

STRESS SYMPTOMS

Check the symptoms of stress you've noticed lately in yourself. . .

PHYSICAL

- appetite change
- headaches
- tension
- fatigue
- insomnia
- weight change
- colds
- muscle aches
- digestive upsets
- pounding heart
- accident prone
- teeth grinding
- rash
- restlessness
- foot-tapping
- finger-drumming
- increased alcohol,
drug, tobacco use

EMOTIONAL

- anxiety
- frustration
- the "blues"
- mood swings
- bad temper
- nightmares
- crying spells
- irritability
- "no one cares"
- depression
- nervous laugh
- worrying
- easily discouraged
- little joy

SPIRITUAL

- emptiness
- loss of meaning
- doubt
- unforgiving
- martyrdom
- looking for magic
- loss of direction
- needing to
"prove" self
- cynicism
- apathy

MENTAL

- forgetfulness
- dull senses
- poor concentration
- low productivity
- negative attitude
- confusion
- lethargy
- whirling mind
- no new ideas
- boredom
- spacing out
- negative self talk

RELATIONAL

- isolation
- intolerance
- resentment
- loneliness
- lashing out
- hiding
- claming up
- lowered sex drive
- nagging
- distrust
- fewer contacts with friends
- lack of intimacy
- using people

AN OVERVIEW OF STRESS

Stress is a very broad concept that can be defined in many different ways. An overview of what stress is and the way our bodies respond to it will help make thinking about stress more clear.

There are two different types of stress. The first is referred to as eustress or "good" stress. We need some stress in our lives in order to be stimulated and motivated. Having good stress in our lives helps us to be and feel healthy. For example, exercising stresses the body, however, it also improves health. The second type is referred to as distress, or "bad" stress. Suffering from distress over a long period of time can eventually result in disease. Some examples of this type of stress include frustration, guilt, anxiety as well as physical discomfort or pain.

Our bodies respond to both "good" and "bad" stress in the same way by use of the stress response. This physiological response was useful to humans in more primitive times. When a danger was encountered, the stress response was activated and the person would be prepared for so-called "Fight or Flight". The energy produced by the stress would be released by running away or by dealing with the threat.

THE FIGHT OR FLIGHT RESPONSE

- increased heart rate and blood pressure
- rapid, shallow breathing
- adrenaline and other hormones are released into bloodstream
- liver releases sugar into the bloodstream
- pupils dilate, senses are heightened
- muscles become tense and ready for movement
- blood flow to the digestive organs and extremities decreases
- blood flow to the brain and large muscles increases
- body perspires to cool itself

Nowadays, much more of our stress is experienced mentally, rather than physically. However, the stress response is still activated by mental threat. The energy produced is bottled up. When stress reactions occur often and over a long period of time, a wearing down of the body's system may occur and eventually result in disease. Many complaints are known to be stress related. Some of these are known to be directly related to stress while other are indirectly related.

STRESS RELATED SYMPTOMS

- tension headaches
- muscle cramps
- back , neck, and shoulder pain
- jaw tension
- migraines
- allergies, asthma, arthritis
- digestive disorders, constipation, diarrhea
- colds, insomnia, fatigue
- forgetfulness, clumsiness

PUTTING STRESS INTO A SOCIAL CONTEXT

So far we have looked at an overview of the stress response in a mainly physiological sense. It is true that the body responds in a certain specific manner no matter what the type of stress is that is affecting it. It is our belief, however, that many stress management approaches fail to take into account the full extent of sources of stress that affect us daily. Many stress management courses and books focus only on learning to recognize tension in the body and reducing that tension when it occurs. The focus is usually on the many techniques that are available to reduce tension such as relaxation, biofeedback, exercise, yoga, and meditation.

It is our belief that these approaches do not go far enough in identifying what stresses us in the first place. It is fine if we can relax our muscles every day after working in an office. However, muscle relaxation won't solve any problems such as poor air circulation, low pay, low job satisfaction, or sexual harassment or discrimination in the work environment.

One goal of this workshop is to put the stresses that women face into a social and political as well as a personal context. That is, to help us to identify how many stresses in our lives originate in larger issues such as discrimination, socialization of women, and societal expectations of women. We hope that this workshop will help us put our own stresses into a broader perspective and be able to see how our stresses relate to those of many other women.

COPING WITH STRESS

SOURCE OF STRESS

PERCEPTION OF STRESS

REACTION TO STRESS

Identify source of stress

Change your attitude

Positive Reactions

- body scan
- 'check in'

- ↓ guilt
- ↓ shoulds
- ↓ unrealistic expectations
- ↑ positive self-statements

- relaxation
- biofeedback
- massage
- exercise
- time management
- nutrition
- use support network
- social action

Changeable by individual action

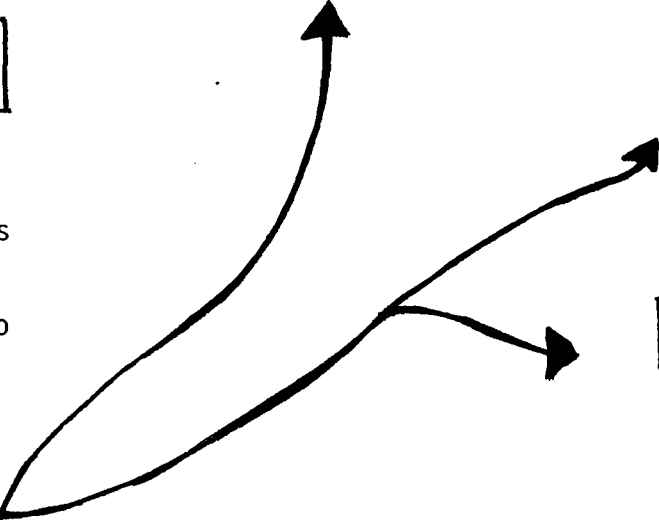
- assertiveness training
- remove the stress
- decrease work by assigning work to others

Less changeable by individual action

- social
- work
- pollution

Negative Reactions

- substance use and abuse
- over and under-eating
- sleeping too much or too little



THE SOURCES OF STRESS

When we're deciding how to deal with stress we need to first look at the overall picture of our lives. Once we've done that we can decide where we want to focus our attention and efforts first.

