



STRESS ENDURANCE

Handling the Stress in Your Life

INTRODUCTION

Most people agree life today is more stressful than it was in the past, and a number of illnesses can be associated with an individual's inability to cope with stress.

How many times have you said or heard someone say, "I've been under a lot of stress lately?" Perhaps you have learned that you have a stress-related illness and your doctor has told you, "You must slow down, relax, and enjoy life." Maybe you are so tense and tired you can't seem to relax and enjoy life. Stress may be affecting your work, your family life, and your personal well-being.

This workbook has been designed to help you understand stress and to help you relax. As your ability to relax improves, you will feel better and stress will cause you less trouble.

Don't try to remember everything in this workbook. Keep it as a handy reference. If there is anything you don't understand, write it down and ask your doctor about it. Be sure to add any notes that may help you later.

The ideas, opinions, exercises, and procedures suggested in this workbook are not intended to be viewed as a substitute for the treatment, advice, and counsel of your doctor. It is advised you consult your doctor before beginning any strenuous physical exercise program or drastic change in your diet. Your health requires competent and regular supervision by your doctor.

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress is the rate of all wear and tear caused by life. It is the non-specific response of the body to any demand made on it. Whether the demand is real or imagined, from within the body or outside, your body reacts to stress with a number of known characteristics called stress responses, or stress. Simply put, lifesaving body functions accelerate and non-essential functions slow down.

Intense stress can cause: damaging wear and tear to the mind or body; serious interference with daily life; and/or destructive behavior towards others.

What Causes Stress?

The demand that causes you to change or adapt is called a stressor. Remember, these stressors may be real or imagined.

There are two causes of stress:

1. Emotionally induced stress—stress caused by your own thought process. Studies show in every cause of emotionally induced stress, the common feature is expectation, the belief that something terrible is about to happen.
2. Physically induced stress—stress that comes from a direct disturbance to your body by the surrounding environment.

Daily Stressors

There are a number of stressors you may encounter every day. Review the following list and identify stressors that disturb you and the ones you can control.

With your job:

- Constant criticism of your work by your boss
- Lack of work that fulfills your needs—boredom
- Job security
- Deadlines that seem unreasonable, work overload, or a strong competitive atmosphere
- Responsibilities are unclear or constantly changing
- Fear of failing in your attempt to get a promotion, or you wonder why you don't get the promotion

With your family:

- Constant worries created by your children
- Traumatic disruptions of a relationship with a loved one or the anniversary of such a happening (death, sickness, moving, divorce, etc.)
- Disruptions by a fight or misunderstanding at home

With your social and economic life:

- Inflation, recession, or your income
- Pressures from others to be wealthy

Conflicting values from different forms of the media—radio, newspaper, television
Religious values not as strong as in the past—this can lead to unclear values on your part
Shortcomings in your personality
Having to move, to meet new people
Not wanting to grow old alone
Changes and uncertainty in the traditional male-female roles

In general:

Loud noises
Overweight or other physical imparity
Uncontrollable surrounding temperature
Crowded feelings from heavy traffic, excessive crime, no open space, etc.
Foul air or pollution that offends you
Sickness or injury
Too much nicotine, caffeine, or other drug

Basically, almost any life situation that requires change or adaptation can be a stressor. Even happy events like public recognition, vacation, Christmas, or reunion with a loved one are stressors because they require adjustments.

In today's world, stress is all around us. You face it in your daily life from the moment you wake in the morning to the moment you fall asleep at night. Take a minute to think about the things you did today that produced stress.

Social Readjustment Rating Scale

Dr. Thomas Holmes, a professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences at the University of Washington School of Medicine, spent more than fifteen years researching the relationship between change and illness. The result was his "Social Readjustment Rating Scale" as a means of quantifying the stress ordinary people may be subjected to over a period of time. The table of life events that follows are rated based on the relative amount of adaptation that they require. To take the test, check those life events listed that you have experienced in the last twelve months and then total your score.

LIFE EVENT	POINT VALUE
_____ Death of spouse	100
_____ Divorce	73
_____ Marital separation	65
_____ Jail term	63
_____ Death of close family member	63
_____ Personal injury or illness	53
_____ Marriage	50
_____ Fired from work	47
_____ Marital reconciliation	45
_____ Retirement	45
_____ Change in family member's health	44
_____ Pregnancy	40
_____ Sex difficulties	39
_____ Addition to family	39
_____ Business readjustment	39
_____ Change in financial status	38
_____ Death of close friend	37
_____ Change to different line of work	36
_____ Change in number of marital arguments	35
_____ Mortgage or loan of more than \$10,000	31
_____ Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
_____ Change in work responsibilities	29
_____ Son or daughter leaving home	29
_____ Trouble with in-laws	29
_____ Outstanding personal achievement	28
_____ Spouse begins or stops work	26
_____ Starting or finishing school	26
_____ Change in living conditions	25
_____ Revision of personal habits	24
_____ Trouble with boss	23
_____ Change in work hours or conditions	20
_____ Change in residence	20
_____ Change in schools	20
_____ Change in recreational habits	19
_____ Change in church activities	19
_____ Change in social activity	18
_____ Mortgage or loan under \$10,000	17
_____ Change in sleeping habits	16
_____ Change in number of family gatherings	15
_____ Change in eating habits	15
_____ Vacation	13
_____ Christmas season	12
_____ Minor violations of the law	11

After checking the items that apply, add up the point values for all the items checked and total your score:_____

As you can see, not all of these events are particularly bad. By the same token, your reactions to them might not necessarily coincide with the reactions of others. Remember, each person is different and will react differently. The point here is that each of these events contributes a degree of stress and that your level of stress is cumulative.

Based on Dr. Holmes' findings, a total score of less than 150 means that you have a 37-percent chance of becoming ill due to stress within the next two years. A score of between 150 and 300 increases those odds to a 51-percent chance. If your score is 300, you face an 80-percent chance of illness, with the odds going up as your score goes up.

A high score is not a guarantee of illness, just as a low score does not mean that you will remain healthy. The scale was developed simply to provide you with an indication of your chances of becoming ill as a result of exposure to stress.

What Stress Does To You

When the brain interprets something to be a stressor, there is an immediate alarm and messages are sent by nerves and hormones to prepare the body for fight or flight. For example, if you are confronted by a mugger in a strange city, you would instinctively want to fight or run. In either case, your body prepares the same way—your senses become keener, your muscles tense for action. The heart and respiratory rates increase, so more blood and oxygen are available for the muscles, brain, and vital organs.

These changes are a magnificent help in preparing the body for the physical activity of fight or flight. These changes also help the body to function at peak efficiency during emergencies. The body prepares for physical action, releases its energy to confront the stressor, and returns to normal. Stressful situations normally give us experiences that help us go through life.

