

Chapter Thirteen

Stress!

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LEARNING OBJECTIVES

After completing this chapter, you should be able to

- 13.1 Explain the concept of stress.
- 13.2 Identify Selye's four variations of stress.
- 13.3 Describe the major causes of stress.
- 13.4 Discuss the unique aspects of college that can be stressful.
- 13.5 Explain the general adaptation syndrome.
- 13.6 Explain the connection between stress and defense mechanisms.
- 13.7 Discuss how reactions to stress can differ.
- 13.8 Compare psychological hardiness and resilience.
- 13.9 Discuss strategies for reducing stress by modifying your environment.
- 13.10 Describe different ways to reduce stress by altering your lifestyle.
- 13.11 Explain how stress can promote personal growth.

After a frustrating 30-minute delay on the expressway, punctuated by honking horns and waving fingers, Nate arrives at the office late. He is told the boss wants to see him right away. "I wonder what that's about?" Nate muses to himself, as he takes off his coat and heads upstairs. He's ushered inside the boss's office, only to find the boss pacing back and forth. The boss is furious. The big deal they were counting on with a major corporation has just fallen through. The boss makes it clear that if Nate values his job he'd better have a good explanation. Nate gropes for words. "Frankly, I'm stunned. I can't imagine what happened," he says. "Let me call and talk to the people over there and find out the story." Nate's boss continues making accusations about Nate's incompetence and his uncertain future with the company. Eventually, Nate feels enraged at being treated this way. He is tempted to yell back at his boss but knows this is neither a mature nor productive response. Instead, he returns to his office to cool off. His stomach churning, his neck muscles tense, and his blood pressure rising, he sits down at his desk. He reaches for a Maalox and a bottle of aspirin.

OH NO!—UNDERSTANDING STRESS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 13.1 Explain the concept of stress.
- 13.2 Identify Selye's four variations of stress.
- 13.3 Describe the major causes of stress.
- 13.4 Discuss the unique aspects of college that can be stressful.

As Nate can tell you, stress takes a heavy toll on workers, causing absenteeism, decreasing productivity, and increasing medical expenses, all of which are estimated to cost businesses over \$350 billion a year (Stambor, 2006). Stress manifests itself in a variety of ways. The most common sign of stress is increased nervousness, anxiety, and tension. Many experience headaches, fatigue, or depression; and others say their stress shows up as anger and irritability (Monroe & Reid, 2009). Other symptoms of stress include muscle aches, stomachaches, an overall feeling of being upset, insomnia, loss of sleep, compulsive eating or loss of appetite, a feeling of frustration, crying, yelling, and screaming. Many of these symptoms are part of the body's physiological stress response—automatic, built-in reactions over which we have little control. However, stress-related symptoms can also occur because of our psychological reactions to events that are

BOX 13-1**Did you know that the following can help you manage stress through self-care?**

- Avoid drugs and alcohol
- Find support
- Connect socially
- Take care of yourself
- Stay active

Source: "Managing Stress," from Centers for Disease and Control website, 2012.

more dependent on the way we *perceive* the world, and our capacity for dealing with it, rather than to the actual stressor.

Regardless of its cause, stress has a major impact on our health, contributing either directly or indirectly, to coronary heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidental injuries, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide (Monroe, 2008)—six of the leading causes of death in the United States. Just like Nate, most of us experience "high stress" at one time or another. Many report that they feel "great stress" at least once or twice a week or live with high stress every day. Clearly, stress can be an impediment to adjustment and growth. In the current chapter, the causes and consequences of stress will be identified, and then the ways to effectively manage it will be presented. Table 13-1 presents other statistics on stress so that you can judge for yourself how large a problem stress is for modern life.

Conceptualizing Stress

THE COMPONENTS OF STRESS Although we experience it all of the time, the concept of stress is somewhat difficult to define; partly because it means different things to different people. Nevertheless, most agree that the experience of stress has three components: (1) the triggering event; (2) the perception of the event as stressful; and (3) the nature and degree of reaction to the event. First, the triggers of stress are called **stressors**—*events in the environment, our body, or our mind that evoke stress*, such as a highly competitive work environment, college roommate conflicts, or worries about appearance. Second, most events are neither good nor bad; it's our perception of them as stressful that matters. For instance, while one person may find an upcoming test overwhelming, another may find the exam to be of no concern. Third, it is our response to an event that really characterizes the experience of **stress**—*a reaction to events that disturb equilibrium or exceed coping abilities*. When events disrupt our usual level of functioning and require us to make an *extra effort* to re-establish our equilibrium, we experience stress.

Table 13-1**Statistics on Stress**

- Over half of Americans view job stress as a major problem in their lives.
- One-fourth of American workers say their stress is so severe that they feel a "nervous breakdown" is imminent.
- More than three out of every five doctor's office visits are for stress-related problems.
- Up to 90 percent of reported illnesses and disease may be stress-related.
- More women than men report feeling super-stressed, including 23 percent of female (as opposed to 19 percent of male) executives and professionals. In college, about 38 percent of women as compared to 20 percent of men report high stress levels.
- Young people are more affected by stress; 75 percent of 18- to 24-year olds have suffered from stress at work.

TYPES OF STRESS We should be careful not to equate stress solely with distress, as it can have beneficial effects in some cases (Reynolds & Turner, 2008). In fact, four basic variations of stress have been identified: distress, eustress, hyperstress, and hypostress (Selye, 1991). *When events have a harmful effect*, stress is labeled **distress**. For around 70 percent of Americans, the three most frequently mentioned sources of distress are money, the economy, and work. In addition, around half of Americans experience significant distress from relationships, personal responsibilities, health concerns, and housing costs (American Psychological Association, 2010). **Eustress** refers to events that are stimulating, motivational, or result in personal growth, such as beginning a new job, getting married, or taking up an exciting sport such as skydiving. **Hyperstress**, or *excessive stress*, usually occurs when events, including positive ones, pile up and stretch the limits of our adaptability. For example, individuals who are already under stress at work and home may experience hyperstress after experiencing a traumatic event such as a car crash. **Hypostress**, or *insufficient stress*, is apt to occur when we lack stimulation, such as working a monotonous job. Moreover, at times bored people resort to sensation-seeking behaviors mentioned elsewhere in the book, such as experimenting with drugs or taking unnecessary financial, personal, or recreational risks.

Of note, stress is often thought of in terms of how long it lasts and how often it occurs. Based on these time-related factors, two different types of stress have been identified: acute and chronic. Whereas **acute stress** is a momentary response to imminent threat and is relieved when the threat is over, **chronic stress** refers to experiencing a long-term, on-going stressor. Case in point, the boss's surprisingly angry outburst at Nate would elicit acute stress, while Nate's long and arduous daily drive to and from work would cause chronic stress.

Major Causes of Stress

Although we each experience stress somewhat differently, there are some common categories of events that cause most of us to feel stressed at some point or another: life changes, daily hassles, catastrophic events, and economic and social conditions. Before reading the next section on each of these major causes of stress, ask yourself this: "What stresses you out?"

LIFE CHANGES Besides being stressful, what do getting married, losing a job, having a parent die, and beginning college all have in common? Each of these events represent a significant



Scientists do not yet know which theory about the causes of stress is correct; the theory about major life stressors (such as a natural disaster) or the theory about daily hassles (such as not being able to find your car in a parking lot).

change in a person's life—referred to by psychologists as a **life change**. Regardless of whether it is positive or negative, a life change can happen at any point during the lifespan (though they may be more common at some ages than others) and can be predictable (as in a wedding following a long engagement) or unexpected (like the death of a loved one) (Holmes & Rahe, 1967). More often than not, life changes produce acute stress.