The sources of stress are located in the complex personal, social, and political environment in which we live. It's very important when we look at our individual situations not to be too self-critical or blaming but rather to understand that there are many social and political reasons why our lives are the way they are. Some sources of stress require personal solutions but many require social and/or political change.

The following exercise is intended to help you identify sources of stress in your life now and decide on a plan of action.

THE OVERALL PICTURE:

A good way to begin is to sit down with a pen and paper and/or a friend and consider your present situation. Some questions to consider are:

- Do I have enough stimulation and interests or too much?
- Do I get enough time alone?
- Do I feel healthy?
- Do I feel comfortable with my body?
- Do I get enough exercise?
- Do I get enough rest?
- Do I eat a nutritious diet?
- Do I have a way of checking in with myself to see how I'm feeling and what I need to do in any given situation?
- Do I know how to relax?
- Am I comfortable with my belief system? [see information in kit]
- Do I feel pressure to live up to expectations? [that I have of myself, from those close to me, from the world "out there"]
- Do I believe I deserve to be treated well?
- Am I able to ask for what I want and need?
- Am I able to set limits for myself?
- Is my work environment healthy?
- Do I enjoy my work?
- How do I feel as I leave work?
- Am I worried about money?
- Am I comfortable with my sexuality?

NARROWING THE FOCUS:

Once you have looked at the overall picture you will need to begin to "narrow your focus" in order to decide where you want to make changes first.

The next step is to fill out the attached work sheet. Begin by choosing a few sources of stress which are troubling you. List these in the first column, leaving plenty of space between each point.

In the second column note whether or not each point feels in your control or not at this time. It can be useful to distinguish between stressful situations that we change can and those we cannot change at this time: being aware of the difference helps us to decide on a plan of action.

In the third column make a list of possible ways of either changing the source of stress or coping for each area of concern. Changing the source of stress involves making changes that fundamentally affect the situation which is causing the stress. Examples of this are changing your work environment if you are getting frequent headaches or taking an assertiveness training course if you have trouble asking for what you need.

It is not always immediately possible to change the source of stress. Sometimes we need to stay in stressful work situations for economic reasons. Many sources of stress, such as air pollution and lack of affordable adequate daycare, require social solutions and take time. In these situations we need to figure out ways to take care of ourselves or cope. Examples of this are learning to do progressive relaxation after a stressful day of caring for children or finding ways of incorporating affirmations into a stressful job. There are information sheets describing a number of coping techniques contained in the kit. Coping techniques don't change the root of problems but they can help us develop the strength and resources we need to tackle the sources of stress.

Be creative at this stage. Write down any ideas that come to mind, even if they don't seem directly related to the source of stress. Don't decide on a plan of action until you have been through this "brainstorming" process for several sources of stress.

When you have completed this process sit still for a couple of minutes. Check in with yourself. How are you feeling...overwhelmed? excited? fearful? It's important to continue on to the last stages, deciding on a plan of action.

DECIDING ON A PLAN OF ACTION:

Read over the ideas you have just written. By now it may be clear what you want to do first. If so write that down under plan of action. If not look for themes. Notice whether you have listed short or long term solutions: it is most effective to have both included in your final plan. You may want to think of a plan of action for each source of stress and then decide which seems the most useful to do at this time.

At this stage be realistic and decide on a plan of action that is manageable and achievable. Don't try to make too much change at once: focus on one or two areas that are important to you. It's useful to divide the plan of action into small steps which are easily realizable.

Often to make changes we need support. Make sure this is included in your plan of action.

EVALUATION:

When you have finished set a date to evaluate how your plan of action is going. At that time first consider the effectiveness of what you've been doing and then go through the process again to decide on what you want to do next.

SOURCES OF STRESS WORKSHEET

SOURCE OF STRESS	CAN I CONTROL THIS NOW?	POSSIBLE WAYS OF EITHER CHANGING SOURCE OF STRESS OR OF COPING	PLAN OF ACTION

Belief systems, conflict and guilt

Children receive many messages about who they should be and how they are supposed to behave. These messages come from within the family and also from the wider world. These messages have a long lasting effect. In fact, when children become adults they often forget where these messages were learned and simply hold on to them as beliefs about themselves and their lives. The messages tend to operate as shoulds inside the head- this is called an internalized belief system. As people become aware of these "internalized shoulds" they often spontaneously imagine them as voices inside their head which have nothing to do with them, voices coming from outside somewhere but that have got inside. Often, by beginning to pay attention to the voice, it becomes clear whose voice it is. For example, a woman finds herself demanding at the dinner table that her daughter behave in a certain way. The child looked confused as this expectation had not been made of her before. The mother felt confused too, wondering to herself why this behavior was suddenly so important. Suddenly she realized that it was her mother's voice that had emerged and her mother's dinner table expectations. As she realized this, she was able to distance herself and take a moment to think to herself whether she really cared about this issue or not. [She didn't.] Many people have this simple experience of hearing something emerge from their mouths that seems to come from nowhere.

Even if these internalized voices can be identified, they can still cause trouble and stress. They create a conflict between what a person has been told she should be and who she is. Often, people are so riddled with shoulds that they are not able to step back and look clearly at what is really important to them or how do they think or feel about something. It is important however to increase awareness of what the messages are in order to better understand some of the sources of stress. It is only then possible to get the distance to ask if the beliefs/messages are current or out of date.

Examples of how conflicts in belief systems causes stress:

A woman is raised to believe that motherhood is a natural instinct and that taking care of a baby is natural and easy. When she finds she can't cope with her colicky baby her stress level is increased because she spends a lot of time feeling guilty about she isn't a "natural" mother and about how she should be able to do this without feeling so awful.