Main stressors of today's time may be a boss or your desire to get ahead. It is not effective to fight or run from these stressors. You may be working on one stressor when another presents itself, so your stress builds and compounds itself. Your ability to handle and cope with stress may become exhausted. Without a physical release or a break from stress, the wear and tear stress generates can cause physical or emotional illness. The following are some illnesses that have been associated with excessive stress on a body:

Headaches	Diabetes	Anxiety
Ulcers	Constipation	Cholesterol and Fatty Deposits
Depression	Diarrhea	Colitis
Heart Disease	Hay Fever	Sexual Impotence
High Blood Pressure	Asthma	Menstrual Problems
Alcoholism	Arthritis	Insomnia
Backaches		

These illnesses are known as psychosomatic illnesses. Psychosomatic illnesses are not imaginary. They are real illnesses where the mind causes the illness, adds to the symptoms, or slows the recovery. Many experts feel from 50 to 90 percent of the illnesses suffered are psychosomatic.

Doctors know the mind and body cannot be separated—what affects one affects the other. Some people develop a habit of worrying. This prolonged worrying or anxiety can trigger and maintain the body’s stress response. The constant muscle tension from this stress response can make a person feel more anxious. Thus an unhealthy psychosomatic cycle is formed. The person may enter deep depression and seek an unhealthy escape from stress.

Escape From Stress

When stress is maintained at an even level, not too much or too little, your health and performance will peak. Psychosomatic illnesses occur more frequently when there is too much or too little stress. In reference to too much or too little stress, consider the pressure of work overload as an obvious stressor. The opposite, job boredom, is also a stressor. A person feels frustrated when not fulfilling his potential.

What is an even level of stress? It will vary with each person. Some like a slow pace, while others thrive on challenges. Each person must find the level of stress best for them. There are early warning signs that may suggest too much stress in your life. They are:

- Nightmares
- Pounding or high rate of heartbeat
- Inability to relax
- Constant irritability or edginess
- Overpowering desire to cry or run away
- Increased use of alcohol, drugs, or tobacco
- Changes in appetite
- Loss of the joy of life
- Constant tiredness
- Tense muscles
- An inability to think clearly or concentrate

Self Evaluating

As you improve your ability to manage stress, many of the symptoms of stress-related problems will lesson so gradually you may not be aware of the progress you have made. Take a moment now to become aware of the symptoms of stress that are telling you to relax. How well are you relating to other people? What emotions have you been feeling lately? Are you experiencing any problems or discomfort physically?

Write down any of the known symptoms of stress you are experiencing. Refer back to this page and add to it as you go through the rest of this workbook.

Facts Of Stress

As a review, keep these facts in mind:

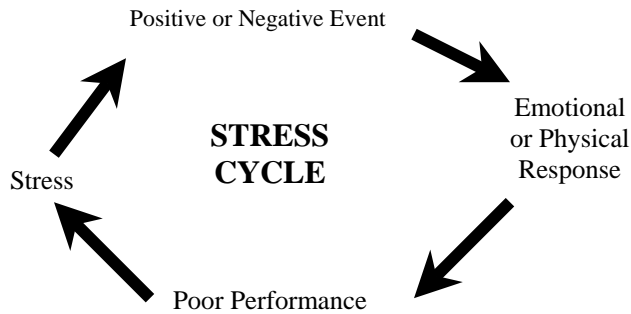
1. A stress reaction is a coordinated chemical mobilization of the entire human body to meet the requirements of life and death struggle or of rapid escape from the situation. The intensity of the stress reaction depends on the brain's perception of the severity of the situation.
2. The great psychological dilemma of stress is that we so often mobilize our bodies involuntarily for fight or flight and that we so seldom carry through the process in physical terms. This amounts to stewing in our own juices—a process which, if continued, can have very serious consequences for health and well-being.
3. Exercise activates the sympathetic nervous system the same way a fearful situation causes stress.
4. Stress is the spice of life. Complete freedom from stress comes only in death. The secret is to reduce as far as possible the unpleasant distress that can sometimes result from difficult situations.
5. Diseases that can be caused or aggravated by excessive levels of stress are ulcers, heart disease, cholesterol and fatty deposits, high blood pressure, constipation, some forms of arthritis, and some forms of cancer.
6. The human body—your body—is capable of literally destroying itself when it is forced to maintain a light stress, alarm state for long periods without relief. The immune system actually turns on itself.

Discussion Questions

1. What exactly is stress?
2. What are the two causes of stress and how do they affect you mentally and physically?
3. Can you identify a specific stressor in your life and tell how you presently handle it?
4. Are there specific stressors in your life that are good for you? Identify one.
5. What factors contribute to make the high-stress jobs so stressful?
6. What was your score on the “Social Readjustment Rating Scale?”
7. Are you experiencing any of the early warning signs that suggest too much stress in your life? Explain.
8. Have you recorded the symptoms of stress you are experiencing?

HOW CAN YOU MANAGE STRESS?

What does it mean to “manage stress?” To get a better understanding of this, look at the “Stress Cycle” illustrated below:



The “Stress Cycle” begins with an event—it may be either positive or negative in nature—which causes you to undergo stress. The stress causes an emotional or physical response, which then causes poor performance. This in turn leads to more stress. To manage stress is to interrupt this cycle, to minimize or avoid the effect of stress.

What is stressful to one individual may not be to another, and each individual’s response to stress is different. For these reasons, various techniques for managing stress are used. Several of the most common are listed:

- Add balance to life; don’t overwork one part of the body; try to wear it out at an even rate.
- Get a thorough physical exam, followed by annual check ups.
- Use relaxation techniques, assertiveness training, time management, active listening, and other personal development programs.
- Expand your support network; have friends or co-workers who can help you.
- Use hobbies, music, and physical activities as renewing activities.
- Eat nutritiously.
- Take “time-outs” at work.

Although there are various techniques for managing stress, this section of the workbook will present two different ways to manage stress—active and passive. Active management involves preventative measures created to combat stress in our everyday lives. Passive management deals with relaxation methods.

Active Stress Management

Stress is an integral element of life—it mobilizes us to get things done. We create stress in our everyday lives—emotional and physical. If this creation of stress gets out of hand, then it becomes distressful and unhealthy.

Managing stress you create can give you that preventative dose of medicine, which will help to curb a possible disaster and give you a better future. The term “active stress management” means to organize your life for quality—not quantity.

