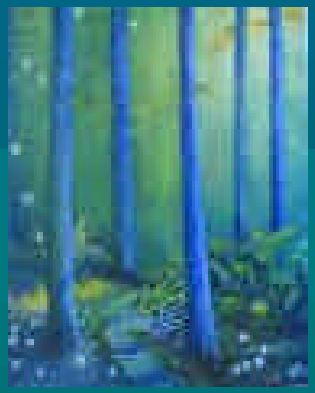
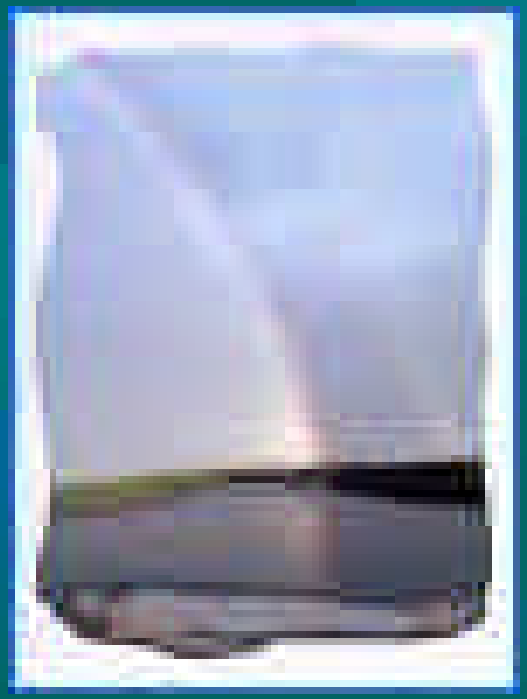
THE IMPORTANCE OF RELAXATION





WHY IS IT IMPORTANT TO RELAX?

- To conserve energy that may be needed later.
- To reenergize the mind, body, and spirit.
- To remain calm during stressful events.
- To be able to stay focused on the task at hand.
- To alleviate anxiety.
- To improve sleep.
- To enjoy the simple things in life!
- To speed up recovery from injury or illness.

WHAT IS STRESS?

- Stress is our body's physiological response to a stress or stimulus, whether it be good stress (*eustress)* or bad stress (*distress).*
- Some stress is healthy, but prolonged stress can lead to various health conditions such as *cardiovascular disease, respiratory problems, musculoskeletal disorders, gastrointestinal disorders*, and *immune system complications*.
- When a mental or physical event threatens the body's equilibrium, the body goes into the *"fight or flight"* response in order to confront or flee the threat.
- The stress response is the body's way of protecting itself and helping to maintain stability of its environment (*homeostasis)*

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

(keep in mind that these symptoms may be caused by other health conditions which should be brought to your doctor's attention)

- Sleep disturbances
- Tension or migraine headaches
- Muscle fatigue
- Irregular heart beat, palpitations
- Asthma or shortness of breath
- Skin problems (hives, eczema, itching, psoriasis)
- High blood pressure
- Constipation, diarrhea
- Hair loss
- Weight gain or loss, eating disorders
- Upset or acid stomach, irritable bowel syndrome, cramps, heartburn, gas
- Sweaty palms or hands
- Reproductive problems
- Chest pain
- Immune system suppression: more colds, flu, infections
- Cold hands or feet
- Reproductive problems
- Periodontal disease, jaw pain

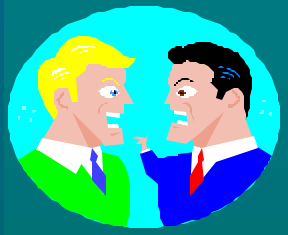
EMOTIONAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

(keep in mind that these symptoms may be caused by other health conditions which should be brought to your doctor's attention)

- Nervousness, anxiety
- Depression, moodiness
- Lack of concentration
- Feeling out of control
- Irritability, frustration
- Substance abuse
- Phobias
- Overreactions
- Memory problems
- "Butterflies"
- Trouble thinking clearly