The anorexic woman might believe that she must appear in a certain image and is constantly struggling to be thinner. This is in conflict with her body's need for equilibrium and her natural weight level. She may feel guilty about eating because it is in conflict with her need to be thin.

A woman believes that abortion is murder. She is pregnant in a situation in which it is impossible for her to have a child without incurring drastic and negative changes in her life. Her belief system about abortion is in conflict with her need to care for herself in the most positive way. This produces tremendous stress.

A professional woman was raised to believe that women should marry and have children. This woman, although happily married, doesn't want to have children and yet feels a tremendous internal conflict. She thinks she should have children to please her family and because they keep telling her that nothing else could possibly be so fulfilling.

Looking at our belief system:

It is important for each of us to examine what our internal messages are. What we were taught about how girls should behave is a good example. We can then begin to untangle the expectations by remembering what was said in our families about girls and boys and by remembering the role models that we were exposed to.

Some questions to consider: what were we taught to expect from life? As girls? As members of a certain economic group? Who were we supposed to be when we grew up? Who influences us besides our parents? What did we learn from our relatives? What did we learn from religious institutions? From the educational system? What memories do we have of questioning any of these learnings, overt or covert? How was our need to question dampened?

Just seeing the conflicts we live with can relieve some of the stress. If you realize that past messages are the source of a lot of your stress you may want to explore this further, with a friend, counsellor, or alone. The book Survival Skills for Women has a number of exercises you may find useful. The book is designed to be used in a group situation but you can do many of the exercises on your own.

Source: Survival Skills for Women, M. Ziegler and S. Berman

TRACING VALUES THROUGH MY LIFE

Below is a list of common value areas. Remember and record what you learned and were told as a young person and what was important about each of these values, i.e. education: "I was told that I would never get anywhere without a college degree. I learned to value education to get what I wanted."

Next indicate whether this early value is still important (I) or not not important (NI). Lastly, look through the list as a whole, and rank the areas 1-17 in how important they are to you today.

<u>VALUE AREA</u>	<u>WHAT I LEARNED/ WAS TOLD AS A CHILD</u>	<u>CURRENT IMPORTANCE</u>	<u>RANKING</u>
Education			
Health - physical well-being			
Money			
Possessions			
Love/affection			
Religion			
Morals			
Achievement			
Recognition			
Helping others			
Power			
Control			
Competing with others			
Security			
Creativity			
Expressing feelings			
Pleasure			

COMMUNICATING ASSERTIVELY

PART A ASKING FOR SOMETHING

1. Be clear about what you want...
2. But listen for alternatives or compromises.
3. Say little; pause; expect; ask for reactions.
4. Don't say 'no' to yourself.
5. Don't apologize for asking.
6. Don't exaggerate or downplay the importance.
Ask: Is this a favor or expected service?
7. Watch out for manipulative 'questions' (e.g., why?) and button pressing; e.g., an attack on your sensitive areas: you are always so...)

PART B SAYING NO

1. Think it over first. Ask for some time to consider. You can also change a 'yes' to a 'no'.
2. Compromise.
3. Be brief--give an explanation but not an excuse.
4. Say the word 'no'; Look serious; Shake your head.
5. Paraphrase and then repeat your no with the same explanation.
6. End or postpone the conversation.
7. Don't feel guilty; it may help to mention your feelings and your thoughts about that.

PART C HANDLING CRITICISM

1. Relax and listen carefully. Paraphrasing can help.
2. Avoid long, self-critical or rationalizing excuses.
3. Stick to the issue. Avoid counter-attacks.
4. Use 'I' statements. Share your feelings about the criticism.
5. Ask for examples. Ask for suggestions.
6. Keep your voice low and speak slowly.

PART D GIVING CRITICISM

1. Plan in advance what you want to say
 - Be specific; give examples.
 - don't overload a person
 - Give positive feedback
 - Concentrate on the problem. What do you want from this person?
2. Plan what you don't want to say. Talk about the situation to someone else and listen for 'red flag' words, then avoid them.
3. Set aside an appropriate time and place.
4. Maintain eye contact; look and sound serious.
5. Use 'I' statements: don't blame the other for making you react in a certain way.
6. Aim for a dialogue, not a lecture: pause; ask open-ended questions.

Source: Working Together For Change: Women's Self-Help Handbook, Women's Self-Help Network

CONSTRUCTIVE CRITICISM

- are assertive requests for a person to change behaviour
- builds on assertiveness we've already done
- is a way of explaining what other person does that bothers you
- doesn't give you all you want but makes you clearer about what you want
- is a way of starting a discussion, requires cooperation
- can be used with friends, relationships, political groups, etc., with someone who's important to you, with equals
- not for use with bosses, etc., although can be useful in helping you understand more of what's going on

Good intentions - why are you doing this? - what do you want to get out of it? - are you doing it for satisfaction or revenge or for understanding and to further relationships?

Asking permission - Is now OK? - If not, when would it be?

1. What bothers me - What am I reacting to?

- difference between observations (what person said or did or didn't do) and judgements (what you think they said or did).

OBSERVATIONS

- you did not close the door
- you interrupted me three times during the afternoon
- you didn't phone me last night after 8 o'clock as you had said you would at lunchtime
- you were very quiet during the group yesterday
- when I came here to visit with my kid and you told her three times to go outside

JUDGEMENTS

- you always forget to close the door
- you're so rude
- you never listen
- you don't care about me
- you're irresponsible
- you grew angry at what we were doing
- you were tired/bored/depressed
- you hate kids
- you were angry at me for bringing her here

How to make an observation

- be specific
- be concrete
- stick to what person said or did, not what they did or didn't do
avoid general words like never, always
- if a person has done a lot of things stick to the most recent specific examples

2. How I feel about it?

- difference between feelings and thoughts
- feelings - what we feel, use feeling words
- thoughts - are often judgements (as in prior part) about a person's behaviour or about how we think they feel

Note the difference between thoughts and feelings:

- I feel you are ignoring me (thought)
- I feel that you are smarter than me (thought)
- I'm angry (feeling)
- I feel hurt (feeling)
- I feel misunderstood (thought - misunderstood is a blame word)
could say: I feel frustrated because I think you misunderstood me
- I really am irritated about what happened yesterday (feeling)
- I feel as though you are being unfair (thought)

How to express feelings

- start sentences with I
- stick to your own feelings

This is hard. Often we don't know how we feel so doing this helps us understand ourselves and lets the other person know how their behaviour makes us feel.