There are five areas of stressors, which you create. They are:

- Self-Imposed Stressors
- Social Stressors
- Physical Stressors
- Organizational Stressors
- Diet Stressors

Self-Imposed Stressors

What are self-imposed stressors? Boredom, frustration, defeat, hate, and pride, just to name a few. These are expectations you place upon yourself.

Emotions such as these and others play a very important part in your everyday life. Sometimes these emotions get out of hand. For instance, you are bored. Why? No sense of purpose? No need to improve? No get-up-and-go? You could ask these questions of each of the above named emotional stressors.

Review the information below and apply it to your lifestyle. Where do you see a need to improve or change yourself?

- | | |
|-------------|--|
| Boredom | Get interested in something new or re-start an unfinished project. |
| Frustration | Look for the cause of the emotion, then seek a way to alleviate the pressure it causes. |
| Defeat | Pick yourself up and start again. Everyone has stubbed their toes and skinned their knees; yet, you did learn to walk. |
| Hate | Look inside and seek to ease the suffering you are experiencing. Releasing this stressor from the rigors of everyday living will make life more enjoyable for you and those around you. Hate is a very expensive, stressful indulgence in our lives. |
| Pride | Be aware of selfish pride. Put away this petty emotion. You will be recognized and boasted about when you complete a task without looking for the reward. Self-imposed pride is a hollow victory for the heart. It leaves you yearning for constant recognition from all who are around you. |

Take these ideas and tailor them for yourself. Learn to laugh at yourself. A sense of humor is important. Recognize that you can take charge of your emotions. Your feelings are your own. Learn to control them.

Social Stressors

Do you go along with the crowd, doing what they do just to be a part of the group? Do you dress according to the latest expensive fads? Are you a “social drinker?”

The expectations of the social aspect of your life create a whole different set of stress problems. These problems can range from dress codes to money and from friends to recreation.

Look at the way you present yourself socially. If you are trying to keep up with the times and are not succeeding, do you try harder?

This social stress can be avoided by living your own life. One way to look at social problems is to allow yourself room to grow. Do not follow the crowd. Set your own social codes and follow them. Be flexible enough to adjust them as social times change, but don't compromise your needs. Remember, you cannot be all things to all people. Learn to say "no" politely and firmly.

Physical Stressors

Does unrelenting noise get you uptight? Does dripping water set you off? Noise, air, and water pollution, traffic jams, and crowded shopping malls are elements of our environment that are irritating, discomforting, stressful, and often unavoidable.

Our physical environment creates factors and circumstances that can ease or exaggerate a stressful situation. People are remarkably adaptable to normal circumstances that would strain a visitor.

Look at the environment you encounter every day and how you deal with it. Then look at the changes that upset the balance and throw it into disarray. Do you plan ahead for sudden changes in your environment or do you just adapt as the changes occur?

Since everyone has lived in a stressful environment at one time or another, there are general rules for combating this stress:

Relax. You are likely to adapt to most stress problems anyhow, so there is nothing to be gained by getting worked up.

Place your stressful environment in a favorable context. If you can convince yourself that the source of stress is useful or necessary, you will have fewer stress-related effects.

Be attuned to your environment. Stressors will be less harmful if they are predictable. You can make them predictable by arranging your own schedule to fit the occurrences of the stressors.

Arrange situations where you control the stressor, even though you may choose not to exercise this control. This may be the single-most effective way to minimize its consequences.

Become sensitive to long-term time perspectives. For example, the best way to get control of commuting to work may be to drive alone in your car so you can choose the time, the route, and the speed of your travel. In the short run, this may make commuting less stressful than traveling by bus, train, or in a car pool. Yet, as we are all beginning to realize, a nation of people on the road at the same time will result in greater stress and harmful consequences to almost everybody. At times, some stress cannot be avoided and this must be simply endured.

We live in a stressful environment, and it is doubtful this will ever change. We are, however, learning more about what causes social stress, where to look for its effects, and how to moderate it.

Organizational Stressors

Is your life one hectic moment after another? Do you often have a dozen things going at once? Do you set your own deadlines? Do you have a guilt complex if a task is not finished according to your pre-set schedule? Are your priorities unclear?

Adding to the above stressors may be stress problems caused by abrupt changes in your job such as technological breakthroughs or advancements in management without proper training to do the job. When these changes come, many people fail to remain flexible. They are defeated by the changes, which bring new stressors into their lives. Some mergers or re-organizations can leave a promising young executive out in the cold with no foreseeable future.

To overcome and prevent these stressors from affecting your life, begin a program of organizing and establishing your priorities. Decide on regular, predictable routines for your daily chores. Keep lists of tasks both at home and at work. Keep those lists updated and revise them as events change. The establishing of priorities in one's life is a good way to defeat stress and its related problems.

Diet Stressors

Diets. Weight Watchers. Overeaters Anonymous. Drug hotlines. Antismoking campaigns. Alcoholics Anonymous. These are all indications of human stress. Could you fit into any of these groups?

In today's fast-paced society, there is not always time to eat a well-balanced meal. There are people who drink their lunch or down handfuls of vitamins or other drugs to pacify their hunger. By forcing yourself to take time to eat properly, you can prevent your body from experiencing fatigue, headaches, cramps, prolonged depression, or other medical problems.

Medical experts have long expressed the need for well-balanced, nutritional meals. Today, that need is necessary more than ever. Those who are constantly on the go and say they cannot always eat right should set daily priorities to eat good meals at the right times.

Examine your diet stress levels and where you can improve yourself. Tune in to changes in your health, appetite, sleep habits, weight, and appearance. Become aware of these changes when they occur and seek medical advice as necessary. Any changes are body signals that warn you of stress problems and the need to combat them.

Passive Stress Management

The opposite of stress is relaxation. For the mind and body to be totally relaxed, they must both become and remain calm.

People confuse recreation with relaxation. What they do for recreation is often not relaxation. For example, the emotional involvement of watching Monday Night Football or a television show stimulates the mind and body. As long as there is emotional involvement, there are stress reactions and your mind and body are not free to restore themselves. For the same reason, lying in bed worrying about problems is not relaxing.

Sleep is essential. Even sleep is not pure relaxation. To sleep you go from periods of deep rest to dreams. During dreams your mind is very active. Emotionally charged dreams that lead to worrisome sleep can cause you to wake up even more tired than when you went to sleep.

Effective relaxation is done while awake. Although you may not reach the same level of rest in relaxation as you do in sleep, the fact that you can steadily remain at a level of reduced emotional involvement can be more refreshing than sleep.

The aim of relaxation is to free yourself from stressors long enough to refresh and restore your mind and body.

When relaxing, the mind does not become dull or cease to function. Instead, the mind is focused and alert while relaxing. Mental clarity and greater concentration result from periods of relaxation.

