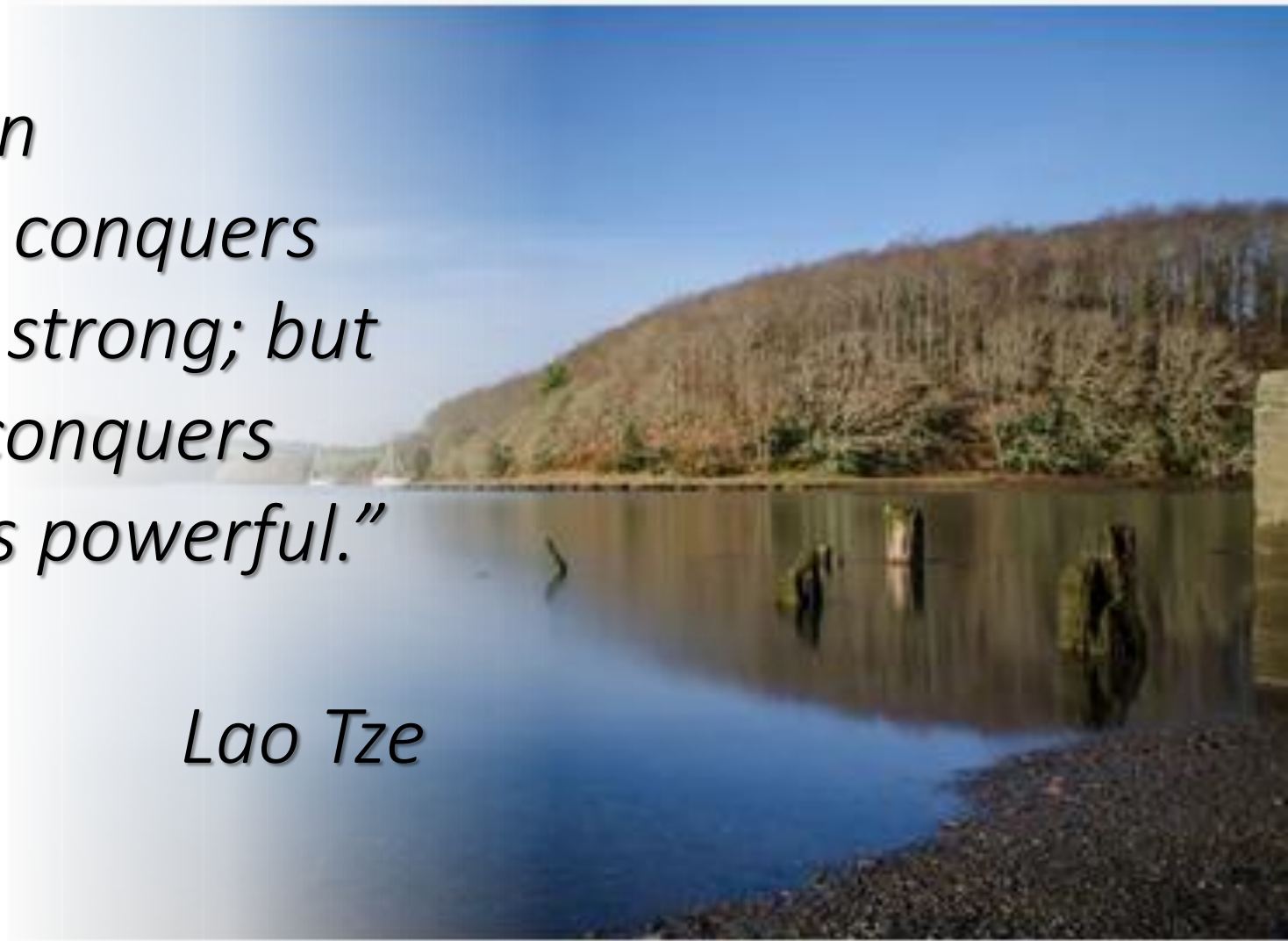
- Breathe
- Write about how you feel and what is bothering you
- Listen to music that relaxes you
- Connect with nature
- If you find that stress is disrupting your mood and life routine, talk to a behavioral health professional.



Reflection

“He who conquers others is strong; but he who conquers himself is powerful.”

Lao Tze




Social and emotional aspect

For recommendations, tools and resources on how you and your family can deal with the emotional and physical concerns that arise during and after your medical treatment, please visit your primary care physician or contact the following phone lines:

Medical Advance Line

1-844-347-7801

TTY/TDD 1-844-347-7804





Questions?

Thanks for your participation!

For more information: mas@firstmedicalpr.com

Scan the code to complete the evaluation.



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