Stress and Anxiety

Solutions to helping treat one of America’s most prevalent mental health issues
Introduction

In a world full of constant stimulus and negativity, stress and anxiety has become commonplace among humanity, specifically adults in the United States.

Because feeling “stressed” is now a nearly daily human emotion, how does stress develop and what can be done to help benefit those who suffer from stress and anxiety?
1. What is Stress?  
The history and science behind stress

2. The Numbers  
Data and percentages in the United States

3. Stress Relief  
The good ways and the bad ways

4. The Problem  
Thesis statement and survey results

5. Solution  
A new space for relieving stress and anxiety

Emily Dontenville BFA Thesis | 2020-2021
What is Stress?
stress (noun)
\‘stres\'

In terms of mental health, a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension.
Hungarian-Canadian Endocrinologist

Selye discovered “stress” in 1936 while studying patients, noticing that while the patients were suffering with different ailments and diseases, they all had some similar symptoms across the board.

This then became known as General Adaption Syndrome, a response of the body to the demands placed upon it.

Selye was determined to make stress his magnum opus, and dedicated the rest of his life to publishing books and studies on the topic. He coined the word “stress” itself, and helped translate the term into languages across the world.
Selye’s discovery was groundbreaking to studying stress, however, a majority of his writings ended up as more theory than fact.

This is due to Selye’s research being now funded by tobacco industries in hopes of establishing a connection between type A personalities and heart disease. This would allow the tobacco industry to argue that it was actually a high stress lifestyle leading to heart attack and cancer, as opposed to cigarette smoking.
When stress occurs, it all begins in the brain:

1. Your brain detects a stressor, typically from physical danger or your brain’s motivational system.

2. The hypothalamus gland releases cortisol into the blood stream as a stress response.

3. Elevated levels of cortisol cause the body to become more focused, energetic, and alert.
While smartphones make our lives easier than ever before, they also are a main cause of stressors with a constant stream of negativity within arm’s reach. Phone use chronically raises cortisol levels in our body, releasing in response to things like checking an angry text message, when your phone is in sight, or even if you just think you hear it. When you get a notification, it’s your body’s natural response to want to check and combat the release of cortisol.
While checking your phone may make the initial spike of cortisol fade, you are likely to find another stressor browsing, and the cycle continues.

The urge to check your phone and diminish the cortisol spike can chronically damage the prefrontal cortex, the decision making section of the brain. This can lead to putting yourself in dangerous scenarios, such as texting and driving.

Constant social media checkers have an average stress level of **5.3/10**
How can stress affect your body?

Hint: in more ways than you would think.

Stress comes with a variety of “side effects” that develop as your body’s natural reaction to impulses. Sometimes, these symptoms are physical, such as nausea, or it can be mental, such as irritability. While these symptoms are mainly short-term, prolonged stress can lead to chronic symptoms like heart attack.

**Physical**
- Migraines
- Jaw clenching
- Dry mouth
- Hyperventilating
- Difficulty breathing
- “Butterflies” or nausea
- Lack of appetite
- Muscle spasms and aches
- Fidgeting, feet tapping
- Increased heart rate
- High blood pressure
- Cold or sweaty hands

**Mental**
- Reduced work efficiency
- Sudden attacks of life-threatening panic
- Difficulty concentrating
- Excessive gambling or impulse buying
- Trouble learning new information
- Increased anger, frustration, hostility
- Insomnia or increased nightmares

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The Numbers
In the United States, anxiety disorders affect over 40 million adults over the age of 18 (18.1% of the total population). Out of this number, only 36.9% go to receive treatment.
**Most common anxiety disorders**

*(in the United States)*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Disorder</th>
<th>Cases</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Generalized Anxiety Disorder</td>
<td>6.8 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Anxiety Disorder</td>
<td>15 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Major Depressive Disorder</td>
<td>16.1 million</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phobias</td>
<td>19 million</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Women are more often 2x more likely to develop anxiety disorders over men*
Another major factor impacting the current levels of stress in the U.S. is the COVID-19 pandemic. The combination of going into quarantine, fear of job or home loss, and sheer number of deaths has had an intense impact on the U.S. adult population.
Stress and Anxiety in 2020
The COVID-19 pandemic by the numbers

88,000
The number of people who developed new anxiety or depressions as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic

370%
The percentage increase of anxiety screenings per day

Between the first half of 2019 and April-May 2020, US adults were \( 3x \) more likely to screen positive for depressive and anxiety disorders.

\( \frac{1}{3} \) screened positive for both.
Stress Relief
There’s a large variety of healthy tactics that people use currently to help relieve stress. Typically these activities are calming or active like reading or exercise.

However, while there are healthy ways to relieve stress, there are also unhealthy ways to cope with stress that harm the body and mind, such as binge eating or self harm.
Psychotropic drugs, like antidepressants, are one way that adults diagnosed with anxiety disorders can receive treatment. However, the rise in popularity may be contributed mainly to over-prescribing.