Relaxation is not achieved through the use of tranquilizing drugs—alcohol, tranquilizers, sleeping pills, etc. These drugs depress or impair the brain or nervous system, making users less responsive to their surroundings.

Relaxation calms the body and mind, but does not impair the senses. Studies show that people who practice relaxation daily actually react quicker to stressors, and recover more quickly than people who do not practice relaxation.

What Relaxation Can Do For You

Relaxation increases productivity. It increases work efficiency because energy is not wasted. Relaxation only requires a few minutes a day, and an attitude of calm. Like physical exercise, relaxation exercises begin with just a few minutes a day and work up to 10-20 minutes a day. They can be done anytime, except after meals when digestion interferes with relaxation.

People who practice relaxation will be less stressed under pressure. Practice will teach them to calm unnecessary brain activity. As they practice they become conditioned to remain relaxed throughout the day. (The centers in the brain that cause relaxation actually learn to dominate the alarm centers.) Relaxation training also calms areas in the brain that control thinking and emotions so responses to stressors are more calm.

There are two ways to relax:

1. To relax your body and the mind will follow—progressive muscle relaxation, yoga, massage, and biofeedback are examples of this approach.
2. To relax your mind and the body will follow—examples here are meditation and visualization. When relaxation occurs, the heart rate goes down, muscle tension decreases, and disease symptoms may lessen.

As you practice relaxation skills, you may discover a number of positive psychological results. You might find that you feel more in control and more happy. The person in control can work efficiently and can also choose to deeply relax when it is appropriate. Relaxation also seems to reach the parts of the brain where creative thoughts originate. You might remember attacking a problem for hours without finding a solution. Then, as you relaxed at night in bed, in the bathtub, or on vacation, your mind seemed to assemble the pieces of the puzzle and present a solution.

Relaxation often creates a profound serenity, a feeling of calm and joy. Try it! The benefits might surprise you.

The remainder of this section of the workbook reviews a few different relaxation skills developed by specialists. Try each skill for a week to find the ones that best suit you.

By spending a few minutes in relaxation, people momentarily shut out the stressors created by their surroundings. They just observe and enjoy their environment. People who do this find themselves learning to appreciate and enjoy the beauty of life. The pleasure this brings usually improves their ability to work efficiently. This is why taking morning and afternoon breaks improve work productivity and efficiency.

Breathing Exercises

These exercises, adapted from the Guide To Stress Reduction by L. John Mason, Ph.D., are easy to learn. They may seem a little funny at first, but give them a chance. Dr. Mason recommends that they be tried for a period of at least twenty minutes a day to achieve their maximum benefit.

Start with easy exercises and gradually progress to more difficult ones. You may find some of the exercises more helpful than others, or you may find you respond best to a combination of them. Remember, everyone reacts to stress in a unique way and you should not expect your methods of coping with it to be similar to anyone else's.

Because breathing is an involuntary response, we tend to take it for granted. You may have noticed that when you were in the midst of a particularly stressful situation, your breathing changed noticeably—it became a series of rapid, shallow breaths, never completely filling your lungs. For a change, take a deep breath. Inhale and hold your breath for ten seconds. Do you feel tension in your throat and chest? Now exhale through your mouth, and as you do, give a sigh of relief. Try this three or four times and see if you don't feel a release of your body tensions with the "sigh of relief." You may not find

this helpful at first, but give it a chance. Proper breathing is essential in triggering the characteristics of relaxation.

One to Eight Count Breathing: First, assume a relaxed position. If you are seated, let yourself go limp with your arms hanging toward the floor and your chin on your chest. If you are lying down, move your arms and your legs away from the body and place your palms face down. Take a deep breath and close your eyes. Concentrate on filling your lungs with air and try to rid yourself of all other thoughts. Exhale slowly, concentrating on trying to empty your lungs of every last molecule of air. As you inhale, again, very deeply, mentally say the number 1 to yourself and try to visualize the number 1 in your mind. Hold the breath for about three seconds and then exhale. As you are exhaling, say to yourself the number 2 and try to see a 2 in your mind. Breathe in again, this time saying the number 3 to yourself and again focusing your mind on seeing the figure 3. Exhale, this time saying 4 and concentrate on seeing it. Inhale thinking 5 and exhale thinking 6. Remember, as you are breathing you want to SEE the numbers. Inhale counting 7 and exhale counting 8. Now slowly open your eyes and resume your normal posture.

Do you feel a little better? Did you have trouble visualizing the numbers as you were breathing? It's not unusual to have a little trouble. Try the exercise again. You may have been trying too hard and in the process were making yourself more tense. It is important to remember to take your time and relax.

One to Four Count Breathing: Now, let's try another exercise. Read through this once (or have someone read it to you). Then assume a comfortable position and close your eyes. Take a full breath and then exhale it fully and completely. Inhale again, this time mentally counting from 1 to 4. While holding that breath again mentally count from 1 to 4. Now exhale slowly, and as you do, mentally count from 1 to 8. Repeat the entire exercise four times, taking a few seconds to relax between each repetition. Slowly open your eyes and resume your normal posture.

Did you run out of air while you were exhaling before you got to the number 8? Try again. This time try taking a deeper breath and exhaling a little more slowly. This exercise may be hard at first, but as you begin to master it, you should find it very helpful in relaxing.

Five to One Count Breathing: Again, get comfortable, close your eyes and say the number 5 to yourself. As you see the number, take a deep breath. Now exhale fully and completely, ridding your lungs of every last molecule of air. While mentally saying the number 4, take another full, deep breath. This time, as you exhale, say to yourself, "I am more relaxed than I was at number 5." Don't rush yourself. Be sure that you have completely exhaled before you take another deep breath, this time saying the number 3. As you exhale, say to yourself, "I am more relaxed than I was at number 4." Continue the sequence through to the number 1. The closer you get to the number 1, the more relaxed you should feel.

There are several other variations of breathing exercises. You should be getting comfortable with the basics of deep breathing. As the breathing exercises were defined, there was mention of visualization of the numbers, and you were asked to concentrate on the sequence or number. These are important concepts in themselves—it is important to use the numbers.

Muscle Relaxation

Progressive muscle relaxation is a skill that is very effective for most everyone who uses it. The instructions are adopted from You Must Relax by Dr. Edmond Jacobson. Dr. Jacobson originated it in the 1920s. Progressive muscle relaxation is so named because you tense and then relax the muscles in the body from head to toe, relaxing more and more deeply as you go. There are three assumptions underlying this skill:

You cannot relax your muscles and worry at the same time. Dr. Jacobson showed that simply thinking about using one's arm measurably raises muscle tension in that arm. Conversely, relaxing tension in that arm quiets worries in the mind.

