

Medicine beyond frontiers

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Mindfulness and Stress Management

Tanphaichitr K.
Washington University,
St. Louis,
Missouri, U.S.A.

Everyone faces stress everyday. Stress can affect a person's life physically or mentally. Physically, stress may represent reactions of the body to forces of a deleterious nature, infections, and various abnormal states that tend to disturb its normal physiologic equilibrium (homeostasis). Mentally or psychologically, stress represents a physical or psychological stimulus such as very high heat, public criticism, or another noxious agent or experience, which, when impinging upon an individual, produces psychological strain or disequilibrium. In life, they can be events or experiences that produce severe strain, e.g., failure on the job, marital separation, loss of a loved one or object. Stress has been known to be the underlying factor of many illnesses, e.g., heart attack, stroke, peptic ulcer disease, nervous breakdown, and depression. Stressful life events, including wished-for events like promotion, marriage, or having a baby could be major stressors (i.e., the demands made on one's mental and physical resources), giving rise to various stress values (on a scale up to 100), e.g., death of partner (100), divorce (73), separation (65), imprisonment (63), marriage (50), loss of job (47), marital reconciliation (45), retirement (45), pregnancy (40), sexual problem (39), changing jobs (36), taking on a large mortgage (31), moving (23). Stresses which human beings of our time are facing, therefore, are frequently related to love, relationship, family, health, financial status, work or school, social life, living environment, and even time-constraint, rather than from physical threats or life-threatening situations, like our own early ancestors or animals being threatened by the predators to become their preys.