



Sonny's Stress Management & Fitness eBook

www.SonnysPianoTV.com

By Sonny Dante Stancarone
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FOREWORD

I'd like to thank all the people who helped me along the way by teaching me many of the philosophies, ideas and techniques presented in this book. I wouldn't be who I am today without their help nor be able to communicate these very valuable lessons to others. And so I am proud to be part of the legacy of these teachers and the tradition of humans passing information down through the ages from one to the other. Also I'd like to thank all the people who studied with me as I learned much of what I know from the very act of teaching. In the end I guess they should put on my tombstonehe taught what he learned from what he needed to learn how to do. That said...

This eBook has been designed to give you the opportunity to explore a wide range of stress management, relaxation, health & fitness, wellness and sports training procedures. It is comprised of articles I wrote for various publications during the years I was a full time health & fitness teacher; corporate & government stress management consultant; public schools sports & wellness consultant, sports medicine clinician and sports coach at various high schools, universities and at a medical college.

There is an art to feeling good, improving health and fitness and living life relatively free of unnecessary tension and stress. However, as with any art or skill, results can only be achieved by regular practice! Feeling good takes work and time, but it is well worth the effort. If you spend just a little time everyday improving fitness, relaxing and reducing tension & stress, you will feel better, have more energy, perform better, be more focused, work faster, you will be more productive and accomplish more in less time; you will be happier and have more time too enjoy yourself, life in general and your loved ones. There is, unfortunately, no magic pill for improving fitness or instant cure for stress and tension. If you practice the procedures outlined in this program, you will get results. It's up to you...

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Chapter 1

UNDERSTANDING STRESS

Understanding how stress works is the first step in developing effective strategies for combating its harmful effects; this chapter is devoted to helping you recognize signs of stress overload and giving you an overview of all the stress management methods at your disposal.



Definitions

Stress Is

The physiological and psychological changes that take place as your body attempts to adapt to any change in your environment.

Not Always Bad

Remember stress is the chemical change that takes place in your body in response to any change, from unexpected illness to passionate embraces.

Stressors

Those things that cause you to feel stress. (E.g. temperature changes, job pressure, illness, winning the lottery.)

Tension

The result of too much stress. Often felt as a tightening of muscles.

Fight or Flight Mechanism

Stress is actually a survival mechanism without which we would not have made it to this century. It prepares you for action while making you stronger, more alert, and quicker. When your brain observes a stressor, it signals the pituitary gland which signals the adrenal glands which secrete adrenalin. This makes your heart beat faster and your blood pressure rise. Then your liver will secrete extra body sugar (glycogen) into the blood for extra strength and energy.

Question?

If stress is the body's way of adapting to changes and makes you feel stronger, faster, more alive and alert, then why do we associate stress with so many negative feelings?



Answer = Stress Overload

Too much stress puts a strain on the mind and body and causes muscles to tighten to further protect you from excess external and internal stimuli, resulting in a chronic state of physical contraction, shallow breathing, irregular blood sugar levels, elevated blood pressure and heartbeat and unhealthy behavior to fight off feelings of constant stress, anxiety, and tension.

Common Signs of Stress Overload

Overeating	High Blood Pressure
Chain Smoking	Lack of Motivation
Alcohol or Drug Abuse	Compulsive TV Watching
Tension Headaches	Poor Organization
Frequent Colds	Lower Backaches
Frequent Lateness	Excess Absenteeism
Insomnia	Loss of Sexual Interest
Feelings of Hostility, Anxiety or Frustration	Tranquilizer Use
Difficulties with Concentration, Focusing or Listening	Tight Muscles
Negative Attitude of Cynicism	Procrastinating
De-Personalized or Detached Behavior	
Being Excessively Precise	
Inappropriate Humor	
Forgetting or Losing Things	
Feelings of Confusion, Disorientation or Alienation	
Continuous Feeling of Rushing or Racing even during Lunch Breaks	
Excessive Sarcasm	
Talking Very Fast, Finishing other People's Sentences	
Strong Desire to Take Flight from Responsibilities	
Resenting Changes	
Anticipating Failures	

Some Causes of Stress

Work

Examples:

Deadlines
Boss
Peers
Subordinates
Job Dissatisfaction
Competition
Job Uncertainty
Promotion
Lack of Respect

Personal

Examples:

Marriage
Divorce
Being Single
Love/Sex
Children
Parents
Aging
Illness
Responsibilities

Environmental

Examples:

Noise
Pollution
Crowding
Commuting
Poor Ventilation

Stress Reduction Methods

Channeling Techniques

(Burning Off)

Examples:

Exercise

Aerobics

Walking

Jogging

Tennis

Physical Work

Dancing

Nutritional

Examples:

Stabilizing Blood Sugar Levels

Reducing Caffeine/Sugar/Nicotine

Vitamins

Proper Nutrition

Emotional Techniques

Examples:

Counseling/Therapy

Expressing Emotions

Support Systems

Communication

Coping Strategies

Mental Relaxation

(Thought Quieting)

Examples:

Meditation

Benson's Relaxation Response

Autogenic Training

Hypnosis

Prayer

Biofeedback

Creativity

Examples:

Music

Art

Writing

Knitting

Recreational

Examples:

Hobbies

Movies

Plays

Vacations

Concerts

Sports Events

Physical Relaxation

(Muscle Tension Loosening)

Examples:

Baths

Massage

Progressive Relaxation

Breathing Techniques

Sauna

Steam Bath

Whirlpool

Shiatsu

BEWARE THE RESISTANCE FACTOR

Beware the little voice in the back of your head that will pop up from time to time and try to convince you that you don't have time for this silly stuff. Remind yourself that you have a right to take time out for yourself, that you'll be able to work harder, be more productive and creative, have more to give your loved ones, look younger, be healthier, happier, and live longer. A car needs a tune-up and oil change once in a while, and humans need a certain quota of love, rest, relaxation, pleasure, happiness and freedom from stress and worry. Learn to turn your mind off and just have fun once in a while and don't listen to the resistance factor.

TAKE ACTION

The key to managing stress is to take action. Start today doing things that will offset its harmful effects and you'll immediately begin to see/feel results. A little effort goes a long way. Don't be fooled into thinking you are Superman or Wonder Woman. We are all human and sooner or later stress will affect you if you don't fight back. The following chapters are filled with techniques, exercises and ideas for helping you to feel, look and function better. Many of these things you may already be familiar with and many may not suit your personality. However, if you try all the suggestions mentioned, you may find many that will work very well for you.

SUMMARY

The main point to understand when dealing with stress is there is no sure, quick answer to reducing it. What works for one person will not necessarily work for the next. We are all individuals with unique personalities and needs. What works one day in one situation, will not necessarily apply to the next day in another situation. The best thing to do is to become proficient in the use of several stress reduction skills from all categories so you can develop a flexible arsenal of weapons to combat stress with.

It must be understood that with stress as with everything else in the universe there is a cause and effect. Physical and mental relaxation techniques as well as exercise primarily deal with the effect or symptoms of too much stress. They can be very effective, even life-saving, however, to effectively deal with the problem of stress-overload, we must look at the cause of the stress and do something to modify or eliminate it at its source.

YOU HAVE TO DEAL WITH THE SOURCE OF THE STRESS

Coping with the stress of today's world is no easy task. But knowledge and work pays off. To feel good, to be happy, to enjoy life, be satisfied and fulfilled are noble aspirations shared by all humans past and present. The difference between those that achieve these goals and those that don't is action, persistence, determination and effort. You have to realize that fun and play are an intrinsic part of life and not feel guilty when you take time out for yourself. Remember, you deserve to feel good! It's your right as a human being.

STRESS AND BACKACHES

I am amazed at how long people will endure pain and discomfort in their backs without investigating the many cures and treatments available. Months, years go by. Why suffer and learn to live with it? Today's small ache could turn into tomorrow's incapacitation.

If the muscles in your back or neck feel tight or tense, then you probably have a tension backache, which is the most common. If you have any sharp pains, numbness, burning or tingling sensations in your spine or radiating into your limbs, you may have something more serious and should consult your physician.

Tension backaches are caused primarily by tight muscles. Whatever you do to loosen your back and neck muscles will generally make you feel better. Let's look at some of the causes and how to prevent the muscles from tightening in the first place.