In order to deeply relax, you must first experience muscle tension. During stress, muscles contract, or shorten, to prepare for fight or flight. You can get so accustomed to having muscle tension that when you try to relax, some tension remains. If you purposefully tense your muscles hard, and then deeply relax, the brain can better distinguish the difference. With practice, deep relaxation can be recalled and quickly reached and muscles will relax.

Once you become aware of the difference between tension and relaxation, you can stop tension before it develops. This leads to a habit of relaxation.

Dr. Jacobson observed that sick people demonstrated higher than normal muscle tension. Even with bed rest prescribed, patients still remained tense. He reasoned that tension slowed healing, aggravated symptoms, and made patients more upset. By teaching patients to relax, Dr. Jacobson found that they recovered from all forms of illness. Observing that people cannot think clearly when they are tense or upset, Dr. Jacobson applied his technique to people with psychological disturbances and found that a wide variety of these disturbances improved. The technique is widely used today and actively involves the participant, thus making it useful for smokers, overeaters, and people whose minds tend to race. Progressive muscular relaxation uses the mind-body connection. It relaxes the body—and the mind follows.

The technique is done once or twice a day for 15-20 minutes each time. Learn it in a quiet room, lying down where you will not be disturbed. However, it may later be used sitting or standing for shorter periods. It is very effective before bedtime to help you get to sleep.

As you perform the skill it is important to fully observe and concentrate on the feelings of tension. Tension is a dull feeling and is sometimes difficult to locate. It is neither agreeable nor disagreeable. It is not the pain or cramps you might notice if you strain. Similarly, concentrate fully on what relaxation feels like. As you do, your brain will become more attuned to the difference, and you will be better able to remain free of tension throughout the day.

The instructions follow. Have someone read them to you, or put the instructions on a cassette tape, so you can concentrate. Otherwise, read and do one step at a time. For simplicity, each muscle group will be tensed and relaxed only once. It is often more relaxing, however, to tense and relax each muscle group twice before progressing to another muscle group.

The Muscle Relaxation Exercise: You will progressively tense and relax most of the muscles in your body. This is a very effective way to achieve deep relaxation. For areas that might be weak or injured, simply avoid tensing these areas.

To prepare, loosen tight clothing. Remove contact lenses, glasses, and/or shoes if you desire. Lie down comfortably on a firm mattress, or on the floor with a small pillow under your head, and a larger pillow under the knees. Let your arms rest comfortably at your sides.

1. To begin, close your eyes. Concentrate on breathing. Notice the alertness when you inhale. Especially notice the feeling of relaxation when you exhale. Your breathing is a natural relaxer that calms you as you tune in to it. Notice the air flowing in the nostrils. Notice your stomach rise as you breathe in and fall as you breathe out. As you breathe deeply, mentally scan your body for tense areas and let the tension go as you breathe out. Particularly notice your exhaling—let your body relax and sink into the floor or bed as you breathe out. Let your breathing gradually slow and become more regular. Throughout the exercise, continue to breathe naturally.
2. Point both of your feet and toes away from your head at the same time. Tense as hard as you can without discomfort. Notice the pulling sensation, or tension, in the calves. Observe tension in the bottom of the feet. Notice if both feet are equally tensed. Form a picture of the tension in your mind. Now completely let go of the tension, all at once. As you exhale, feel the relaxed feeling in the calves and bottom of your feet. These parts may feel slightly warm or tingling as blood flow returns. Just enjoy letting them relax. Let your feet sink into the floor feeling relaxed, comfortable, and heavy.
3. Next, point your toes upward toward your head. Observe the tension in the muscles below the knee. Tense as hard as you can without discomfort. Feel and visualize the tension in these muscles. Now relax, completely relaxing all tension. Let those muscles relax more and more.
4. Next, tense the powerful quadriceps muscles on the front part of the leg above the knee. You'll do this by straightening out your legs and locking your knees, as though you were pushing your knees into the ground. Concentrate on pulling in your legs. Visualize the tension in your mind. See it. Relax. Scan your quadriceps for the relaxed feeling. Feel it and see it in your mind so that you can easily recall the image later, when you want to relax. Breathe out as you feel the tension slip from your legs.
5. Next, Dig your heels into the floor. Observe the tension in the back of the legs, particularly behind the quadriceps. Press down hard. Now relax. Let your legs entirely relax (pause 10 seconds). Now search your entire legs and feet for the

- relaxed feeling. Notice where the warm, heavy feelings of relaxation are. Notice how different relaxation is from tension. Let these feelings spread evenly throughout the legs as they become even more and more relaxed (pause 15 seconds).
6. Pull in the muscles of the stomach. Pretend you see yourself tightening those muscles to absorb a blow. Very tight and hard. Notice this tensing interferes with your breathing. Draw the stomach in as though it will touch the spine. And relax. Notice the difference as your stomach relaxes and lets go of the tension. Feel the warm relaxed feeling spread throughout this area. It is there. Just sense it. Soft, warm, heavy, getting even more relaxed.
 7. Next, tense muscles that carry much of the day's tension, the muscles of the back. First, gently and gradually press the shoulders against the floor or bed while arching your back up and away from the floor or bed. At the same time, raise your chest toward your chin. Notice where you observe the tension in your back. Now relax. Sense the pleasant relaxing feeling as those muscles relax deeper and deeper. Let go of the tension.
 8. Next, press your lower back against the floor so it is flat. See your lower back pressing hard against the floor. Relax. Just relax. Let our entire back now be completely relaxed, more and more calm and free of tension (pause 15 seconds).
 9. Next, squeeze your shoulders downward toward your feet. At the same time press your arms against the sides of your body. Push hard. Notice the tension across the chest, shoulders and upper arms. Relax now. Notice the contrast as these muscles now relax. You may not have been aware of how relaxed your chest can feel. Notice that when you inhale, there is slight tension in the muscles around the ribs and chest. When you exhale, your entire chest relaxes even more, feeling comfortable and warm inside.
 10. Next, shrug your shoulders. Raise them toward your ears and feel the tension above the collarbones. Relax. Observe the difference as you cause these muscles to relax deeper and deeper.
 11. Next bend your hands backward as if to touch your knuckles to your elbow, keeping your fingers bent. Scan your hand and forearm for the tension. You should observe it on the top part of the forearm. Now relax and enjoy the pleasant contrast. As you relax the tension, your forearm feels limp, heavy, and warm.
 12. This time, make fists and draw them up to your shoulders tightly as if you were pulling in the reins to stop a team of horses. Notice how tight your fists can clench. Notice the tightness in your biceps. Now relax. Let your arms go limp at your sides. Now you have relaxed your whole body below the neck. Scan your body now. Search for the relaxed feelings. Notice where they are. Observe these feelings of relaxation (pause 15 seconds).
 13. The neck carries a lot of tension without much rest. Now relax this area. Use care and move slowly as you do this, and don't strain. Right now, gently and slowly turn your head to the right until you feel tension below your right ear. Feel and notice what the tension feels like. Now slowly return to the relaxed position, and let the muscles on the right side of the neck totally relax. Now, slowly and gently turn your head all the way to the left, this time noticing the tension in the neck below the left ear. Relax. Now slowly bring the chin toward the chest. Feel the