While experiencing a single life change can be stressful, most times we can effectively handle it without consequence. However, when there are a number of life changes occurring at the same time, the amount of readjustment required to cope may become overwhelming; and as a result, our health and well-being may suffer. Accordingly, the combined stress of life events has been related to a variety of **stress-related illnesses**—*illnesses affected by our emotions, lifestyles, or environment*—such as sudden cardiac death, stroke, diabetes and other chronic illnesses, depression, complications of pregnancy and birth, everyday colds, flare-up of multiple sclerosis, and many other physical problems (Contrada & Baum, 2011).

Despite its usefulness, the life-events approach to stress has several limitations. First, the particular events considered stressful may not be equally relevant for all groups of people. For examples, divorce is not an issue that most teenagers or the elderly, for that matter, typically encounter. Second, the life-events approach does not take into account how individuals perceive a given change, much less how well they adapt to it. Third, because the life-events approach is built around infrequent, but significant change, it fails to include a great deal of stress that comes with chronic or repeated conditions, such as a boring job or a long-lasting unsatisfying marriage. Finally, it leaves out the “little things” in everyday life that often get to us, such as losing your car keys or snapping a shoelace when you're in a rush in the morning (Monroe, 2008).

DAILY HASSLES For many people, it's not the major life events that cause them angst, rather it's the petty annoyances that surround them every day—the smelly roommate who won't shower, the toilets that needs cleaning, and the dirty laundry that keeps piling up are just a few examples. Such *everyday difficulties that cause stress* are called **daily hassles**. Of note, people vary considerably in terms of what bothers them (Almeida, 2005). Among traditional college students, the most commonly reported hassles are anxiety over tests and grades. Middle-aged people are bothered more by worries over health and money. Professional people feel they have too much to do and not enough time to do it; and they have difficulty relaxing. Daily hassles common to all groups are misplacing or losing things, worrying over physical appearance, and having too many things to do (Kieffer, Cronin, & Gawet, 2006). As it turns out, the cumulative effect of daily hassles on stress is powerful, affecting both psychological and physical health; with people who suffer chronic, intense hassles having the poorest health; for example, an increased likelihood of depression (Lazarus, 1993; McIntosh, Gillanders, & Rodgers, 2010).

CATASTROPHIC EVENTS When *the same life change happens to many people at the same time, disrupting lives and causing death and destruction*, it rises to the level of a **catastrophic event**. Examples include natural disasters, pandemics, and terrorist attacks. Mass tragedies can affect us in many ways: physically, emotionally, and mentally. They can make people feel angry, enraged, confused, sad, anxious, tired, or even guilty. Case in point, after being involved in a catastrophic incident resulting in multiple deaths, those who lived may experience **survivor guilt**—*feeling guilty simply because they are still alive while others are not*. No one who sees or hears about a catastrophic tragedy is untouched by it—and in an era of instant mass communications, the number of people exposed to such trauma in one way or another is significant. For instance, the repeated viewing of graphic images associated with the events of September 11, 2001, has caused fear and anxiety in many youthful viewers (Saylor, Cowart, Lipovsky, Jackson, & Finch, 2003).

Catastrophic events, whether experienced in person or seen in the media, will affect most of us negatively; but those effects will eventually fade over time. For some, however, such feelings may not go away on their own, and alcohol and drug use may follow in a misguided attempt to cope with these feelings (Keyes, Hatzenbuehler, & Hasin, 2011). For others, the stress associated with living through a tragedy is so great that severe depression ensues. Consider this,

five years after Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans, the suicide rate was still more than double of what it was prior to the levees breaking (Spiegel, 2010).

As the anniversary of a disaster or traumatic event approaches, many survivors report a return of restlessness and fear. The psychological literature calls it the **anniversary reaction** and defines it as *an individual's response to unresolved grief resulting from significant losses*. The anniversary reaction can involve several days or even weeks of anxiety, anger, nightmares, flashbacks, depression, or fear. However, not all survivors of a disaster or traumatic events experience an anniversary reaction. On a more positive note, the anniversary of a disaster or traumatic event can also provide an opportunity for emotional healing. Individuals can make significant progress in working through the natural grieving process by acknowledging the emotions and issues that surface during their anniversary reaction. These feelings and issues can help individuals develop perspective on the event and figure out where it fits in their hearts, minds, and lives (Holland & Neimeyer, 2010).

ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CONDITIONS The current economic situation in the United States is brutal, with slightly over 46 million Americans in poverty, the largest number in 52 years (U.S. Bureau of the Census, 2012). Globally, it is estimated that more than 1.4 billion people are impoverished, living on \$1.25 each day or less (Worldhunger.org, 2012). In addition to causing a number of physical ailments (such as malnutrition), the negative effects of poverty on psychological well-being cannot be understated, especially for those with families. For both children and adults alike, the stress of poverty is associated with increased levels of psychopathology, such as anxiety and depression. Within the family system, poverty also causes parenting to suffer and inter-parental conflicts to increase (Wadsworth, Raviv, Santiago, & Etter, 2011).

Beyond poverty, there are other social conditions that cause stress: discrimination and prejudice among them (Thompson, 2002). For instance, ethnic minorities encountering discrimination experience more stress and are more likely to attempt suicide than those without such experiences (Cassidy, O'Connor, Howe, & Warden, 2004; Gomez, Miranda, & Polanco, 2011). Ethnic minorities may also face **acculturative stress**—*the stress related to the process of adapting to the beliefs, languages, practices, and values of a dominant culture*. Although acculturative stress frequently affects first-generation immigrants shortly arriving in their new country it can also impact their progeny years later. For example, the children of immigrants may feel caught between the values of their parents and those of their peers; resulting in family conflict and tension (Ahmed, Kia-Keating, & Tsai, 2011).

ADDITIONAL FACTORS Here are some additional factors that contribute, alone or in combination, to our experience of stress (Scott, Jackson, & Bergeman, 2011).

- *Physical stressors* such as too much to do or too many demands on our time and attention.
- *Lack of control* over decisions and demands in our personal life or our work life.
- *Unpredictability* of events that therefore find us unprepared to cope with them.
- *Lack of social support* from friends and family.
- *Poor interpersonal relations* with family members, friends, or coworkers.
- *Role conflict* in which one role (e.g., a job) conflicts with another role (e.g., being a readily available parent).
- *Career concerns* including finding a job, receiving a promotion, and being unemployed.
- *Unpleasant or dangerous physical conditions* such as a noisy work environment.

Clearly, this list is not exhaustive, and we're sure you could come up with other stress-inducing situations very easily. But as you can see, the potential for stress is everywhere, including college.

Stress in College

As most of you are all too well aware, the pursuit of higher education comes with a great deal of stress. College students, especially in their first year, are exposed to new social norms and customs, different peer groups, work overload, a change in lifestyle, as well as more demands placed

on their time and their self-control (Guo, Wang, Johnson, & Diaz, 2011; Singh & Upadhyay, 2008). As a result of these changes, the transition to college is particularly difficult, with a large number of freshmen reporting overwhelming stress. However, college alone, no matter what year a student is in, stimulates additional stress; especially if the student has work-related responsibilities in addition to their academic ones (Pritchard & Wilson, 2006). Currently, around 37 percent of students work full-time while attending college; a decade ago that number was 25 percent (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2011; *Techniques*, 2000). And correspondingly, stress levels have increased over the same 10-year period (Huang, 2011). It is also worth noting that college women report more stress than college men (Darling, McWey, Howard, & Olmstead, 2007).

