

# 1h. Stress - Coping and Strategies

**Coping - A process involving an attempt to manage the demands of a stressor in some effective way.**

- **Approach coping strategies** involve efforts to confront a stressor and deal directly with it and its effects.
  - Activity is focused towards the stressor, its causes and a solution that will address the underlying problem, issue or concern and minimise or eliminate its impact. Very adaptive and effective
  - E.g. Creating study timetable. An approach strategy for a stressor involving loss of a job through retrenchment is to search for a new job.
- **Avoidant coping strategies** involve efforts that evade a stressor and deal indirectly with it and its effects.
  - Activity is focused away from the stressor and there is no attempt to actively confront the stressor and its causes. Strategies tend to be maladaptive (not targeting the stressor).
  - E.g. Substance use, watching tv when having an upcoming exam. An avoidant strategy for a job loss stressor may be to not tell anyone and not think about it.

**Context-specific effectiveness - When there is a match/'good fit' between the coping strategy that is used and the stressful situation**

**Coping Flexibility - The ability to effectively modify or adjust one's coping strategies according to the demands of different stressful situation:**

- **High coping flexibility:** able to readily adjust coping strategies if a particular strategy is proving to be ineffective; tend to use different types of coping strategies across a variety of stressful situations.
- **Low coping flexibility:** difficulty in adjusting/adapting a coping strategy to suit the stressful situation; consistent use of the same type of coping strategies across different stressful situations.

Exercise as a coping strategy:

1. Exercise can help the body return to normal functioning following arousal by a stressor.
2. Exercise increases the efficiency of the cardiovascular system and increases strength, flexibility and stamina for encountering future stressors.
3. Many people experience short-term psychological benefits during or immediately after exercising.
4. Strenuous physical activity can produce chemical changes in the body that can improve psychological health.
5. Exercise can also provide an opportunity for distraction or 'time out' from a stressor.
6. People who exercise with others can experience long-term psychosocial benefits from the social interaction and potential social support the interactions can provide.