

COMBATING TECHNOSTRESS THROUGH YOGA

By Yogacharya Dr ANANDA BALAYOGI BHAVANANI

M.B.B.S, A.D.Y, D.S.M, D.P.C, P.G.D.F.H, P.G.D.Y, F.I.A.Y

Chairman: International Centre for Yoga Education and Research at Ananda Ashram, Pondicherry, South India. www.icyer.com

INTRODUCTION:

Modern man faces stress everywhere and caught in its claws in a vicious spiral knows not how to extricate himself. His life has become a 'rat-race' and his body, emotions and mind are all jangled by the physiological and psychological responses of his 'self' to the stress he faces in his life at every stage of existence. None are spared the whirlpool-like pull of this web. From tiny tots facing innumerable 'tests' in school, corporate businessmen struggling to balance their accounts at work, farmers toiling for their daily bread, soldiers guarding the frontiers, news-reporters breaking themselves in order to make their 'dead-line's - none is spared this whirlpool of stress and no one knows how to escape.

The words tension, pressure and stress are virtually synonymous terms that are used to describe the huge expenditure of nerve energy that modern conditions or situations of life demand from all of us. This can easily be seen when a busy doctor, lawyer, businessman or politician has to meet a large number of persons, face differing problems and find out immediate solutions. The human body is made to operate without a break, with the result that our nervous system is perpetually under high tension and our neuro-muscular system becomes habitually tense. All of this then ultimately leads to mental, emotional and physical fatigue along with neuro-endocrine burnout. One of the most common statements heard nowadays is "I am too tired to even think"!

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is the natural ability that the human system has developed over millennia in order to withstand strain. The ability to withstand stress differs from one individual to another. Every individual has a threshold of stress up to which, they can bear stress and cope with the demands of their external environment. Type of personality, individual temperament and emotional stability determine this stress threshold. When external stress exceeds the threshold of the individual, then they succumb to overstress. In such a scenario, the body and mind of that person try to reduce, avoid or withdraw from that stress-creating

situation. However, if the excessive stress persists and/ or increases, the body and mind suffer. This in turn leads to physical maladies and mental pathologies. Insomnia, asthma, coronary troubles, hypertension, cancer, sexual inadequacies, diabetes, mental breakdown, neurotic behaviour are only a few of the numerous disorders that result from excessive stress.

Caught in this situation, people try to seek release from such overstress by resorting to handy remedies such as sleeping pills, alcohol, smoking, absenteeism, and emotional withdrawal. None of these are answers to the problem and to the contrary start to create more stress and problems for such a person.

Stress may be defined as the "response pattern of an organism to prepare itself for fight or flight". The fight or flight response relieves the effects of stress and thus is a normal phenomenon termed 'eustress'. However, modern man has no means to 'fight or flee' the real or imagined stressors and ends up in "distress" leading to psycho-somatic disorders of various kinds.

Recent research has supported the importance of the role of stress or rather 'distress' in premature aging and the etiology of disease. It is postulated that frequent stressful experiences lead to the failure of the homeostatic, self-regulating mechanisms of the organism leading to disease, premature aging and early or sudden death. Stress has also been shown to weaken the immune system and make us more vulnerable to infection and other debilitating illness.

We must realise that it is '**our attitude**' towards events and even towards stress itself that causes the major part of the problem. Relaxation and exercise can form part of stress management but rarely are they the whole answer as they do not deal with what causes us to become tense in the first place. We need to find out where the problem lies - whether in our attitude or behaviour or a combination of both and then develop the necessary skills to overcome it. For example if you always give in to others you will end up feeling like a doormat. If you practice relaxation you may end up as a relaxed doormat rather than a tense one but everybody will continue to walk over you. And now as you are not showing signs of stress or tension, they will walk over you with an easier conscience. Thus we must learn to analyze what is causing the stress and develop the necessary skills to combat it. Great motivation, commitment and practice are required to do this to the level necessary.

