Module 7: Motivation, Emotion, and Stress
Topic 3 Content: General Adaptation Syndrome Notes

Introduction

General Adaptation Syndrome

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Stage One: Alarm

In stage one of the general adaptation syndrome, the body first reacts to stress by preparing for a threat. Stress hormones, such as adrenaline and cortisol, are released to provide energy and focus. Blood is diverted from major organs to the muscles.

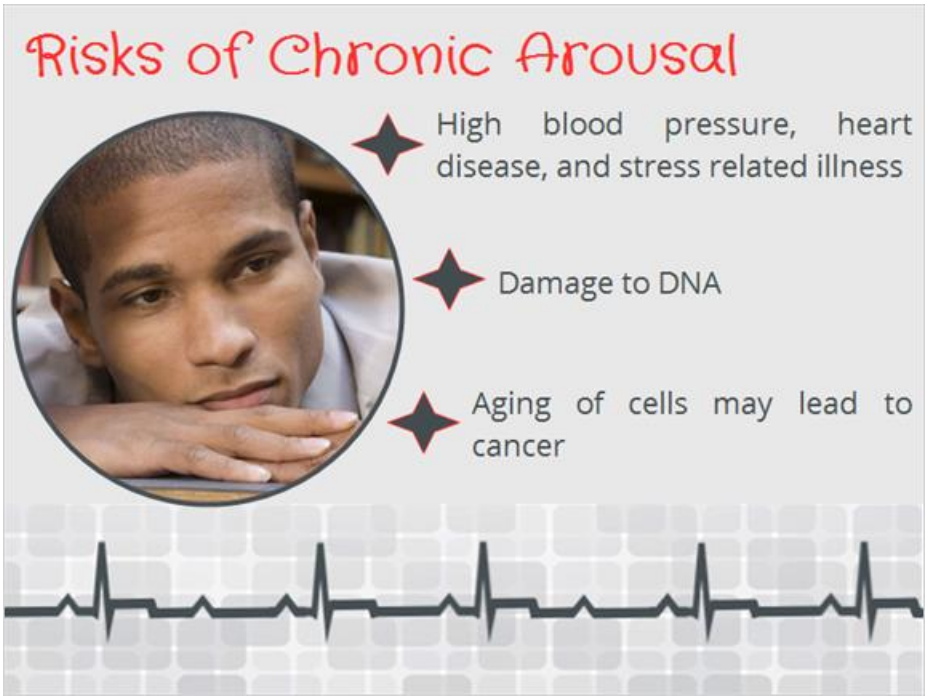
Stage Two: Resistance

In stage two of the general adaptation syndrome, the stress continues to increase, so the body tries to maintain its energy by releasing reserves of stress hormones. If the body is not given an opportunity to recover, this response persists, so the body is in a constant state of arousal.

Stage Three: Exhaustion

In stage three of the general adaptation syndrome, the stress continues further, and the body begins to lose its ability to maintain stress hormone levels. Thus, reserves become depleted. Often called burnout, this stage allows for little resistance to fight infections in the body, which makes people susceptible to illness because of a compromised immune system.

Risks of Chronic Arousal



As you can see, your body is not prepared to maintain arousal chronically. In time, this scenario contributes to a long list of physical issues, such as high blood pressure, heart disease, and other stress-related illnesses.

Believe or not, stress also damages a person's DNA, making him or her less able to heal wounds and respond to genetic mutations that cause disease. In addition, stress causes cells to age faster, which makes people more likely to get cancer. Chronic stress is also related to heart disease. Although heart disease is caused in part by genetic factors, high blood pressure, high cholesterol, and cigarette smoking, it is also caused by long-term stress, possibly resulting in death.