

UNIT 4

**Anxiety and
Psychosomatic
Illnesses**

Why is this unit important and what I will learn?

This unit is about Anxiety and psychosomatic illnesses, which are prevalent conditions that significantly impact patients' physical and mental health. As future healthcare providers, understanding these conditions will enable you to diagnose, manage, and treat patients more effectively.

I will learn the following:

- **First:** To define anxiety and explain its physiological and psychological manifestations.
- **Second:** To be able to explain the relationship between anxiety and psychosomatic illnesses.
- **Third:** To identify common psychosomatic disorders encountered in medical and dental practice.
- **Forth:** To explain and recommend to my patients the evidence-based strategies to manage anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms, including referrals to psychologists.
- **Fifth:** To apply cultural sensitivity understanding when addressing anxiety-related issues in diverse populations.

Understanding Anxiety

Anxiety is a psychological state characterized by feelings of tension, worried thoughts, and physiological changes such as increased heart rate or blood pressure.

It often arises in anticipation of future threats or challenges.

Anxiety can manifest in various forms, including generalized anxiety disorder (GAD), panic disorder, social anxiety disorder, and specific phobias



Anxiety and Psychosomatic illness

psychosomatic illnesses refer to conditions where psychological factors, such as stress, anxiety, or depression, significantly contribute to the development, progression, or exacerbation of physical symptoms.

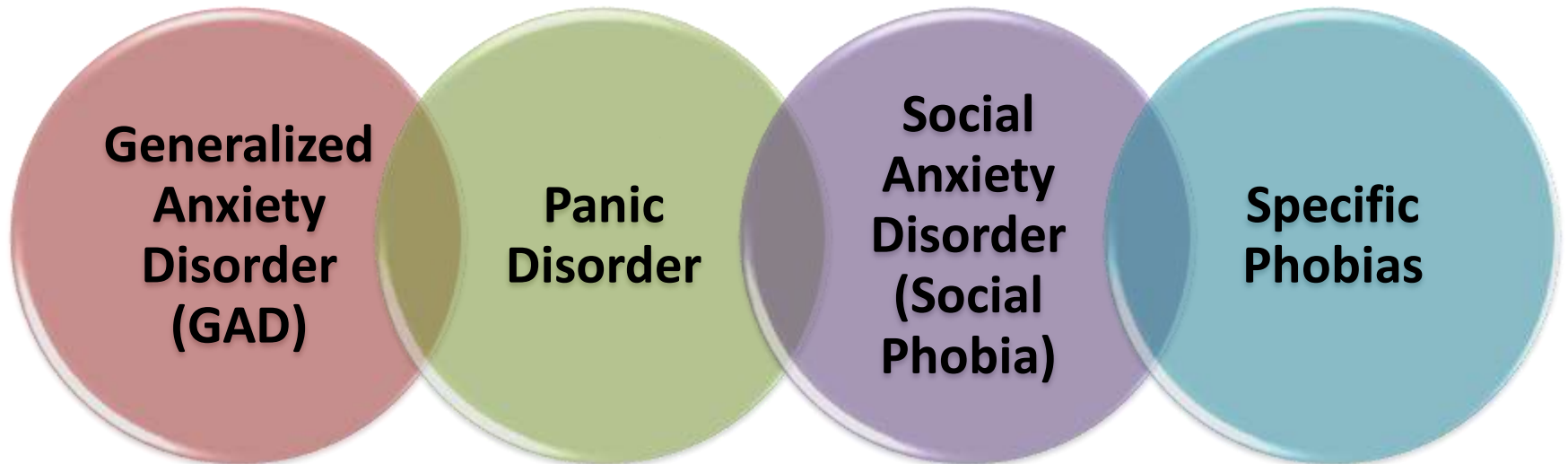
These illnesses highlight the intricate connection between the mind and body, emphasizing that mental health can directly influence physical well-being



