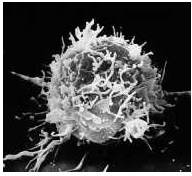


# Stress and Immune Functioning



***This activity will help you to:***

- Understand research into the relationship between stress and immune functioning*
- Extract, summarise and use psychological information in exam essays*
- Write effective commentary and discussion (AO2) in exam essays*

## Is There Any Evidence That Stress Makes Us Ill?

We have examined the findings of Kiecolt-Glaser et al (1984). Here is a brief summary of some other research findings into the relationship between stress, immune functioning and illness:

- Bartrop et al (1977) studied people who had recently lost an intimate relationship, either through divorce or the death of their partner. They found that such people, compared to a control group, had less responsive immune systems.
- Levy et al (1989) gave participants a scale that measured their perceived daily hassles and also measured the activity of their natural killer (immune) cells. They found that the two measures showed a small negative correlation.
- Both job stress and unemployment have been found to be associated with a lowering in the responsiveness of lymphocytes to a chemical challenge (Dorien et al, 1985; Arnetz et al, 1987)

Use these research findings to write a paragraph that could appear in an essay answer to the question 'Discuss research into the relationship between stress and immune functioning'. The paragraph you write should summarise the main findings given above, but without getting bogged down in lengthy descriptions of the research. It should also contain commentary explaining the implications of the different research findings. You should try to use phrases like:

- This shows that...
- This suggests that...
- One implication of this finding is...

## What Are The Mediating Factors?

Mediating factors are those things that modify the effect of one thing on another. We have seen that stress can affect immune functioning, but there are many factors that influence the extent of this relationship. Here is some relevant research:

- Taylor (1999) found that people with a high number of positive social relationships showed smaller immune changes in response to stress than people with few positive relationships.
- Segerstrom (1999) found that optimistic students who used active engagement with problems as a coping strategy showed stronger immune responses than those who were pessimistic and/or used avoidant coping.
- Kiecolt-Glaser et al (1995) found that medical students who vented their frustrations and expressed their feelings about stress had fewer doctor's visits and better immune functioning than those who did not.

Write a further 'however' paragraph where you use the above findings to modify your conclusions. Start your paragraph with the sentence:

- However, stress does not affect every person's immune system in the same way.*