

Introduction

Systematic Stress Management® is a structured program designed to prevent and minimize the damaging effects of stress. The techniques presented are easy to learn and can be included in normal day to day activities. The *system* to **Systematic Stress Management** is made up of five simple steps:

- **Capture** an increased understanding of stress theory as we know it today. This knowledge is key to making the remaining steps worthwhile.
- **Remember** to pay attention to distress signals and symptoms.
- **Identify** personal stressors. This takes a high level of awareness plus honesty, and leads to the responsible and effective management of stress.
- **Seek** out tools and skills that work to prevent, eliminate, and recover from distress.
- **Practice** all of the above steps regularly in order to become and remain stress-fit.

“Stress is essentially reflected by the rate of all the wear and tear caused by life... although we cannot avoid stress as long as we live, we can learn a great deal about how to keep its damaging side-effects, ‘distress’, to a minimum.”

Hans Selye, M.D.

Stress Definition and Theory

The definition of stress management comes to us from the work of Hans Selye, M.D. He is considered a pioneer in medicine and stress research. *Stress*, according to Selye is, “the non-specific response of the body to any demand.” It does not matter whether or not it is caused by pleasant or unpleasant things. It does not matter whether or not it results in good or bad things. Stress is the automatic state that results when the body is told to make changes in order to adapt to any demand. This response is driven by hormones flowing throughout the human body. These hormones act like a conductor in an orchestra and tell the different systems of the body what to do. This is like the conductor telling what each group of instruments should do as they play the same song all together. So far, stress looks to be a very nice gift from Mother Nature.



Stress can be very positive as seen in Diagram A. The **Stress and Productivity Curve** demonstrates a theory that there is a direct link between stress and human productivity. As shown in the diagram, without stress, our productivity is low. With high levels of stress, again productivity is low. The key to optimal productivity seems to be moderate levels of stress. You might agree that your personal productivity leads to your satisfaction in life. This makes stress vital to us.

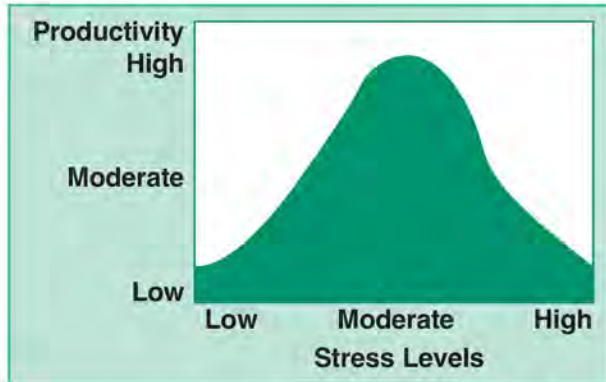
So what is the concern we all have about stress? Selye tells us, “The statement of, *he is under stress*, is just as meaningless as the expression, *he is running a temperature*.” What we actually mean by such phrases is an *excess* of stress or of body temperature. The stress of concern is the stress of excess.

Understanding Stress

There are two major categories of stress:

- *Eustress* = Pleasant or curative stress
- *Distress* = Unpleasant or disease-producing stress

Diagram A



Stress & Productivity Curve

The Stress Quotient and Deviation

In addition to the total amount of stress in the body being too much, one must also be aware of the amount of stress being experienced by part or parts of the body, in comparison to the total body. Selye names this concept **The Stress Quotient**:

**Local Stress in Any One Part = Greater =
You Need Diversion**

**Total Stress in The Body = Greater =
You Must Rest**

The message to receive from **The Stress Quotient** is this. When a particular body part has more stress put upon it than the whole body, Selye suggests what is called *diversion*. Diversion is like taking a detour or making a distraction for the mind, or the body part, that is experiencing too much stress at the moment. Or, you might increase the total general stress response for the whole body to balance the quotient.

However, when the total body is experiencing too much stress or distress, the message is total rest. It becomes important that we each learn how to pay attention to the stress experienced by individual body parts and to the body in general. This can be done by learning distress signals and symptoms.