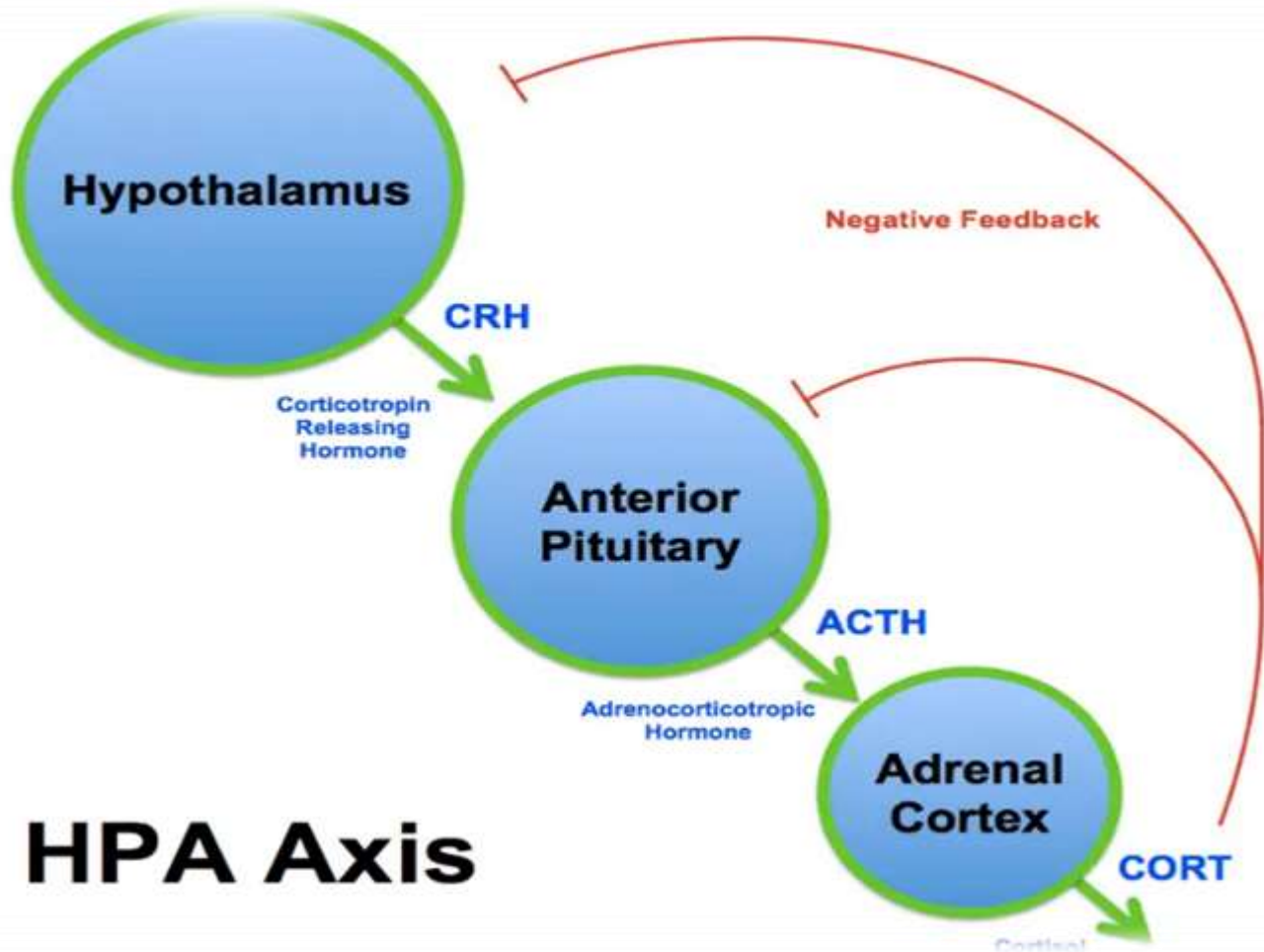
Why anxiety should be managed?