3. What changes do I want?

- these are wants, not demands
- what do you want the person to do
- who do you want to do it (important in group) avoid negatives
- be concrete and specific

Note the difference between clear and unclear statements:

- I wish people would stop interrupting everyone all the time (not clear)
- Susan, I want you to wait until I'm finished talking before you make a coment (clear)
- I want you to phone me if you are going to be more than 15 minutes home late from work (clear)
- I want you to be more supportive (not clear)
- I would like to be able to telephone you when I am upset (clear)
- I'd like you to look after my son for two hours while I go to the doctors (clear)
- I want you to listen when I talk (not clear)
- I want you to lend me your red sweater for a job interview on Wednesday (clear)
- I want you to feel better about yourself (not clear)
- I want you to hear compliments without answering with a negative comment (clear)
- I want you to stop being so disorganized (not clear)
- I want you to be on time for the next meeting (clear)

Receiving Criticism - continued

5. The person who is giving the criticism is having trouble saying it. You can help her by asking how to be more specific.

If you are confused by what she is saying, you can ask her to say it again.

You can paraphrase what you have heard her say to make sure you've got it right. Paraphrasing means saying back to her what you heard her say. In paraphrasing, we use our own words rather than parroting what she said.

If you care about her, reassure her you will continue to be her friend, even if it's hard to hear what she is saying.

Source: Survival Skills for Women, M. Ziegler & S. Berman

BREATHING

Proper breathing habits are essential for good mental and physical health. Proper breathing is also an antidote to stress... When you are upset or tense your breathing becomes shallow and irregular, and as a result, there is a chemical imbalance in your blood. Digestion becomes hampered, your organs and tissues become undernourished and deteriorate, and there is a greater susceptibility to anxiety states, depression and fatigue, making each stressful situation harder to cope with. Proper breathing, or diaphragmatic breathing, on the other hand, counteracts these stressful states. The deep full breath restores the chemical balance in the blood, strengthens weak abdominal and intestinal muscles, and contributes to a relaxed state. It is important to remember that breathing is the easiest physiological system to control, and that the deep slow breath can also be used to trigger the rest of the components of the relaxation response (i.e. slowing of heart rate, relaxation of muscles, and a return to a 'balanced' state).

Relaxed breathing is done primarily by the diaphragm, a large muscle located between the chest cavity and the abdomen. To practise relaxed breathing, place one hand below the rib cage (above the abdomen). Take a deep breath, and as you inhale, notice the movement of your hand. If you breathed properly your hand moved outward. The reason for this is that with diaphragmatic breathing you are filling the lower part as well as the rest of your lungs with air, and as a result the diaphragm moves down, and the stomach must move out. When you take a deep breath, try to imagine the lowest part of the lungs filling with air, the middle part of the lungs filling, the chest expanding, and finally the upper part of the lungs filling with air, and the shoulders moving slightly upward. It is preferable to breathe in through the nose, to filter and warm the air, and, when doing breathing exercises, to breathe out through the mouth so that more "waste air" is released. Some people habitually "chest breathe" and may require repeated practice sessions before being able to breathe properly with their diaphragms.

Don't wait for a stressful event to practise deep breathing. Try to take at least 40 deep breaths every day but avoid taking more than 4 or 5 deep breaths at one time as you may feel light-headed! To remind yourself to practice deep breathing, associate it with something commonly done during the day. If you drive a great deal, try taking a deep breath and relaxing at each stop signal. As you breathe, check your shoulders and your forehead to see if they are tense. If you are working in a busy office, try taking a deep breath each time the phone rings, and exhaling fully before picking up the phone.

Breathing exercises have been found to be effective in reducing anxiety, depression, irritability, muscular tension, and fatigue. They are used in the treatment and prevention of breath-holding, hyperventilation, shallow breathing and cold hands and feet.

BREATHING EXERCISES

The proper breath is the basis for many breathing exercises. To ensure that you are breathing properly, place your hand below your rib cage (above your abdomen), as this should move outward with each deep breath. In breathing for relaxation remember to breathe in through your nose, and exhale through your mouth (if this feels uncomfortable, just do what feels right).

Try to take at least 40 deep breaths every day, don't wait for a stressful event to practice these. To remind yourself to practice, associate it with something you commonly do during the day. (Never take more than 5 deep breaths at a time).

EXERCISES:

1-TO-8 COUNT

Close your eyes and take a deep slow breath, and exhale fully.

-Breathe in again and try to see the number 1 in your mind. Hold your breath for three seconds.

-Exhale fully, and visualize the number 2.

-Breathe in again and focus on the number 3.

-Hold your breath for three seconds.

-Exhale fully, mentally saying 4.

-Inhale again, saying 5. Hold for three seconds.

-Exhale saying 6.

-Inhale, saying 7. Hold for three seconds.

-Exhale, saying 8.

Repeat the entire sequence for 1 to 8. Remember, don't force relaxation, try to give in to relaxation.

1-TO-4 COUNT

Close your eyes and take a deep, slow breath and exhale fully.

-Breathe in again and mentally count from 1 to 4. Hold your breath and again count from 1 to 4. Exhale fully slowly counting from 1 to 8.

-Repeat the sequence 3 times.

ALTERNATE NOSTRIL BREATHING (This is a more difficult exercise, so take your time).

-Place your right finger over your left nostril, pressing lightly to close off the nostril.

