

Effective Stress Management

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INTRODUCTION

Pioneers of Stress

In the early part of the twentieth century, Walter Cannon was a noted psychologist employed at the Harvard Medical School. He was the first person to describe the body's reaction to stress. Think of it this way: Your heart begins to pound and speed up, you seem unable to catch your breath, you begin to perspire, your muscles tense and a whole array of changes occur within your body. He identified this stress reaction as the 'fight or flight' response. Your body prepares itself, when confronted by a threat, to either stand ground and fight or

run away.

Using rats in an experiment and exposing them to stressors, Hans Selye was able to specify the changes in the body's physiology. In his book "The Stress Of Life", he summarized stress reactivity as a three-phase process called the general adaptation syndrome:

Phase 1: Alarm reaction - The body shows the changes characteristic of the first exposure to a stressor. At the same time, its resistance is diminished and, if the stressor is sufficiently strong (like extreme temperature), death may result.

Phase 2: State of resistance - Resistance ensues if continued exposure to the stressor is compatible with adaptation. The bodily signs characteristic of the alarm reaction have virtually disappeared, and resistance rises above normal.

Phase 3: Stage of exhaustion - Following long continued exposure to the same stressor, to which the body has become adjusted, eventually adaptation energy is exhausted. The signs of the alarm reaction reappear, but now they are irreversible, and the individual dies.

Selye said stress is "nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it." That means both good things (like a promotion) to which we must adapt (also called eustress) and bad things (loss of a loved one, a.k.a. distress). Both are experienced physiologically. Other researchers have added to the work of these two scientists to shed more light on the relationship of stress to body processes. With this understanding comes a better appreciation of which illnesses and diseases are associated with stress and how to prevent these

conditions from developing. Others also helped clarify the effects of stress. Others have found ways of successfully treating people with stress-related illnesses.

Stress may not just be bothersome but may be downright unhealthy, and that stress may lead to other negative consequences, such as poor relationships with loved ones or low academic achievement. Stress management is serious business to which some very fine minds have devoted their time and effort. This study has paid off and is continuing to do so.

What Causes Stress?

What causes stress? Part of the answer is a “stressor”. The other part is “stress reactivity”. A stressor is a stimulus with the potential of triggering the fight or flight response. The stressors for which our bodies were evolutionarily trained were threats to our safety. The caveman who saw a lion looking for its next meal needed to react quickly. Cavemen who were not fast enough or strong enough to respond to this threat didn't have any worry about the next threat. They became meals for the lions.

When you step off a curb, not noticing a car coming down the street, and hear its horn, you quickly jump back onto the curb. Your heart beats fast, your breathing changes, and you perspire. These are all manifestations of your response to a stressor, the threat of being hit by a car. Other stressors you encounter have the potential for eliciting the same fight or flight response, even though it would be inappropriate to respond immediately or with some action.

These stressors are symbolic ones; for example, the loss of status, threats to self-esteem, work overload, or over-crowding. When the boss overloads you with work, it is dysfunctional to fight with him or her and equally ridiculous to run away and not tackle the work. When you encounter the stressors associated with moving to a new town, fighting with new people you meet or shying away from meeting them are both inappropriate means of adjustment.

The point is that our bodies have evolved to respond to stressors with an immediate action by altering their physiology for greater speed and strength. When we encounter symbolic stressors, our bodies are altered in the same manner, although we do not use the changed physiology by responding with some action. Therefore, we build up stress products. We do not use these stress products but rather “grin and bear” the situation. The results are illness and disease when the stress reaction is chronic, is prolonged, or goes unabated.

This need not be the case. We can learn to take control of ourselves and of our bodies to prevent the fight or flight response from developing when encountering symbolic threats. We can also learn how to use stress products once our physiology has changed to prevent them from resulting in illness, disease, or other negative consequences.

Now that you know what a stressor is and what stress reactivity entails, it is time to define stress itself. It is the combination of a stressor and stress reactivity. Without both of these components, there is no stress. A stressor has only the potential of eliciting a stress reaction. Imagine two people fired from their jobs. One views being fired as catastrophic, while the other views being fired as

less severe. The stressor (being fired) had the potential of eliciting physiological arousal, but only the thought processes employed by the first person would result in such a reaction. By definition, that person experienced stress. The second person encountered the same stressor but perceived it in such a way as to prevent physiological arousal. That person was not stressed.

Goals of Stress Management

The goal of stress management is not to eliminate all stress. Life would certainly be dull without both joyful stressors to which we have to adjust and distressors needing a response. Furthermore, stress is often a motivator for peak performance.

Stress can be useful, stimulating, and welcome. Therefore, even if it is possible, we do not want to eliminate all stress from our lives. Our goal should be to limit the harmful effects of stress while maintaining life's quality and vitality. With a great deal of stress, a great deal of illness occurs. However, with only a minute amount of stress, illness could still happen. Thus, there is an optimal amount of stress that is healthy.

Chapter One

STRESS AND THE BODY

Hot Reactors

Chronic stress can lead to poor health. Some people tend to react to stressors with an all out physiological effort that takes a toll on their health. We call these people hot reactors. If you notice that you get angry easily (you are often anxious or depressed, you urinate frequently, you experience constipation or diarrhea more than usual, or you experience nausea or vomiting), you may be

a hot reactor. In that case, you may want to seek regular medical examinations to identify illnesses when they can be easily cured or contained and learn to use stress management techniques and strategies.

Psychosomatic Disease

People have died or have become ill from severe stress, when there seems nothing physically wrong with them. Some illnesses are easily seen as being physical, while others are assuredly recognized as being mental, yet it is impossible to deny the interaction between the mind and the body and the effects of one upon the other. The mind makes the body susceptible. These conditions are called psychosomatic.

Psychosomatic disease is not “all in the mind”, contrary to popular belief, but involves both mind and body. Psychosomatic disease is real, can be diagnosed, and is manifested physically. However, it also has a component in the mind, although it is not easily measured. That common cold may be a function of psychological stress, which decreases the effectiveness of the immunological system and results in the body being more vulnerable to cold viruses. That cold may also be caused by psychological stress using up particular vitamins in the body and leading to decreased effectiveness in combating viruses.

Psychogenic refers to a physical disease caused by emotional stress. Asthma is an example of this. Somatogenic psychosomatic disease occurs when the mind increases the body's susceptibility to some disease causing microbes or some natural degenerative process. Examples are rheumatoid arthritis and

cancer.

Stress-related Conditions and Illnesses

Hypertension

This is the excessive and damaging pressure of the blood against the walls of the arterial blood vessels. There are several causes of hypertension. Excessive sodium (salt) intake may cause hypertension in those genetically susceptible. It can also be caused by a kidney disease, a narrow opening in the aorta (main blood vessel), and the use of contraceptives. However, these conditions cause only an estimated ten percent of all hypertension. Approximately 90 percent of hypertension is termed essential hypertension and has no known cause.