Yoga is a spiritual science for the integrated and holistic development of our physical, mental as well as moral-spiritual aspects. The philosophy of Yoga is practical and definitely applicable in our day-to-day living. Yoga has been documented to produce desirable physiological changes and recent advances in the field of research have shown that it also has sound scientific basis.

The Yogic concept of health and disease enables us to understand that the cause of physical disorders stems from the seed in the mind and beyond. **Adi** is the cause and **Vyadhi** only the effect in the Yogic scheme of things. By paying careful attention to personal history, one can nearly always trace the origins of psychosomatic disease back to patterns of emotional pressures.

PHASES OF PSYCHOSOMATIC DISEASES:

From the Yogic viewpoint of disease it can be seen that psychosomatic diseases appear to progress through four distinct phases:

1. **Psychic Phase:** This phase is marked by mild but persistent psychological and behavioral symptoms of stress, such as irritability, disturbed sleep and other minor symptoms.
2. **Psychosomatic Phase:** If the stress continues there is an increase in symptoms, along with the beginnings of generalized physiological symptoms such as occasional hypertension and tremors.
3. **Somatic Phase:** This phase is marked by increased function of the organs, particularly the target, or involved organ. At this stage one begins to identify the beginnings of a disease state.
4. **Organic Phase:** This phase is marked by the full involvement of a so-called disease state, with physiological changes such as an ulcerated stomach or chronic hypertension, becoming manifest in their totality.

Often, however, the early stages of the disease process are overlooked and the final stage is seen as an entity unto itself, having little relationship to one's living habits and patterns. This is because modern medicine only looks at the human being as being the physical being and neglects the effects of the Pancha Kosha and Tri Sharira on health and disease.

There are many examples of psychosomatic diseases, which are directly related to stress and technostress. They include common colds, ulcers, headaches, back pains, chest pains, spastic colons, constipation and diarrhea. The list is almost endless. We don't know why one organ system is affected by stress and not another. Certainly, genetic factors, diet and conditioned learning are all involved, but the key lies in one's mental structures. In other words, what is increasingly clear is that stress is at the root of all psychosomatic disease regardless of the organ system involved.

The art and science of Yoga has infinite possibilities to provide answers to most problems of modern man. However modern man often misunderstands the science of Yoga and wants it to be his miracle pill. A pill that he takes only once, and wants all his problems to vanish into thin air!

Yoga is a wholistic science and must be learnt and practiced with such a view in mind. The dedicated practice of Yoga as a way of life is no doubt a panacea for problems related to stress and stress-induced disorders.

TECHNOSTRESS:

With increasing levels of automation in the workplace, people often grapple with unrecognized concerns over how that technology is impacting their jobs. More and more information is available in a wider variety of formats. Today's users expect more services and a greater level of service. Meanwhile this technology raises larger problematic issues. This has given rise to technological stress or "Technostress".

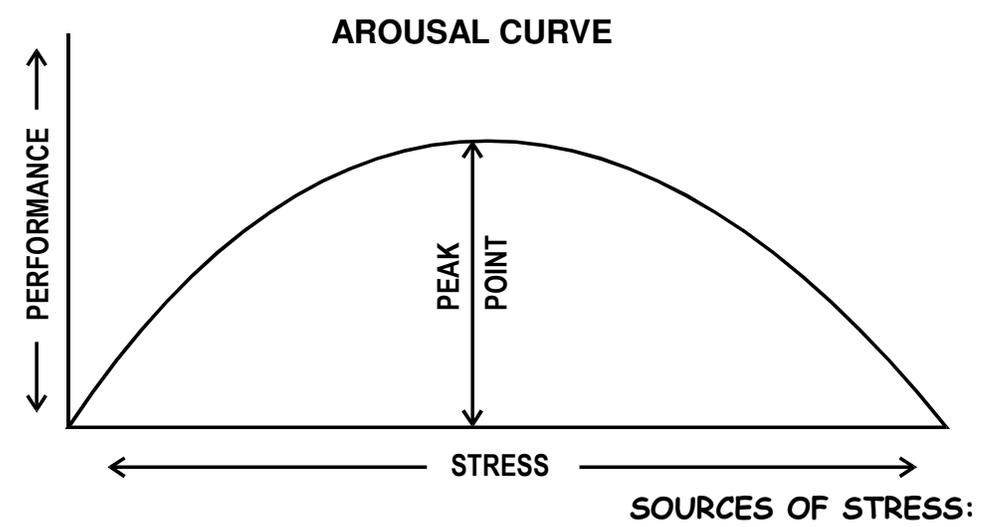
Technostress has been defined by Craig Brod in his book "Technostress: The Human Cost of the Computer Revolution as "A modern disease of adaptation caused by an inability to cope with the new computer technologies in a healthy manner". He further states that this manifests itself in two distinct ways: in the struggle to accept computer technology, and in the more specialized form of over identification with computer technology.