Stress! Stress is a major contributing factor. Let's say you're walking down the street and someone suddenly throws a rock at you. What happens? You tighten up your muscles, and duck to protect yourself. The same mechanism is at play when life suddenly throws a kind of stressful situation at you; there is an unconscious tendency to tighten up to protect yourself. During stressful situations, be aware that you may be holding your shoulders too high or back too erect and tight. Take some slow deep breaths, relax your body and drop your shoulders. Don't get caught in the "perfect posture" trap. Most of us were conditioned to stand too straight. Women were taught to throw their shoulders back, hold their stomachs in and squeeze their buttocks tight to look more attractive. Men are taught to stand tall by thrusting their chests out and sucking their stomachs in. These are among the worst things you can do. Natural respiration is inhibited because the stomach area needs to be relaxed in order to breathe correctly from the diaphragm. Circulation can be restricted. Muscle tension is created and energy is wasted by holding yourself in. All this contributes to tight muscles in the back and throughout the body. Try to relax and stand, sit, drive and walk more comfortably. Loosen up!

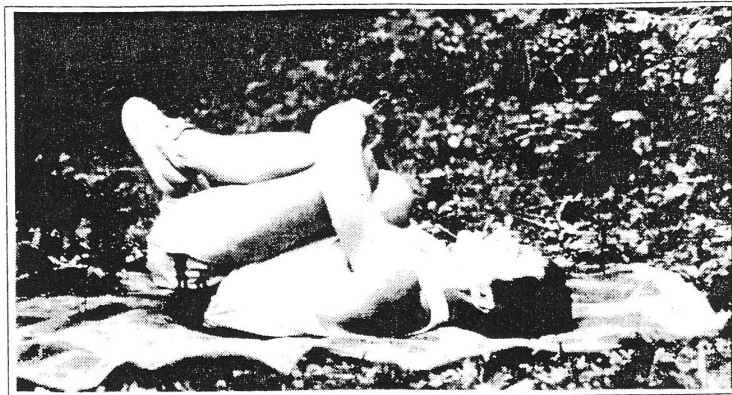
Tension backaches can also be caused by over exercising or physically overexerting yourself, sitting too long, being sedentary and lack of exercise.

The following are practical suggestions for loosening, relaxing and strengthening tense back muscles:

Moderately Hot Baths: Wet heat is one of the best ways of releasing muscle tension. Soak in the tub for at least 25 minutes as it takes a while for the muscles to loosen. Saunas, steam baths, Jacuzzis and swimming are good forms of water therapy as well. (See section on Baths.)

Stretching: Stressful experiences and the stress from day to day living can cause the muscles throughout your body to tighten and cause chronic feelings of tension in your shoulder and back muscles. Spend a few minutes each day doing some stretching exercises to loosen yourself up. Try doing the lower back stretch in the photo below or try following the routines on the posters included in this book. Try taking some moderate yoga classes or look around for a “healthy back” clinic. See an exercise physiologist or ask your physician to refer you to a physical therapist and have them recommend some back stretching.

Massage: Massage increases circulation, washes out toxins, rejuvenates muscle tissue, releases spasms and contracted muscle groups. It can increase your energy, improve your breathing, bring you more in contact with your body and make you alive, youthful and healthy. An occasional professional massage will do wonders for your back. (See section on massage.)



LOWER BACK STRETCH: A great way to release muscle tension in your lower back is to hug your knees to your chest and gently rock from side to side. Don't forget to breathe slowly and deeply. Concentrate on relaxing and hold the position for a few minutes.

CHAPTER 2

RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Developing the ability to relax your body and mind at will is a very important survival skill. It can be easily learned at any age with just a little bit of regular practice. This chapter offers a wide selection of relaxation techniques. Try each one at least twice before you decide whether or not it's for you. Spend a little time each day relaxing and loosening up; you'll be amazed at how good it feels to just stop and relax.



THE SECRETS OF RELAXATION

What does jogging, hot baths, physical work, exercise, expressing your emotions, massage, biofeedback, reading and singing have in common besides the fact that they all reduce stress and make you feel relaxed?

Answer:

They all bring about to one degree or another quieting of thoughts and a release of muscular tension.