-Take a deep full breath, inhaling with your right nostril.

-Remove your finger from the left nostril and lightly close off the right nostril with your thumb.

-Exhale slowly through the now open left nostril.

Inhale through your left nostril.

-Close off the left nostril, with your long finger again, and exhale through the right nostril. Inhale through the right nostril.

-Close off the right nostril, with your thumb again, and exhale through the left nostril. Inhale through the left nostril.

Repeat this slowly and rhythmically for 6 more breaths.

PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION

Ideally, progressive relaxation should be practised in a chair with a high back to support your neck and head, and with feet well supported or while lying on a bed, with one pillow under your head, and two pillows under your knees. It is important to have a relaxed, almost passive attitude towards the exercises. Do not approach these as if you were an athlete in training. Select a quiet room free from distractions. Remove shoes and loosen ties and belts. Avoid doing the program immediately after eating.

Each muscle group is tensed from 5-7 seconds, and then relaxed for 20 - 30 seconds, and the procedure is then repeated. If an area remains tense, you can practice up to 5x. However avoid tensing too hard, to avoid pain or cramping. You should feel no discomfort. **Any area that has been injured or is prone to injury should be tightened gently.**

While doing the exercises, you should not hold your breath. Try to time the release of tension for the muscle group you are tightening to coincide with an exhalation or "out" breath. **Try to imagine that you are "breathing out the tension"**. Also, when you are releasing the tension, let those muscles go completely and immediately.

THE TRAINING SEQUENCE

- A) 1. RIGHT ARM: Put your arm and hand in a relaxed, supported position and make a fist, tensing your upper arm as if you were going to lift a heavy bucket, but do not move the arm. -2x
2. LEFT ARM: As for right arm. -2x.
3. FOREHEAD: Lift your eyebrows high as if you wanted them to touch the top of your head. (Another method is to frown, or "knit your brows".) -2x
4. EYES: CHEEKS, AND NOSE: Close your eyes tightly and wrinkle your nose. 2x
5. JAWS, LIPS, AND TONGUE: Clench your teeth, press your lips together, and push your tongue up onto the roof of your mouth. -2x
6. NECK AND THROAT: Pull your chin down as if trying to touch it to your chest, but at the same time prevent it from actually touching your chest. (Another method, if you are lying, is to press your head back). -2x
7. CHEST, BACK AND SHOULDERS: Take in a deep breath, hold it, (this is the only time you hold your breath) then press your shoulder blades towards each other while at the same time tightening the chest muscles. -2x

Progressive Relaxation (continued)

8. ABDOMEN AND BUTTOCKS: Make your stomach hard (or pull your stomach in and hold it, or push your stomach out). Clench your buttocks together. -2x
9. RIGHT LEG: Tighten the thigh, calf and foot muscles. To do this, imagine that you are lifting your lower leg with your upper leg but do not allow it to move, press your heel down into the floor and pull your toes upward toward your head. -2x
10. LEFT LEG: As for right leg. -2x

Once you have worked through the entire program, try to set aside enough time to allow you to lie quietly in the relaxed state for 15-20 minutes.

- B) After completing 12-15 sessions with the 10 muscle groups, begin to use 4 muscle groups only. These are:
 1. BOTH ARMS
 2. FACIAL MUSCLES AND NECK MUSCLES
 3. CHEST, BACK, SHOULDERS, ABDOMEN AND BUTTOCKS
 4. BOTH LEGS
- C) After completing 6-10 sessions with the 4 muscle groups, begin to use a recall method. In this procedure, the 4 muscle groups are used but this time, identify the tension only in each group and relax the tension away by recalling how those muscles felt before when they were tensed then released, and relaxed.

Source: Lynne Parisien O.T.

AUTOGENICS

The autogenic exercises developed by the psychiatrist, Johannes Schultz, are aimed at reversing the fight or flight responses that occur during stress. The heaviness exercise promotes relaxation of the muscles of the arms and legs (unlike the tensing of the stress response). The warmth exercise promotes increased blood flow to the arms and legs (unlike the stress response which pools blood in the trunk and head, reducing blood flow to the hands and feet).

The autogenic method was developed for people wishing to achieve deep relaxation through self-suggestion. The simple word phrases used such as "My right arm is heavy," suggest relaxation to the unconscious mind. The unconscious mind can then begin to create the desired responses in the body. Some people are aware of feelings of heaviness immediately. For others it may take a few weeks of daily practice before they subjectively experience any feelings of heaviness. The same is true with experiencing the feelings of warmth.

It is important to remember that trying too hard with these exercises will only create more excess tension and make it more difficult for you to relax. The hardest part of autogenics is letting go, and giving in to relaxation. Also, your mind may tend to wander as you attempt to focus on the exercise, but simply redirect your attention on the exercises as soon as you become aware of this. It is suggested that you practice before meals rather than after eating, and when you first attempt autogenics, try to reduce all outside distractions. When you become adept at these exercises you will find that you can practise these in any setting, at almost any time. .

The following are 2 of the basic postures recommended for autogenics:

1. A lying-down position on a couch or bed, with your head comfortably supported, your arms at your sides and not touching your body, with a pillow under the knees to provide maximum relaxation of the leg and back muscles, and your legs slightly apart.
2. Sitting in a comfortable chair with a high back preferably to support the trunk of the body and the head, with hands and fingers in a relaxed position on the arms of the chair, or hanging loosely on the inner side of the chair, close to the body, and with your feet apart but well supported.

Autogenics has been found useful in reducing general anxiety, irritability and fatigue. It can be employed to modify your reaction to pain, increase your resistance to stress, and reduce or eliminate sleeping disorders. It is not recommended for people who lack motivation. It should be used with caution with people with high or low blood pressure as there can be a sharp change in blood pressure when doing autogenics.