Exploration 13.1: Stress and You

healthfinder.gov A website devoted to helping people learn about mental health issues, including stress.

The stress of college, resulting from financial, academic, and social pressures, has been associated with a variety of negative behaviors, including increases in “energy” drink and junk food consumption, smoking, and alcohol and drug use. Declines in healthy eating habits, fitness, and other positive health behaviors, such as vitamin taking, are also well documented. Additionally, stressed students are significantly less pleased with their grade-point averages and their health. It is unclear whether high levels of stress produce lower grades and poor health or whether poor levels of academic performance and fitness result in added stress (Economos, Hildebrandt, & Hyatt, 2008; Pettit & DeBarr, 2011). Not surprisingly, high levels of college-related stress also have a harmful impact on mental health; with anxiety, depression, eating disorders, and suicide as potential consequences (Singh & Joshi, 2008; Sulkowski, Dempsey, & Dempsey, 2011).

Faculty (who frequently function as teachers, mentors, and academic advisors) often have a difficult time gauging how much stress their students are under (Misra, McKean, West, & Russo, 2000). Thus, your professors, no matter how well intentioned, might not be the best first line of defense for recognizing and reducing college-related stress. On the other hand, many college campuses offer counseling services for their students as well as workshops on stress reduction, study habits, and career counseling. Others provide support groups for common disorders that accompany stress, such as eating disorders or depression. Do you know what services your campus has available? Perhaps you need to explore them for yourself or someone close to you?

YIKES!—REACTIONS TO STRESS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- 13.5 Explain the general adaptation syndrome.**
- 13.6 Explain the connection between stress and defense mechanisms.**
- 13.7 Discuss how reactions to stress can differ.**
- 13.8 Compare psychological hardiness and resilience.**

Our reaction to stressful events takes four primary forms: *emotional, behavioral, cognitive, and physiological*. An emotional reaction to stress refers to the feelings that a stressor evokes; and those emotions can be either positive (e.g., excited, energized) or negative (e.g., anxious, fearful). What we do following a stressful event comprise our behavioral reactions. These behaviors can be beneficial to us (e.g., study harder, go to therapy) or detrimental to our well-being (e.g., drink and use drugs; give up hope). The cognitive aspect of stress is concerned with how we think about the stressor, in terms of its severity, how long it will last, the perceived ease of coping with it, and the likelihood of it occurring again. Collectively, the emotional, behavioral, and cognitive reactions to stress are referred as psychological reactions. Finally, our physiological

reactions to stress include changes in hormones (such as adrenaline), brain activity, and basic functions related to survival, such as heart rate, respiration, and blood pressure (Monroe, 2008).

Physiological Stress Reactions

GENERAL ADAPTATION SYNDROME Hans Selye (1991), a pioneer in the study of how stress affects the body, maintains that in addition to the body's specific responses to a particular stressor (e.g., sweating in response to heat), there *also is a characteristic pattern of nonspecific physiological mechanisms that are activated in response to almost any stressor*. Selye called this pattern the **general adaptation syndrome (GAS)**. *It consists of three progressive stages: the alarm reaction, the stage of resistance, and the stage of exhaustion.*

(1) ALARM REACTION *The initial emergency response to stress-provoking agents is known as the alarm reaction.* The alarm reaction consists of the body's initial mobilization of resources that produce similar symptoms regardless of the type of stressor, be it physical (e.g., lifting heavy boxes; being attacked) or psychological (e.g., taking a test; giving a speech). For this reason, people experiencing alarm reaction often complain of common symptoms such as headache, aching muscles and joints, loss of appetite, and a generally tired feeling.

During the alarm stage, the presentation of a stressor can evoke a **fight-or-flight response**. **Fight**, of course, means *confronting the stressor*, and **flight** means *fleeing from the stressor*. When the stressor is insurmountable, we flee; when it is capable of being vanquished, we often fight it. This stress response starts in the brain when a stressor is perceived; the brain then signals the rest of the body to prepare to fight or to flee. For example, blood flow to our muscles increases, we sweat, and our heart begins to quicken as does our breathing. When the stressor disappears or subsides, so too, do many of the physiological responses to stress; the body relaxes and fight-or-flight responses are no longer present.

(2) RESISTANCE If our exposure to stressful situations continues, the alarm reaction is followed by the **stage of resistance**, in which *the human organism develops an increased resistance to the stressor*. The symptoms of the alarm stage disappear, and body defenses rise above their normal level to cope with the continued stress. Thus, the goal of this stage is to return the body to normal functioning. If the stressor is effectively dealt with, then this stage becomes one of recovery and renewal; though the body's overall defenses will be compromised for a while. On the other hand, if the stress response is activated too often or turned on for too long, resources become depleted, and the body's responses to stress can actually turn against itself; the stage of exhaustion has been reached.

(3) EXHAUSTION During the **stage of exhaustion** *body defenses break down and adaptation energy runs out, making the body vulnerable to illness*. Indeed, research on stress and health confirms that chronic stress makes us more susceptible to viruses—not just colds but HIV, which causes AIDS—and diminishes wound healing as well as lowering our immunity (Glaser, 2005). Moreover, when the body is exhausted there is an increased likelihood of “diseases of adaptation” (i.e., illnesses resulting from our inability to adapt to stress), such as peptic ulcers and high blood pressure (Segerstrom & Miller, 2004).

ALLOSTATIC LOAD Some scientists believe that the fight-or-flight explanation for stress is too simplistic and that the GAS model isn't inclusive enough with regard to other processes involved in stress reactions, such as hormone production (Monroe, 2008). As such, they believe that the physiological reactions to stress are better explained by the concepts of allostasis and allostatic load (McEwen, 2005). **Allostasis** means *achieving stability through changes via a process that maintains balance among the physiological factors essential for life*, such as hormones and the immune system. **Allostatic load** refers to *cumulative changes that reflect the cost to the body of adapting repeatedly to demands (i.e., stresses) placed upon it*. This view takes into account

a time frame. Over the short run, bodily functions associated with allostasis provide *protective effects against stress*, but over the long run, stressors can have *damaging effects* and adversely affect our life by resulting in poorer health (Almeida, 2005).

For example, the hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal (HPA) axis is a network of tissues and glands in which the hypothalamus, pituitary gland, and adrenal gland are the central components. In response to stressful situations, the HPA axis releases hormones, such as cortisol, into the bloodstream (McCrorry, De Brito, & Viding, 2010). But cortisol is a toxin, and as such, sustained exposure to it can damage nerve cells, muscle, and tissue. It is believed that the body’s production of this potentially toxic hormone motivates us to reduce stress. In fact cortisol levels decrease after a stressor has been effectively dealt with (Golubchik, Mozes, Maayan, & Weizman, 2009). However, if stressors do not go away, then the presence of cortisol in the body becomes problematic. Put another way, allostasis helps us physiologically manage stress, but chronic allostatic overload means we eventually become too distressed. It is the difference between being “stressed” and “stressed out.”