- tension at the sides and front of the neck. Now relax and feel the neck relaxing all around. Now point the chin up in the air and press your head against the floor or bed. Observe the tension along the back of the neck. Relax and feel the difference. Let your neck now relax all around.
14. Next, make a wide smile. Open your mouth wide. Grin ear to ear. Feel the skin and muscle around the cheekbone, just below the eyes, raise up. Notice tension also around the temples. Now relax those muscles completely.
 15. Next, frown, pulling the corners of your mouth down as far as they will go. Feel the tension around the mouth and sides of the neck. Relax. Feel the warm, deeply relaxing contrast.
 16. The jaw muscles are extremely powerful and can carry much tension. Clench your teeth, while pushing your tongue against the upper teeth. Observe the tension from the angle of the jaw up to the temples. And relax. Let the teeth part slightly. Make sure the tongue is relaxed.
 17. Now pretend you are annoyed. Frown, drawing your eyebrows together, while shutting your eyes tightly. Study the tension under the eyebrows and along the muscles of the eyelid. Now relax and let that tension melt away.
 18. Next raise your eyebrows high, as if someone were pulling back on your scalp. Feel the tension under your wrinkled brow. Now relax and feel complete relaxation in that area. Your body has now been completely relaxed. Search your body, observing how relaxation feels. Let all remaining tension slip away (pause 15 seconds).
 19. To conclude, imagine a spout on top of your head. It is opening, and warm, relaxing water is flowing in, slowly flowing down your head and neck, bringing relaxation as it does. The warm fluid now goes down through your shoulders, into your arms and hands, making them feel limp and heavy. The liquid flows down your chest, back, and stomach, bringing soothing warmth. Your legs and feet are now filled with this soothing, warm water, making them feel very relaxed and heavy. Now imaginary spouts on your toes open, and the water begins to drain out, carrying out with it all remaining tension. Starting with your head, the fluid drains from your neck, then the arms and trunk. Finally the water drains down the legs and feet slowly bringing even deeper relaxation than you experienced before. Your entire body is quiet and relaxed. Enjoy this feeling for a few moments, breathing diaphragmatically (pause 1 minute).
 20. **IF YOU DO NOT WISH TO SLEEP:** You now feel relaxed and alert. Count to five, with each count feeling more awake and alert (pause). Before opening your eyes, take three deep breaths (pause). Stretch and open your eyes. Sit up slowly to allow circulation to normalize. Sit peacefully for a moment, then continue your activities, remaining alert and relaxed.

Remember this technique may be applied in segments during tense times. For example, at the desk you can tense the lower half of your body by pointing your toes, straightening the legs, and pressing the heels down all at once. Similarly, you can combine several of the exercises to tense and relax the upper body. At a traffic light, you can push your tongue against your upper teeth, clench your teeth, and frown.

Within a few weeks of practice, relaxation can often be achieved within 60 seconds.

Meditation

In meditation, you calm your mind. As the mind becomes serene and free of racing thoughts, the body follows and relaxes. Meditation produces restful changes in the body that are exactly opposite to stress. Neither a religion nor lifestyle, meditation is currently practiced by business executives, professional athletes, generals in the armed forces, and others in all fields. Most practitioners report that meditation helps them stay calm throughout the day, with increased alertness.

Would you like to decrease the occurrence of headaches, colds, insomnia, asthma, or allergic reactions? Would you like lower blood pressure? Would you like to eliminate the need for drugs like alcohol, cigarettes, or coffee?

Would you like to still the worries inside you, and increase your ability to rebound from stress? Would you like to increase your energy level, concentration, and self-esteem resulting in better job performance and better family relationships? Would you like to feel happier, need less sleep, and have less muscle tension?

When you are relaxed, solutions and creative ideas “bubble up,” as your creative mind is freed to rest and function unencumbered. Often accompanying this profound restful state of mind are feelings of indescribable peace, unity, contentment, and awareness.

To prepare, find a quiet room and tell others not to interrupt you. Some executives have their secretaries defer calls or take the phone off the hook during the few minutes of practice. If there is background noise, try masking it with a fan, an air conditioner, or music. Turn off or dim the lights. Since stimulants like caffeine and nicotine counter the relaxation effects, they should not be used for at least two hours before using this technique. In fact, any drugs which affect the senses interfere with the natural benefits of meditation and should be avoided before meditation.

Approach meditation with a calm mind and body. So first relaxing through exercise, yoga, stretching, progressive muscular relaxation, a warm bath, or massage before performing this technique will help. This, however, is optional.

Don't be concerned about boredom or distracting thoughts that may occur. These are normal. As you persist, the deep relaxation will be more satisfying than sleep.

You are ready to begin. The following instructions were developed by Dr. Benson at Harvard University's Thorndike Laboratory and detailed in his book The Relaxation Response.

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them relaxed.

4. Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing. As you breathe out, say the word “one,” silently to yourself. For example, breath in; out; ONE. Breathe easily and naturally.
5. Continue for 10 to 20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened. Do not stand up for a few minutes.
6. Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace. When distracting thoughts occur, try to ignore them by not dwelling on them and return to repeating “one.” With practice the response should come with little effort. Practice the technique once or twice daily, but not within two hours after any meal.
7. It is recommended that this be done twice a day for 10 to 20 minutes.

During the day, try to cultivate the attitude of observing your feelings and surroundings without criticizing or judging. Just notice how you feel. As soon as we realize what we are feeling, anger and stress tend to subside. Remember that when you constantly hurry and strive to force things to happen, you rarely get creative insights and hunches. So it is wise to take a few minutes each day to deeply rest the mind, helping you to function more efficiently, productively, and creatively.

Discussion Questions

1. In the “Stress Cycle” illustration, do you see the never-ending tension that can be created if you don’t break that cycle?
2. What is active stress management?
3. Can you handle the five areas of stressors you create? How?
4. What is passive stress management?
5. What is the difference between relaxation and recreation? When is each the most effective?
6. Which of the relaxation skills will be the one you can use? Why?
7. How can deep breathing relieve stress?
8. How can muscle relaxation reduce the mental tension you experience at stressful times?