Anything you do that releases muscular tension and frees your mind of stressful, worrisome thoughts will give you a feeling of pleasurable relaxation...



Tense/Tight



Loose/Relaxed

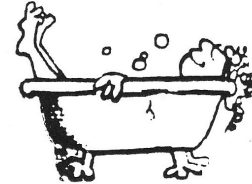
BATHS

For Deep, Instant Relaxation

One of the true pleasures of life...

...escape to the bathtub

Throughout history baths have been used for therapeutic and recreational purposes. We heat penetrates deep into muscle tissue, releasing tension and increasing circulation, leaving you feeling relaxed, refreshed and invigorated. The Romans used the public baths for meetings and social interaction. The Swedish Sauna and Turkish Steam-baths have long been recognized for their therapeutic efforts. Whirlpool treatment is used today to promote healing of damaged muscle tissue. Baths were used to calm down patients in hospitals and institutions long before the discovery of tranquilizers. If it worked for them, it will work for you.



Start of the Day...

Get up a little bit earlier and start your day off right. A moderately hot bath will prepare you for a particularly stressful day by relaxing your body and clearing your mind. The rhythm you set in the morning often carries throughout the day. Try it once, you'll probably find you'll get more done and feel better all day long.

After Work or Stressful Experience...

Wash away the tension of the day to refresh and revitalize yourself so you can enjoy your free time to the maximum. Soak for approximately 25 minutes and try to concentrate on relaxing all your muscles from head to toe as you breathe slowly and deeply. This will slow you down, clear your mind and raise your spirits. Gives you time to reflect and contemplate. A shower does not give you the same deep muscle relaxation. Make baths a regular habit and you'll reduce your stress level considerably. TRY IT, YOU'LL LIKE IT!

Together...

Try squeezing in your spouse or mate. It could be a romantic interlude or just a relaxing moment together.

Candlelight and Soft Music...

Restaurants and nightclubs always use dim lights to create a relaxing atmosphere for their patrons...play your favorite soft music with a candle or small lamp (do not put near water) and you'll enhance your relaxation experience considerably.

Reading & Planning...

If you have a hard time sitting still, you may want to bring a book or magazine in with you. You could also plan out the next day's, week's month's activities. Napoleon used to plan out his battles while sitting in his bathtub for hours at a time!

Problem Solving...

When your body and mind are relaxed, you'll find you can think clearer, which will make bath time a good time for analyzing problems and thinking through various solutions.

Eyes and Head Soak...

Dip a washcloth in the hot water and place it across your forehead, eyes and face. Let the warmth soak into your muscles and feel how nice and relaxed your face, eyes and head will feel.

Sleep better...

To get a really good night's sleep, the muscles in the body must release and relax. Also, a stressful day may leave a lot of adrenalin (therefore heightened heartbeat and blood pressure) floating in your blood. A bath before bed will relax you and help you sleep better.

Relaxation Bath Mixture...

For a concentrated deep relaxation bath experience, stir in a pound of bicarbonate of soda with a pound of sea salt or epsom salt. This will relax you more than a regular bath.

Warning: Do not make the water too hot, just enough to give you a relaxing experience. People with hypertension, diabetes, or on any kind of medication should consult their physician prior to proceeding with a program of regular baths.

NATURE SOUNDS & WALKS

The sounds of nature bring us a feeling of harmony and peace of mind. Go for a walk by the seashore, visit a park or nature preserve or sit outside and listen to the birds, the wind and the leaves rustling. Purchase a CD or download and mp3 of nature sounds. Leave it playing while you go about your daily tasks the sounds of nature can be a tonic for what ails us leaving you feeling relaxed and de-stressed.

