

Stress Coping within the Medical Fraternity

Saima Shahbaz

Department of Anatomy, Fatima Jinnah Medical University, Lahore, Pakistan
Correspondence to: Saima Shahbaz, Email: saimashahbaz1973@gmail.com

Stress is defined as “a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation”. It is a natural response of human beings that motivates us to deal with the challenges and threats in our daily lives. Every individual experiences stress to some degree. The way one responds to stress, however, makes a big difference to the overall well-being of an individual.¹

The medical fraternity, particularly medical students, faces significant stress due to their demanding academic and professional responsibilities. Medical education is widely regarded as a highly demanding environment, often placing considerable strain on students’ academic performance as well as their physical and psychological well-being.² Among medical students, stress has been found to arise from multiple interconnected sources, including academic pressures, social challenges, and physical and emotional demands.³

Early identification of such students who are likely to be affected by stress in the early days of their college life and then providing them with the necessary psychological and emotional support could be beneficial to reduce the negative effects of stress in the future. The medical profession, no doubt a noble profession, is not free of stress and suicidal tendencies. Loneliness, nervousness, and sleeplessness are the result of stress that is not managed promptly. Studies have proved that compared to the general population, the medical fraternity is the most distressed one.⁴

Stress may be understood as a sense of pressure or anxiety that arises in response to challenges encountered in daily life. The World Health Organization describes mental health as “a state of well-being in which individuals recognize their own abilities, can cope with the ordinary stresses of life, work productively, and contribute meaningfully to their communities.”⁵ A stressor is a personal or environmental event that causes stress.⁶

Stress and coping capabilities are interrelated when it comes to medical education. Academic Stress is more common in students. It is studied that female medical students feel more stress than male students. While both male and female students are trying to cope with the stress by avoiding the predisposing factors. Medical students face more Stress year by year. One of the studies showed that 2nd year students are facing more stress as compared to 1st, 3rd, 4th, and final year.⁷

Stress management is a wide range of practices, methods, and approaches that can help you cope with and reduce your stress. Though high stress is sometimes inevitable in a normal individual’s life, if you have too much stress for a long period, it can be very dangerous for both physical and mental health. However, in small amounts, stress can even be beneficial, such as motivating you to get things done on time. The following are different strategies to cope with stressful situations:

Take care of your mind

- Stay away from the news and social media for a while. Staying updated and well-informed is a good thing, but constant information about negative things can make you upset.⁸
- Take your time to unwind.
- Deep breathing, stretching, or medication if necessary.
- Reading a journal.
- Spending time in outdoor activities either actively or just for relaxing.
- Doing some other relaxing activities like shopping or visiting someone.
- Practicing gratitude daily. Reminding yourself of several things you are grateful for and making a list of them by writing in a diary.⁹
- Interacting with people.
- Talking with friends or siblings you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
- Having connections with your community-based or faith-based organizations or groups.

Taking care of your body

- Getting enough sleep. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day to help you sleep better. Adults need 7 or more hours per night.¹⁰
- Moving actively: Staying physically healthy can improve your emotional health. Even a small physical activity helps a lot.
- Start with a small activity or even a walk and build up to 2 ½ hours a week.
- Break it into smaller sessions, such as 20 to 30 minutes a day.
- Having healthy meals: Have fruits, nuts, and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains, and low-fat dairy. Avoid junk food and unhealthy fats, salt, and added sugars.

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Stress among medical students remains an important concern that deserves attention from educational institutions and healthcare policymakers. Creating supportive learning environments and encouraging positive coping mechanisms can contribute to better mental health and improved professional development.

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