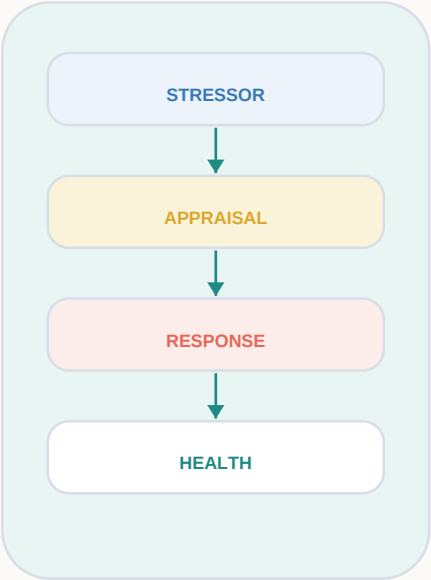
AP PSYCHOLOGY | UNIT 5

TOPIC 5.1

Introduction to Health Psychology

Health psychology connects behavior and mental processes with physical health, wellness, stress, and coping.



THE CORE HEALTH CHAIN

DEMAND

a stressor places a demand or signals a threat

RESPONSE

body, thoughts, emotions, and behavior react

OUTCOME

coping can protect wellness or strain health

BY THE END, YOU SHOULD BE ABLE TO...

1. Explain how stress can affect both physical and psychological health.
2. Compare eustress, distress, trauma, daily hassles, and ACEs.
3. Trace the stress response and choose an appropriate coping approach.

BIG IDEA

Stress is not automatically harmful. Its effects depend on the demand, duration, appraisal, available resources, and coping response.

1 Stress and health

Stress is a response to demands or threats; the same demand can be experienced differently across people and situations.

EUSTRESS VS DISTRESS

EUSTRESS

A manageable challenge that can energize, focus attention, or motivate action.

DISTRESS

Stress that feels overwhelming, disrupts functioning, or strains well-being.

The label depends on impact and appraisal - not just on the event itself.

SOURCES OF STRESS

TRAUMA

A deeply distressing or threatening experience.

DAILY HASSLES

Small recurring stressors that can accumulate over time.

ACEs

Adverse childhood experiences with possible lifespan effects.

WHEN STRESS REACHES THE BODY

HYPERTENSION

high blood pressure

HEADACHES

pain linked with strain

IMMUNE SUPPRESSION

reduced immune effectiveness

CAREFUL CLAIM

Stress can increase susceptibility to disorders and disease. It is a risk influence, not proof that stress alone caused a specific illness.

2 Reactions and coping

The stress response changes over time, while coping strategies differ in whether they target the stressor or the emotional reaction.

GENERAL ADAPTATION SYNDROME

1 ALARM
Initial reaction; fight, flight, or freeze prepares the body to respond.

2 RESISTANCE
The person confronts or adapts to the continuing stressor.

3 EXHAUSTION
Resources are depleted or stress subsides; illness susceptibility is greatest.

TEND-AND-BEFRIEND Some people respond to stress by caring for needs and seeking social connection.

TWO COPING TARGETS

PROBLEM-FOCUSED

Change or solve the stressor. Example: create a schedule to reduce an overloaded workload.

EMOTION-FOCUSED

Manage the emotional response. Examples: deep breathing, meditation, or appropriate medication.

MATCH THE STRATEGY TO CONTROL

CHANGEABLE STRESSOR

Problem-focused coping may address the source directly.

NOT IMMEDIATELY CHANGEABLE

Emotion-focused coping may reduce distress while support is sought.

Effective coping is flexible: people may combine strategies as the situation changes.

Support and safety matter when stress is intense, chronic, or traumatic.