Psychological Stress Reactions

Unlike the body’s stress reactions, our psychological reactions typically are shaped by learning and are heavily dependent on the way we perceive our world. Included here are a wide variety of cognitive, emotional, and behavioral responses to stress.

DEFENSE MECHANISMS Because most stressors evoke **anxiety**—*the vague, unpleasant feeling that something bad is about to happen*—common psychological reactions to stress are meant to defend us from the psychological pain associated with the perceived threat. Such reactions are called **defense mechanisms**—*automatic unconscious mechanisms that protect us from the awareness of anxiety, thereby helping us to maintain a sense of self-worth in the face of threat*. Here’s an example of one such defense mechanism, **rationalization**, in which we *justify our unacceptable behavior with “good” reasons*. After failing a test in psychology because he didn’t study, Nate thinks to himself, “Well, I didn’t want to be a Psych major anyway. You can make more money with a business degree.” Table 13–2 provides a description of additional defense mechanisms used to ward off the anxiety associated with stress. Remember, defense mechanisms are meant to fool *the self*, not other people.

Each of us relies on such mechanisms at one time or another, especially when we feel threatened; and regardless of whether the situation actually warrants it. As emergency reactions, defense mechanisms diminish our awareness of anxiety and help us maintain our sense of adequacy and self-worth in the face of threat. However, because defense mechanisms also involve self-deception and a distortion of social reality, habitual reliance on them can prove maladaptive and can stifle personal growth.

PERCEIVED LEVEL OF STRESS How people behave under stress depends partly on the level of stress experienced. Mild stress can energize us to become more alert, active, and resourceful. Medium stress tends to have a disruptive effect on our lives, especially on complex behaviors such as writing a term paper. Very high levels of stress can be extremely troublesome. Under such stress, people become less sensitive to their surroundings, easily irritated, and more apt to resort to unhealthy coping devices such as consuming too much alcohol or staying up all night watching TV. Stress also evokes a wide range of emotions, ranging from a sense of exhilaration in the face of minor, challenging stressors to the more familiar negative emotions of anxiety, anger, fear, jealousy, and discouragement. Moreover, severe stress tends to inhibit behavior and may lead to apathy and immobility, as in clinically depressed individuals who feel helpless in the face of overwhelming frustration or deprivation (Monroe & Reid, 2009). In addition, survivors of traumatic events, such as rape victims, assault, and combat, may cope well at the time of the trauma, but several months later experience a delayed emotional reaction known as posttraumatic

Table 13–2 A Few Recognized Defense Mechanisms

Defense Mechanism	Definition	Example
Repression	Excluding unacceptable ideas or feelings from consciousness.	You can't remember details of a wedding for a marriage that ended in divorce.
Denial	Not accepting (denying) the reality of a painful or embarrassing situation.	Despite the fact that you failed a drug test and lost your job, you refuse to believe that you have a drug problem.
Regression	Reverting to a form of behavior that was more appropriate at an earlier stage of development.	Upon the birth of a sibling a 10-year-old starts to crawl around on the floor and make baby sounds.
Projection	Attributing our unacceptable ideas or feelings to others.	You complain about your roommate being vain, but you're the one who is really concerned about looks and appearance.
Displacement	Redirecting threatening ideas or impulses onto less threatening objects.	Mad at your boss because you didn't get a coveted promotion at work, you go home and yell at your kids.
Sublimation	Channeling socially unacceptable urges into acceptable behaviors.	Desires to cause pain and suffering in others are expressed through writings about the zombie apocalypse.
Reaction formation	Developing conscious feelings and behaviors opposite to the unconscious, anxiety-arousing ones.	A parent who likes one of their two children better than the other, gives more positive attention to the child they're least fond of.

stress disorder. **Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)** is a severe anxiety disorder characterized by symptoms of anxiety and avoidance behavior, resulting from an unusually distressing event. Box 13–2 discusses PTSD in more detail.

BOX 13–2 Focus on Wellness: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is an anxiety disorder that can develop after exposure to a terrifying event or ordeal in which grave physical harm occurred or was threatened. The types of events that trigger PTSD usually lie outside the realm of ordinary human loss and grief. Examples are plane crashes, earthquakes, floods, assaults, rapes, hostage taking, torture, murders, and military combat.

Incidence

The most frequent cause of PTSD for Americans is automobile accidents (Blanchard & Hickling, 2003). However, the incidence of PTSD is much higher in veterans than in the general populations. Case in point, nearly 14 percent of Iraq veterans suffer from PTSD (Tanielian & Jaycox, 2008). And although nearly half of the U.S. adult population is exposed to at least one traumatic event during their lifetime, only 7 percent will develop this disorder (National Institute of Mental Health, 2012; Ozer & Weiss, 2004). In fact, we now know that many adults do successfully navigate disastrous events (Bonanno, Galea, Bucciarelli, & Vlahov, 2007). These individuals have spawned the growth of studies on resilience, which is discussed later in this chapter.

(Continued)

BOX 13-2 (Continued)**Symptoms**

The symptoms of PTSD can begin immediately after the traumatic event or 3 to 6 months later. However, it is not unusual for the symptoms to emerge only after a much longer period, which is characteristic of the chronic or delayed forms of the disorder (Horowitz, 2011). Victims involuntarily re-experience the past traumatic event in dreams, which include “flashbacks” of the event accompanied by the original emotions of fear, shock, and horror. Flashbacks are especially likely to occur when they encounter reminders of the trauma. They also experience an emotional numbness toward their everyday world. Frequently, they have trouble concentrating at work during the day and difficulty sleeping at night. Feeling alienated from others, they may also lose interest in people. Angry outbursts and irritability are also signs of PTSD. The possibility of PTSD is greatest for those who have suffered additional traumas prior to the current one (Ai, Evans-Campbell, Santangelo, & Cascio, 2006). Interestingly, scientists using brain imaging and other sophisticated techniques have found neural changes in victims of PTSD; these physiological changes may account for some of the more chronic symptoms mentioned above, such as flashbacks and blunted emotions (Rougemont-Bücking et al., 2011).

Exploration 13.2: Trauma and Stress

www.apa.org The American Psychological Association’s online public information site. It includes material on trauma, stress, and hardiness.

How Do You React to Stress?

Imagine that you just failed a test, or that your significant other just broke up with you. What do you do? Do you seek out friends for comfort and support or do you just get mad? Your answer may very well depend on your gender (Taylor, Manganello, Lee, & Rice, 2000). Here’s why: Women are more likely than men to cope with stress through social support; “tend and befriend” as it is often called (i.e., sharing emotions and stressful experiences with their friends). In contrast, stressful situations cause many men to become angry, hostile, or avoidant (Darling et al., 2007). Of note, women also react to a wider range of stressors and say they feel stress more often than men (Eaton & Graham, 2008).

REACTIONS BASED ON PERSONALITY TYPE Beauty isn’t the only thing that “is in the eye of the beholder” as stress is too. In fact, how you perceive a given stressor may make it more or less stressful (Monroe, 2008). Some people take criticism of their work as a personal attack, become highly distressed and waste a lot of energy defending themselves. Other people may take similar criticism as a challenge to improve their work, thereby experiencing less stress. Additional factors, such as the tendency to worry and emotional instability, can also affect the experience of stress—with higher levels of these two traits associated with greater stress responding (Zautra, Affleck, Tennen, Reich, & Davis, 2005). Of course, one of the most well-known differences in the perception of stress is between those with Type A and Type B behavior patterns.