HOW DO YOU INTEGRATE STRESS REDUCTION INTO YOUR LIFESTYLE?

To continue your study of stress management, study these tips and determine those best suited to your needs and lifestyle. Each has proven useful for some people. You can't totally eliminate stress, but you can make it more manageable if you integrate some of these tips into your lifestyle.

Picture Your Goals

A basic tool to improve your self-image is using clearly defined goals. The conscious and subconscious work together to achieve goals that are clearly defined and pictured on a daily basis. An illustration—basketball players who simply pictured a perfect free throw in their minds improved as much as players who actually practiced shooting each day for the same amount of time. In other words, picture a success in your mind long enough and it will become true.

Your self-image can be improved by clearly defining the desired attitudes of goals, relaxing, and then rehearsing or practicing these goals in your mind on a daily basis until the attitudes become part of your subconscious.

Use Time Management

Each week, you have exactly 168 hours to use as you wish. Only you can determine if you want to use your time more effectively. You make time management tick. By managing your time, you can minimize stress. You do it by concentrating all your energies into these thoughts:

Time is important to your job, your family, your spiritual development, your career, and all aspects of your life. Remember, your time is your life.

Putting effort into time management gives you the benefit of increased free time.

Concentrate on those activities that will produce the greatest time-saving results for you.

Take Care Of Your Body

Want to feel good? Try exercise. Exercise can help you cope with stress. According to cardiologists and stress consultants, exercise is a major treatment for stress. Many well-known businesses have placed exercise programs in their facilities. This has resulted in improved productivity and attitudes.

Laboratory studies show exercise alters the way the body handles stress. The exercised heart does not beat as fast in response to stress hormones and it returns to a rest level quicker. More importantly, blood stress hormone levels do not go up as quickly, nor do they stay up as long in people who exercise. In addition, exercise:

Reduces muscle tension, reducing the potential need for medication (people who are too tense to sleep usually benefit from exercise)

Reduces above-normal blood pressure

Lowers the levels of blood fats and sugar, which reduces the risk of a number of stress-related diseases
Increases energy levels and stamina
Strengthens the heart, making it able to meet the demands of stress
Produces natural pain killers (endorphins) in the body
Provides a “time out” from problems, allowing our minds to become rested and refreshed.

Eat Properly

Sensible eating habits are essential in managing stress. Basically, good nutrition raises resistance to stress, while poor nutrition is a stressor. Think of eating, not dieting, as necessary for good health. You can expect to be healthy if you eat well. When we eat well we tend to look, feel, and perform better. Dietary guidelines for stress are simple and consistent. They permit an infinite variety of delicious and nutritious foods.

1. Obtain nutrition that is balanced and varied. Foods balanced from the four basic food groups (meat, dairy products, fruits/vegetables, and bread/grain) supply all the essential nutrients, including vitamins and minerals. There are no vitamin or mineral pills that will make a person healthy, because they lack protein, carbohydrates, and fat. Each day an adult should balance food selections from the four basic food groups. Also, seek variety each day. For example, an apple has a number of vitamins, but little vitamin C compared to an orange. So it is better to have an orange and an apple rather than two apples a day.
2. Follow proper dietary guidelines. There are a number of diets advertised in the media. If you are serious about losing weight, consult your doctor. Ask him to recommend a diet plan and exercise program. To go on a crash diet or a fad diet may deprive your body of nutrients needed to function. An improper diet could create more stress.
3. Eat breakfast. Breakfast can make or break you. Skipping breakfast permits blood sugar to drop, which triggers the stress response. Breakfast skippers work less efficiently, suffer more mid-afternoon fatigue, and are more prone to obesity.
4. Eat smaller, more frequent meals. Research shows that people who eat five or six small meals a day feel more energetic and are better able to control their weight. Eating throughout the day tends to keep blood sugar levels fairly constant, so fatigue and irritability are less likely and appetite is reduced.
5. Reduce drug intake from the caffeine family. Caffeine is found in coffee, tea, chocolate, and certain soda pops. Caffeine drugs mimic the stress hormones. The amount of caffeine in one or two cups of coffee can trigger the stress response and anxiety symptoms, including:
 - a. Raised blood sugar
 - b. Nervousness
 - c. Headaches
 - d. Muscle tension
 - e. Irritability

6. Get your vitamins. Certain nutrients (vitamin C, zinc, B vitamins) appear to be used at a greater rate during stressful periods. People ask if vitamin or mineral supplements should be taken. Most experts feel a balanced and varied diet will furnish ample nutrients, even in stressful times. Ask your doctor. Massive doses of vitamins can be harmful.
7. Drink water. Lots of water throughout the day helps flush out the kidneys, disposing of waste products from the blood (salts and bacteria). Water is necessary for digestion and regulation of body temperature. Approximately two quarts are needed per day. If you drink a glass or two 20 minutes before eating, you'll also feel less hungry. It takes about 20 minutes for the brain to register the full feeling.

Change Your Surroundings

Are the lighting and temperature in your surroundings comfortable? Extremes in temperature and lighting can decrease productivity and increase stress, so you might want to consider changing the lights or adding a fan or heater. Using an air conditional permits windows to be closed, which decreases outside noise.

Do traffic lights annoy you? Travel a different route. Go to work earlier and avoid rush hour traffic. If you arrive early at the office, you may find you can plan your day in peace.

Listed below is a four-step plan for changing your surroundings.

1. Identify the stressor. Carry an index card with you and write down items that bother you during the day—include people on this list. Ask yourself why this item upsets you as you write it down. Later take another look at your list. Are there unrealistic beliefs you hold about a stressor?
2. Create alternatives. List alternate solutions to the stressor. Be careful. Under stress, people often try to come up with the one “perfect” solution, and overlook less likely, but sometimes superior, alternatives.
3. Evaluate the alternatives. Measure the pros and cons of each alternative. For example, if a job is stressful, what are the pros and cons of seeking a new job, perhaps in a new or related field? Does an alternative simply trade one set of problems for another?
4. Select the best alternative. Which alternative seems best? There are seldom perfect solutions, but knowing you have the power to choose the one that feels best for you promotes a feeling of control. Try it, and feel free to reevaluate it. If it isn't working right, be flexible enough to adapt as the situations change.

Changing your surroundings also means making them more pleasant. Can you rearrange your workplace to make your work easier or more efficient? Would painting, cleaning, or redecorating your surroundings make them happier? Do you enjoy music in your home or workplace? Could you make a quiet place at home where you can enjoy quiet, relaxing moments?

Twenty-One Day Plan To Break The Stress-Prone Rut

There are a number of things you can do to break out of a stressful behavior pattern and reduce the risk of an illness.