He further elaborates the manifest symptoms of technostress as follows: "The primary symptom of those who are ambivalent, reluctant, or fearful of computers is anxiety. This anxiety is expressed in many ways: irritability, headaches, nightmares, and resistance to learning about the computer or outright rejection of the technology. Technoanxiety most commonly afflicts those who feel pressured by employers, peers, or the general culture to accept and use computers".

PHYSIOLOGY OF STRESS:

"Stress is an altered state of body and mind from normal homeostatic conditions that is caused due to extrinsic or intrinsic factors"

This disturbance is due to unusual burden on the organism leading to a state of tension and pressure which threatens to damage and impair the functioning capacity of the organism. He also stressed the point that all stress is not bad. Stress has both a positive as well as the negative dimension. The positive dimension of stress brings out creativity and the best in us by goal setting and improved performance via the optimal arousal of body and mind. On the other hand, the negative dimension of stress through exaggerated arousal of the body and mind leads to, decreased performance and ill health. It is like a parabola curve, which initially leads to betterment of performance but later when more and more stress occurs, performance suffers drastically. (see fig.)



We are affected by stress from all directions. It may be from the work place, the home, family members or from within the person themselves. The sources of stress can be classified as those due to the external environment and those due to the internal environment of the person themselves.

EXTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

1. Physical environment: climatic changes, natural and man-made disasters
2. Family environment: stress at home, cruel husbands, nagging wives, irritating relatives and ill-behaved children
3. Work environment: stressful job situations such as defense personnel, anesthesiologists, exploitation at work and laziness and underachievement.
4. Societal environment: fast life & over-activity, negative social behaviour & wrong actions and disharmony in the society
5. Conflict between intellect & emotions: lack of harmony between one's thought, word and deed leading to inner turmoil
6. Sudden / severe / cumulative changes anywhere

INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT

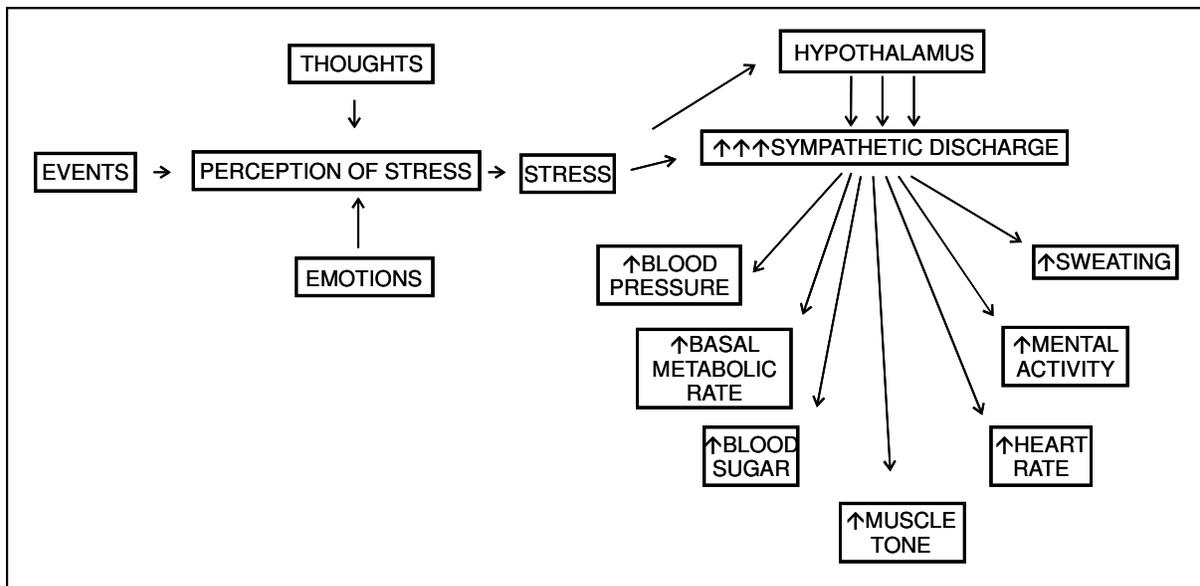
1. Life events: death of a close friend or family member, birth of a new family member, big fat Indian weddings, messy divorces and misunderstanding in the family.
2. Loss of an expected promotion