AUTOGENICS (cont'd)

Try to practise the entire sequence at least once a day, and initially choose a place to practise in where there are no distractions. After a few weeks you may find you can decrease the number of repetitions as you begin to respond more easily and quickly to the suggestions. It is also important to remember not to try too hard, but rather to let go and give in to relaxation. If your mind wanders while doing the exercises simply redirect your attention to the exercises as soon as you become aware of this. Make sure you are comfortable and close your eyes. Repeat the following phrases:

1. My right arm is heavy. 3X.
2. My left arm is heavy. 3X.
3. My right leg is heavy. 3X.
4. My left leg is heavy. 3X.
5. My neck and shoulders are heavy. 3X.
6. My right arm is warm. 3X.
7. My left arm is warm. 3X.
8. My right leg is warm. 3X.
9. My left leg is warm. 3X.
10. My neck and shoulders are warm. 3X.
11. My breathing is calm and regular. 3X.
12. My solar plexus is relaxed and calm. 3X.
13. My forehead is cool and smooth. 3X.
14. I am at peace with myself and fully relaxed. 3X.

Give yourself a few minutes to enjoy your feelings of peace of mind and relaxation. To bring yourself to an alert state repeat the phrase:

15. I am refreshed and completely alert. 3X.

Take a deep breath, flex your arms and legs, and stretch. Slowly open your eyes.

Autogenics, it is important to mention, when initially developed, was to be used by saying one phrase only at a time, and when this was mastered, then the next phrase would be learned and practised, and so on. You may wish to try this out and see how it suits you. You might also consider starting with the first 4 or 5 phrases for a period of a week, then moving on to the next 5, etc.

Source: Lynne Parisien O.T.

VISUALIZATION

Visualization involves using your imagination to create positive mental pictures, and it is a technique that can be used to remove tension and stress from your daily life. For example, you can imagine yourself in a very pleasant, tranquil environment, feeling relaxed, healthy, and at peace with yourself, or you might picture yourself handling a normally difficult situation effortlessly and in a relaxed manner.

When you create a mental picture, your body can actually respond to this 'visualization' as if it were a real experience. Although it is not understood exactly how a mental image can affect a physiological process, research shows that visualization can change how your body functions. In other words, "you are what you think you are". If you think anxious thoughts, you become tense - instead you can refocus your thoughts on positive, relaxing and healthy images, and become a more relaxed person because of it.

Techniques such as visualization or "guided imagery" that use the imagination, have been found effective in treating many stress-related and physical illnesses e.g. headaches, muscle spasms, chronic pain, and general or situation specific anxiety.

To achieve greater relaxation, it is suggested that you do some deep breathing, progressive muscular relaxation or autogenics exercises before beginning any "visualization" exercises.

You may want to try each of the following scenes and choose one that is particularly relaxing for you, or imagine any scene that you particularly enjoy and find peaceful.

1. Escalator ride - This exercise can be used alone or in combination with other imagined scenes. Imagine yourself slowly riding down a long escalator, and as you do so, you become more and more relaxed. You count from 10 to 1 slowly, breathing away your tension and gradually relaxing every part of your body. As you reach 1, you are completely relaxed.
2. Imagine and write down your favorite outdoor scene e.g. beach, meadow, mountain stream, forest, etc., as explicitly as you can. You may wish to note smells and textures, as well as what you see, and how your body feels. Remember to give yourself a specific place to rest along the way and to use any 'affirmations' you may have chosen for yourself. Also remember to tell yourself that you feel refreshed and alert as you gradually and gently bring yourself back to an alert state. You may wish to count to 3 as you become fully alert, taking a deep breath and stretching.

You may want to tape this scene or reread it first prior to beginning or have someone read it to you.

3. Imagine that you are lying on a magic carpet, that you are able to travel anywhere, with no one to distract you or make demands on you. You can leave all your worries and thoughts behind you, and enjoy this brief vacation.

Feel yourself floating gently off the ground; you are safe and at ease with your surroundings. Feel the warm air blowing against your body and the warm sun shining down on you. You are able to float as high as you wish, and you control the speed of the magic carpet. You can travel to nearby places or very exotic places.

VISUALIZATION (continued)

When you are ready to return, slowly go back to your point of departure. Touch down gently and savor any special moment you have experienced on your ride. (Enjoy these feelings of relaxation and bring them to mind whenever you feel tension or anxiety). Gradually bring yourself to a state of alertness, taking a deep full breath, and stretching.

A Visualization Script

Close your eyes and take a slow, deep breath, and exhale fully. Again, inhale deeply, and hold, and exhale fully. Continue to take a few more deep breaths. Begin to imagine that with each breath you can breathe away your anxieties and your worries, and begin to allow yourself to relax more and more.

As you continue to breathe slowly and calmly, imagine that all your thoughts and worries running through your mind, are "bubbles", and that these are floating up and out of your consciousness.

Imagine that you are watching a glass of carbonated water and that the bubbles containing your thoughts are floating up to the surface..., and as they reach the surface they burst, and all your worries are let go. Watch the glass of water, and see all the bubbles gradually disappear, until the water is clear, and calm.... Be aware of these thoughts, but don't hold onto them, just watch them as they float by.

As your mind calms, any thoughts or distractions leave you; your muscles are beginning to feel heavy and calm. Every time you breathe out, you breathe away more and more tension from your muscles.

See yourself at the top of a very long, slow-moving escalator. As you step onto the escalator, you begin to slowly ride down Begin to count backwards from 5 to 1. Imagine the number 5 in your mind, and say it to yourself. Breathe slowly and calmly and focus on relaxing your arms. Relax your upper arms, your elbows, your lower arms, your wrists, your hands, down to the tips of your fingers. Begin to feel the heaviness gradually increase in your arms and in your hands, as your muscles just let go and relax. Breathe calmly, exhaling fully while you slowly ride down the escalator. Feel the increased warmth spreading down your arms, and into your hands.

Visualize the number 4 in your mind. Turn your awareness to your legs, allowing them to relax fully and completely. Relax your thighs, your knees, your lower legs, your ankles, and your feet. Begin to feel the heaviness in your legs; feel your muscles let go, and relax even further.