Forty-one percent of the United States population aged twenty to seventy-four are hypertensive, although many of these people do not even know it, since hypertension occurs without signs and symptoms. Since blood pressure increases during stress, the relationship between stress and hypertension has long been suspected. Recognizing this relationship, educational programs for hypertensives have included stress management. Although hypertension can be controlled with medication, the possibility of disturbing side effects from these drugs has led to attempts to control hypertension in other ways. Since obesity, cigarette smoking, and lack of exercise correlates to hypertension, programs involving weight control, smoking withdrawal, and exercise, as well as decreased ingestion of salt, have all been used to respond to high blood pressure.

Stroke

Apoplexy (also called stroke) is a lack of oxygen in the brain resulting from a blockage or rupture of one of the arteries that supply it. Stroke is related to hypertension, which may also result in a cerebral hemorrhage. Stroke has been linked with high blood pressure, diet and stress.

Coronary Heart Disease

Heart attack kills more Americans than any other single cause of death. That stress is related to coronary heart disease is not surprising when we consider the physiological mechanisms that stress brings into play: accelerated heart rate, increased blood pressure, increased serum cholesterol, and fluid retention resulting in increased blood volume. Further, the stereotypical heart attack victim has been the highly stressed, overworked, overweight businessperson with a cigarette dangling from his lips and a martini in his hand.

Ulcers

Ulcers are fissures or cuts in the wall of the stomach and other parts of the intestines. For many years, it was thought that stress led to the excessive amounts of hydrochloric acid being produced in the stomach and the intestines. One theory explaining the effects of stress on the development of ulcers pertains to the mucous coating that lines the stomach. The theory states that, during chronic stress, secretions cause the stomach lining to constrict. This, in turn, results in a shutting down of mucosal production. Without the protective barrier, hydrochloric acid breaks down the tissue and can even reach blood vessels, resulting in bleeding ulcer.

Many cases of ulcers are caused by a bacterium called H. pylori. It is believed that H. pylori inflames the gastrointestinal lining, stimulates acid production, or both. Another major cause of ulcers is the ingestion of aspirin and other non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drugs, like ibuprofen and naproxen and piroxicam. These drugs promote bleeding in the stomach and can wear away its protective lining.

Still, stress can exacerbate the conditions in the digestive tract to make ulcers more likely to occur. Stress results in an increase in hydrochloric acid in the intestines and stomach, and a decreased effectiveness of the immune system that is marshaled to combat the invasion by H. pylori.

Migraines

Migraine headaches are the result of a constriction and dilation of the carotid arteries of one side of the head. The constriction phase, called the pre-attack or prodrome, is often associated with light or noise sensitivity, irritability, and a flushing or pallor of the skin. When the dilation of the arteries occurs, certain chemicals stimulate adjacent nerve endings, causing pain.

The migraine is not just a severe headache. It is a unique type of headache with special characteristics, and it usually involves just one side of head. The prodrome consists of warning signs, such as flashing lights, differing patterns, or some dark spaces. Migraines are a sign and symptom of a lifestyle gone awry. Signs and symptoms should be treated with either medication or meditation without eliminating the underlying cause. Rather than care for the migraine after it strikes, why not prevent it in the first place by changing your

lifestyle?

Cancer

Although many people do not realize it, both the prevention and the treatment of cancer are suspected of being related to stress. Some researchers believe that chronic stress results in a chronic inability of the immune response to prevent the multiplication of mutant cells, which some believe are present but normally controlled in most people. The role of stress in the development of cancer is still being debated. Since cancer is the second leading cause of death in the US, research in this area has been and is presently being conducted.

Further, some support has been provided for the cancer-prone personality type. The cancer-prone person has been described as holding resentment, with the inability to forgive, using self-pity, lacking the ability to develop and maintain meaningful interpersonal relationships, and having poor self-image.

Tension Headaches

Headaches may be caused by muscle tension accompanying stress. This muscle tension may include the forehead, jaw, or neck. Once the headache occurs, it tends to fuel itself. It is difficult to relax when you're in pain. Treatment for tension headaches may include medication, heat on tense muscles, or massage. Others have also reported on the effectiveness of relaxation training for control and prevention of tension headache.

Allergies And Asthma

Some medical scientists, unable to identify any antigen in many asthmatics, have argued that allergies are emotional diseases. This was shown

in an experiment in which a woman who was allergic to horses began to wheeze when shown only a picture of a horse, another woman who was allergic to fish had an allergic reaction to a toy fish and empty fishbowl' and others reacted to uncontaminated air when suspecting it contained pollen. Crying-induced asthma, brought on during stressful events is another example.

Some have concluded, therefore, that the effects of stress on the immune system either decrease our ability to withstand an antigen or, even in the absence of an antigen, can lead to allergic-like response. Some allergy sufferers -- in particular, asthmatics -- are being taught relaxation techniques and breathing control exercises to enable them to control their physiology during allergic reactions.

Post Traumatic Stress Disorder

PTSD is a condition that develops in people who have experienced an extreme psychological and/or physical event that is interpreted as particularly distressing. PTSD is defined as:

- A threat to one's life or serious injury or being subject to horror with intense fear and helplessness
- Recurrent flashbacks, repeated memories and emotions, dreams, nightmares, illusions or hallucinations related to traumatic events from which one is often amnesic
- Trying to avoid feelings, thoughts, or places that may trigger associations with trauma

- Poor sleep, poor appetite
- Self-recrimination
- Feeling jumpy, irritable, or emotionally explosive or "spaced out"
- Having difficulty concentrating, socializing, or working

Among the characteristics of those who have successfully managed PTSD are that they had supportive relationships with family and friends, they did not dwell on the trauma, they had personal faith/religion/hope, and they had a sense of humor.

Other Conditions

Stress has been shown to affect other health conditions, as well. Stress can lead pregnant women to miscarry. In a study, 70 percent of women who had miscarriage had at least one stressful experience four to five months before the miscarriage, as compared with 52 percent who did not have one. Even sports injuries occur more frequently in athletes who have experienced stressors and who do not have the resources and skills to cope well with stress. With high stress and poor coping resources, the result is increased muscle tension and attention redirected toward the stress and away from the event.

Chapter Two

STRESS AND LIFE SITUATIONS

Stress begins when a particular event disorients you and knocks you out of balance. You are nudged or shoved into an unbalanced state and need to right yourself. This life situation could be a change in temperature, a threat from another person, death of a loved one, or some other change in your life to which you need to adapt. We all know, however, that the same situation presented to different people may result in different reactions. That is because different people will interpret the situation differently. This is termed their 'cognitive appraisal' and can be controlled.

We have a life situation that is perceived. Such feelings as fear, anger,

and insecurity or feelings of being overpowered, frustrated, pressured, or helpless may be results of perceiving a life situation as stressful. These feelings lead to physiological stimulation. If physiological stimulation is chronic or prolonged, illness or disease may result. In addition, stress can lead to other consequences, like inefficient performance and interpersonal relationships at work, school, or home.

Setting Up Roadblocks

Once the succession from a life situation through emotion, physiological stimulation, insight, and susceptibility to illnesses and other consequences is understood, it is then possible to hamper these consequences from occurring. Intervention entails setting up roadblocks at different points on the stress model.

