

LESSON 25

HEALTH PSYCHOLOGY

SUMMARY

In order to enjoy life, one needs to be healthy. People who are unhealthy or sick, cannot perform well and meet the various demands of life. Health is important for a person individually as well as socially. In order to be a productive member of society, we need an alert mind and an active body.

The field of health psychology deals with psychological factors which are important in maintaining and fostering health and well-being. Also, it explores the factors which lead to the condition of illness. It has become increasingly clear that the life style or our ways of thinking and behaving are contributing to the health status of people. Experts think that the factors causing illness and death can be prevented with the help of exercise, proper intake of nutritious food, and changes in bad habits like smoking.

Concept of Health and Well-being

Health refers to a state of physical, mental and spiritual well-being. It is a positive state and incorporates thriving and coping.

The quality of life of people in today's world is being challenged from many quarters such as

external environment stress, changes in social structure, increased competition, consumerism – which are causing frustration, loneliness, conflict and loss of support. The result is that psychosomatic disorders are on the rise.

Stress has a negative effect on physical health as well as psychological well-being. Technically, stress refers to our response to events that are viewed as threatening and disrupting psychological functioning. The situations or factors in the environment that cause stress are called stressors.

Major categories of stressors

Stressful life events

Hassles of everyday life

Work related stress

Catastrophic events like disasters

Stress effect depends on the degree of fit between person and environment. Also, people vary in certain dispositions like optimism, perception of control, health beliefs, emotional state, and personality pattern which may help or hinder coping with stress.

In Indian thought the term swastha (healthy) means the state of 'being in oneself'. It is an auto-locus person who can be called

swastha. Ayurveda or the science of life often refers to a state of balance or appropriateness (Sama) as an important component of well-being and health.

Health Promoting behaviours

Achieving health requires following certain patterns of behaviour. The important behaviours are described below:

Relaxation - it is very useful for stress reduction. It involves deep breathing. By holding one's breath for a few seconds and exhaling slowly.

Exercise - regular exercise helps in maintaining physical and mental health. It strengthens the heart and lungs and improves the use of oxygen by the body.

Weight control - it is very difficult to control weight. Dietary intervention is necessary but often insufficient for producing lasting weight loss.

Diet - dietary control involves meal planning, cooking methods and eating habits. A healthy diet should be a goal for every one of us.

Attending to health problems - It is very important to attend to your health problems in time.

Positive emotions - Recent studies indicate that the experiences of various positive emotions enhance the status of one's health.

Threats to health

Many of the diseases and threats to health which ultimately reduce longevity are related to the ways we behave and conduct ourselves. Some of the important ones which increase the risk for health are as follows:

Alcohol and drug abuse

Smoking

Use of tobacco

Poor nutritional habits

Lack of exercise

Unsafe sex (HIV, AIDS)

Interventions for promoting well being

People with such successful ageing are clearly different from the rest in terms of three factors viz.- diet, physical activity, and involvement in community life.

Based on researches of a wide variety, it is being felt that ensuring health and wellness is possible with the help of adopting certain preventive strategies such as –

Primary Prevention - It tries to reduce or eliminate the occurrence of preventable illness and injury. It involves helping people learn about behaviour and health, promoting motivation and necessary skills to practice healthy behaviour, and modifying poor health practices. It also involves generating awareness about immunization.

Secondary Prevention - The major goal of this kind of prevention is to decrease the severity of illness which a person suffers. With the help of early detection, using diagnostic tests that screen the disease, steps may be taken for cure. People can learn methods of self-examination of body parts, and functioning of various organs, that may help in prevention of disease.

Changing lifestyle - Mind and body both go together. The various types of illnesses are often caused by our beliefs and habits. In achieving the optimum state of health it is important to achieve the harmony of body and mind. Ayurveda, suggests that health and well being depend upon proper Ahara (diet), Vihar (recreation), Achara (conduct) and Vichara (thought)

Evaluate yourself

1. List the threats to mental health.
2. What are the major stressors in human life?
3. Discuss the different health promoting behaviours.