3. Biological factors: capacity of the system to withstand and combat stress, stress threshold of the person and the type of individual personality.
4. Psychological factors: unbalanced outer development with no parallel inner development; overindulgence & immorality; negative emotions such as anger, hate, jealousy, ego, grief, self-doubt; over-ambition, inflated goals & greed; excessive desire and excessive attachment.
5. Physiological states: pregnancy, post partum period and puberty
6. Pathological states: disorders and diseases that decrease the ability to combat stress leading to manifest illness
7. Pharmacological factors: some drugs decrease the ability to combat stress
8. Becoming a millionaire overnight

STRESS RESPONSE:

Prof Hans Selye's model of stress reaction in the body, known as the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) has three phases: 1) Alarm Reaction, 2) Resistance, and 3) Exhaustion.

ALARM REACTION: This is the immediate effect of stress on the body. In this the person responds to the perceived or real stress with either 'fight or flight'. Stress hormones such as adrenaline, nor adrenaline, cortisol, glucagon and aldosterone secreted and various physiological changes occur in the body to prepare us to respond to the stress.



RESISTANCE: In this phase the body seems to return to normal but if the stress persists, the resources of the body get depleted. Externally the problem is not visible and we end up thinking that all is well with our system.

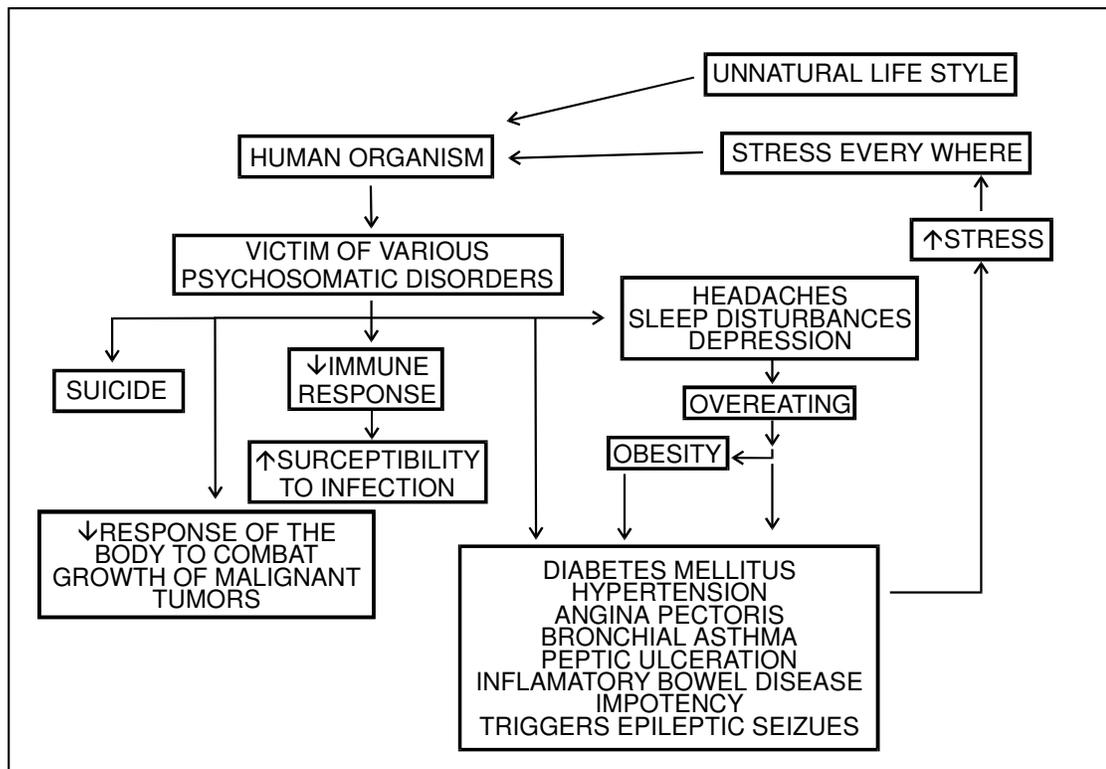
EXHAUSTION: Chronic stress places a constant load on these Neuro-endocrine adaptive mechanisms leading to distortion in the homeostatic mechanism, thus weakening the response of the organism to environmental challenges which in turn leads to ill health and disease. The disorders that we associate with stress start to manifest in this phase.