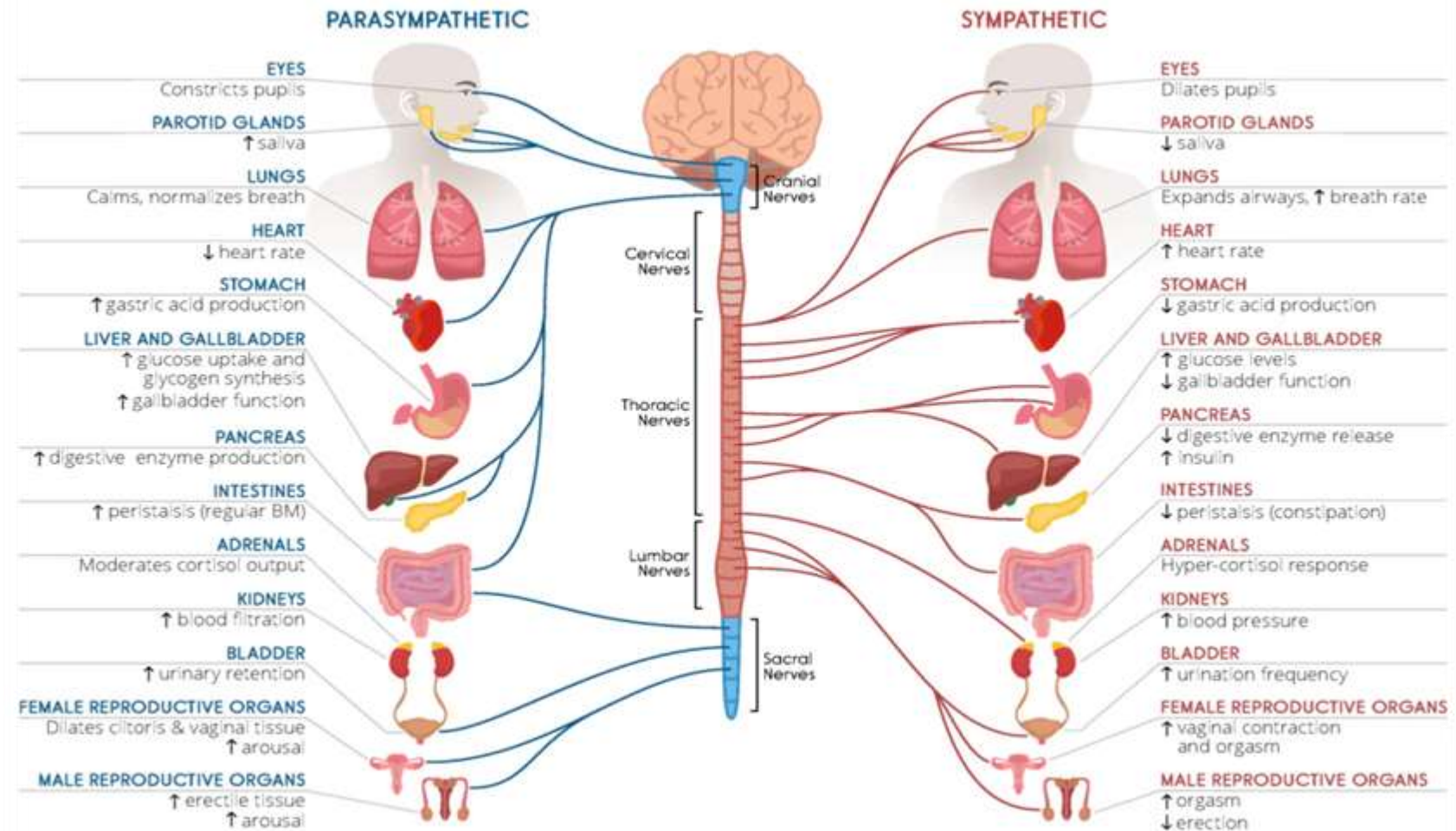
Types of Anxiety Disorders



Physiological Mechanisms of Anxiety



Physiological Mechanisms of Anxiety



Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders

A. Psychological Symptoms:

- Excessive Worry: Persistent and uncontrollable thoughts about potential negative outcomes.
- Irritability: Feeling easily annoyed or agitated.
- Difficulty Concentrating: Trouble focusing on tasks due to intrusive thoughts or restlessness.
- Fear of Losing Control: A pervasive sense of impending doom or fear of going "crazy."
- Avoidance: Avoiding situations or places that trigger anxiety, such as social gatherings or specific phobic objects.
- Compulsions: Repetitive behaviors or mental acts aimed at reducing anxiety, as seen in OCD.
- Hypervigilance: Constantly scanning the environment for potential threats, leading to an inability to relax.

Symptoms of Anxiety Disorders

B. Physical Symptoms:

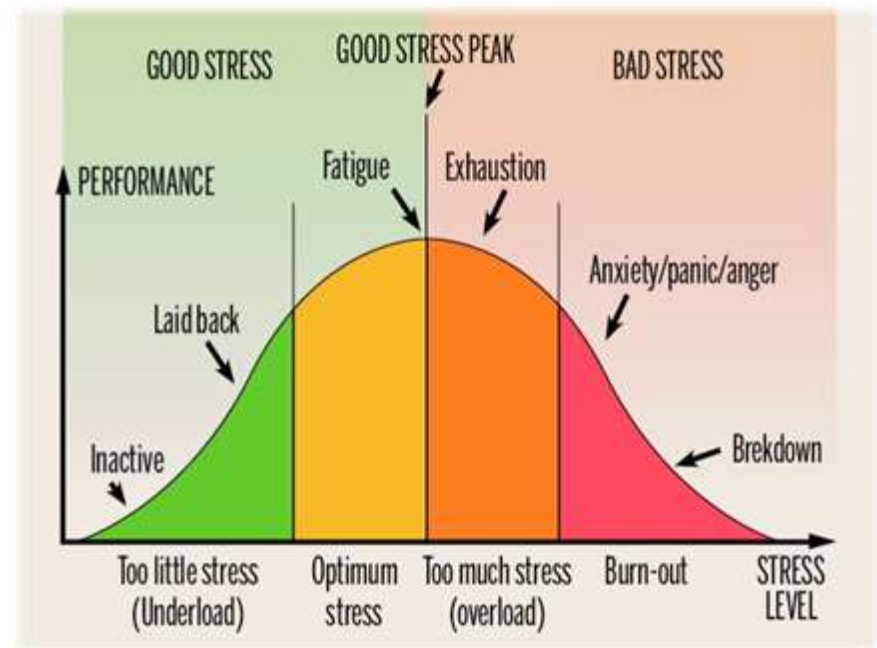
- Restlessness: Feeling on edge or unable to relax.
- Fatigue: Feeling tired despite not engaging in strenuous activity, often due to disrupted sleep or constant tension.
- Muscle Tension: Tightness in muscles, particularly in the neck, shoulders, and back, leading to discomfort or pain.
- Sleep Disturbances: Difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing restorative sleep due to racing thoughts or physical tension.
- Gastrointestinal Issues: Anxiety can affect the digestive system, leading to symptoms like nausea, diarrhea, or irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).
- Increased Heart Rate: Palpitations or a racing heart, often triggered by the activation of the sympathetic nervous system.
- Sweating and Trembling: Physical signs of autonomic arousal, especially during panic attacks.

“Good Stress” and “Bad Stress”

Stress is not inherently negative; it can be categorized into "good stress" (eustress) and "bad stress" (distress) depending on its nature and duration.

Eustress is short-term, motivating, and often linked to positive challenges

Distress refers to chronic, overwhelming stress that persists over time, often stemming from uncontrollable or negative situations like financial struggles, work overload, or unresolved conflicts.