- Day 1: Reduce your tendency to think and speak rapidly by making a conscious attempt to hear what other people say. Deliberately ask questions so they can continue talking and remind yourself to recognize them as people who have interests and concerns worthy of hearing. Overcome the possibility of interrupting others by taking a slow, deep breath every time you feel the urge to finish someone's conversation.
- Day 2: Adopt the attitude and behavior that will make you prioritize those matters that require immediate attention. Then do only as many of those items as time allows. Delegate routine tasks and less important matters to others.
- Day 3: Avoid getting upset when you do not complete all your work in a given day. Ask yourself, "In one hundred years, who will know or care?"
- Day 4: Do only one thing at a time. While waiting for a phone call to go through, instead of trying to accomplish a second or third task, choose instead to drop your pen and look out the window or gaze at a tranquil picture to avoid having to do something in the "waiting" time.
- Day 5: Relax without guilt. Instead of feeling guilty about not spending enough time with the family, turn these feelings around and let them motivate you to spend time relaxing, talking and enjoying the company of family members. Lay aside the newspaper or magazine to avoid the tendency to read and half listen when someone talks to you. Get distracting items out of your hands.
- Day 6: Refocus your desires for recognition. Seek recognition on a human and personal level by enriching the lives of those people you touch. Focus recognition inward when you satisfactorily reach a goal by telling yourself, "This is a good job and something I can be proud of."
- Day 7: A reassessment of "what is life" can help you view competitive, aggressive behavior in a different perspective. Ask yourself, "Is aggressive behavior appropriate, useful, or necessary to accomplish a desirable, worthwhile personal or business goal?" This evaluation process will result in the discarding of aggressive behavior as a viable tool.
- Day 8: Look with fascination at the games you and other people play, such as maneuvering, putting others down, stealing ideas, and using flattery. Usually these are done for advancement purposes, but often with little idea of what success really entails.
- Day 9: Play soft background music at home and in your office to provide a soothing backdrop to the hustle and bustle of office personnel, noisy telephones, or crying children.
- Day 10: Reduce an irritating situation by planning your schedule so you are driving or commuting when traffic is light.
- Day 11: Stop evaluating your success in life in terms of how many material things you have acquired.
- Day 12: Recognize what you value and want out of life. This is the first step to modifying or changing your behavior. Be responsive to the world around

you. Remember the saying, “You only live this day but once.” Adapt yourself to a reasonable pace and you’ll become more aware of your environment and enjoy it more.

- Day 13: Reduce some of your self-imposed time pressure. Allow yourself more time than you need to get a job done. This can be done by scheduling ahead of time and for longer intervals. If you normally plan a half hour to get a job done by rushing through it, schedule forty-five to sixty minutes do you can do the job more deliberately and thoughtfully. This can only improve the quality of your work.
- Day 14: Start your day fifteen minutes earlier than usual and do something nice for yourself. Job, walk the dog, share breakfast with your family, or leisurely read the newspaper. It’s a pleasant way to start the day.
- Day 15: Attempt to make your noon hour a rest from work. Shop, browse, read, have lunch with a friend. Keep business luncheons to a minimum.
- Day 16: Spend time alone when at home. If you have children, this may be difficult. However, you can teach them a valuable lesson if you make them aware of the need to respect one another’s privacy and understand the need for each person to have some time alone. At work, try to find some moments by yourself even if it means walking around the building or sitting quietly in your car. If you are in a responsible position, have your secretary hold your calls for a few minutes so you can have some uninterrupted time. Trade off a few minutes to cover for someone else in the office while he or she has a few moments of quiet. Then have that person do the same for you.
- Day 17: Develop interests and hobbies just for the pure enjoyment of it. Avoid making these hobbies work related.
- Day 18: Keep a beautiful bouquet of fresh flowers at home or in the office. Surround yourself with an assortment of hanging plants. When you feel yourself becoming tense, engulf yourself in this natural beauty.
- Day 19: Hike or sail a boat rather than indulging in competitive leisure activities. Ski just for the fun of it. Avoid tournaments and races that escalate competition. Enjoy a game of backgammon or darts and be willing to quit even if you have not won.
- Day 20: Notice as you keep the number of your activities within reason, your work productivity and your leisure will be more enjoyable.
- Day 21: Establish life goals separate from the ongoing clatter and frantic pace of your everyday life. Make peace of mind one of your goals. When you do, money, status, and prestige will no longer control your motivations. Set aside time for playing with people you choose to be with. Stop doing things with people whose friendship you seek as status. Form acquaintances with people you like being with and who in turn like being with you.

As stated previously, individuals who are most subject to the damaging physical consequences of stress are often those who inflict stressful experiences on themselves.

The stress-prone personality is constantly burdened with goals that are too high, deadlines that are not needed, and standards that are unreasonable.

Stress-prone personalities do not develop overnight. These personalities are often molded in childhood by parents who allow youngsters to become obsessed with winning, controlled by a desire to get top grades, or motivated by a desperate need for recognition based on achievements rather than inner worth. The most important step in curbing this behavior is spotting the tendency while the personality is still in its formative stages.

Stress-prone behavior is not necessarily right or wrong. The danger comes not in having stress-prone traits but in not knowing how to counteract them when stress overload is imminent. Research has confirmed that inability to resolve stress overload is a greater factor in heart disease and long-term illness than physical habits such as smoking or overeating.

Discussion Questions

1. Can a person totally eliminate stress? Why/Why not?
2. Does a person need a little stress to work effectively? Why/Why not?
3. How can a good self-image help you handle stress?
4. Can positive visualization help you handle stress? How?
5. What are some time management tips that can help you be more organized and minimize stress?
6. How do you maintain a proper diet? Are there certain foods you like that your digestive system doesn't like? Are there stress-related activities associated with the consumption of these foods?
7. Do you have control of your surroundings? Can you change them? How would you change them?

IN SUMMARY

After you have had time to practice the techniques in this workbook, go back to your self-evaluation in the first section. Notice which stress symptoms have changed for the better. What caused the difference? Which techniques will you continue to practice? Are there techniques you would still like to try?

You have reviewed several methods of reducing the stress each of us faces in our daily lives. As you've seen, stress comes from many sources and can be alleviated in many different ways. Several other techniques are available to combat stress and you are encouraged to continue your stress education by learning them.

If you feel you have a serious problem with stress, consult your physician. While the information presented here is a guideline, the symptoms of stress can often be indicators of serious health problems that only your doctor can deal with. If you are already under a doctor's care, seek his advice before beginning any stress reduction program. The forces of your body are powerful ones that should not be taken for granted.