MANIFESTATIONS OF CHRONIC STRESS:

Stress or rather "distress" manifests not only in our physical body but also in the other Koshas (sheaths or bodies of man) in various ways.

Annamaya Kosha:

- Neuro - endocrine imbalances. e.g. diabetes mellitus,
- Peptic ulcer, irritable bowel syndrome, essential hypertension, coronary artery disease, obstructive lung diseases and tension headaches.



Pranamaya Kosha

- Emotional disturbances. e.g. road rage, mood fluctuations
- Breathing difficulties. e.g. bronchial asthma, COPD
- Energy imbalances. e.g. lethargy and the feeling of being "down in the dumps."

Manomaya Kosha

- Mental problems and various psychiatric disorders such as depression, schizophrenia, hysteria, bulimia, mania, anxiety neuroses.
- Decreased quality of life
- Increased amount of worries

It is worthwhile to remember the words of Hans Selye who rightly said, "It's not stress that kills us, it is our reaction to it".

ROLE OF YOGA IN PREVENTING AND MANAGING TECHNOSTRESS

Yoga is a wholistic science of life, which deals with physical, mental, emotional and spiritual health. Various aspects of Yoga help in the prevention and management of stress of all types including technostress.

1. YOGIC CONCEPTS:

Various *Yogic* concepts have guided man towards shaping his life and the interpersonal relationships in his social life.

- a. ***Vasudeiva Kudumbakam*** - The whole world is one family. This is an excellent concept which helps one to understand that division on the basis of class, creed, religion and geographical distribution are all 'man made' obstructions towards oneness. One can then look upon all as his own and can bond with everyone irrespective of any barrier.
- b. ***Pancha Kosha*** - The concept of our five sheaths or bodies helps us to understand how all our actions, emotions and even thoughts can influence our surroundings and that "No man is an island". The concept of "Nara" or psychic disassociation helps us to be aware of why things happen to us and others in our daily life.
- c. ***Chaturvidha Purusharthas*** - The four legitimate goals of life tell us how we can set legitimate goals in this life and work towards attaining them in the right way, following our *dharma* to attain *Artha* (material prosperity), *Kama* (emotional prosperity) and finally the attainment to the real goal of our life, *Moksha* (spiritual prosperity).