For example, even though a life situation requiring adaptation presents itself to you, a roadblock between that life situation and the next phase could be set up. This roadblock could consist of prescribed medications (tranquilizers, sedatives), drugs, or an assertion on your part that you will just not permit yourself to consider this situation as upsetting. Regarding the last option, you might decide to focus upon the positive aspects of the situation.

A roadblock between the perception phase and the emotion phase can also be established. To prevent disturbing physiological stimulation, you can employ various kinds of relaxation techniques to tame potential emotional reactions. The blocks between it and poor health must consist of some form of physical activity that utilizes the stress resources.

Some stress management programs teach people meditation, yoga, or time management. Your goal, however, will not be to eliminate all of your stress. Remember, there is a minimum amount of stress that we need to have in our lives. Thus, it is impossible, and undesirable, to eliminate all stress.

The Positive Stress: Eustress

Stress has positive consequences. Stress that leads to positive consequences is what we call eustress. When stress leads to actions that are beneficial to the person, it is called eustress. And when stress encourages optimum performance, that is also attributable to eustress. You probably have experienced stress that made you consider yourself better for the experience when it was over - either it was a positive life event that required significant adjustment, or a more threatening event that led you to make important changes in your life.

In any case, you were stressed for the better. That is eustress. Here are a few other examples:

- Having to present an important report to a major client and getting pats on the back afterwards because stress made you prepare extra hard for it.
- Asking the person you have a crush on since middle school to the prom because you've pressured yourself that now is the right time to do so.
- Having a friend tell you what he or she does not like about your attitude and changing this ill trait to make yourself a better person

Taking Control

Managing stress is really just exercising control rather than giving it up to others or to your environment. So often we hear others say, "So and so made me angry!" No one can make you angry. Rather, you allow yourself to be angered by what so and so has said or done. When you describe your behavior as dependent upon another's, you have given up control of that behavior to that other person.

The actual event does not necessarily have anger as its consequence. The anger was brought to that situation by you – not by the event or another person. On some days, the same event would not have resulted in your becoming angry. You may have been having a great day and telling yourself it was so great that nothing was going to ruin it. What's more, nothing did! You are the master of your ship. You may not be able to influence other people to alter what they say or do, but you can alter your reaction to what they say or do. No one can tell you to do otherwise.

Thus, it is up to you if you want other people's behavior or actions to affect you and cause an impact. It is up to you whether you should practice relaxation techniques when faced with these kinds of situations or not. The practice of these techniques is a good example of taking responsibility for your actions and taking control of your life.

It would be dysfunctional to employ stress management techniques in a stressful way – and yet, that is not uncommon. The more you try to control stress

and suppress it, the more stressed you will likely become; so take a breather. Since you have not bothered to use comprehensive stress management for the many years of your life, don't rush into it now.

Making a Commitment

While you are advised not to rush into stress management, a beginning should be made immediately. That first step is significant since subsequent steps depend upon it. Since chronic or prolonged stress reactivity may result in your becoming ill, the longer you wait to begin controlling stress, the less healthy you can expect to be. If you're healthy now, you want to maintain that status. If you're persistently ill and that illness is exacerbated by stress, you can move towards health by managing that stress.

Determine your commitment to managing your stress by completing a contract with yourself. Don't make the contract too stressful. Try to be realistic. Set both rewards and punishments for accomplishments and failures. There is no time like the present.

Chapter Three INTERVENTIONS

Eliminating Unnecessary Stressors

The better you can siphon off stressors, the more likely it is that you will be able to manage the stress in your life. You would think, if you could eliminate all stressors in your life, you would never experience stress and, therefore, never become ill from it. Since that goal is both impossible and undesirable, your attempt at stress management at the top level of the stress model should be to eliminate as many distressors as possible.

Nutrition and Stress

The relationship between nutrition and stress remains unclear. However, we know that certain food substances can produce a stress-like response, that other substances provided by foods can be depleted by stress, and that certain stress-related illnesses can be exacerbated by dietary habits.

In addition to being malnourished, ingesting too much or too little of particular nutrients can lead to illnesses that can cause a great deal of stress. An example is obesity. Although it is desirable to control your body weight, an overemphasis on dieting can itself be unhealthy. Sometimes, for instance, obesity can be in the mind of the beholder. That is, we are bombarded with media images of the ideal body type as being thin with all the curves in just the right places. Consequently, when our bodies do not measure up to this ideal, we become distressed and we vow to put that extra weight off.

If you find you are obsessive about your own weight (although you really need not be), you might want to consult with a counselor at your campus health center or with your personal physician.

Furthermore, certain food substances have particular relationships with stress. For example, a group of food substances can actually produce a stress-like response. These substances are called pseudostressors, or sympathomimetics. That is, they mimic sympathetic nervous system stimulation. Colas, tea, coffee and chocolate that contain caffeine are examples. Nicotine is another.

Sugar is another stress culprit. To break down sugar, the body must use some of its complex vitamins. We now know what that means. This results in a

diminished ability to produce adrenal hormones in response to stressors. Sugar ingestion has other stress implications. Ingestion of large amount of sugar in a short time, or missing meals then ingesting sugar, can result in a condition called hypoglycemia. Hypoglycemia is low blood sugar that is preceded by elevated levels of blood sugar. This condition may be accompanied by symptoms of anxiety, headache, dizziness, trembling, and irritability. Subsequent stressors are likely to provoke an unusually intense stress response.

Another food substance that has a relationship to stress is salt. Some people are genetically susceptible to sodium and will develop high blood pressure when they ingest too much of it. The federal government recommends no more than 5000 milligrams of salt, which translates to 2000 milligrams of sodium per day.

Now that we have an appreciation for the relationship of nutrition to stress, here are ways to manage stress better by reducing stressors in our diet.

- Eat a balanced diet that includes the amounts recommended in the food pyramid.
- Limit the amount of saturated fats in your diet and increase the amount of fiber.
- Add cruciferous vegetables to your diet and limit the alcohol you ingest.
- Limit the intake of processed flour. However, some experts believe that, if the flour is enriched with vitamins and minerals, it need not be avoided.
- Be more realistic about your weight. That is, lose weight if you need to, but

don't expect to measure up to the ideal projected by the media.

- Limit your sodium intake.

Noise and Stress

Anyone who has roomed with a noisy person, worked in a noisy office, or tried to study with a party going on in the next room can attest to the effect of noise on one's level of stress. Noise can raise blood pressure, increase heart rate, and lead to muscle tension. Noise has been found to be related to job dissatisfaction and to result in irritation and anxiety. Most disturbing is noise that constantly changes in pitch, intensity, or frequency.

Noise is measured in decibels. At 85 decibels, stress responses usually develop, and prolonged exposure to sounds above 90 decibels can result in hearing damage. Of course, depending on one's level of concentration and the task being performed, even low levels of noise can be bothersome.

In spite of its potential for stress, noise can at times be soothing. In fact, on many stress management audiotapes, you will find noise to help you relax. This is called white noise, and its purpose is to drown out other sounds that may interfere with relaxation. Sounds such as surf rolling onto the shore, birds chirping, or the wind rustling through the leaves can all serve as comforting sounds.