Psychosomatic Illnesses: Bridging Mind and Body

Psychosomatic illnesses, or psychophysiologic disorders, are conditions where psychological factors such as stress, emotions, and mental health issues significantly contribute to the development or worsening of physical symptoms.

The diagram consists of two overlapping circles. The left circle is red and contains text about psychosomatic illnesses. The right circle is green and contains text about chronic anxiety. The overlapping area in the center is a brownish-yellow color.

Chronic anxiety, which is a persistent state of heightened stress, is closely linked to psychosomatic illnesses as it perpetuates the body's "fight or flight" response, activating the sympathetic nervous system and flooding the body with stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline.

First: Cardiovascular System

Elevated levels of cortisol and adrenaline increase heart rate and blood pressure, forcing the heart to work harder over extended periods.

This prolonged strain can lead to hypertension (high blood pressure), an increased risk of heart disease and strokes.

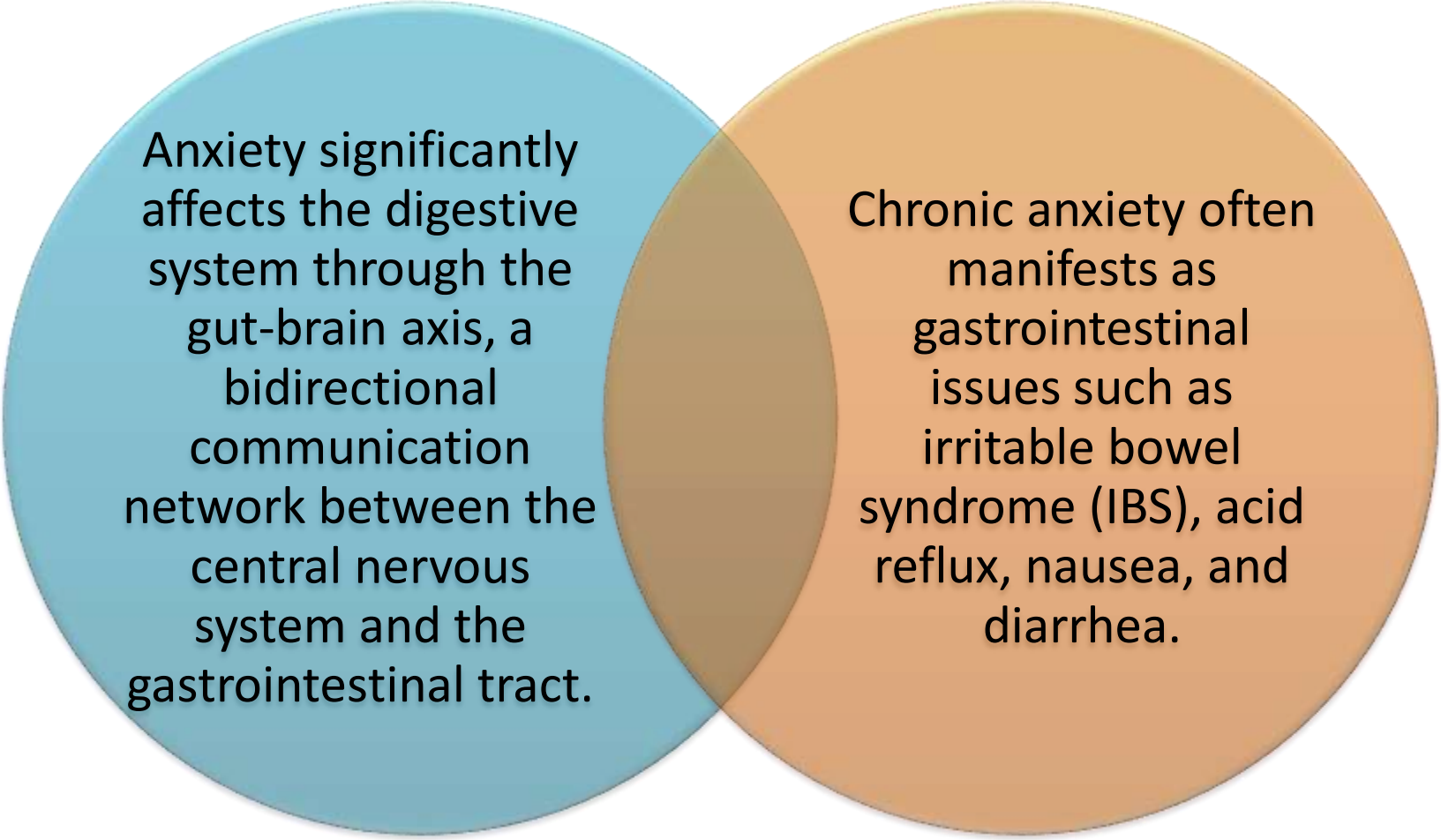


Second: Immune System

The immune system is also compromised by chronic anxiety. While acute stress temporarily boosts immune function, prolonged stress suppresses it, making the body more susceptible to infections and illnesses.

High cortisol levels interfere with the production and function of white blood cells, which are crucial for fighting off pathogens

Third: Digestive System



Anxiety significantly affects the digestive system through the gut-brain axis, a bidirectional communication network between the central nervous system and the gastrointestinal tract.

Chronic anxiety often manifests as gastrointestinal issues such as irritable bowel syndrome (IBS), acid reflux, nausea, and diarrhea.

Forth: Endocrine System

The endocrine system bears the brunt of chronic anxiety due to the continuous release of stress hormones.

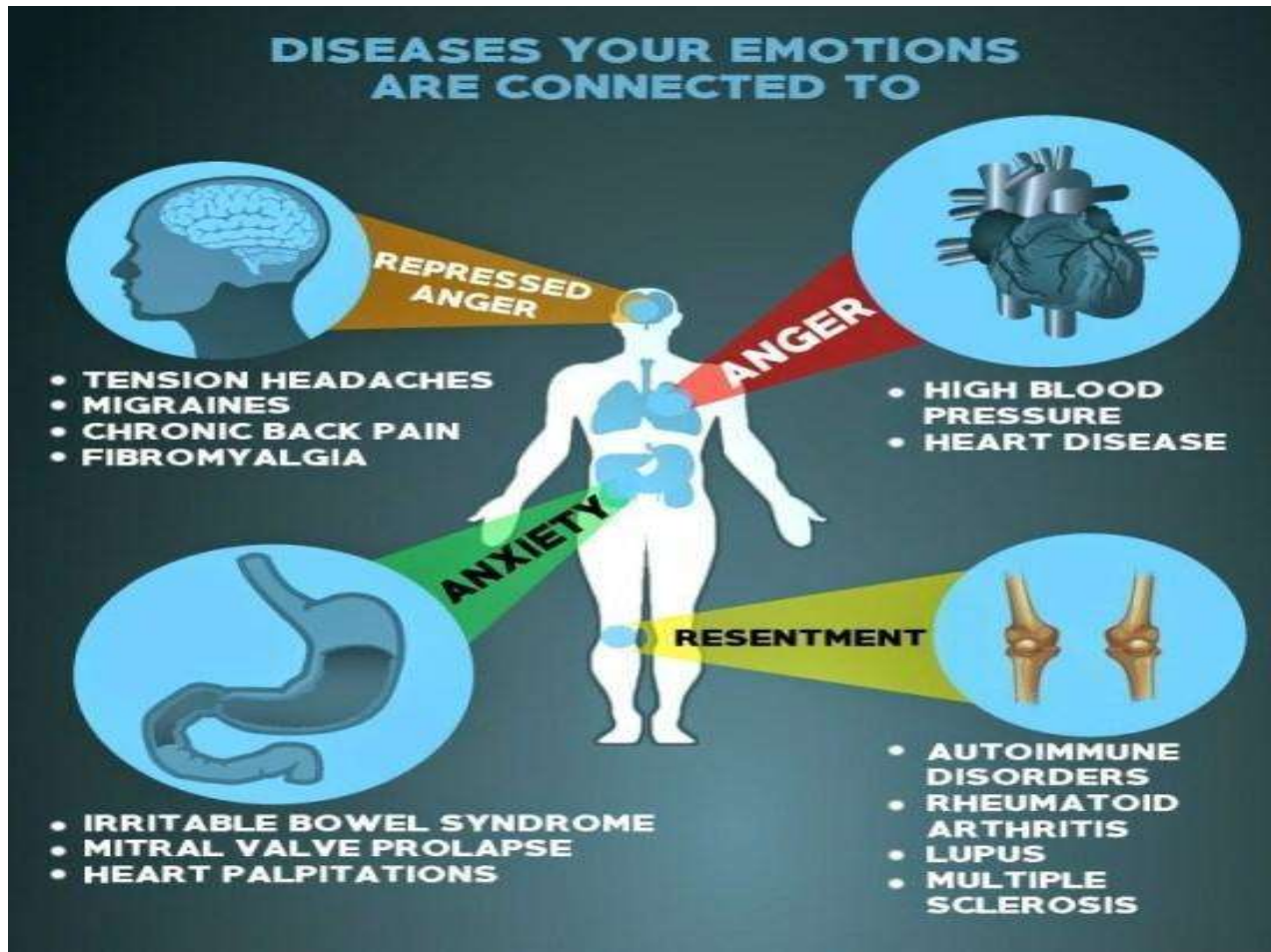
Elevated cortisol levels disrupt hormonal balance, affecting insulin sensitivity, thyroid function, and reproductive health.