- d. **Chatur Ashramas** - This concept of the four different stages in life, helps us to know how, what and when to perform the various activities in our life. **Brahmacharya** is the period from birth till 27 years and is the period for study, conserving the creative impulse and channeling it towards elevating spiritual pursuits. **Grahashta** is the period of responsibility, spanning the period from 27 - 54 years in which we learn to care about others in the family and the social network, fulfilling our *dharma* towards both the young and the old. **Vanaprastha** or retirement is the period after 54 years when one's life can be played over again and again in the mind with a sense of fulfillment and satisfaction having not to worry about anything at all. **Sanyasa** is the period of life when after performing our duties to the best of our ability for 81 years and after having attained perfection in life we renounce everything for the divine.
- e. **Pancha Klesha:** *Avidya* (ignorance), *Asmita* (ego), *Raaga* (attraction), *Dweshha* (repulsion) and *Abinivesha* (urge to live at any cost) are the five *Kleshas* or mental afflictions with which we are born into this human life. Through Yoga we can understand how these control our life and see their effects on our behaviour. These '*Kleshas*' hinder our personal and social life and must be destroyed through the practice of **Patanjali's Kriya Yoga**, which consists of *Tapas*, *Swadyaya* and *Ishwar Pranidhana* (*Atman Prasadhanam*).
- f. **Nishkama Karma:** Selfless action and the performance of our duty without any motive, are qualities extolled by the *Bhagavad Gita* which is one of the main *Yogic* texts. Performing one's duty for the sake of the duty itself and not with any other motive helps us to develop detachment (*Vairagya*) which is a quality vital for a good life.
- g. **Karmasu Koushalam:** 'Skill in action' is Yoga says Yogeshwar Krishna in the *Bhagavad Gita*. 'To do our best and leave the rest' is how Pujya Swamiji Gitananda Giri Guru Maharaj used to describe the best way of life. Even if we don't practice the other aspects of *Yoga*, we can be 'living' *Yoga*, by performing all our duties skill fully and to the best of our ability. A great artist, doctor, worker, singer or sportsman can be a Yogi by performing doing their duty to perfection and without care for the rewards of the action, even if they do not practice any *asana*, *Pranayama* etc.
- h. **Samatvam:** 'Yoga is equanimity ' says the *Bhagavad Gita*. Development of a complete personality who is neither affected by praise nor blame through development of *Vairagya* (detachment) leads to the state of "*Stitha Prajnd*" or "*Sama Bhava*". This is a state of mind which is equally predisposed to all that happens, be it good or bad. Such a human is a boon to society and a pleasure to live and work with.

- i. **Vairagya:** The concept of *Vairagya* (detachment) when understood and cultivated makes us dispassionate to the *Dwandhwa* (the pairs of opposites) such as praise-blame, hot-cold or pleasant-unpleasant.
- j. **Yoga as a "way of life":** The regular practice of Yoga as a 'way of Life' helps to reduce the levels of physical, mental and emotional stress. This *Yogic* 'way of life' lays emphasis on right thought, right action, right reaction and right attitude.

2. HATHA YOGA AND JNANA YOGA

Yogic Asanas, Pranayamas and *Jnana Yoga Kriyas*, work on the various *Koshas* of our body and clear up all the subconscious 'quirks' in our brain from the billions of years of evolution from animal to the human state. An understanding of these 'quirks' helps us to understand our reaction to various situations and helps to prevent our 'stress response' to them. 'Stress Relievers' from *Hatha Yoga* and *Jnana Yoga* are of immense benefit in relieving the pent up emotions and the reaction to the stressful situation.

3. YAMA AND NIYAMA

The *Pancha Yama* and *Pancha Niyama* provide a strong moral and ethical foundation for our personal and social life. They guide our attitudes with regard to the right and wrong in our life and in relation to our self, our family unit and the entire social system. These changes in our attitude and behaviour will go a long way in helping to prevent the very causes of stress in our life.

<i>Ahimsa</i>	-	Non - Violence
<i>Satya</i>	-	Truthfulness
<i>Asteya</i>	-	Non-Stealing
<i>Brahmacharya</i>	-	Proper Channeling of the Creative Impulse
<i>Aparigraha</i>	-	Non - Coveted-Ness

These are the "DO NOT'S" in a *Yoga Sadhaka's* life. Do not kill, do not be untruthful, do not steal, do not waste your god given creativity and do not covet that which does not belong to you. These guide us to say a big "NO" to our lower self and the lower impulses of violence etc. When we apply these to our life we can definitely have better personal and social relationships as social beings.