So you can see that noise can be stressful but certain sounds can be relaxing. You can take greater control of your life by limiting disturbing noises and seeking out relaxing sounds. Walk through the woods; recline on a beach. Noise

or relaxing sound – it's up to you.

Hassles, Chronic Stress, and Success

Everyday hassles are daily interactions with the environment that were essentially negative and, because of their chronic nature, could take a significant toll on health. Losing a wallet, smoking too much, and having troublesome neighbors are examples of these hassles. Although the absence of uplifts has not been found to be related to ill health, the presence of hassles has. Hassles have been shown to be predictive of psychological distress and the dynamics of stress and aging.

Success is multifaceted and, like beauty, is in the eyes of the beholder. What you view as successful, others might not. Some consider themselves successful when they achieve independence and their success charts reflects this viewpoint, with successes such as owning their first car, getting their first job, or moving into their own apartment.

Chapter Four

OCCUPATIONAL STRESS

Before proceeding, answer the following questions to get a better handle on occupational stress. If you are presently employed, answer these questions as they relate to your job. If you are not working now but have worked, answer these questions as they relate to your last job.

- How often do you feel that you have too little authority to carry out your responsibilities?
- How often do you think that the amount of work you have to do may interfere with how well it is done?

- How often do you not know what opportunities for advancement or promotion exists for you?
- How often do you think you will not be able to satisfy the conflicting demands of various people around you?
- How often do you worry about decisions that affect the lives of people you know?
- How often do you feel unable to influence your immediate supervisor's decisions and actions that affect you?
- How often do you feel that your job affects your family life?
- How often do you feel that you may not be liked and accepted by people at work?

What Is Occupational Stress?

Occupational stress is an extremely difficult construct to define. Obviously, it is stress on the job, but stress on the job occurs in a person. Here is where we run into problems, since any worker brings to the job a level of predisposition to be stressed. Several sources of occupational stress exist. Some of these stressors are intrinsic to the job. Some are related to the employee's role within the organization, some to career development, some to relationships at work, and some to the structure and climate of the organization.

Interacting with these work stressors are the individual's characteristics. These are brought to the workplace rather than being a function of it, but they are

important ingredients in occupational stress, nevertheless. These characteristics include the worker's level of anxiety and neuroticism, tolerance of ambiguity, and Type A behavior pattern.

Added to the brew are the sources of stress that come from outside the workplace and outside the worker. These extra organizational sources of stress come from family problems, life crises, financial matters, and environmental factors. Mix it all up and out come symptoms of occupational health problems that may develop into full-blown disease. Different workers have different levels of anxiety and tolerances of ambiguity, and different workers experience different amounts of family and financial problems. To assume that all of these ingredients can be quantified is naïve.

Why Is Occupational Stress Of Concern?

One of the reasons why occupational stress has been receiving so much attention of late is that businesses are genuinely beginning to care about employee welfare. You don't buy that? Well, how about this? Work stress is costing businesses billions of dollars.

It is estimated by the International Labor Organization that stress on the job costs businesses over \$200 billion annually. These costs include salaries for sick days, costs of hospitalization and outpatient care, and costs related to decreased productivity. Other stress-related factors are catching the eyes of business leaders. For instance, health-benefit costs to employers have increased dramatically.

Employees trained over a long period of time, at great cost, may break

down when stressed on the job. They may make poor decisions, miss days of work, begin abusing alcohol and other drugs, or die and have to be replaced by other workers who need training. All of these are costly.

American businesses have taken note of employer-employee relationships. Fear of government regulation in support of employee health has led some businesses to act now rather than “under the gun” later. In an attempt to attract the best employees, some companies have beefed up their fringe-benefit packages. Programs to reduce occupational stress and promote physical fitness are included as such inducements.

Occupational Stress And Disease

The link between occupational stress and disease is a difficult one to prove since the workers' characteristics and the stressors outside of the workplace complicate this relationship. There is, however, evidence that supports the conclusion that occupational stress is related to illness and disease. This evidence falls into two categories: physiological and psychological.

- Physiological

Physiological arousal accompanies occupational stress. Airplane pilots have been found to have an elevated heart rate and military pilots have elevated blood pressure during takeoff and landing. However, blue-collar jobs that are paced by machines have also been found to be physiologically arousing. Further, jobs that involve a hurried pace and relative lack of control over that pace by the worker lead to increased heart and blood pressure rates.

Many studies have implicated occupational stress in the development of illness and disease. The relationship of cardiovascular disease to occupational stress has been a consistent finding among researchers. In addition to coronary heart disease, work stress has been linked to hypertension, diabetes, and peptic ulcers.

- Psychological

Occupational stress also has consequences for your psychological health. For example, it has been found that some occupational stressors can result in low self-esteem, increased job tension, and lower job satisfaction.

Occupational Stressors

Workers report more occupational stress when work objectives are unclear, when they have conflicting demands placed upon them, when they have too little or too much to do, when they have little input into decisions that affect them, and when they are made responsible for other workers' professional development.

- Lack of Participation

One of the factors of the workplace and the organization's modus operandi that is related to stress is the degree of participation. Workers' perceptions of the degree of participation in the decision-making process, the degree to which they are consulted on issues affecting the organization, and their involvement in establishing rules of behavior at work have proven to be related to job satisfaction, job-related feelings of threat, and feelings of self-esteem. Others have found that nonparticipation is related to overall poor physical health,

escapist drinking, depression, dissatisfaction with life, low motivation to work, intention to leave the job, and absenteeism.

- Role Problems

A clear sense of your role in an organization and a sense that you can 'play the part' are important in keeping stress at a minimum. A variety of role-related problems may arise for workers who lack these feelings.

- Role Overload

When job demands are so great that the worker feels an inability to cope, stress will develop. You can imagine the feeling of having too much to do in too little time.

- Role Insufficiency

When workers lack the training, education, skills, or experience to accomplish the job, they feel stressed. A poor fit between workers' talents and the organization's expectations creates disharmony and dissatisfaction.

- Role Ambiguity

When aspects of the job and workplace are unclear, frustration and stress are likely to develop. Workers should know the criteria for career advancement, the priorities of the organization, and generally, what is expected of them.

- Role Conflict

Sometimes, workers are caught in a bind. Two supervisors each expect something different. The worker may be faced with conflicting demands. This is the 'damned if you do, damned if you don't' dilemma.

Job Dissatisfaction

The factors that are typically thought related to dissatisfaction on the job are salary and conditions of the workplace. However, even if workers were paid well and worked in hygienic conditions, they might still be dissatisfied. A class of work related factors, called motivational factors can affect job dissatisfaction.

These factors include the degree of stimulating tasks involved, the amount of recognition for jobs done well, relationships with fellow workers, and the amount of encouragement to take on responsibility.

The Workaholic

Too much work, even if you enjoy it, can itself be an occupational stressor. Some of us either enjoy our work so much or find so little pleasure in our nonworking lives that we immerse ourselves in our jobs.