RELATIONAL SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

- Isolation from social activities
- Frequent job changes
- Conflict with employers or co-workers
- Increased arguments
- Road rage
- Overreactions
- Domestic or workplace violence



POTENTIAL TRIGGERS OF STRESS

- The environment in which you live or work
- Family or friends
- Work itself
- Unpredictable events
- The state of the world
- Perfectionism
- Unrealistic expectations
- Negative attitudes and behaviors
- Irresponsible behaviors
- Poor health habits

WHY LEARN TO COPE WITH STRESS?

*Long-term stress responses have been shown to have a negative effect on the body! Certain health conditions have been attributed to having high levels of stress such as:

- Cancer
- Heart Disease
- Ulcers
- Substance Abuse
- Depression
- Diabetes
- Anorexia Nervosa
- Anxiety or Obsessive Compulsive Disorder
- Gum and Tooth Diseases
- Poor Reproductive Health
- Decreased Immune Function

WAYS TO MANAGE STRESS

- Change your **perception** about the "stressor". Figure out what is causing the stress and try to find a more positive way to perceive it.
- **Remove** yourself from a stressful situation. List the stressful situations that you encounter and find ways to either limit them or avoid them.
- Improve on your **time management skills**. Make out a daily schedule that has all of your tasks prioritized. Make sure to schedule breaks throughout the day as well.
- **Schedule time for yourself every day**, such as for exercising, relaxation, or leisure activities with family and friends.
- **Learn to say "no"**. Be aware of your limits and honor them.
- **Limit your nicotine and caffeine intake**. Both of these are stimulants, which can increase your sensitivity to stress.
- **Exercise daily**. It is a great way to minimize the physiological effects of stress. Make sure to find ones that you enjoy.

STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES

"If you take time to relax effectively, you will become more aware of your body's internal environment and better able to adapt to your external environment. It is one way to put yourself more in control."

- PROGRESSIVE MUSCEL RELAXATION
- CONTROLLED BREATHING
- VISUALIZATION/IMAGERY
- YOGA

PROGRESSIVE MUSCLE RELAXATION

- **This technique produces increased relaxation and decreased tension.**
- Get into a comfortable position. You may be seated or lying down.
- Begin at one end of the body and progress to the other, while alternately tensing and relaxing the muscles, with the tension stage occurring for 5 seconds and the relaxation stage occurring for 10-15 seconds.
- Include **muscles in the feet, calves, legs, thighs, hips, buttocks, groin, abdomen, back, shoulders, neck, arms, jaw, forehead, and eyes.**
- The degree of muscle tension and where it is carried varies among each individual. Extremely tense areas may need more emphasis.

CONTROLLED BREATHING

- This technique is based on the premise that most individuals breath shallowly and or irregularly when tense or anxious.
- These patterns lead to an imbalance of carbon dioxide and oxygen in the body, which can lead to physical symptoms of anxiety.
- It takes some time to restore the balance between carbon dioxide and oxygen in the body, so this technique should be practiced for at least 4 minutes.
- Get into a comfortable position
- As you inhale, the stomach should expand and decrease as you exhale. You can put one hand on your stomach and the other on your chest in order to monitor your breathing.
- Find a comfortable position. You may be seated or lying down.
- Inhale through your nose for a count of 4. Hold for a count of 7, and exhale through the mouth for a count of 8.
- It may feel a bit uncomfortable at first, but stick with it.

VISUALIZATION/IMAGERY

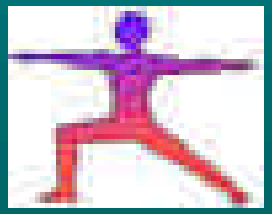
- This technique incorporates visualizing or focusing on an image that is peaceful and relaxing to you.
- It may be an image that you are familiar with, or it may be one that you make up that you perceive to be relaxing and safe.
- The way the image makes you feel is more important than the scene itself.
- The more senses that you engage, the more meaningful your image will be.
- Get into a comfortable position. You may be seated or lying down.
- Try to imagine yourself in your safe and tranquil place, whatever it may be.
- Pay attention to the smells, sounds, tastes, and how it feels to be there.
- Control your breathing, and enjoy the moment.