<i>Soucha</i>	-	cleanliness
<i>Santhosha</i>	-	contentment

- Tapas* - discipline
- Swadyaya* - study of one's-self
- Ishwar Pranidhana* - reverential gratitude towards the Divine Self

The *Pancha Niyamas* guide us with "DO'S" - do be clean, do be contented, do be disciplined, do self - study (introspection) and do be thankful to the divine for all of his blessings. They help us to say a big "YES" to our higher self and the higher impulses. Definitely a person with such qualities is a God-send to humanity.

Even when we are unable to live the *Yama* and *Niyama* completely, even the attempt by us to do so will bear fruit and make each one of us a better person and help us to be of value to those around us and a valuable person to live with in our family and society. These are values which need to be introduced to the youth in order to make them aware and conscious of these wonderful concepts of daily living which are qualities to be imbibed with joy and not learnt with fear or compulsion.

4. IMPORTANCE OF THE RIGHT ATTITUDE

"To have the will to change that which can be changed, the strength to accept that which can not be changed, and the wisdom to know the difference" is the attitude which needs to be cultivated. An attitude of letting go the worries, the problems and a greater understanding of our mental process helps to create a harmony in our body, mind whose disharmony is the main cause of '*Aadi - Vyadhi* or the psychosomatic disorders.

5. PRANAYAMA

The practice of Pranayama helps to regulate our emotions and stabilize the mind, which is said to be as restless as a 'drunken monkey bitten by a scorpion'. Animals that breathe slowly are seen to be of less excitable nature than those who breathe rapidly and a similar observation holds true for humans. Even when we get angry, we can experience that our breathing becomes rapid and it is slower when we are cool and relaxed. Thus the slow, rhythmic and controlled breathing in *Pranayamas* leads to the emotional control seen in many *Yoga Sadhakas*.

6. PRATYAHARA

Pratyahara Kriyas help to distance our self from the sensory objects, attraction to whom is said to be the initial step in the causation of stress in man. Here, we

withdraw our self from the senses and then are not affected by them. We realize how false the senses are in reality, and then do not get either attracted to them nor feel any revulsion towards them.

7. DHARANA AND DHYANA

Dharana and *Dhyana*, help to focus our mind on the right ideals and pursue our goals in a spirit of "*Nishkama karma*" (selfless action) and "*Karmasu Kouशलam*" (skillful actions). Development of clarity of thought appears when we are a '*Stitha Prajna*' (person of mental balance) and have '*Sama Bhavd*' (equal reaction to the opposites). Proper sleep patterns and a subjective feeling of wellness are produced by *Yoga* and this in turn leads to better human relationships, proper attitudes, increased production at work and the greater good for the individual, family, nation and ultimately for the whole of humanity.

8. BHAKTI YOGA

Bhakti Yoga, enables us to realise the greatness of the Divine and understand our puniness as compared to the power of the Divine or nature. We realize that we are but 'puppets on a string' following his commands on the stage of the world and then perform our activities with the intention of them being an offering to the divine and gratefully receive HIS blessings.

9. NADA YOGA AND MANTRA YOGA

Music and the chanting of Mantras with devotion helps to elevate the mind into a higher plane where the individual transcends their problems and can look at things in the right perspective. A detached view of our life can help us to see our self in the true reality. The divine manifests in various ways and the loss of our individual ego enable us to see the divine Self that is there within us and also within all beings.

NINE PRACTICAL SUGGESTIONS FOR MANAGING TECHNOSTRESS:

Though stress probably cannot be avoided, it can, however, be managed. The following actions may help reduce/eliminate all forms of stress including technostress.

1. **Awareness:** It is important that we first become aware of the stress and then try to let it go. Sharing your tension with a friend and/or a family member may solve the problem to a great extent. You cannot wish away problems by non-acknowledgement of them.