Workaholics have the following characteristics:

- Tend to become energetic and intense
- Prefer work to play
- Sleep less than most people
- Tend to blur the distinction between work and play
- Have difficulty taking vacations
- Can and do work anywhere and everywhere
- Spend most of their waking time working
- Frequently eat while they work
- Work hard at making the most of their time

To combat workaholism, try these tips:

- Focus on the work you most love doing, and try to find ways to stop doing, delegate, or minimize the parts of your work that you dislike.
- Try to stay in touch with the positive aspects of your work; the pleasure of doing work that fulfills you, the freedom, the opportunity to be of service to others, or other aspects of your work you find rewarding.
- Ask yourself, “What work would I do for free?” Then try to evolve your work in that direction.
- Schedule open time into your work life. If, for instance, you now schedule work-related appointments every thirty minutes, try to evolve toward scheduling them every forty-five minutes instead.
- Decorate your workplace to create an environment that pleases you. You deserve it.
- Build friendships at work. Arrange to spend quality time with coworkers.
- Use your time; don’t let it use you. Decide how much time you want to spend working, and then limit your work time accordingly. For example, you might arrange to stop working at 5:30 pm by making a commitment to go running with a friend every workday at 5:45.
- Learn to say “no” to demands on your time. If this is difficult, say that you’d like some time to think about it, then say “no” later.

- Heavy involvement in work usually entitles you to have a good deal to say about the way you work. How might you change or restructure your work to make it more fulfilling?

The workaholic enjoys work and, therefore, might not notice the harm it is doing. The family often suffers more than the workaholic since time is taken away from them. Family responsibilities are also added to them because of the workaholic's work style. To intervene between workaholism and poor family health, time should be scheduled for family activities that will get the workaholic away from the telephone and job commitments.

Burnout

Too much work or frequent frustration at work can lead to a syndrome of physical and emotional exhaustion. This syndrome is called burnout. Burnout is an adverse work stress reaction with psychological, psychophysiological, and behavioral components. Moreover, burnout appears to be a major factor in low worker morale, high absenteeism and job turnover rates, physical illness and distress, increased alcohol and drug use, marital and family conflict, and various other problems.

The symptoms of burnout include:

- Internal changes: emotional exhaustion, loss of self-esteem, depression, frustration, and a trapped feeling
- Self-medication: increased use of alcohol, tranquilizers, and other mood-altering drugs

- Changed job performance: increased absenteeism, tardiness, use of sick leave, and decreased efficiency or productivity
- Social withdrawal: pulling away from coworkers, peers, and family members
- Increased physical complaints: fatigue, irritability, muscle tension, stomach upset, and susceptibility to illness
- Increased overtime and no vacation: indispensable to the organization, reluctant to say no to working on scheduled off-days
- Skipping rest and food breaks: continually having no time for coffee or lunch breaks to restore stamina
- Diminished sense of humor: inability to laugh at daily, on the job situations
- Pessimism, paranoia, rigidity, callousness, feelings of loneliness, guilt, and difficulty in making and explaining decisions

If you dislike your job and it is causing you to either feel ill or behave in ways that are detrimental to your career and/or home life, you can always quit that job. Short of that, you can ask for a change in job responsibilities, or you can request a less stressful job within the same organization. If you are experiencing burnout, learn to organize your time better and to say no when asked to take on additional jobs. Here are some rules that might help:

- Don't take work home
- Do not discuss business over lunch

- Take a full lunch hour
- Discuss your feelings about occupational stress with whomever is close by whenever those feelings develop

Recognizing that your perceptions of your occupational stress are as important as actual events precipitating that stress, you will need to intervene in these perceptions. These suggestions should help:

- Look for humor in your stressors at work.
- Try to see things for what they really are.
- Distinguish between need and desire.
- Separate your self-worth from the task.
- Identify situations and employ the appropriate style of coping.

Managing Occupational Stress

In conclusion, occupational stress may be difficult to define and measure because of the personal stressors people bring to their jobs and their varying personality characteristics, but we all know when we are experiencing it. Fortunately, we can manage occupational stress by using the stress model to set up roadblocks between occupational stress and illness and disease. We can change jobs, perceive the stressors associated with our jobs as challenges rather than burdens to bear (perception intervention), practice relaxation techniques, and exercise regularly to use up the accumulated products of stress. However, anything we do is our own choice. Grinning and bearing it won't help; neither will always complaining about our jobs or our bosses.

Chapter Five

STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES AND STRATEGIES

While some life situation interventions can be successfully employed when no one else is directly involved, there are interventions that are useful when the situation involves other people as well as yourself.

Asserting Yourself

Men and women who find it difficult to say “no” when asked by the boss if they can handle one other chore or responsibility, and youths who can’t say no to friends when teased into trying a mood-altering substance, have the same problem. Training programs have been mushrooming throughout the country and

world to help people say “no” when they should, say yes when they want to, and in general, behave in a self-actualizing manner.

The relationship of assertive behavior to stress lies in satisfaction of needs. If you generally act assertively, you are usually achieving your needs while maintaining effective interpersonal relationships. If you generally act non-assertively, you are not satisfying your needs, and those unsatisfied needs will become stressors. If you generally behave aggressively, your needs are met but at the expense of your relationships with others. Poor interpersonal relationships will become stressors. You can see that, to siphon off stressors at the life-situation level, you need to learn, practice, and adopt assertive behavior as your general pattern of satisfying needs.

Assertion theory is based upon the premise that every person has certain basic rights. Unfortunately, we are often taught that acting consistently with these rights is socially or morally unacceptable. We are taught some traditional assumptions as children – which stay with us as adults – that interfere with basing our behavior on these basic rights. These assumptions violate our rights, and we need to dispense with them.

Examples of these misconceptions and our basic rights are the following:

1) Misconception: It is selfish to put your needs before others’ needs.

Right: You have the right to put yourself first.

2) Misconception: You should always try to be logical and consistent.

Right: You have a right to change your mind or decide on a different course of action.

3) Misconception: People don't want to hear that you feel bad, so keep it to yourself.

Right: You have a right to feel and express pain.

4) Misconception: You should always have a good reason for what you feel and do.

Right: You have a right not to have to justify yourself to others.

5) Misconception: When people are in trouble, you should help them.

Right: You have a right not to take responsibility for someone else's problem.

6) Misconception: When someone takes the time to give you advice, you should take it very seriously. They are often right.

Right: You have a right to ignore the advice of others.

7) Misconception: Don't be antisocial. People are going to think you don't like them if you say you'd rather be alone instead of with them.

Right: You have a right to be alone, even if others would prefer your company.

8) Misconception: You should never interrupt anyone. Asking questions reveals your stupidity to others.

Right: You have a right to interrupt in order to ask for clarification.

9) Misconception: Things could get even worse; don't rock the boat

Right: You have a right to negotiate for change.

10) Misconception: You should always try to accommodate others. If you don't, they won't be there when you need them.

Right: You have a right to say no.