BREATHING

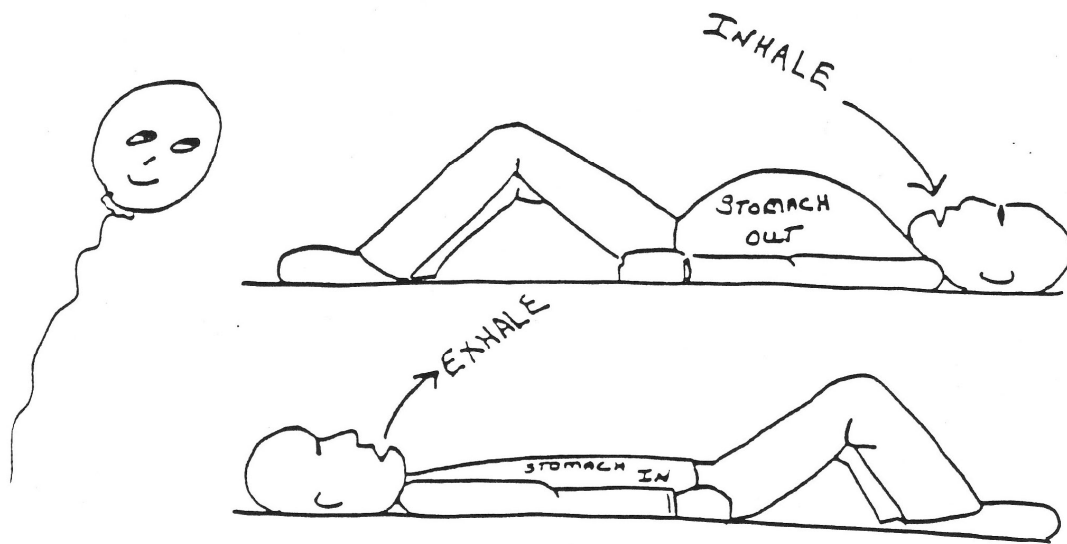
Most of us don't breathe as deeply and as fully as we ought to. This in itself can be a cause of tension. Check yourself right now, at this moment and you'll probably notice that your breathing pattern is shallow. Try to be more aware of the times you're holding your breath, and you'll see that it's usually during tense, stressful situations. By learning to relax and breathe more fully you can give your body more energy and begin to feel better. As you know, a car with a clogged fuel line cannot run efficiently. In the same way, shallow breathing cuts down on your fuel supply, preventing you from working up to your potential. Remember, breath is a necessary life energy!

Realize that slow, deep breathing is nature's built-in tranquilizer. The more slowly and deeply you breathe the better you will feel. Here are just a few methods for relaxation through breathing. Try them.

WARNING: If you find yourself getting lightheaded or dizzy, stop the exercise as this is an indication that you have more than enough oxygen.

- A. Relaxation Breathing: Anytime and anyplace you want to calm yourself a little, just breathing very slowly and deeply. This will relax your body and mind. Try it right now as you're reading. Take 5 slow, deep breaths. Feels good, doesn't it?
- B. Instant Relaxation Technique (the invisible procedure): The I.R.T. Technique is one of the most effective, quick ways of relaxing available. It's hardly noticeable that you are practicing a relaxation procedure so you can do it virtually anywhere. Take a very long, slow deep breath through your nose, hold the breath, count to 5 and exhale even more slowly through your nose than you inhaled. Repeat several times. This is great to do before tests, sports performance, meetings or anytime you find stress or anxiety interfering with your concentration or performance.

- C. Balloon (Belly Breathing): Natural relaxed breathing is like a balloon. When you blow it up with air it expands on all sides. When it loses air, it contracts. When you inhale and fill up with air your chest and stomach should appear to expand, when you exhale, your stomach and chest should contract. Try lying on your back with your knees bent and practice breathing slow and deep, expanding your stomach and chest as you inhale, contracting your stomach and chest as you exhale. Do this for 5-15 minutes. You'll feel very relaxed.



D. B.D.R. Techniques

B – Breathe

D – Drop your shoulders

R – Relax your body

Throughout the day, practice this technique and you will find you'll feel more relaxed and have more energy.

Step 1 – Breathe – take a slow, very deep breath through an open mouth, expand your abdominal area and then your chest.

Step 2 – Drop your shoulders as you exhale completely, also through your mouth.

Step 3 – Relax the muscles throughout your body. First concentrate on the abdominal region, then your legs and then your arms and head. (Repeat 3-5 times)

E. DURING EXERCISE & PHYSICAL ACTIVITY

When we concentrate and exert ourselves, we also tend to tighten and hold our breath. Relax and breathe, exhaling deeply through your mouth as you swing that tennis racquet, exhaling slowly as you release that bowling ball, exhaling completely as you swing that golf club, breathing fully and deeply as you climb those steps, walk that dog, mow that lawn, carry those groceries, clean that house, run, walk or job. Remember when playing sports, exercising or during physical activity, always breathe in and out through an open mouth for maximum air exchange and breathing efficiency.