People with a **Type B behavior pattern** are *patient, relaxed, and easy going*. In contrast, those with a **Type A behavior pattern** tend to be *competitive, argumentative, time-urgent, ambitious, impatient, and hostile*. They also tend to judge themselves and others by rigorous standards (Jamal, 2005). When others fail to maintain the high standards set by the Type A individual, they can be nasty. As a result, Type A people often keep themselves (and others) under more frequent and constant stress than do **Type B** individuals (Mohan, 2006). Not surprisingly, Type A behavior pattern has been linked with heart disease and other stress-related illnesses. However, it is worth noting that it is the hostility aspect of the Type A behavior pattern, and not the achievement-related components, that best predict health problems (Kent & Shapiro, 2009). What type of behavior pattern best describes you? Complete Activity 13-1 to find out.

ACTIVITY 13-1

WHAT'S YOUR BEHAVIOR PATTERN TYPE: A OR B?

INSTRUCTIONS: For each of the following statements, indicate your level of agreement by circling the appropriate number below the statement.

1. When another student is doing better than me in class, I make sure that I catch up and get a higher grade.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

2. When I have somewhere to go, I still take time to "stop and smell the roses."

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

3. When I am being driven somewhere and I know a good shortcut, I get very irritated if the driver doesn't listen to my suggestion.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

4. I find it difficult to relax because there is always something for work or school I could be doing.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

5. I only take on projects that I know I can excel at.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

6. I never do work on a vacation; after all, it wouldn't really be a vacation if I did.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

7. I don't sweat the small stuff; and it's all small stuff.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

8. I like to make friends with people who can help me do better in school or advance at work.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

9. I tune people out when what they say no longer interests me.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

10. I feel at ease most of the time.

Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

SCORING: First, reverse score Questions 2, 6, 7, and 10 (1 = 7; 2 = 6; 3 = 5 . . .). Now tally up your score for all items. The higher the score, the more likely you engage in a Type A behavior pattern. This self-assessor was designed specifically for this book, so please use caution when interpreting the results.

More recently, psychologists have begun looking into the relationship between stress and another personality characteristic, **persistence**, which refers to *continued attempts to reach a goal in the face of adversity*. An example of persistence would be not going to bed until you figure out how to solve the math problem that you've been working on for the past few hours. Persistence, while essential in modicum to happiness and success, may become detrimental when we cannot disengage from unattainable goals. We need to know when to give up a losing battle; otherwise the stress of continued failures can mount. Ultimately, excessive persistence can lead to the development of stress-related illnesses (Miller & Wrosch, 2007).

ARE YOU STRESS PROOF? Some individuals seem better able to take stress in stride; that is they demonstrate **psychological hardiness**—*the attitude that allows them to make the most of the situation*. The three trademarks of hardy individuals are feelings of *challenge* (instead of threat), *commitment* (rather than alienation), and *control* (as opposed to powerlessness). Those who do well with stress feel stimulated by change and stress (challenge); they are also intensely involved in what they are doing (commitment); and they are not usually overcome by feelings of powerlessness even in very difficult situations (control). The last issue, control, is especially noteworthy. In probing the relationship among stress, physical illness, and psychological disorders, the importance of personal control recurs again and again. Being able to acknowledge heightened stress, as well as its effects on you, while maintaining reasonable control of yourself and, if possible, the situation at hand is vital to managing stress successfully (Maddi, 2005).

A concept similar to hardiness is **resilience**, defined as *positive growth or positive adaptation following extreme adversity*. Resilience was once thought to be rare. Today, however, it is the most common trajectory observed following distress and trauma (Almedom, 2005; Bonanno et al., 2007). Of note, *resilience* is quite different from *recovery* after trauma. Resilience is characterized by a relatively *mild and short-lived disruption*, followed by a period of growth and healthy functioning. In contrast, recovery after trauma is typified by a significant disruption in normal functioning that declines only gradually (Bonanno, Papa, Lalande, Zhang, & Noll, 2005). In other words, resilient individuals bounce back from stressful experiences more quickly and effectively than others (Tugade & Fredrickson, 2004). Such people use humor, positive emotions, replacing negative thoughts with positive ones, social support, and optimism to cope with adversity (Southwick, Vythilingam, & Charney, 2005). The important message here is that individuals can and do experience personal growth during adverse times.

By taking the self-assessment in Activity 13–2, you can begin to identify your own stress-coping style.

PHEW!—MANAGING STRESS

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

13.9 Discuss strategies for reducing stress by modifying your environment.

13.10 Describe different ways to reduce stress by altering your lifestyle.

13.11 Explain how stress can promote personal growth.

Stress occurs daily; and it will continue to do so for the rest of our lives. At times, the stress will be intense while at others it will be relatively minor. But one thing is for certain, stress is unavoidable. Distress, however, *is* avoidable. Managing stress means taking charge, directing and controlling our responses to stressors, thereby modifying the overall experience of stress. While there are many other ways to cope with stress, most of them fall under two major headings: modifying your environment and altering yourself or your response.

Modifying Your Environment

Soon after his boss berated Nate, a camera he had on special order finally arrived. He quickly discovered it was not exactly what he wanted. What should he do? What would you do? You

ACTIVITY 13-2

WHAT'S YOUR STRESS STYLE?

INSTRUCTIONS: For each of the following statements, indicate your level of agreement by circling the appropriate number below the statement.

1. When I am under stress, I become angry more quickly than usual.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
2. During stressful times, my health habits (such as maintaining a good diet) decline.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
3. When I am under stress, I have difficulty concentrating.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
4. Despite being in sticky situations, I find I can resort to humor or positive thinking to help myself get through it.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
5. When I am under stress, I react with more anxiety than do other people.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
6. At times of stress, my nervous habits (such as nail biting or hair twisting) become more prevalent.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
7. Stress makes my memory worse.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
8. When I am under stress, I become easily frustrated and tense.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
9. Stress makes me cry more easily than at other times.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
10. I have a harder time learning as well as studying for exams when under stress.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
11. I find stress challenging at times and sometimes even exhilarating.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree
12. After a distressing event, I take a few quiet moments to learn about myself and my reaction.
Strongly disagree 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 Strongly agree

SCORING: *Emotional reactions to stress* are measured in Questions 1, 5, and 8. *Behavioral reactions to stress* are measured in Questions 2, 6, and 9. *Cognitive reactions to stress* are measured in Questions 3, 7, and 10. *Resilient reactions to stress* are measured in Questions

4, 11, 12. Add up your points for each reaction cluster, and write your total for that cluster in the space provided below:

Emotional reactions _____ Behavioral reactions _____
 Cognitive reactions _____ Resilient reactions _____
 Total for all reactions _____

Now decide if the scale did an accurate job measuring your typical reaction. For example, would your family or best friend concur with your scores? If you scored highest for emotional reactions, would they agree that you are emotional in stressful situations? Also, consider your total score. In some ways it indicates whether your reactions to stress are too strong or perhaps whether you are under high levels of stress. Now think about ways that you can better react or cope with stress and how you can reduce the total amount of stress that you have. Remember, this measure was designed specifically for this book. Your findings, therefore, should be used only as a tool to stimulate critical thinking about how you cope with stress.