(Source: The Relaxation and Stress Reduction Workbook by Martha Davis, PhD; Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman, MSW; and Matthew McKay, PhD)

Assertiveness is not only a matter of what you say but also a function of how you say it. Even if you make an assertive verbal response, you will not be believed if your body's response is nonassertive. Non-assertive behavior can also be recognized without even hearing the words. It includes:

- leaning forward with glaring eyes
- shouting
- pointing a finger at the person to whom you are speaking
- putting your hands on your hips and wagging the head
- clenching the fists

(Source: Escape From Stress, Stop Killing Yourself, by Kenneth Lamott)

Practice and adopt assertive nonverbal behavior while concentrating on eliminating signs of non-assertiveness and aggressive behavior.

Conflict Resolution

If you become effective in resolving conflict, your interpersonal relationships will be improved. The result of this improvement will be a decrease in the number of stressors you experience. Less conflict of shorter duration resolved to your satisfaction will mean a less-stressed and healthier you.

Resolving conflict can be relatively simple. What confounds the situation,

however, are usually a lack of listening, an attempt at winning, an inability to demonstrate an understanding of the person with whom you are in conflict, and a rigidity that prevents you from considering alternative solutions. Here is a simple procedure to resolve interpersonal conflict. The steps of this communication process consist of the following:

- 1) Active listening – reflecting back to the other person his or her words and feelings; requires the listener to paraphrase the speaker's words so the speaker knows that his or her meaning has been received. By reflecting the speaker's words and thoughts, the listener creates an awareness on the speaker's part that the listener cares enough to really understand his or her views.
- 2) Identifying your position – stating your thoughts and feelings about the situation.
- 3) Exploring alternative solutions – brainstorming other possibilities, listing all possible solutions, and evaluating each proposed solution until both people agree upon one. With this technique, it initially appears that no one wins. However, in fact, everyone wins.

Communication

In addition to learning to be more assertive and to resolve conflicts well, other communication skills will help you get along better with friends, family, and coworkers, with the result being less stress.

Nonverbal Communication

Notice the body posture of your peers. During a boring class, they will probably be leaning away from the lecturer or group. We call this physical behavior body language. Communicating by the body posture often says as much as the spoken word. When people feel uncomfortable about expressing their thoughts or feelings verbally, body language is sometimes the only form of communication they participate in.

We all recognize the importance of communicating nonverbally, since we smile when we say hello, scratch our heads when perplexed, and hug a friend to show affection. We show appreciation, affection, revulsion and indifference with expressions and gestures.

Verbal Communication

Unfortunately, the nonverbal expression of feelings and thoughts is easy to misinterpret. Consequently, depending on nonverbal communication alone to express yourself is to risk being misunderstood. Furthermore, if another person is depending on nonverbal communication to express feelings to you, it is up to you to ask – verbally – whether you are getting the right message. Without such a reality check, the other person, while totally failing to connect, might assume that he or she is communicating effectively.

Check out your impressions of someone's nonverbal communication, and improve your communication by making your nonverbal and verbal messages as consistent as you can.

Planning Time To Talk

To improve your communication with others, you may need to plan time for discussions. Accept all feelings and the right for the verbal expression of these feelings, and take a risk and really describe your thoughts and feelings. Don't expect the other person to guess what they are.

Listening

The listening and paraphrasing is effective in regular conversation, as well as during conflict. All of us can do a better job at listening. Try to pay more attention to this aspect of your communications.

Beginning with Agreement

You would be surprised at how much better you can communicate with someone with whom you disagree if you start your message with a point on which you do agree. For instance, if you are disagreeing about who should take out the trash, you might begin by saying "I agree that it is important that the trash be taken out now."

"And" not "But"

The word "but" is like an eraser; it erases everything that precedes it. When someone says, "Yes, your needs are important, but..." they are saying, "Your needs may be important, but let's forget them because I'm about to tell you what's really important." In other words, the importance of your needs is being eradicated and now we can focus on what really matters.

Substituting the word "and" for "but" is so simple and yet so significant. "And" leaves what preceded it on the table and adds something to it. "Your needs are important and..." means that we will not discount your needs; we will just

consider them in addition to considering what will be presented next.

“I”

Too often we try to get other people to behave or believe as we do. Others naturally resent that, just as we resent it when others try to get us to behave or believe as they do. When we say “you”, we are making the other person feel that he or she is being criticized and needs to defend himself or herself. When we say “I”, we are focusing on our feelings, beliefs, and interpretations. Feeling less defensive, the other person is more likely to listen to us, and the result is communication that is more effective.

Avoid “Why”

As with statements that include “you” instead of “I”, questions that start with “why” make the other person defensive. “Why did you leave so early?” makes the other person have to justify leaving early. In addition, “why” questions are often veiled criticisms.

Social Support Networking

One of the protective factors suspected of preventing stress-related illness or disease is social support. Social support is belonging, being accepted, being loved, or being needed. In different words, it is having people you can really talk to, to whom you feel close, and with whom you share your joys, problems, apprehensions, and love. Social support can be provided by family members, friends, lovers, or anyone else who provides what is described above. The mediating effect of social support lies in the hypothesis that significant others

help an individual mobilize psychological resources and master emotional burdens; share tasks, and they extra supplies of money, materials, tools, skills, and cognitive guidance to improve the handling of the situation. They help one deal with and feel better about stressors.

Common sense dictates that social support can help prevent stressors from leading to negative consequences. You have probably also found value in talking over problems and stressors with friends and relatives. You may not have known it at the time, but what you were experiencing was social support.

Social support has been found to be related to several indices of health and illness. Pregnant women with good social support, regardless of life-changes, were found to have only one-third the complications of pregnant women with poor social support. Women who were experiencing major life stress but had intimate relationships were found to develop less depression than women experiencing life stress but lacking such relationships. Unemployed men with high social support experienced lower levels of negative emotion than did unemployed men with low support.

One of the keys to developing social support networks is being open and caring with others. It's often easier and less threatening to stay aloof and detached from others. Fear prevents getting close to others. We fear that, if we show love for another person, that person will reject us. We fear that we will be embarrassed. We fear that we will be ridiculed. To develop social support systems, however, requires an overcoming of these fears.

If we don't take advantage of opportunities when they are presented to us,

we probably will never have another chance. Why don't you take a chance? Tell someone that you love him or her. Get involved with those around you. Show people you care about them. By doing so, you will be improving your social support network. You can expect this love, involvement, and care to rebound to you, allowing you to be more effective in managing the stress in your life.

Selective Awareness

A lot of us are very inexperienced at focusing on the positive side of situations. What do we do about it? The first step is to realize that in any situation there are good and bad, positive and negative elements. Thus, you can choose to raise your blood pressure, serum cholesterol, heart rate, and muscle tension, or you can choose not to alter these body processes. That choice is yours. Even if the situation is so bad that it couldn't possibly get any worse, you could choose to focus on the fact that things have to get better.

Right now, there are situations in your life that are causing you a great deal of stress. You may not like where you live, whom you're living with, or the work you're doing. You may not feel you have enough time to yourself or for leisure-time activities. You may not like the way you look. You may be in poor health. You may be alone. Some of these stressors you may be able to change; some you will not be able to. You now know, however, that you can become selectively aware of their positive components while de-emphasizing (though not denying) their disturbing features.