BREATHING GIVES YOU EXTRA STRENGTH, ENERGY AND ENDURANCE.



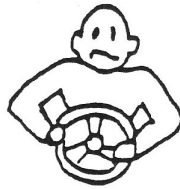
POWER BREATHING: To immediately improve your sports performance, inhale deeply through your mouth and exhale as you swing that bat, racquet or golf club. Deep breathing from the abdominal area increases strength, power, speed and endurance in all sports. Always exhale into your maximum exertion of force.

BREATHING AND EMOTIONS

If someone throws a rock at you,
the natural thing to do is to duck,
tighten up and hold your breath.

If someone throws an unkind word at you, the
tendency, on a much subtler level, is to do the same –
duck, tighten up and hold your breath.

Stressful situations will cause you to subconsciously attempt to protect yourself by tightening up and holding your breath.



As children, most of us were taught not to express many of our natural feelings, such as crying, anger, sadness, happiness.

“Big boys
don't cry.
Babies cry.”

“Little
girls don't
get angry!
That's not
ladylike.”

“Get that
smile off
your face!”

One of the best ways to hold back what was once thought to be inappropriate feelings was to tighten up your muscles and hold your breath.

This is why so many of us feel our stress and tension as shoulder aches, lower backaches, tightness in the stomach or a literal pain in the neck.

Try this experiment...

Throw up your shoulders and draw your stomach in tight.

Now try and take a deep breath.

What happens?

It's impossible to breathe deeply.



Now, drop and relax your shoulders and relax your stomach.

Now, take a deep breath.

Much easier, right?



DON'T HOLD YOUR BREATH!

Be aware of the times, especially during stressful situations, when you are tensing and holding your breath. Relax your muscles and try taking several slow, deep breaths, preferably through your mouth. Try repeating silently to yourself during the day:

BREATHE – RELAX – LET GO – BREATHE – RELAX – LET GO – BREATHE...ETC.

as a reminder to breathe – relax – and let go.

PROGRESSIVE RELAXATION

Because of its effectiveness and easily obtained results this is probably the most popular and widely used relaxation method practiced today. It has been designed to teach you to concentrate on each part of your body so that you can relax as much as possible.

As you lie comfortably on a floor or bed you can learn to tense and relax the various muscle groups in your body by repeating each of the following steps three times before going on to the next.

How to do it: A) Start by taking a deep breath and stretching both hands over your head behind you. Then stretch every muscle from head to toe. Exhale and bring your arms back to your sides. B) Close your eyes. Take a deep breath and hold it. Now make a fist with both hands and squeeze the tension out of your hands, arms, and shoulders. Exhale slowly and feel the tension being released. Relax your fingers, hands, arms and shoulders. C) Take a deep breath again, and as you hold it, tense up your toes, legs and backside. Then exhale slowly and concentrate on relaxing your toes, legs, and finally your backside. D) Now take a deep breath, and as you hold it, tense up your face. Squeeze out all the tension by shutting your eyes tightly and tightening your forehead and cheeks. Then exhale slowly, relaxing your entire face.

Follow this procedure twice, and then allow yourself to lie back comfortably for 10-15 minutes absorbing the effects. Each time you do progressive relaxation you'll relax easier and quicker, awakening refreshed and revitalized.

MUSIC RELAXATION

How easily we forget music's power to soothe the soul! Make a list of your favorite albums and set aside some quiet time to just relax and enjoy. Play your radio, make some cassette tapes and play them while driving or working. Learn to play an instrument! You may have always meant to learn the piano, harmonic, guitar, flute, drums, organ or whatever. Why wait? Playing music can be one of the most relaxing and gratifying experiences of life.

SINGING, HUMMING CHANTING

Sing along with your favorite songs. It will get you breathing more deeply and release some physical and emotional stress and tension. Singing can also oxygenate the tissue throughout your body which is very important for healthy functioning and increasing energy and circulation. Also when you sing try and breathe diaphragmatically as explained earlier in the book. Humming and chanting are other good ways of relaxing your body and mind. Think of all of this as a kind of ultra sound therapy putting sound vibrations throughout your body will relax and rejuvenate you.