Continue to breathe calmly, and see the number 3 in your mind. Say the number 3 to yourself and realize that you are more relaxed now than you were at number 4. Continue to breathe away any excess muscle tension and allow the muscles in your back to relax, going loose and limp.

You are slowly nearing the bottom of the escalator. Say the number 2 to yourself. Continue to let go of any remaining tension and realize that you are more relaxed than you were at number 3. Relax the muscles of your shoulders and your neck and feel the tension leave your body. Continue to breathe slowly and naturally, and exhale fully.

Visualization Script - (cont'd)

Now say the number 1 in your mind and let the relaxation spread to your head and your face, letting your forehead become calm and smooth. Let the muscles around your eyes, and your mouth, and your face relax and just let go of as much tension as you wish to, by just breathing it away with each exhalation.

As you continue to ride down the escalator let yourself drift even further into relaxation. See yourself getting to the bottom of the escalator and as you step off, you realize you are outdoors, in a beautiful natural setting, your ideal place... It's a beautiful day... for as far as you can see the sky is a brilliant bright blue... you notice the emerald green color of the grass and trees, and the golden sunlight shining on everything around you... You pick a very comfortable place and lie down... You can feel yourself just letting go, letting the tension melt away as you become filled with calmness and relaxation... You're aware of the gentle golden sunlight and how warm it feels, and of the warm breezes, warming your body, and deep within. As you inhale, you can feel the golden sunlight filling you completely with brilliant golden-white light, and you're aware that this light is bathing every cell of your body and nourishing it with all the nutrients it requires - you see every cell absorbing this healing light and energy, and you can see each cell grow healthy and strong, and vibrantly alive. See and feel yourself in perfect health, completely relaxed and deeply at peace with yourself. You are totally safe and comfortable in this special place of yours, and you know you can return to this place anytime you need to feel deeply relaxed.

As you begin to leave this special sanctuary of yours, you see a path which stretches off into the distance. You start to walk up the path and as you do so, you see in the distance a form coming toward you, and you realize it is a very wise friend, someone who cares deeply for you and your welfare. You feel at peace and good within yourself in the presence of this wise friend. You ask this wise person if there is anything he or she would like to say to you, or any advice to give you at the moment... there may be a question that you have brought with you and you ask it... Rest for a few moments and absorb the wisdom that has come to you. You know that the words, if not clear now, will become clearer later. You thank this wise person and know that you can return to meet with this special friend any time you wish.

You walk down the path, to your original resting place, feeling calm and happy and satisfied. You inhale deeply, gradually allowing yourself to become more alert, and bringing with you the feeling of calmness, relaxation, happiness, health and joy. You begin to feel the chair or bed beneath you. As you count from 1 to 5, you say to yourself "I am refreshed and alert, I am refreshed and alert, I am refreshed and alert." Take a deep breath and stretch, letting yourself become fully and completely alert.

Source: Lynne Parisien O.T.

AFFIRMATIONS

(To be Used in Conjunction With
Visualization or When Relaxed)

An affirmation is simply a strong, positive statement. It can be general or very specific. It can be spoken silently to yourself, or out loud, and/or written down. What we say to ourselves certainly influences and colors our feelings, and our perceptions of any situation. The practice of doing affirmations allows us to begin replacing some of our negative self-talk and mind chatter, with more positive ideas and concepts.

Some important considerations when doing affirmations are:

1. Always phrase affirmations in the present tense, not in the future. Don't say "I will be more relaxed and happy with myself", but rather "I am a relaxed person and I like myself for it." This is not lying to yourself; it is just acknowledging that everything that is created has a "thought" as its source.
2. Always phrase affirmations in the most positive way that you can. Don't say "I no longer have insomnia", but rather "I now wake up, completely rested and full of vitality."
3. Generally, the shorter and simpler the affirmation the better. The more feeling it conveys, the stronger the impression it makes on your mind.
4. Always choose affirmations that feel right for you. An affirmation should feel positive, expansive, and freeing.
5. Always remember that you are not trying to redo or change what already exists, but that you are creating something new and fresh.
6. Affirmations are not meant to contradict or try to change your feelings or emotions. They can help you create a new point of view about life.

The following are examples of affirmations. Choose any that feel right to you, or create your own, in your own words.

Self-appreciation affirmations:

I love and accept myself completely as I am.

I don't have to try to please anyone else. I like myself and that is what matters.

I am a positive, loving, and creative individual.

I am growing more and more positive (happy, etc.) every day.

Source: Lynne Parisien O.T.

STRESS REDUCTION: Physical exercises

(as put together by Sara Joy David, Ph.D)

1. **Shoulder shrugging:** both shoulders 10 times, right one-5, left-5.
2. **Shoulder rotating backwards** 5 times.
3. **Elbowing:** elbows are at shoulder height, hands hang down loosely. Elbows are moved backwards vigorously. Use sentences like "off my back" 5 times.
4. **Arm flinging:** arms are raised with fingers of each hand on chest. Fling arms backwards and outwards. Do the right arm only and then the left arm only. Head and eyes follow swinging arms.
5. **Pushing arms forward:** Hands are in front of chest, palms facing out. Push irritating or hurtful situations away. Use phrases like "Get away". 5 times.
6. **Jumping and shaking:** jump up and down on the spot, knees loose, on toes, move shoulders, arms, head. Idea is to loosen the whole body by shaking it up. Shake tension out of finger tips, kick it out at toes.
7. **Head shaking:** Shake head back and forth as rapidly as possible without causing undue pain.
8. **Head rotations:** Drop head forward. Rotate right, back to centre, to left, repeat 5 times. Do this frontwards only.
9. **Reaching/stretching:** First with one hand and then the other, reach above your head as high as you can. Imagine grabbing hold of a rope and pulling it down. Imagine the rope is something you long for - meaningful work, love, increased creativity, etc. 5 times for each arm (alternating right, left).
10. **Stomping with hands and feet:** lie on floor, knees bent, head on floor, hands and feet on ground. Hit with palms and stomp feet (looks like a temper tantrum). Let sounds out or say 'no' 'stop' 'don't'.
11. **Jack-knife stomping:** bring both legs up to chest and stomp. Pelvis comes up as feet come towards the floor.