At least half of the adults in the United States being treated with antidepressants aren’t actually benefiting from the active pharmacological effects of the drug due to over-prescribing. They do still receive all the side effects, including nausea, agitation, and loss of appetite.
CBT is a short-term, goal-oriented psychotherapy treatment that takes a hands-on, practical approach to problem-solving. The goal is to change patterns of thinking or behavior that are behind people’s difficulties and change the way they feel without medication. It also comes with no side effects.

Many people seeking help go to their primary care doctor for assistance and walk away with an antidepressant without being aware of non-prescription methods such as Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT).
To help me gather research on how stress and anxiety affects some of my peers, I conducted a survey of 11-20 multiple-choice questions on their personal experiences with stress and anxiety.
Survey Respondents

total: 73

**Age**
- 18-23: 67%
- 24-29: 5%
- <18: 4%
- 30-39: 3%
- 40-59: 15%
- 60+: 5%

**Gender**
- Female: 77%
- Male: 18%
- Non-binary: 4%
- Other: 1%
How stressed out do you feel?

- **Currently**
- **Over the past 6 months**

Level of stress: 0 (No Stress) to 10 (Extremely Stressed)

Number of people:

- 0
- 1
- 2
- 3
- 4
- 5
- 6
- 7
- 8
- 9
- 10 (Extremely Stressed)

Survey: Emily Dontenville BFA Thesis | 2020-2021
The main cause of your stress?

<18-23
School
The general state of the world
Relationships

24-60+
The general state of the world
Work
Money/Bills

Your favorite way to relieve stress?

<18-23
Hang out with friends/family
Listen to music
Hobbies

24-60+
Outdoor activity
Hang out with friends/family
Exercise
Out of the 73 survey respondents, 25 (35.2%) said they had been diagnosed with an anxiety or depressive disorder.
Of the 25 respondents diagnosed with an anxiety or depressive disorder:

**Therapy**
9 do not receive therapy  
4 of those 9 would like to receive therapy  
All who are receiving therapy believe it is actively benefitting them

**Medication**
13 take medication  
3 of those 13 do not believe the medication is actively benefitting them
Obstacles

In order to receive treatment, many times there are significant and unnecessary obstacles in a person’s way before they can receive help.

“Yes, my doctor told me I would be fine without help and grow out of it and never looked into treatment.”

“I wasn’t given any resources and it was difficult to find information.”

“The thought of talking with a professional scares me.”

“I was seeing a pediatrician and they didn’t take it very seriously and I was too nervous to see someone who specialized.”
In the present day, people all over the world are dealing with stress and anxiety in extremely high volumes. In an effort to combat this, providing a space with various tactics to relieve stress can help people cope with their anxieties in day to day life.
5 Solution
solace
your safe space
solace (noun)

/ˈsæləs/

1. comfort or consolation in a time of distress or sadness.

2. an all-inclusive center dedicated to stress relief and accessible therapy resources. It is designed for all levels of stress, but includes certain amenities for specific needs, as well. Whether it is attending a therapy appointment, meeting up with friends to do homework, or simply enjoying the outdoors, there is something for everyone at Solace.
Brandon Grotesque

A B C D E
F G H I J K
L M N O P
Q R S T U
V W X Y Z
0 1 2 3 4
5 6 7 8 9

#6D6E71
R 109
G 110
B 113

#FCB13D
R 252
G 177
B 61
A phone app to have the resources of Solace available anywhere you are, whether you are currently in a Solace space or in your own home.
The Solace space features two floors with four main stress relief components: therapy, a gym, solo quiet areas, and larger community areas. On the backside of the space is a large outdoor area.
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**Floor Plan**

- **Gym**
- **Therapy**
- **Solitude**
- **Community**
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Solace has three therapy treatment rooms, a main therapy check-in lobby, and two larger, specialized therapy rooms. The design is based around comfort, green and nurturing tones, and flexibility. It is open and available for anyone seeking therapy resources.
Therapy Lobby

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Solitude

The solitude areas of Solace are dedicated to providing quiet and secluded areas for guests to get away from the noise and drama of reality and spend time to themselves. There are 8 small solo pods and a larger semi-collaborative area for working.
Solo Pod

Acoustic paneling on all 4 walls and ceiling

Display screen and control panel to adjust light, temperature, sound, etc.
Community

The largest physical area of Solace is dedicated to community. The area is designed for collaboration and spending quality time with family and friends. While the space is configured for large groups it is still flexible for solo stress relief. The community area includes the central courtyard and the large exterior “backyard” that features gardens, grassy areas, and seating.
seating
detail color
brick exterior
cone path
roof paneling
pole lighting
seating
concrete path
Community Material Board
solace
The Solace City is a smaller, scaled version of the main Solace campus with a more compact layout to fit a variety of buildings and spaces. This plan features a small community area in the front, solo pods, and two therapy rooms.
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Front Community Seating
Thank you!

Emily Dontenville
Interior Architecture BFA Thesis | 2020-2021

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