Exploration 13.3: Stress Management

www.stressrelease.com This website contains lots of information on stress, such as the reasons for it and tips on stress management. Make sure you check out the online resources section.

could return to the store and tell the clerk a mistake had been made and then proceed to order the correct model of camera. Or you could simply accept the camera on hand and leave, making sure never to buy anything in that store again. There's yet another option: You could refuse to accept the order and, instead, choose another camera more to your liking from among those already in stock. These responses illustrate some of the basic ways to modify your environment: assertiveness, withdrawal, or compromise. They are considered *environmental* rather than personal responses to stress because they either change your environment or change the responses of others who are creating stress for you. Let's look at each of these strategies.

ASSERTIVENESS **Assertiveness** is the preferred way to manage stress whenever there is a reasonable possibility of success. Assertiveness is *the expression of one's rights and feelings in a direct way without violating the rights of others*. Such an approach consists of direct attempts at modifying the stressful situation itself. Common examples are returning a defective product to a store or speaking up in response to an unreasonable request. Assertiveness is a rational and constructive way of handling stress, which in turn tends to alleviate the stress involved.

WITHDRAWAL **Withdrawal** means *removing oneself physically or emotionally from an activity, organization, or person*. Withdrawal may be an appropriate response to stress, especially when a stressful situation cannot be successfully modified through assertiveness or compromise (discussed next). An example of withdrawal would be the consumer who actively shops at a different store after getting no satisfaction from the first store's customer service center. Withdrawal is neither good nor bad in itself. Much depends on how it is used. On the one hand, if someone habitually withdraws from stressful situations, that person may drift into a constricted lifestyle that prevents adequate adjustment or personal growth. On the other hand, the use of withdrawal as a temporary strategy may be a valuable means of coping with stress that has become overwhelming or detrimental to one's health. Some examples of temporary withdrawal are as follows: A destitute student drops out of school until they can earn more money and marital partners agree to a separation while they seek counseling. When no suitable solution is forthcoming, despite the best efforts of the people involved, a permanent withdrawal may be more appropriate.

COMPROMISE Compromise is still another adaptive response to stress and occurs when an adjustment is made by modifying opposing ideas or behaviors. In contrast to withdrawal, compromise allows us to remain in the stressful situation but in a less active way than does the assertive approach. Compromise is most likely to be used when someone holds a higher rank or authority than another or when both participants are at a standstill. The three most common types of compromise are conformity, negotiation, and substitution.

1. **Conformity** as a response to stressful situations involves a change in our behavior due to another's direct influence. Let's say Nate worked as a buyer for a large corporation that has just established a more elaborate procedure for purchasing, including much more paperwork and more signatures for approval. At the outset, he detests the change. He may comply outwardly by adopting the new procedure even though he dislikes it. Or, he could conform to the new demands because he likes his superiors and coworkers enough to accommodate the added stress. Inasmuch as jobs are not easy to get or hold, Nate may take the new procedures in stride and decide that changing his attitude is the most realistic approach, because endless strife and resentment may be more stressful than accommodation or outright assertion. The key question in any type of conformity response, however, is whether the price of the compromise is worth it.

2. **Negotiation** is a more active and promising way to achieve compromise in many stressful situations. Negotiation means that *we make mutual concessions with another person*. Often used in the public area of labor management and political disputes, negotiation has now become more widely used at the interpersonal level among coworkers, marriage partners, and friends. Negotiation is preferable to conformity wherever possible because it involves mutual accommodation among the participants.

3. **Substitution** means that *we seek alternative goals with another person*. Substitution is a way to achieve compromise with another person when negotiation or conformity is not appropriate. For instance, if a woman desires to resume her college education but has small children and cannot enroll full-time, she may decide that the best alternative is to attend part-time. In this case, a substitute means was found to achieve the same goal. At other times, it may become necessary to choose a completely different substitute goal.

Compromise itself is neither good nor bad. Much depends on the relation between the satisfaction achieved and the price paid for the reduction of stress. Habitual compromise may bring more frustration and conflict than a more assertive approach. Too many people suffer in stale jobs or conflict-ridden relationships longer than necessary because compromise has become the easy way out. A life of passive accommodation to undue stress may be more stressful than an assertive or avoidant (withdrawal) approach.

Altering Your Lifestyle

We ultimately have more control over ourselves than over our environment. As a result, we may choose to modify something about ourselves or about our behaviors as a way of better managing stress. There are many possibilities, including developing greater tolerance for stress, altering our everyday habits, learning to control distressing thoughts, acquiring problem-solving skills, and seeking social support. See Table 13-3 for a listing of the ways to reduce stress by altering your life style.

INCREASE YOUR STRESS TOLERANCE To combat stress, it is often necessary to build up a greater tolerance for it. **Stress tolerance** can be defined as *the degree of stress you can handle or how long you can put up with a demanding task without acting in an irrational or disorganized way*. Many of the competent, successful people we admire are probably under a great deal more stress than we realize; they've simply acquired a high tolerance for it. Greater tolerance for pressure—deadlines, competition, criticism from others—usually comes with greater experience and skill. People in high-pressure jobs such as entrepreneurs, police, surgeons, and

Table 13-3 Ways to Alter Your Lifestyle to Reduce Stress

- Increase your stress tolerance
- Slow down your pace of life
- Learn to control distressing thoughts
- Experience more humor
- Improve your problem-solving skills
- Learn to effectively cope with stress
- Relax, but get plenty of exercise
- Seek out social support

Remember, you can use as many of these techniques as necessary to reduce the stress in your life!

fire fighters have learned how to stay calm in the face of stress through months and years of experience on the job (Brandstätter, 2011). Our tolerance for frustration can also be improved by selecting reasonable goals and adjusting our expectations to match the realities of the immediate situation. Likewise, expecting too much of ourselves is a frequent source of frustration. Each of us is disappointed with ourselves from time to time. Rather than wallow in self-pity, it's more helpful to ask what we can do to remedy the situation and then learn from our experience for future reference.

SLOW DOWN YOUR PACE OF LIFE You might be bringing a lot of stress on yourself by rushing around and trying to accomplish too much in too little time. A fast pace of life makes you walk, talk, conduct business, and do almost everything quickly; often resulting in stress when things don't go as planned. And as a consequence, health can suffer. For instance, people who feel pressured for time have blood pressure that is much higher than others (Gupta, 2002). Some believe that technology has contributed to an increase in the pace of life all over the world (Wajcman, 2008). After all, e-mail, text messaging, Internet access (be it on a computer, tablet, or phone) and the like allow for a frenetic pace of life where we come to expect instant gratification for many of our needs. Moreover, we tend to get frustrated when technology fails us, and patience is required. Learning how to slow down, then, can serve us well. Frequently, we could also lighten the stress by means of better time management.

