

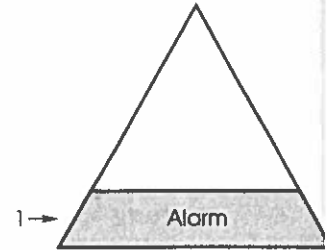
## UNDERSTANDING THE THREE BASIC STAGES OF STRESS

### ALARM STAGE

(Example—You discover that an expected promotion you had been promised and have already announced to friends is being held up for budget reasons.)

— Symptoms include:

RESTLESSNESS  
ANXIETY  
ANGER  
DEPRESSION  
FEAR

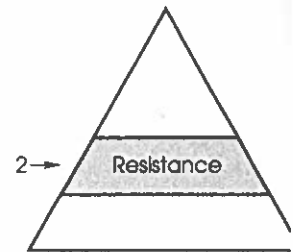


### RESISTANCE STAGE

(Example—You resolve not to let anyone know about your disappointment.)

— Symptoms include

DENIAL OF FEELINGS  
EMOTIONAL ISOLATION  
NARROWING OF INTERESTS

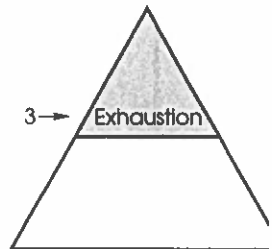


### EXHAUSTION STAGE

(Example—There is no change in your situation after several weeks—and you remain uncertain of whether or not you will ever receive the promotion.)

— Symptoms include

LOSS OF SELF-CONFIDENCE  
POOR SLEEP HABITS  
UNUSUAL AND ERRATIC BEHAVIOR  
PHYSICAL PROBLEMS, such as  
- HYPERTENSION  
- PEPTIC ULCER  
- DEPRESSION  
- NERVOUS TICS



In the stages described above, the impact of stress likely can be reduced by identifying and accepting (owning) the feelings of stage one, avoiding the isolation and withdrawal of stage two, and seeking medical and/or professional counseling for stage three.

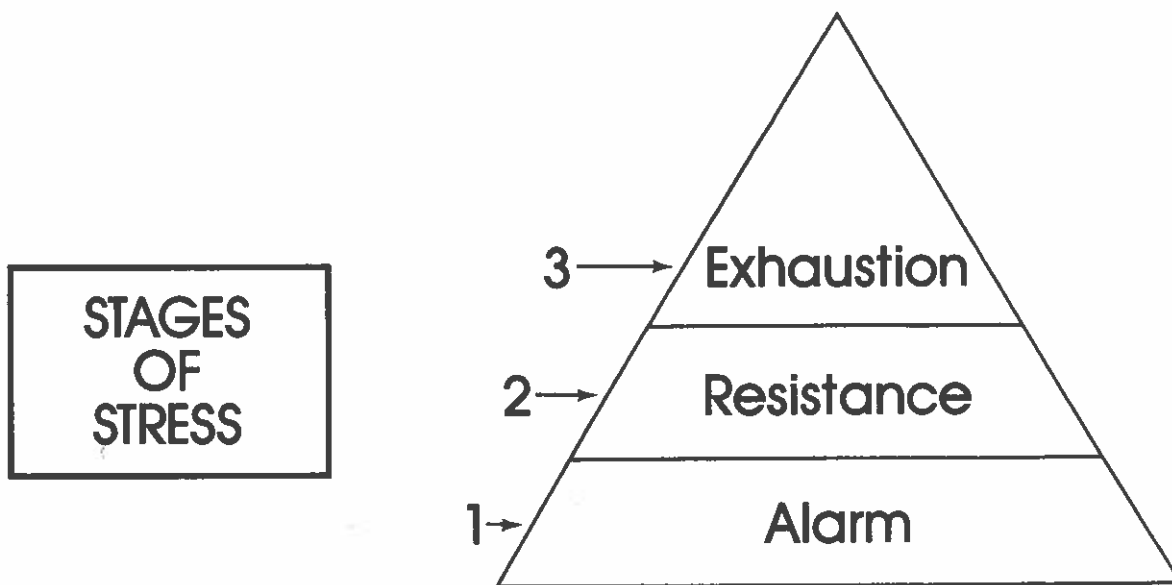
Sharing your situation with another caring person and talking out your feelings may help give a new perspective.

Hans Selye, M.D., a foremost researcher in the field of stress, described three stages of stress in several of his writings, including *The Stress of Life*, revised edition (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1976).