Why not go even further? Each time you do something that works out well,

keep the memory of that with you. Tell others how proud you are of yourself. Pat yourself on the back. Take time just before bedtime to recall all the good things that happened that day. Don't be like some of your friends who can't sleep because they still feel embarrassed about something they did that day or worried about something over which they have no control.

Stop to smell the roses. Life can be a celebration if you take the time to celebrate. What prevents us from being aware of life as we live it is often the routine of daily experience. When we experience something over and over again in the same manner, we become habituated to it. We are desensitized to that experience and interact with it out of habit, paying little attention to what we're doing. We do that very often. For instance, let's bet that when you travel to school or work, you take the same route each time. In fact, you probably chose this route because it was the fastest one. Other routes may be more scenic or interesting, but you chose speed as your number one priority.

Do you experience the "getting there" or only the "having gotten there"?

Have you ever consciously felt the texture of the steering wheel you hold so often?

Do you ever listen to the sounds of your car and the neighborhood through which you travel?

There are other ways to experience life more fully, too. The idea is to make yourself consciously aware of your experience, as you are going through it, by adopting less routine and habitual behavior.

Humor and Stress

Following is the definition of an optimist. A 70-year-old man has an affair with a young, vivacious, curvaceous, twenty-year-old woman. Before too long, she finds out she's pregnant and irately calls her lover. "You old fool! You made me pregnant!" The elderly man answers, "Who's calling, please?"

Humor has been shown to be an effective means of coping with stress. It can defuse stressful situations and/or feelings. Research investigations have verified this conclusion.

Humor can take several forms. It can use surprise, exaggeration, absurdity, incongruity, word play, or the tragic twist. Regardless of the type of humor, its effects on health have been studied for many years. Humor results in both physiological and psychological changes. Laughter increases muscular activity, respiratory activity, oxygen exchange, heart rate, and the production of endorphins. These effects are soon followed by a relaxation state in which respiration, heart rate, blood pressure, and muscle tension rebound to below normal levels. Psychological effects include relief of anxiety, stress, and tension; an outlet for hostility and anger; an escape from reality; and a means of tolerating crises, tragedy, and chronic illnesses and/or disabilities.

Humor can also be used inappropriately and actually cause distress. Anyone who has seen the hurt look on a person's face after being the butt of a joke has witnessed humor's power to cause tension. Unfortunately, humor's effects are not always predictable. Thus, humor should be used carefully when helping someone else cope with stress so as not to exacerbate the situation.

However, once consideration is given to the potential negative effects of humor and they are judged to be minimal, don't hesitate to use this approach when you think it would be helpful.

Self-Esteem

What you think of yourself affects how you behave. If you don't think well of yourself, you will not trust your opinions or your decisions. You will, therefore, be more apt to be influenced by others. Not "marching to the beat of your own drum" may result in your conforming to the behaviors of those with whom you frequently interact. As a matter of fact, poor self-esteem is related to drug abuse, irresponsible sexual behavior, and other "unhealthy" activities. People with high self-esteem engage in these activities to a significantly lesser extent.

Assertiveness, success, and social support are key components of stress management. Self-esteem is related to each of these. How can you assert yourself and demand your basic rights if you don't deem yourself worthy of these rights? Self-esteem is learned. How people react to us; what we come to believe are acceptable societal standards of beauty, competence, and intelligence; and how our performances are judged by parents, teachers, friends, and bosses affect how we feel about ourselves. It is common sense, then, to expect our successes to improve our self-esteem and our failures to diminish it.

The very essence of stress management requires confidence in yourself and in your decisions to control your life effectively.

Because self-esteem is so important, the means of improving it deserve

your serious attention. There are no magic pills to take or laser beams with which you can be zapped to improve your sense of self-worth. It has developed over a long period of time, and it will take a while for you to change it. With time, attention, effort, and energy, you can enhance your sense of self or at least feel better about those parts of you that cannot be changed.

The first thing to do is to identify that part of yourself about which you want to feel better. Perhaps an exercise program can improve that part, or you need to begin a weight-control program, pay more attention to how you dress, or use makeup more effectively. Along with control comes responsibility.

Externals blame both their successes and their failures on things outside themselves. "Oh, I did such a good job because I work well under pressure." It's the pressure, not the person. "Oh, I didn't do too well because I didn't have enough time." It's the lack of time, not the person. Internals might say "I did so well because of how I decided to adjust to the pressure and time constraints," or "I did poorly because I didn't work hard enough." Internals accept responsibility for their successes and their failures.

Coping With Anxiety

Unfortunately, too many people fail to cope successfully with dysfunctional anxiety and only make matters worse. You may do drugs, drink alcohol, or in some other manner alter your state of consciousness to avoid dealing with the anxiety provoking stimulus. Obviously, these are only temporary solutions and are accompanied by unhealthy consequences. You not only keep your anxiety,

but you now have a drug habit to boot.

Re-labeling

Taking note of the selective awareness method, you can re-label any negative experience as a positive one. All that is required is to focus upon the positive aspects rather than the negative ones. If you have test anxiety, you could consider it an opportunity to find out or to show others how much you know. Rather than conceptualizing an airplane ride as risking your life, you can re-label it as an opportunity to ride on a sea of clouds or to see your hometown from a totally new and interesting vantage point.

Environmental Planning

Sometimes it is appropriate to adjust your life and environment to avoid the anxiety-provoking stimulus. For those anxious in crowds, living in a small town will probably be preferable to living in a large city.

Self-Talk

This technique requires some objectivity. You must ask yourself what the real risk is in the anxiety-provoking situation. Self-talk may be used to realize that people are generally polite. They won't boo or throw tomatoes. If they thought that you are absurd, they'd probably take listening so as not to appear rude. The worst that could realistically happen is they won't ask you back again. That would mean you'd have more time to do other things. That's not so bad, at all.

Thought Stopping

As simple as it sounds, when you experience negative thoughts, you can shut them off. To employ thought stopping, you should learn deep muscle

relaxation techniques. Then, whenever you have anxious thoughts you want to eliminate, tell yourself that you will not allow these thoughts to continue, and use the relaxation method. The pleasant sensations of relaxation will reinforce the stopping of anxious thoughts, as well as prevent these thoughts from resulting in potentially harmful physiological consequences.

Systematic Desensitization

Systematic desensitization involves imagining or experiencing an anxiety-provoking scene while practicing a response incompatible with anxiety. Widely used by psychotherapists, this method was found to be nearly as effective when people used it by themselves.

Chapter Six

MEDITATION

Understanding Meditation

Meditation is simply a mental exercise that affects body processes. Just as physical exercise has certain psychological benefits, meditation has certain physical benefits. The purpose of meditation is to gain control over your attention so that you can choose what to focus on rather than being subject to the unpredictable ebb and flow of environmental circumstances.

Types of Meditation

Transcendental meditation is but one form of meditative practice. Chakra yoga, Rinzai Zen, Mudra yoga, Zen meditation, and Soto Zen are examples of other meditative systems. In Soto Zen meditation, common external objects (like

flowers or peaceful greens) are focused on. Tibetan Buddhists use a mandala – a geometrical figure with other geometric forms on it that has spiritual or philosophical importance -- to meditate upon. The use of imagined sounds or of silently repeated words, called mantra, has also been used.