PLAYING A MUSICAL INSTRUMENT

One of best ways to relax and release tension and stress is to play a musical instrument. The wind instruments cause you to breathe deeply and oxygenate drums and percussive instruments, piano, vibes, guitar, violin, cello and all the string instruments are a physical release through movement and breathing. Playing any instrument is a good way to release pent up feelings and stress. Studies indicate that playing an instrument releases dopamine and endorphins in the brain for a sense of well being.

Some theories say instruments are a kind of magnetic, energy therapy and as mentioned above in regard to singing music/sound travelling through you body can cause muscle tissue to relax and rejuvenate similar to the effect that ultra-sound therapy does.

LISTENING TO MUSIC

"Music hath charms to soothe a savage breast, to soften rocks, or bend a knotted oak."

William Congreve

Listening to music can affect us on many levels. Entire books have been written how various kinds of music make us feel different ways. In general there is a wealth of music that can relax and help soothe and rejuvenate us. Having some relaxing music playing in the background while you work, exercise or play will help you get into the flow and relax into whatever you are doing. Many Classical and New Age Music pieces in particular have a very soothing, relaxing, effect on us both physically and psychologically.

MIND RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Mental gymnastics for quieting those stressful thoughts for greater relaxation and peace of mind.

Mind Relaxation Phrases

One old psychological principal states that the constant repetition of any thought or idea can bring about its eventual subconscious acceptance. Sitting quietly with your eyes closed, standing, walking, or even working, repeat silently to yourself over and over again with any one of the following mind relaxation phrases:

I am relaxing more and more. I am relaxing more and more. I am relaxing more and more. Or – Just relax, just relax, just relax. Or – Let go, let go, let go, let go. Or – slow down, slow down, slow down.

Continue for at least 5 minutes.

Counting

Sit quietly with eyes closed, take 4 very slow deep breaths, concentrate on relaxing all your muscles from head to toe and very slowly begin counting down backwards for 100, 99, 98 to 1. Try to visualize the numbers in your mind. If you should get so relaxed you forget your counting, that's OK. Just go back and start again where you left off. With each count, allow yourself to relax more and more.

Sensory Focusing

Sit or lie quietly, breathe slowly and deeply, concentrate on relaxing all your muscles and just allow your focus to wander from one sense to the next. Start with hearing. Just listen to the sounds in your environment. See how many sounds you can be aware of. Then go to the

sense of touch. Be aware of all sensations in your body, the feeling of your skin touching the chair, couch and floor. Then focus on your sense of smell, taste, sight.

The Mantra

The mantra is an ancient relaxation technique developed in India thousands of years ago. While Easterners have used it for centuries as a method for calming the mind, its effectiveness has only recently been discovered by the Western world. Translated, the “mantra” means sound, and this technique of relaxation is a simple process of repeating a certain soothing sound to yourself as you sit quietly. By silently saying the mantra over and over again you can learn to relax your mind completely, reawakening clearer and more alert.

How to do it: Choose one of the following mantras: ROM, OM, I AM, AUM. Sitting in a comfortable, relaxed position, begin breathing in slowly and deeply. Then start repeating your mantra silently and slowly over and over again. Listen to the sound of it as you say it. If you feel your mind wandering away and find yourself thinking of something else, that's O.K. - it's supposed to happen. Just gently bring your attention back to the mantra and begin repeating it again. Use this technique for 10-25 minutes once a day or as needed.

Nature Visualization

This exercise should be used after you've worked with any of the above methods. Lying down or sitting quietly, allow your mind to wander back to a time when you were enjoying a peaceful, serene moment communing with nature. Or simply visualize a scene deep in the forest, high on a mountain top, or alongside a lake or ocean. Remember the feeling these scenes evoked as your mind holds onto the picture. Just thinking of a nature scene causes one to sigh and relax, and that's what this technique is all about. A record album with sounds of nature can be helpful here. But remember, nothing is as good as the REAL THING. When was the last time you experienced nature? How far is the nearest forest, beach, or lake? Learn to forget about your troubles now and then and go off by yourself or with a friend to find a few moments of peace and serenity. Renew yourself. You'll be glad you did.

