What Causes Stress?
How Stress Affects Your Body

CHAPTER 3.1 AND 3.2
What is Stress?

- **Stress** is the response of your body and mind to being challenged or threatened.
- You experience stress when people, events, or situations make demands on your body and mind.
- **Eustress** is when a positive stress is put on your body, whereas **distress**, is the negative stressor on your body.
Types of Stressors

- **Stressors** are events or situations that cause stress.
- Types of stressors:
  - Major Life Changes
  - **Catastrophes** - events that threaten lives and may destroy properties.
  - Everyday Problems
  - Environmental Problems
How Stress Affects the Body

- The body’s automatic response to stress occurs in three stages which are triggered by all stressors.

- Three Stages of Stress:
  - Alarm Stage
  - Resistance Stage
  - Exhaustion Stage
Alarm Stage

- Your body releases a substance called adrenaline into your blood that causes changes within your body.
  - Figure 4, pg 61.
  - Your heart beat speeds up, your breathing speeds up, and your muscles tense.
- Adrenaline activates the “fight or flight response,” which is the body’s initial response to stress.
Resistance Stage

- When you cannot successfully deal with a stressor during the alarm stage, your body adapts to the presence of the stressor.
- Once your body adapts to the presence of the stressor you may not even realize that you are stressed anymore.
- Since your body is still fighting the stressor, you may become irritable, tired, and less capable to handle easy situations.
Exhaustion Stage

- Your body can no longer keep up with the demands of the stressor.
- Exhaustion only occurs if a stressor continues for long periods of time- weeks, months, or even years.
Signs of Stress

- There are four warning signs of stress as listed on pg 62 Figure 5.
  - Behavioral Changes
  - Changes in Thinking
  - Physical Changes
  - Emotional Changes
Behavioral Changes

- Overeating or hardly eating at all
- Sleep problems
- Hurrying, talking fast
- Withdrawing from relationships
- Reckless behavior
Changes in Thinking

- Unable to Concentrate
- Negative Thinking
- Excessive Worrying
- Self-Criticism
- Critical of Others
Physical Changes

- Muscle Tension
- Headache
- Upset Stomach
- Pounding Heart
- Shortness of Breath
- Increased Sweating
- Skin Rash
Emotional Changes

- Irritable
- Angry
- Impatient
- Nervous
- Increased Crying
Stress and Illness

• When a person is continually under stress illnesses can be triggered, your body’s ability to fight illnesses can be lowered, and it can make some diseases harder to control.
Stomachaches

- Can occur in the stomach, small intestine, or large intestine.
- Stress on the body causes a disruption in the digestive system.
- Because the food may move either too fast or too slow a person could experience gas, cramps, diarrhea, or constipation.
- Stomach acid may build up and make it more likely for ulcers to form in the stomach and also make it harder for them to go away.
Asthma

- An asthma attack occurs when the air passages of the respiratory system narrow, making it difficult to breathe.
- People who have asthma should recognize which stressors cause an attack.
Headaches

- Tension in the muscles around your scalp, face, and neck may produce an aching or pounding sensation in your head.
- A migraine begins when blood vessels in the brain and scalp narrow and limit the supply of blood to the brain.
- When the vessels narrow, a stretching occurs to allow a proper amount of blood flow. This is what causes the pain.
- Other causes can be certain foods, such as chocolate and large amounts of caffeine.
Lowered Resistance to Disease

- Science has shown that during the alarm stage, some parts of your body’s immune system works exceptionally well, but overexertion of one particular part makes the immune system weaken.
- When your immune system is lowered you cannot fight off illness or infections as well.
Heart Disease

- Unlike the others, some effects of stress occur later in life. Heart disease is one of those.
- During the alarm stage your body reacts with the heart beating faster, breathing speeding up, and your muscles tensing.
- High blood pressure can occur because of this, therefore making it more likely to suffer from heart disease later.
- Reducing the stress in your life will help lower your blood pressure and reduce your risk of heart disease.