You may do all or part of the series. Pick one and do 3 - 4 times a day. The idea is to incorporate these exercises into your life - to be aware of tensions, and releasing it without making it 'work'. Self massage is a good complement

Source: Working Together For Change: Women's Self-Help Handbook, Women's Self-Help Network

SOME ADDITIONAL TECHNIQUES FOR STRESS REDUCTION

BIOFEEDBACK

Biofeedback is a technique used to monitor a physiological process and provide feedback to the individual. Biofeedback helps people to learn to control body functions that previously were thought to be far beyond conscious control. There are three main measures that biofeedback techniques use.

The first is skeletal muscle tension. Nerve impulses that trigger muscle contractions are amplified by an electromyograph machine and converted into a tone or light signal. The signal gives a measure of muscle tension. Using EMG sensors, a person can learn to relax tight muscles anywhere in the body.

Skin temperature is the second biofeedback measure. With relaxation, arteries to the feet and hands dilate, blood flow increases and the skin temperature rises. The stress response will cause constriction of blood vessels resulting in a drop in temperature. Learning to relax the smooth muscles of the blood vessels can be accomplished by using a special temperature training machine. Using an easy to read thermometer or wearing a "mood" ring will also provide the same feedback.

Galvanic skin response is the third measure used in biofeedback. When stress levels rise, sweating occurs. Moisture on the skin increases electrical conductance as resistance is low, giving a low GSR reading. A high GSR reading indicates relaxation. Without using a machine, you can still easily identify situations which cause you to perspire.

MASSAGE

People have great needs for touch, however, far too often these needs are not met due to Western culture's tendency to discourage touching. Massage can provide a means for conveying friendship and caring. It can also be used when alone to achieve relaxation and a sense of well being. Massage also serves physiological functions such as helping muscles to relax, and stimulating blood flow. It also helps to clear away waste products in the lymph vessels. Muscle tension and muscle pain can be reduced by massage. Anxiety and feelings of stress may also be lessened by massage, leaving one feeling calm and cared for. It is not necessary

to have a partner to receive benefits from massage. There is a lot that you can do to help your own muscles relax.

Self Massage

Forehead: When you feel that a headache may be on its way try using your fingers to gently smooth your skin from the center of your forehead towards your temples.

Neck: After sitting for a long time, try to grab as much of the muscles on the back of your neck as you can, squeeze and release a few times. Moving your fingertips in small circles, press down on the more tender spots of your neck muscles. This exercise is also helpful for shoulder muscles.

In B.C. 12 visits per year to a massage therapist will be covered by MSP.

YOGA

Hatha yoga is the form of yoga best known and most widely practised in the west. This form focuses on the physical body. It is intended to prepare the body for meditation, but it is used by many people to release tension, develop physical strength, and improve flexibility. It does this through breathing techniques and through a series of postures called asanas. Many ailments caused by tension and poor posture are likely to improve with the practice of asanas. More beneficial changes in physical and mental health will happen as awareness of the body and its potential for change increases.

HYPNOSIS

When done by a skilled practitioner, hypnosis can induce a light, medium, or deep trance state. This is a state of deep relaxation when the mind is free of inhibition and open to suggestion. It is useful as a way of exploring old hidden memories and repressed feelings, or as a way to change habitual behavior such as overeating, smoking, and drinking, and to overcome phobias.

SELF-HYPNOSIS

A technique individuals can use to reach the early stages of hypnosis which is a state of physical and mental relaxation. Self-hypnosis is similar to deep relaxation or autogenic training; we can give ourselves messages about things we want to change in ourselves when we are in a deeply relaxed state.

ACUPUNCTURE

According to traditional Chinese medicine, a life force or energy controls the workings of the body's organs and systems. The energy flows along pathways called meridians. In a healthy body, the energy flows freely, whereas illness blocks the energy flow. The purpose of acupuncture is to restore a balanced flow of energy. This is done by inserting very thin needles into specific points on the meridians, after a careful diagnostic examination. Some conditions that respond well to acupuncture include migraines, deafness, backpains, menstrual problems, arthritis, asthma, spastic colon, high blood pressure, and digestive and skin problems. Acupuncture is done by a few doctors and naturopaths in B.C., but is not covered by MSP.

SHIATSU (Acupuncture without needles)

With Shiatsu, finger pressure is applied at specific points on the meridians (energy lines) of the body. This is a tension releasing technique that stimulates the circulatory and autonomic nervous system and induces deep relaxation.

LIFESTYLE CHANGES:

NUTRITION

EXERCISE

IMPROVING COMMUNICATION SKILLS

Lack of or poor communication between people is often a cause of stress. To be able to communicate your needs to others, you need first to understand your own feelings. Getting to know and understand your feelings can be difficult at first, but is an important step in becoming aware of your needs. When communicating with others, avoid blaming the other person for how you feel. As well, being sensitive to the nonverbal messages that you send out and that you receive can help to improve your communication skills. One useful source of information on communication is Solving Women's Problems, by Hogie Wyckoff.

VANCOUVER WOMEN'S HEALTH COLLECTIVE
WOMEN AND STRESS WORKSHOP EVALUATION FORM

1. What did you find most useful about the workshop and why?

2. What did you find least useful and why?

3. Was there anything missing from the workshop you would have included?

4. Did the facilitators seem open to discussion and questions?

5. If you had facilitated the workshop what would you have done differently?

6. Do you plan to make any changes in your life as a result of attending this workshop? If yes, why..... if no, why not?

7. How did you hear about the workshop?

8. Any additional comments.

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