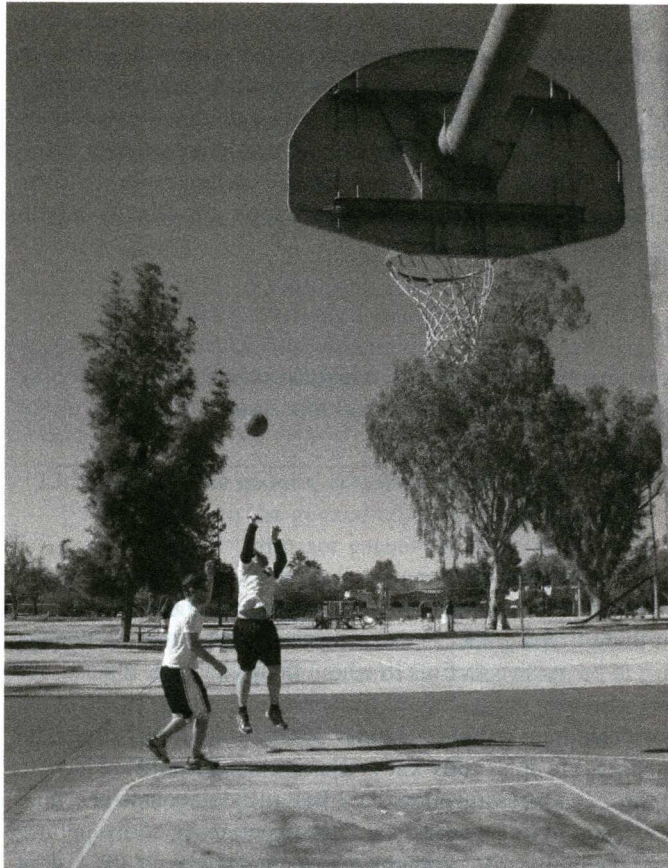
LEARN TO CONTROL DISTRESSFUL THOUGHTS Perhaps you've had the experience of glancing at the first question on a test and muttering to yourself, "If the rest of this test is this hard, I'm going to flunk it." Ironically, such negative self-monitoring interferes with your performance, making you do worse on the test. You can control distressful thoughts by using the following strategy. First, become aware of your negative, catastrophic manner of thinking. You'll probably notice how such thoughts lead you to assume the worst, such as "I'll never make it," "How did I get into this mess?" or "What the heck am I going to do now?" Second, formulate positive thoughts that are incompatible with your distressful thoughts. Some examples are "I can do it; just take it one step at a time," and "I'll keep doing my best and see how things turn out." It also helps to relax and give yourself a mental pat on the back when you've successfully managed distressing thoughts. Take a few minutes to acknowledge to yourself, "I did it; it worked. I'm pleased with the progress I'm making."

EXPERIENCE MORE HUMOR Humor is effective at reducing stress. As such, another way to manage distressing thoughts is to replace them with humorous ones (Cann & Etzel, 2008). Do not minimize your stress by making fun of distressing events; rather, take some time to enjoy humor. Read some cartoons, go to lunch with a friend and tell jokes, recall funny events from

your life. Humor is a valuable form of coping that can have physiological as well as psychological benefits for distressed individuals. When people laugh, there is a reduction in chemicals associated with stress, and the activity of the immune system frequently is enhanced. Humor can also reduce reactions to trauma and anxiety (Martin, 2001; Szabo, Ainsworth, & Danks, 2005).

IMPROVE YOUR PROBLEM-SOLVING SKILLS Most colleges and many community agencies offer a variety of workshops on topics such as assertiveness training, job-hunting skills, and stress management. Some people are wise enough to take such training as a way of bolstering their repertoire of social skills. Others seek it only after encountering problems. Once you have developed effective problem-solving skills, you can readily use **problem-focused coping**—*the individual tries to change the environment or find a solution to the problem*—to handle stressful situations. Imagine that you have a term paper due at the end of the semester, but you've never written one and you're not quite sure where to start. Going to the campus writing center (well in advance of the due date) would be an example of problem-focused coping because you are finding a solution to the problem of not knowing how to write a term paper.

LEARN TO EFFECTIVELY COPE WITH STRESS As mentioned above, one way to tackle the stressful events in your life is to use problem-focused coping. At times, however, there may be no solution to the problem you are facing. That is to say, the solution is outside of your control, such as experiencing the loss of a loved one or being in a terrible accident. For these situations, you may want to try **emotion-focused coping**, where *the individual tries to alter the emotional reaction to stress*. Each of the following is an example of this type of coping style: ignoring the problem or



Sports and hobbies are good methods for managing stress.

denying that it even exists, venting emotions to others, and trying to turn “lemons into lemonade” through positive thinking (which can help reduce negative emotions). In the past, psychologists have considered emotion-focused coping less adaptive than problem-focused coping. However, newer studies are demonstrating that emotion-focused coping is just as adaptive (Austenfeld & Stanton, 2004). In fact, positive emotions such as gratitude and love can buffer stress during crises such as airplane crashes and terror attacks (Fredrickson, Tugade, Waugh, & Larkin, 2003).

RELAX, BUT GET PLENTY OF EXERCISE Yet another way to help control stress is to make sure you have opportunities to relax, while at the same time, getting plenty of exercise (of course, it’s best to not try to do both simultaneously). Virtually all forms of exercise combat stress, including jogging, weight lifting, using the elliptical, and swimming. In addition to burning away the stress of the day, exercise releases endorphins, which are naturally occurring body chemicals that make us feel good. Moreover, the physical benefits of exercise will give you the strength you need to ward off the negative mental health effects associated with stress (Barbour, Edenfield, & Blumenthal, 2007). If it’s been a while since you’ve exercised take it slow at first to avoid injury. Of course, relaxation can also reduce stress, whether it comes in the form of listening to soothing music, getting a massage, practicing meditation, engaging in deep breathing, or reading a book. Such techniques work for teens and adults alike (Burns, Lee, & Brown, 2011). So remember, to reduce stress you can either get moving or you can stay still. The choice is yours.

SEEK OUT SOCIAL SUPPORT Another means for finding help is simply to turn to friends. Numerous studies have shown that we manage stress and trauma more successfully when we have the support of a spouse, close friend, or support group (Scarpa, Haden, & Hurley, 2006). Having access to friends and support groups may help to alleviate stress in several ways. First, close relationships provide the opportunity to share painful feelings, which if kept to ourselves become more burdensome. Second, friends provide emotional support through their expressions of concern and affection. Third, the understanding and reassurance of our friends may bolster our self-esteem throughout the low periods of our lives. Fourth, concerned friends and support groups may provide information and advice that may help us to reach more effective solutions to our problems. This is especially true of support groups that are oriented to a particular problem, such as the death of a spouse. Fifth, friends can enhance positive experiences in our lives (Moritsugu, Wong, & Duffy, 2010). Remember, though, we don’t have to turn to friends only in times of trouble; friends can enhance the experience of joy, too.

Exploration 13.4: Stress and Well-being

www.stress.org The site for the American Institute of Stress, which is committed to developing a better understanding of how to tap into the vast innate potential that resides in each of us for preventing disease and promoting health.

Using Stress for Personal Growth

How we choose to alter our lifestyle or modify our environment is up to us. Stress management, like stress itself, is a personal matter. Each of us faces a different combination of stressful events at work and at home. The important thing to remember is that we can do something to manage stress more effectively. We don’t have to be passive victims to whom things happen. Instead, we can look at ourselves as active agents who take charge of our lives. No matter how stressful the situation, there’s always something we can do to reduce the stress. Keep in mind that stress can be a valuable means of self-understanding. We don’t fully know what we can do until we have to do it. Each time we successfully get through a stressful situation, like a difficult course at school or a trying problem in our love life, we gain in self-confidence. Even experiences of disappointment and failure are sometimes blessings in disguise. Perhaps we weren’t ready for the task at

hand, or we were pursuing the wrong goals. Sometimes, a minor failure today can save us from a bigger let down later on. Finally, we can make stress work for us. Remember that stress is not synonymous with distress or stressed out. Too little stress and we become bored and lazy. Too much and we become tense, make mistakes, and get sick more easily. To get the most out of life, each of us needs to find our optimal level of stress and the types of stress we handle best. Properly managed, stress gives zest to life. A stressful situation can challenge us to try harder, evoking our best and bringing personal growth.