Regardless of the type of meditation, however, one of two approaches is used: opening up of attention or focusing of attention. Opening up of attention requires a nonjudgmental attitude: you allow all external and internal stimuli to enter your awareness without trying to use these stimuli in any particular manner. As with a blotter and ink, everything is just absorbed. When the meditative method requires the focusing of attention, the object focused upon is something either repetitive or something unchanging.

Benefits of Meditation

Because it is so popular and can be learned quickly and easily, meditation has been one of the most researched of the relaxation techniques. Its physiological effects include a decrease in muscle tension and a decrease in heart rate. When experienced meditating people were compared with novice ones and people taught a different relaxation technique, it was found that the most significant decreases in heart rate occurred in the experienced and short-term meditating ones.

Psychological effects include less anxiety. At this point, you realize that the mind cannot be separated from the body. Consequently, you've probably guessed that the physiological effects of meditation have psychological

implications. Numerous studies have found evidence that the psychological health of people who meditate often is better than that of non-meditating individuals.

For instance, people who meditate have been found to be less anxious. To add, teaching people to meditate can diminish anxiety. Researchers have also found that meditation is related to an internal focus of control and greater self-actualization.

Chapter Seven

AUTOGENIC TRAINING

Autogenic Training Defined

German psychiatrist Johannes Schultz had used hypnosis with his patients. In 1923, he developed autogenic training, which consists of a series of exercises designed to bring about these two physical sensations and, thereby, an auto-hypnotic state. Autogenic training is a technique to treat neurotic patients and those with psychosomatic illnesses. However, its use quickly expanded to healthy people who wanted to regulate their own psychological and physiological processes.

Although autogenic training and meditation both lead to the relaxation response, they get there by different means. Meditation used the mind to relax the body. Autogenic training uses the bodily sensations of heaviness and warmth

to first relax the body and then expand this relaxed state to the mind by the use of imagery.

Benefits of Autogenic Training

Physiological

The physiological effects of autogenic training are similar to those of other relaxation methods that elicit the trophotropic response. Heart rate, respiratory rate, muscle tension, and serum cholesterol levels all decrease. Alpha brain waves and blood flow to the arms and legs increase. Other studies show that autogenics also helps with bronchial asthma, constipation, writer's cramp, indigestion, ulcers, hemorrhoids, tuberculosis, diabetes and back pains.

Psychological

Autogenic training has been found to reduce anxiety and depression, decrease tiredness, and help people increase their resistance to stress.

Doing Autogenic Training

There are three basic positions for doing autogenics: one, reclining; and two, seated. In the reclining position, you lie on your back, feet slightly apart, toes leaning away from the body. The seated positions have two advantages: you can do them almost anywhere, and they are less apt to result in sleep. On the other hand, they don't allow as much total muscle relaxation as the reclining position.

The stages of Autogenic Training are sequential. You need to master the skills of each stage before practicing the next. *Six Initial Stages Of Autogenic Training:*

- 1) Focus on the sensations of heaviness throughout the arms and legs.
- 2) Focus on the sensations of warmth throughout the arms and legs.
- 3) Focus on the sensations of warmth and heaviness in the area of the heart.
- 4) Focus on breathing.
- 5) Focus on sensations of warmth in the abdomen.
- 6) Focus on sensations of coolness in the forehead.

(Source: *The Relaxation Response*, by Herbert Benson, 1975)

With experience in autogenics, it should take you only a few minutes to feel heaviness and warmth in your limbs, a relaxed and calm heart and respiratory rate, warmth in your abdomen, and coolness in your forehead. Remember, though, that it usually takes several months or more of regular practice to get to that point. However, don't be too anxious to master it, since trying too hard will interfere with learning the skills. Proceed at your own pace, moving to the next stage only after you have mastered the previous stage.

Chapter Eight

OTHER RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Diaphragmatic Breathing

This is what we call very deep breathing, and it is quite effective as an immediate response to stress. To practice diaphragmatic breathing, lie on your back, with the palms of your hands placed on your lower stomach area. As you breathe, expand your chest area while keeping your tummy flat. Next, expand your abdomen so that your stomach rises and falls with each breath while chest size remains relatively constant. Practice it at various times of the day.

Body Scanning

Even when you are tensed, there is some part of your body that feels

relaxed. Body scanning requires you to search for that part and, once identifying it, spread that sensation to the more tense parts of yourself. The relaxed sensation can be imagined to be a warm ball that travels to various bodily locations, warming and relaxing them.

Massage and Accupressure

Massage has a way of relaxing the muscles of a tense body. But accupressure – pressing down on points of the body where knots or bands of muscle tension frequently occur – appears to be one of the more popular forms. To use accupressure correctly, you should obtain a chart of accupressure points.

Yoga and Stretching

Yoga comes from a root words that has many meanings: to bind, join, attach, and yoke; to direct and concentrate one's attention; or communion with God. The stretching involved in yoga can be quite relaxing, and the prescribed yoga positions encourage this benefit. However, be careful not to stretch in a way that is uncomfortable (remember, you are trying to relax) or in a way that will cause injury.

Quieting Reflex

Quieting reflex is a relaxation technique designed to elicit relaxation quickly, even in as short as six seconds. To practice QR:

- 1) Think about something that makes you afraid or anxious.
- 2) Smile inside.
- 3) Tell yourself "I can keep a calm body in an alert mind".
- 4) Inhale a quiet, easy breath.

- 5) Let your jaw go loose as you exhale; keeping your upper and lower teeth slightly apart.
- 6) Imagine heaviness and warmth moving throughout your body – from head to toes.

CONCLUSION SPIRITUALITY AND STRESS

Seldom do we celebrate life's wonders with the attitude of gratitude. Parents take their children for granted instead of marveling at their uniqueness and development. Students become desensitized to the beauty surrounding them on campus. Professors forget to appreciate the cloistered environs in which they are honored by being allowed to devote their careers to labors of love. And creation itself often receive short shrift in a hurried society concerned with fast food and quick weight-loss diets. Quicker, faster, more, sooner, easier: so little time to nourish the soul, to develop optimal spiritual health.

Spiritual health has been defined in a number of ways. Some of these recognize the existence of a supreme being, whereas others relate spirituality to one's relationships with others and one's place in this world. Another definition is the ability to discover and express your purpose in life; to learn how to experience love, joy, peace, and fulfillment' and to help yourself and others to achieve full potential.

Spiritual health may include answers to such questions as "Who am I?" and "Why am I here?" questions that confront you with the very fact of your existence and the meaning of your life. Answers to these questions may comfort you and alleviate stress with assurance that your life is headed in the direction you desire. On the other hand, you answers may disturb you. Should that occur, use that dissonance to make changes in your life to be more spiritual – take more walks in the park, so to speak. Celebrate loved ones and natural wonders, find activities in which to make a contribution to your world and the people who inhabit it, leave something of meaning behind, experience who you are and let others experience that as well. All of these changes will make you less distressed, more satisfied with your life, and more effective in your interactions with both your environment and the people about whom you care.