YOGA

"Yoga brings peace and harmony to the body, mind, and spirit."

- Yoga is an ancient practice that dates back to more than 5000 years ago. Back then, the strong desire for health, self-understanding, and long life helped to create this practice. Now it is practiced throughout the world.
- It is a holistic system refining the *body*, the *mind*, and the *spirit* in union.
- The yoga system is based on 3 structures, which include exercise, breathing, and meditation.
- With *exercise*, the body is used as an instrument.
- *Breath* is considered to be the source of life.
- With the practice of both of these comes *meditation*.

BENEFITS OF YOGA



- Increased Concentration
- Improved Digestion
- Increased Balance
- Increased Flexibility
- Stress Reduction
- Increased Strength in Mind & Body
- Preventative Medicine
- Therapy for Chronic Pain & Disease

WHERE CAN YOU PRACTICE YOGA?

- Home
- Class Setting
- Beach
- Park
- Mountains
- Office/Work

All you need is a little bit of room, fresh air, and some peace and quiet!

YOGA AT WORK

YOU SPEND A LOT OF TIME AT WORK, WHY NOT TAKE A FEW MINUTES OUT OF YOUR DAY TO REJUVINATE PHYSICALLY AND MENTALLY?

DESKTOP YOGA

Courtesy of www.mydailyyoga.com

- Sit up tall in your chair, or if possible, stand up. Stretch your arms overhead and interlock your fingers, turn the palms to the ceiling. Take a deep breath in and on the exhale, extend your side torso and take the tips of the shoulder blades into the body. Take another deep breath and on the exhale, stretch to the right, inhale, come up and stretch to the left.

- On an inhale, lift your shoulders up to your ears and then exhale and let them drop. Repeat 3 times. Contract the trapezius muscle fully when you lift your shoulders up and then on the drop it will release more completely.

- Take your hands behind your back and interlock the fingers, stretching the shoulders back, opening the chest. Take several breaths. Make sure that your head stays in the midline and that your eye gaze is on the horizon.

DESKTOP YOGA CONTINUED

- Stand by the wall, extend your right arm and place your palm on the wall with the fingers up. On an exhale, turn your chest away, taking the shoulder blade into the torso. Repeat on left side.
- Stand at your desk and place your palms in the desktop with the fingers pointing towards your body. Gently stretch the lower arm and wrist.
- Reach the right arm into the air and on an exhale bend the elbow and reach your fingers down the back, between the shoulder blades. Place the left hand on the elbow and on an exhale, gently pull the elbow to the left. Relax the ribs and hold for several breaths. Release and repeat on the other side.
- Sit forward in your chair and open the legs a little wider than the hips. Lean forward from the hips and drop your torso down. Let the head and arms hang toward the floor. Take several breaths and slowly come back up.

"Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are." ~Chinese Proverb

HELPFUL WEBSITES

Stress Management

1) http://www.helpguide.org/mental/stress_signs.htm
2) http://www.utmem.edu/campusrec/stress.htm
3) http://www.isma.org.uk/
4) http://www.pp.okstate.edu/ehs/links/stress.htm

Relaxation Training

1) http://wso.williams.edu/orgs/peerh/stress/relax.html
2) http://www.healthy.net/asp/templates/article.asp?PageType=article&ID=1205
3) http://www.brianmac.demon.co.uk/relax.htm
4) http://www.mindtools.com/stress/RelaxationTechniques/IntroPage.htm

Yoga

1) http://www.yogajournal.com
2) http://www.yogasite.com
3) http://www.yogamovement.com
4) http://mydailyyoga.com