2. **Movement:** Movement helps in reducing tension. This can mean walking, jumping, making noise, swimming and playing. Stress tends to accumulate in the joints and movement helps to dissipate it. Rotation of the neck and shoulders in many cases helps a lot. Corporate managers have even established stress-relieving chambers where employees may shout, scream or hit a hanging pillow to relieve the pent up tension.
3. **Yoga techniques:** The regular practice of various Yoga techniques and inculcating the Yogic values in daily life will go a long way towards not only reducing the stress levels but also in giving us that elusive "Peace of Mind". Yogic relaxation practices such as Shavasana and Yoga Nidra help to create a sense of awareness and relaxation in the whole body as well as the mind.
4. **Hobby:** A hobby can help to relieve tension because it helps us to divert our mind from an unpleasant occurrence. Music, dance, painting, cooking and gardening are effective ways to take our mind to a different "Zone". Playing with your pet can also help relieve tension and many people have 'thera-pets' or pets that help them therapeutically!
5. **Breathing:** Breathing is one of the easiest ways of relieving stress. Whenever you feel tension rising, take a few deep breaths and you will immediately feel the difference. Pranayama is the link between the mind and body as brings about psycho-physiological harmony.
6. **Attitude:** It is important to "Let things lie" for sometime when facing problems and many situations resolve on their own. Other situations may appear smaller and less stressful after some time. Development of a detached attitude can also help us to have a better perception of situations and this in turn helps us to face them better.
7. **Visualization:** Visualization of a pleasant solution to the problems can also help a lot. This is quite different from daydreaming. This is widely adopted by players and athletes for improving their performance. After a stressful encounter, coolly sit in your chair, close your eyes and visualize the episode as an act of an ignorant person and excuse him for the incident.
8. **Auto-Suggestion:** Another mental technique is Positive self-suggestion. The negative thoughts are to be replaced with positive ones and an attitude of 'I can and I will ' is to be developed.
9. **Self effort:** Stress is related to the individual's environment and their tolerance capacity. As both of these are different in different people, each individual has to settle for their own method for managing their day-to-day problems. It must be clearly understood that we are responsible for our health and happiness and have a duty to take care of these Divine

gifts. Swami Gitananda Giri used to often say, "Health and happiness are your birthright". It is through our own efforts and will power that we can ultimately solve the problem of stress and achieve our birthrights.

CONCLUSION:

Stress is inevitable in the modern world because of the imbalance between the demands of one's environment and one's capabilities. In fact, it is the distress, which causes the problem. The development of individual capacities and capabilities is not able to keep pace with the increase of demands on them.

Some amount of stress (eustress) is necessary in order to bring out the best in us. However it is vital to learn how to manage stress and keep it under our control. Epictetus in 60 A.D. wisely said, "Men are not disturbed by things, but the views, they take of them". As Swamiji Gitananda Giri jocularly used to say "You don't have problems—you are the problem!"

We must strive to become persons of "Equal mindedness in all situations" that is described as Stitha Prajna or Samabhava in the Srimad Bhagavad Gita. Yogeshwar Krishna says that the man of Stitha Prajna has the following qualities: He is,

Beyond passion, fear and anger. (II.56)

Devoid of possessiveness and egoism. (II.71)

Firm in understanding and unbewildered. (V.20)

Engaged in doing good to all beings. (V.25)

Friendly and compassionate to all. (XII.13)

Has no expectation, is pure and skillful in action. (XII.16)

Yoga is not just performing some contortionist poses or huffing and puffing some Pranayama or sleeping our way through any so-called meditation. It is an integrated way of life in which awareness and consciousness play a great part in guiding our spiritual evolution through life in the social system itself and not in some remote cave in the mountains or hut in the forest.

The Yogi wishes peace and happiness not only for themselves, but also for all beings on all the different planes of existence. They are not "individualists" seeking salvation for only themselves, but on the contrary are "universalists" seeking to live life in the proper evolutionary manner to the best of their ability and with care and concern for their human brethren as well as all beings on all planes of existence.

"Om, Loka Samasta Sukhino Bhavanthu Sarve Janaha Sukhino Bhavanthu"

"Om Shanti, Shanti, Shanti. Om"

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