Fifth: Musculoskeletal System

The body's instinctive response to stress is to tense up muscles as a protective mechanism, but when this tension persists, it can lead to chronic pain conditions such as headaches, back pain, and temporomandibular joint disorder (TMJ).



Psychosomatic illness & Emotions



Pathophysiology: The Biopsychosocial Model

The bio-psycho-social model is a framework used to understand how biological, psychological, and social factors interact to influence health and disease.

Biological Factors:

- Genetic Predisposition:
- Neuroendocrine Dysregulation:
- Neurotransmitter Imbalance:

Psychological Factors:

- Stress and Anxiety
- Cognitive Appraisal

Social Factors:

- Lifestyle and Environment.
- Cultural Influences.

Diagnosis Challenges

Diagnosing psychosomatic disorders can be challenging due to the overlap between physical symptoms and those of organic diseases.

Factors should be looked at:

- Comprehensive Patient History
- Ruling Out Organic Causes
- Interdisciplinary Collaboration
- Patient-Centered Approach

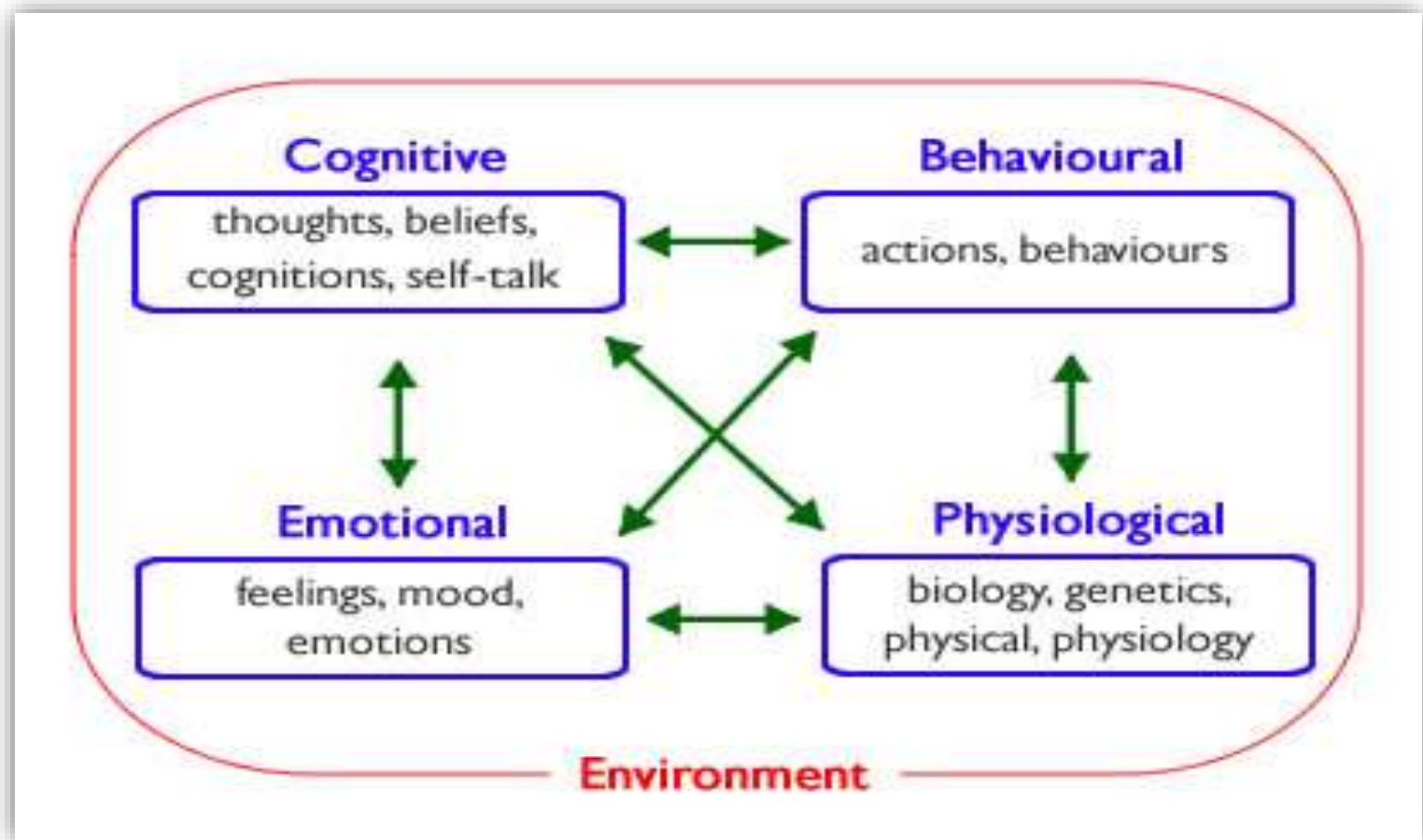
Managing Anxiety and Psychosomatic Symptoms

Anxiety and psychosomatic symptoms can significantly impact an individual's quality of life, but effective management strategies are available.

These strategies can be broadly categorized into:

- Non-pharmacological interventions
- Pharmacological treatments
- Lifestyle modifications

Non-pharmacological interventions



Pharmacological treatments

While non-pharmacological interventions are often *the first line of treatment*, medications may be necessary for moderate to severe anxiety or when psychosomatic symptoms are significantly impairing daily functioning

Antidepressants

Anxiolytics

Lifestyle modifications

Exercise

Types of
Exercise

Nutrition

Sleep Hygiene

Stress
Management

Religious and
Spiritual
practices

Practical Applications: Managing Anxiety-Induced Symptoms

Case 1: Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS) with Anxiety

Case 2: Temporomandibular Joint Disorder (TMJ) with Anxiety

Case 3: Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (CFS) with Depression

Practical Tips

Do

- Validate patients' experiences and emotions.
- Use open-ended questions to explore stressors.
- Refer patients to mental health specialists when needed.

Avoid

- Dismiss symptoms as purely psychological without investigation.
- Rush through consultations without addressing emotional concerns.
- Prescribe anxiolytics as the sole treatment without exploring other options.