

Psychology: Stress - Notes for 17/11/03

Physiological Stress Management

- Focusing on alleviating the symptoms of stress even if the situation is not changeable;
- Involves drugs, or learning how to control some aspects of the stress reaction.

Psychological Stress Management

- Learning techniques to help with dealing with the situation itself, not just the symptoms.

Benzodiazepines – Reduce Nervous System Activity

- These are drugs used to treat anxiety;
- Sold under various trade names: Librium, Valium, Halcion, Xanax;
- They work by enhancing the activity of the biochemical substance GABA, which is a natural form of stress relief:
 - GABA slows down nerve cell activity
 - GABA reduces serotonin activity

Beta Blockers

- Act upon the sympathetic nervous system rather than the brain;
- Reduces the activity of the sympathetic nervous system, thus reducing the undesirable symptoms such as increased blood pressure, heart rate, cortisol production etc.

Criticisms of Drug Therapy

Strengths:

- Effectiveness – drugs work >> Kahn (1986), Placebos noticeably worse than real drugs;
- Easy to take;
- Little effort required on the part of the patient.

Weaknesses:

- Addictive;
- BZs replaced Barbiturates forty years ago but both have withdrawal symptoms – maximum 4 weeks usage;
- Side effects: drowsiness, dizziness, weakness, diarrhoea, changes in appetite, blurred vision, changes in sex drive, seizures, skin rashes, irregular heart beat;
- Treats the symptoms, not the problem.