


English for Medical Students (L1/ S2).

Medical Psychology Module

 *Online Learning Course*

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Prepared by : Prof. Nadia BOULAKDEM

## Lesson 2 : Stress and Its Effects on Health

### 1 Lesson Introduction

Stress is a common psychological factor that significantly affects **physical and mental health**. Understanding stress and how it influences the body is essential for future doctors.

This lesson explains **what stress is, its causes, and its effects** on the body. It also provides **practical examples** to show how stress can influence patients' health outcomes.

### 2 Learning Objectives

By the end of this lesson, students should be able to:

1. Define **stress** clearly.
2. Identify **common causes of stress** in patients.
3. Explain the **effects of stress on physical and mental health**.
4. Give **examples of stress-related symptoms and diseases**.

### 3 Key Vocabulary and Definitions

Term	Definition	Example
Stress	The body's physical and psychological response to pressure or challenges	A student feels stressed before an exam → faster heartbeat
Acute stress	Short-term stress caused by immediate events	Feeling nervous before giving a presentation
Chronic stress	Long-term stress caused by ongoing challenges	Worrying about exams or family problems over months

Term	Definition	Example
Cortisol	A hormone released during stress	High cortisol levels can increase blood pressure
Coping strategies	Ways to manage stress effectively	Meditation, exercise, talking to a friend
Psychosomatic	Physical symptoms caused by psychological factors	Headache caused by anxiety or worry

## 4 Lesson Content

### a) What is Stress?

Stress is the **body's reaction to demands or challenges**. It can be **positive (motivating)** or **negative (harmful)**.

- **Example of positive stress:** Preparing for an important exam → increases focus and energy.
- **Example of negative stress:** Excessive worry about health → insomnia, headaches.

#### Demonstration idea:

Think of a time you were late for an appointment. Notice **your heart rate or tense muscles**. This is your body responding to stress.

### b) Causes of Stress

Stress can be caused by **internal or external factors**:

1. **Physical factors** – illness, injury, sleep deprivation
2. **Psychological factors** – anxiety, fear, low self-confidence
3. **Social factors** – family problems, workload, peer pressure

#### Example:

A medical student has multiple exams (social factor) → feels anxious (psychological factor) → develops headaches (physical factor).

### c) Effects of Stress on Health

Stress affects the **body and mind**:

#### Physical effects:

- Headaches
- High blood pressure
- Sleep problems
- Fatigue

#### Psychological effects:

- Anxiety
- Irritability
- Depression

#### Long-term consequences:

- Weakened immune system → higher susceptibility to illness
- Digestive problems
- Heart disease

**Example:**

A patient with chronic stress may have stomach pain, frequent colds, and trouble sleeping.

**d) Coping with Stress**

Effective coping strategies help reduce harmful effects of stress :

1. **Exercise** – reduces tension, improves mood
2. **Relaxation techniques** – meditation, deep breathing
3. **Time management** – planning and prioritizing tasks
4. **Social support** – talking to friends, family, or counselors
5. **Positive thinking** – focusing on solutions instead of problems

**Example:**

A student feels anxious before exams. Using deep breathing and reviewing a study plan can **lower stress and improve performance**.

**5 Practical Examples**

1. **Acute stress:**  
A patient is nervous before a blood test → fast heartbeat, sweaty hands.
2. **Chronic stress:**  
A patient worried about long-term illness → headaches, insomnia, frequent colds.
3. **Coping in action:**  
A patient practices daily meditation → reduces blood pressure and anxiety.

**6 Conclusion**

Stress is a **natural response**, but excessive stress can **harm physical and mental health**. Medical students and future doctors must:

- Recognize **stress symptoms in patients**
- Understand the **connection between stress and disease**
- Suggest or implement **effective coping strategies**

**7 Suggested Exercises for Students**

1. Write a short paragraph (5–7 lines) titled:  
*“How does stress affect the body and mind?”*
2. Identify two coping strategies that can **help patients manage stress** and explain why they are effective.
3. Give one example of a **psychosomatic symptom** caused by stress.