Chapter 14: Health Psychology: Stress, Coping, and Well-Being
Health Psychology

• Health psychology
  – Branch of psychology that investigates the psychological factors related to wellness and illness, including the prevention, diagnosis, and treatment of medical problems

• Psychoneuroimmunology (PNI)
  – Study of the relationship among psychological factors, the immune system, and the brain
Stress and Coping

• Stress
  The response to events that threaten or challenge a person

• Psychophysiological disorders
  Medical problems that are influenced by an interaction of psychological, emotional, and physical difficulties
Categorizing Stressors

• Cataclysmic events
  – Strong stressors that occur suddenly, affecting many people at once

• Personal stressors
  – major life events such as the death of a family member, that have immediate consequences that generally fade with time
Categorizing Stressors

- Posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD)
  - Phenomenon on which victims of major catastrophes or strong personal stressors feel long-lasting effects that may include re-experiencing the event in vivid flashbacks or dreams
    - 9/11 terrorist attacks
Categorizing Stressors

• Background stressors “Daily hassles”
  – Everyday annoyances, such as being stuck in traffic, that cause minor irritations and may have long-term ill effects if they continue or are compounded by other stressful events
  – “Uplifts”
    • Minor positive events that make one feel good
High Cost of Stress

• Psychophysiological disorders
  – Psychosomatic disorders
    • Medical problems influenced by an interaction of psychological, emotional, and physical difficulties
The General Adaptation Syndrome

- **Alarm and mobilization stage**
  
  Become aware of the presence of a stressor

- **Resistance stage**
  
  Preparation to fight the stressor

- **Exhaustion stage**
  
  Negative consequences of the stress appear
Psychoneuroimmunology and Stress

- Stress may overstimulate the immune system
- Decreases the immune system response
  - Alters the level of production of lymphocytes

Direct physiological effects
- Elevated blood pressure
- Decrease in immune system functioning
- Increased hormonal activity
- Psychophysiological conditions

Harmful behaviors
- Increased smoking, alcohol use
- Decreased nutrition
- Decreased sleep
- Increased drug use

Indirect health-related behaviors
- Decreased compliance with medical advice
- Increase in delays in seeking medical advice
- Decrease in likelihood of seeking medical advice
Coping With Stress

• Coping
  – Efforts to control, reduce, or learn to tolerate the threats that lead to stress
    • Emotion-focused coping
      – Managing emotions in the face of stress
    • Problem-focused coping
      – Attempts to modify the stressful problem or source of stress
  • Avoidance
  • Defense mechanisms
Learned Helplessness

- State in which people conclude that unpleasant or aversive stimuli cannot be controlled—a view of the world that becomes so ingrained that they cease trying to remedy the aversive circumstances, even if they actually can exert some influence
Coping Styles: The Hardy Personality

• Hardiness
  – Personality characteristic associated with a lower rate of stress-related illness, consisting of three components
    • Commitment
    • Challenge
    • Control
Social Support

• Mutual network of caring, interested others
• Health and loneliness in college students
  – Can be psychologically painful
  – Negative effect on the immune system
The A’s and B’s of Coronary Heart Disease

• Type A behavior pattern
  – Competitive
  – Shows urgency about time
  – Aggressive
  – Driven quality at work
  – Hostile, verbally and nonverbally
  – Highly linked with coronary heart disease in men

• Type B behavior pattern
  – Cooperative
  – Noncompetitive
  – Nonaggressive
  – Not usually hostile
Cancer

- Evidence suggests the emotional responses of cancer patients to their disease may have a critical effect on its course.
Smoking

• Heredity factors
• Rite of passage
• Habit forming
• Quitting
  – Replacement therapies
  – Psychotherapy
  – Societal views
Well-Being and Happiness

• Subjective well-being
  – Person’s evaluations of their life, in terms of both their thoughts and emotions

• Characteristics
  – High self-esteem
  – Sense of control
  – Optimism
  – Sociable

Faces Scale: “Which face comes closest to expressing how you feel about your life as a whole!”

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