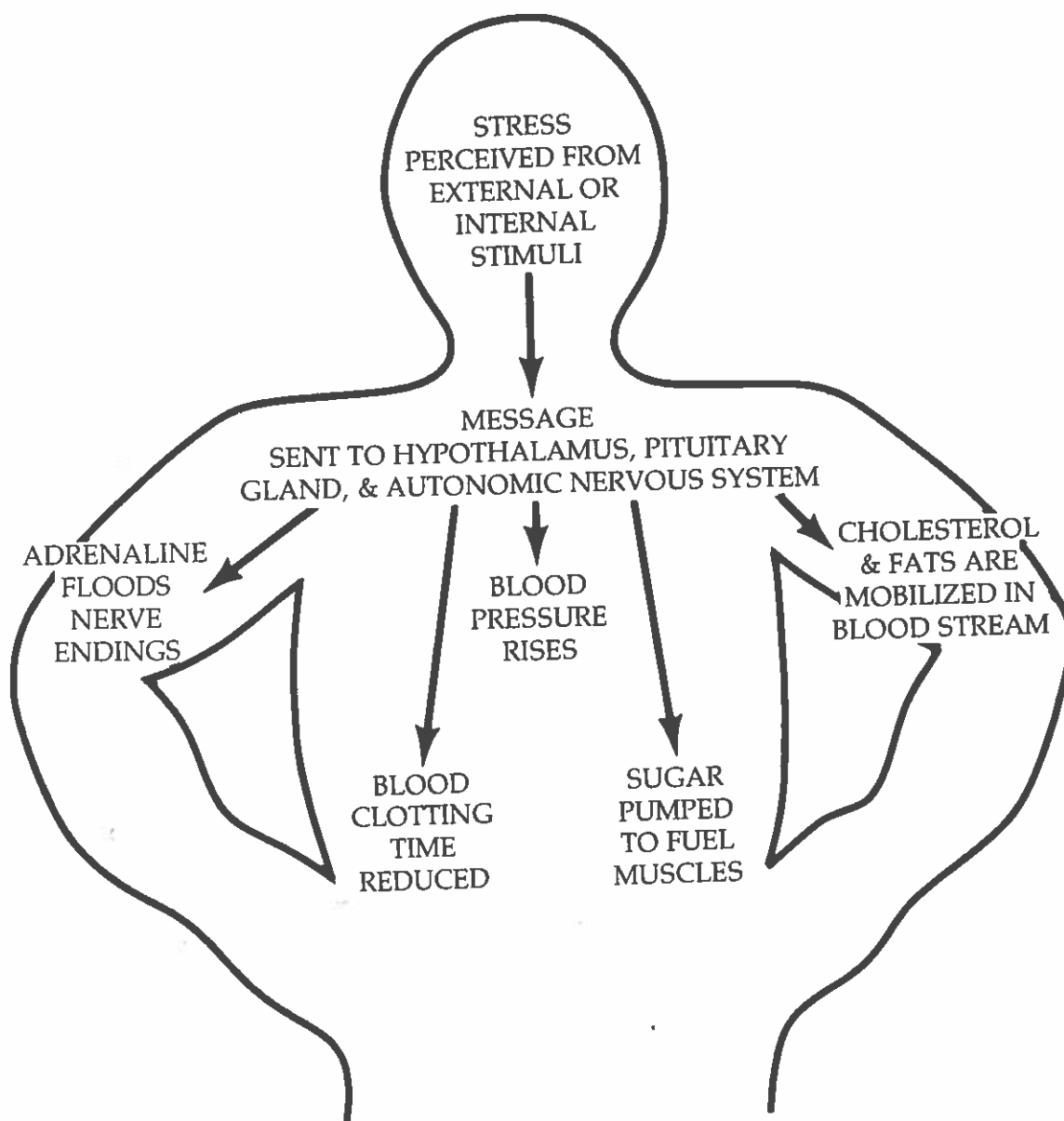
## STAGES OF STRESS

It is natural to resist or deny the presence of stress. We all have a tendency to "plunge on," working harder and harder to overcome stressful situations rather than to acknowledge the situation and "back off." For example, sometimes in a stressful work environment, a person will return to the office night after night in an effort to deal with the stress. There comes a point when the mind and the body simply become exhausted. When this happens, efficiency decreases. Often, taking a break (i.e., doing something else, or getting away from the work) may be the most helpful way to relieve the stress.

Learning to identify the symptoms of stress and to recognize when resistance or denial is not helpful is essential. If we continue to experience stress and do nothing to alter the situation, it is likely we will develop physical problems such as exhaustion.



## HOW STRESS AFFECTS OUR PHYSICAL SELF



Continuous stress has been shown to have a gradual damaging effect on the circulatory system, digestive tract, lungs, muscles and/or joints. It also hastens the process of aging.

## CONCEPTUAL METHODS OF COPING WITH STRESS

1. *Change your internal attitudes/perceptions.* While we may not be able to change some types of external stimuli that are stressful, we *can* change our internal attitudes and perceptions of these stresses. Examples include:
  - Develop social supports that reduce your sense of aloneness.
  - Develop a sense of humor about your situation.
  - Talk about troubles with friends.
  - Seek professional counseling.
  - Own your personal stress.
  - Know yourself and your level of optimum stress.
  - Balance work and play.
2. *Change your interaction with the environment.* This strategy says that if we can “work smarter, not harder,” we may be able to reduce the amount of stress on us.
  - Improve your skills in areas like goal setting, time management and conflict management.
  - Take assertiveness training.
  - Use peer feedback as a way to identify areas for possible changes in functioning.
  - Use a case consultant for particularly difficult job areas.
  - Slow down.
3. *Change your physical ability to cope.* The most common stress reduction activities are those designed to improve the physical resources of our body to handle the stress that we experience.
  - Get adequate and proper nutrition.
  - Implement a fitness program.
  - Cut down on intake stressors (i.e., caffeine, nicotine, sugar, etc.).
  - Relax, learn to loaf a little.
  - Get enough sleep and rest.
  - Develop some recreational activities.
4. *Change your environment.* If a stressor is closely related to a particular environment, find a way to place yourself in a different environment. Caution should be taken that one does not develop the style of avoiding all stressful situations, but sometimes this may be a good short-term solution. For example:
  - Quit going to certain meetings.
  - Change job/vocation/location.
  - Develop extended education programs.
  - Structure time off from work.
  - Set up your job, if possible, so you can work in a variety of different program areas.