Chapter Summary

OH NO!—UNDERSTANDING STRESS

13.1 Explain the concept of stress.

Stress is defined as the pattern of specific and non-specific responses an organism makes to stimulus events that disturb its equilibrium and tax its ability to cope. However, stress may have beneficial as well as harmful effects, depending on the person and the situation

13.2 Identify Selye's four variations of stress.

Whereas distress refers to events that produce a harmful effect, eustress refers to events that are stimulating, motivational, or result in personal growth. Hyperstress, or excessive stress, stretches the limits of our adaptability. In contrast, hypostress, or insufficient stress, results from a lack of stimulation.

13.3 Describe the major causes of stress.

The major causes of stress are life changes, daily hassles, catastrophic events, and economic and social conditions.

13.4 Discuss the unique aspects of college that can be stressful

New social norms and customs, different peer groups, work overload, a change in lifestyle, as well as more demands placed on their time and self-control characterize college-related stress.

YIKES!—REACTIONS TO STRESS

13.5 Explain the general adaptation syndrome

According to the general adaptation syndrome, the presence of a stressor causes an alarm reaction in which the body's defenses are mobilized. If the stress continues, the body attempts to adapt to the stress (i.e., the resistance stage), but it will eventually succumb to the negative effects of stress if it lasts too long (i.e., the exhaustion stage).

13.6 Explain the connection between stress and defense mechanisms

In an effort to ward off anxiety associated with stressful events, we use defense mechanisms to deceive ourselves and distort reality.

13.7 Discuss how reactions to stress can differ

Each of us experiences the same stressful situations somewhat differently, depending on our particular personality and coping strategies. In response to stress, women, more so than men, are likely to engage in a "tend and befriend" style of coping. Those with a Type A behavior pattern experience more stress than those with a Type B behavior pattern. Remember, persistence can become detrimental when we cannot disengage from unattainable goals.

13.8 Compare psychological hardiness and resilience

Those who are psychologically hardy possess an attitude that allows them to make the most out of any situation, even those that are bad. In contrast, resilience refers to positive growth or positive adaptation following extreme adversity.

PHEW!—MANAGING STRESS

13.9 Discuss strategies for reducing stress by modifying your environment.

The three main ways of modifying the situational sources of stress are assertiveness, the preferred response; withdrawal, when appropriate; and compromise, especially negotiation, because it involves mutual accommodation among participants.

13.10 Describe different ways to reduce stress by altering your lifestyle.

Alleviating stress by altering our lifestyle includes building greater stress tolerance, changing our pace of life, controlling distressful thoughts, experiencing humor, relaxing and exercising, acquiring problem-solving and coping skills, and seeking out emotional support.

13.11 Explain how stress can promote personal growth.

Remember that stress is not synonymous with distress. Instead, to get the most out of life, each of us needs to find our optimal level of stress and use it to our advantage. A stressful situation can challenge us to try harder, evoking our best and bringing about personal growth.

Self-Test

- Lucy worked in a chocolate factory on an assembly line. Her job was to identify misshapen truffles and remove them from the conveyor belt. At first she liked the job, but after a while the job became extremely boring. Lucy's job is most likely to cause her which of the following types of stress?
 - hypostress
 - eustress
 - hyperstress
 - distress
- While driving home on a country road at night, a deer jumped out in front of Thomas' car. Thomas driver swerved to miss the deer. Luckily, his quick reactions in combination with a good set of brakes resulted in him missing the deer by inches. At first Thomas was freaked out by the experience, but after a few hours he was back to normal. What type of stress did Thomas experience?
 - chronic stress
 - hypostress
 - distress
 - acute stress
- About a year ago Del lost his \$100,000 job when the company he worked for went bankrupt. He quickly went through his life savings in order to pay his oldest daughter's college tuition and the cost of caring for his parents in a nursing home. Del can't sell his home because he owes more money to the bank than the house is worth. It would be another six months before Del landed a job. Based on the above information, and prior to gaining employment, Del appears to be in a state of _____.
 - chronic stress
 - acute stress
 - eustress
 - hypostress
- As a boss, Jeff left much to be desired. He was constantly yelling his employees, had no patience when they needed help, and felt that they were always behind in their work (even when they were not). Jeff constantly reminded his employees that they needed to "beat out" their competitors in terms of company growth and profit. What type of personality does Jeff most likely possess?
 - Type F
 - Type B
 - Type A
 - Type Z
- For the past 5 years, on April 16 Aisha relives the last moments she spent with her dying mother: She cries and becomes overwhelmed with grief. Aisha is experiencing:
 - an anniversary reaction
 - reactive attachment
 - the General Adaptation Syndrome
 - alarm reaction
- Which of the following is not part of the General Adaptation Syndrome?
 - alarm reaction
 - resistance
 - persistence
 - exhaustion
- Srikar had a huge organic chemistry exam coming up. Even though he was stressed, Srikar was able to study hard for the exam. According to Selye, Srikar's behavior is an example of a:
 - a "fight" response
 - a "flight" response
 - persistence
 - allostatic load
- Arlene was stressed. Her roommate left her clothes all over their dorm room, stayed up till all hours of the night, and kept eating her stash of Oreo cookies. To help her deal with her roommate issues, Arlene talked about the emotional consequence what was going on with her best friend. Arlene engaged in:
 - problem-focused coping
 - sublimation
 - reaction formation
 - emotion-focused coping
- A desirable way of handling stress that involves mutual accommodation among all the participants is:
 - denial
 - negotiation
 - conformity
 - withdrawal
- Having a high degree of _____ is essential for people who face stressful situations on a daily basis.
 - stress tolerance
 - defense mechanisms
 - allostatic load
 - alarm reaction

Exercises

- Take an inventory of your stress.* List the most common ways you manage stress. When you think back over the past six months, did you handle stress well? If not, why not? Do you think that if you changed how you react to stress, you would manage stress better?
- Daily hassles.* Jot down some of the little things in everyday life that annoy or distress you, for example, a friend who is perpetually late or being stuck in traffic. Which hassles bother you the most? Select two or three of them and suggest specific ways you could make them less troublesome.

3. *Defense mechanisms.* Think of a particular situation in which you reacted defensively. Which defense mechanism(s) did you rely on? How well did you cope with this situation? If you face a similar situation in the future, would you handle it differently? How so?
4. *Describe your most stressful experience.* In a page or so, tell what made the incident or experience so stressful and how you coped with it. How well did your coping mechanisms work in this situation?
5. *Managing stress assertively.* Recall a stressful situation that you wished you had handled in a more assertive manner. How did you react in this situation? What happened as a result? If you're faced with a similar situation in the future, how could you handle it more assertively?

Questions for Self-Reflection

1. Can you recall several instances when stress had a beneficial effect?
2. Which situations do you find most distressing?
3. What are some of the "little things" that get you down?
4. Would you agree that having some control over your work activities makes them less stressful?
5. How can you tell when you're under a lot of stress?
6. When you become defensive, how do you behave?
7. Are you inclined to abuse alcohol or drugs when under stress?
8. What are some ways you've modified your environment to decrease stress?
9. Have you tried altering your lifestyle as a way of alleviating stress?
10. Do you believe that you have the traits of hardiness and resilience?