

## SECTION 2: THE NATURE OF STRESSORS

### *A Winner's Creed*

*If you think you are beaten, you are.  
If you think you dare not, then you won't.  
If you like to win, but you think you can't,  
it is almost certain you won't.  
If you think you'll lose, you're lost.  
For out of the world we find,  
success begins with a fellow's will—  
it's all in the state of the mind.  
If you think you are outclassed, you are—  
you've got to be sure of yourself before  
you can ever win a prize.  
Life's battles don't always go  
to the stronger or faster man,  
but sooner or later the man who wins  
is the man who thinks he can.*

*—Author unknown*

## **Examples of stressors**

*Stressors can be divided into various categories:*

### **(a) Physical or environmental stressors:**

- Inadequate ventilation
- Pollution
- Overcrowding
- Famine
- Excessive or continuous noise
- Peer pressure
- Work pressure
- Family pressure
- Information overload
- Social isolation

### **(b) Natural disasters or disasters caused by human activity:**

- Multiple injury or fatality accidents
- Fires
- Hurricanes
- Floods
- Volcanic eruptions
- Earthquakes
- Tornadoes
- Explosions
- Airplane crashes
- War

### **(c) Major life changes:**

- Marriage
- Marital separation
- Divorce
- Exposure to assault or abuse
- Birth of a child
- Death of a loved one
- Change of job
- Imprisonment
- Retirement
- Illness of a family member

**(d) Hassles, i.e., minor changes or day-to-day aggravations:**

- Dissatisfaction with one's physical appearance or sex appeal
- Concerns about the well-being of persons dear to us
- Job dissatisfaction
- Feelings of estrangement
- Relationship problems with spouse/partner
- Relationship problems with in-laws
- Financial concerns
- Housekeeping responsibilities
- Lost or misplaced items
- Concerns about one's safety

**(e) Personality-related stressors:**

- Poor self-concept
- Impatience
- Poor consequential thinking
- Inability to set realistic goals and to prioritize
- Poor resource management
- Poor health habits
- Over-dependence
- Inflexibility
- Poor communication skills
- Poor interpersonal skills



## Features of stressors

A stressor is any stimulus which evokes a stress response. Stressors may be *real* or *imagined*, *internal* or *external*. The overall impact of a stressor will depend on its characteristics and the characteristics of those who have been affected. The *perceived* more than the *absolute* qualities of a stressor determine its potential impact. For example, if you are listening to a type of music that you like and the radio station starts to play a type of music that you dislike, you will likely turn the volume of the radio down and complain that it was too loud!

Two conditions are necessary for a potential stressor to become an actual stressor: there must be uncertainty over the impact which such a stressor will have on the individual and the outcome must be important to that individual.



*Stressors are not all unpleasant—most life situations that require change or adaptation can be viewed as stressors. Even pleasant events such as promotions, vacations and marriage are stressors since they require many adjustments and place demands on the person.* Nonetheless, there is increasing evidence that it is not the change per se, but the quality of the change that is potentially damaging to people. Events which are sudden, abnormal, undesired, severe and sustained and those over which the individual has little or no control are the most detrimental.

Any event which is very distressing and outside of the realm of normal human experience is termed a *traumatic stressor*, for example, rape, physical assault, natural disasters and serious accidents. Such events normally involve a perceived threat to the physical integrity of the individual or others and evoke reactions of intense fear, horror and/or helplessness.