

Chapter 14

Health Psychology

Chapter Summary

1. Health psychology is a rapidly developing subfield that is concerned with the social and psychological factors that influence health and illness.
2. Hans Selye developed the concept of stress as the nonspecific response of the body to demands to adjust to a wide range of changes.
3. Stressors are demands that give rise to the general adaptation syndrome (GAS), which consists of three stages: alarm, resistance, and exhaustion.
4. Selye's emphasis on change and adaptation led researchers to investigate circumstances that could lead to stress. Among those circumstances are catastrophes, major life changes such as divorce, traumatic events such as criminal victimization, and hassles. They have been associated with long-term stressful reactions, including physiological responses such as increased levels of stress hormones.
5. Using the Social Readjustment Rating Scale, Holmes and Rahe found that high levels of life change were associated with illness. Subsequent research reveals that the relationship between major life events and illness is not as strong as originally reported. One explanation is that a person's interpretation of events is an important determinant of the event's impact.
6. Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) occurs in the aftermath of deeply disturbing experiences such as rape and combat. Victims of PTSD often relive the traumatic event in dreams, flashbacks, or intrusive thoughts.
7. Hassles are everyday minor annoyances that can accumulate and become associated with subsequent health problems. Repeated hassles may lead to elevated levels of stress hormones. Several situations involving conflicts among motives have been identified: approach-approach, avoidance-avoidance, approach-avoidance, and multiple approach-avoidance conflicts.
8. Interpretation or appraisal of an event often determines whether an event is stressful. Primary appraisal occurs when we determine whether an event is a threat; in secondary appraisal, we decide how to deal with the threat.
9. The immune system is the body's major line of defense against bacteria and viruses. Psychoneuroimmunology is the study of how psychological and physiological factors interact to influence the immune system. A wide variety of stressful events can affect immune system functioning.
10. Smoking-related illnesses are the most preventable cause of death in the United States. The number of smokers is declining, but people with less education are more likely to smoke than people with more education. Most smokers tried their first cigarette before age 18. Peer pressure is a major factor leading individuals to start smoking.
11. Although there are many programs to help people stop smoking, most people who quit do so on their own, usually after several unsuccessful attempts. Anticipated weight gain after quitting is often cited as a reason for continuing to smoke.
12. The concept of Type A behavior has been used to explain the development of heart disease. Type A individuals tend to be aggressive, competitive, impatient, and have difficulty relaxing.
13. The Western Collaborative Group Study indicated that a Type A individual was twice as likely to develop heart disease as the more relaxed and easygoing Type B person. Subsequent studies did not replicate this finding, and it became apparent that not all the components of Type A impart risk. Current research focuses on hostility as the toxic component of Type A behavior.

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14. Obesity is associated with several physical illnesses. Factors such as gender and poverty play a role in the prevalence of obesity among certain groups in the population.
15. Genetic factors play a key role in determining how much a person weighs. The resting metabolic rate is the rate at which a person burns calories to keep the body functioning. The body defends a setpoint weight, making it difficult, though not impossible, to lose weight.
16. A person with anorexia nervosa will lose a significant amount of weight. A person with bulimia nervosa will engage in a gorging-purging cycle, which involves taking in large amounts of food and then vomiting.
17. A number of psychological factors have been shown to modify stress reactions. Hardiness is a psychological characteristic composed of commitment, a sense of control, and a tendency to view change as a challenge. Hardy individuals react differently to stressful events and experience fewer illnesses than less hardy individuals.
18. Distraction has been used to reduce the side effects of chemotherapy in pediatric cancer patients. Experimental research reveals that distraction has benefits in dealing with other stressful situations.
19. Social support is the availability of approval, advice, money, or encouragement from others. Social support may reduce the negative effects of stressful events.
20. There is growing support for the notion that humor and laughter can reduce mood disturbances, buffer the effects of life events, and aid in dealing with pain.
21. Businesses are increasingly concerned with reducing the negative effects of stress. Psychologists have evaluated stress management programs established by businesses in order to provide evidence of their effectiveness.
22. Many people have never developed the skill of relaxing. Among the techniques used to produce relaxation are progressive relaxation, the relaxation response, and biofeedback. Relaxation activates the parasympathetic nervous system and is helpful in reducing stress reactions.
23. Physical activity is associated with increased longevity and positive benefits on physical and psychological health. Current recommendations call for at least 30 minutes of physical activity per day, which can be accumulated in short bouts throughout the day.