MASSAGE

Massage is one of the oldest and most thoroughly pleasurable forms of relaxation known to man and woman.

Face & Neck & Shoulders

When excess stress and tension causes your neck, face and shoulders to tighten, your breathing becomes restricted, causing build-up of carbon-dioxide in your body. This can make you feel tired, lethargic and anxious. Veins and arteries can become constricted, resulting in reduced circulation to the brain, headaches, neck or shoulder pains, premature wrinkling.

Using your whole hand (palms, fingers and thumbs), make circular patterns, massaging the muscles around your eyes, forehead, temples, neck. Move the muscles around to release tension. Do not just rub the skin. Work the muscles loose until you feel them relaxing.

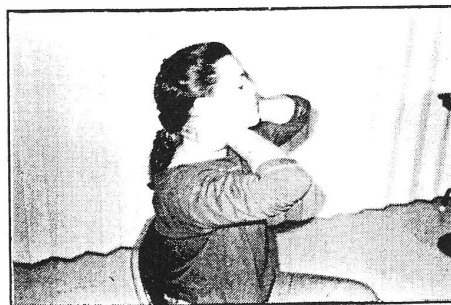
Professional Massage

If you have never experienced a complete body massage from a good professional, massage therapist, then you have missed one of the true therapeutic pleasures of life. Many of us have very tight muscles that could be loosened by a trained professional.

Shiatsu

Shiatsu is an ancient form of Japanese massage that is based on the same principal as acupuncture and has become very popular recently. Using the thumb instead of needles, the therapist applies pressure on various points throughout the body. This is extremely beneficial for releasing tension and stress throughout your body.

Gently massage the muscles on the side and back of your neck with slow, circular motions.



CHAPTER 3

FITNESS

Do some stretching exercises to loosen up shoulder, chest, back, neck and leg muscles. Breathe properly, expanding the abdominal region and chest upon inhaling, and contracting when exhaling. Run, jog, skip, hop, dance or walk for some aerobic benefits as well. Exercise to music; make it fun. Take “happy exercise” breaks anytime during the day or night.

This chapter is loaded with tips and ideas for improving fitness safely and enjoyably.

MAGIC MOMENTS

Instead of going for the burn or another personal best, crushing the opposing team, hitting a home run, pushing harder, faster, and then feeling like you were hit by a truck; what if the goal of every workout or sports activity was to achieve a natural high or peak experience? I like to view fitness as an opportunity to renew, recharge and re-create ourselves, rather than another of life's more tiresome obligations. What if we changed the word "workout" to "playout"; a time to experience the thrill of letting go and having fun? We would still get all the benefits of exercise, but the attitudes we took to the gym would be entirely different. Do you think more children and adults would then involve themselves in regular, life-renewing fitness practices? I know they would; I know they do. When an atmosphere of pleasure and acceptance is created, when you are encouraged to be yourself, be happy and have fun, when the drive to be perfect or the best is replaced with the desire to do something nice for yourself and feel good all over, people are drawn to exercise like bees to honey.

Is it possible to lose weight and increase energy and endurance without busting a gut, without pain and strain? Yes, and much more. We can use exercise as a vehicle for lifting depression, channeling frustrations, and releasing tension and stress. Better yet, we can use exercise as a way to reach a peak experience. By simply breathing, relaxing and letting go, any physical activity has the potential to trigger a magic moment. Breathing deeply increases energy, relaxing promotes an intensely satisfying feeling of just being alive, letting go brings us in tune with the spontaneous pulsations of nature, of life, of the universe around us.

This method also can enhance creativity. Instead of approaching art, music, writing or any creative endeavor with an attitude of "I must do this perfectly," why not emphasize the process more and the goal less. While playing that instrument, forget for a moment how it sounds. How does it feel? Release your emotions, have fun, be happy, enjoy yourself. So many of us have such bad memories of piano teachers who pushed boring, mechanical drills on us in hopes of turning us into the perfect pianists. Is that the only goal in life? To be perfect? What's wrong with just being happy, fulfilled and satisfied?

As long as we continue this obsession with perfection, we miss the bliss of being spontaneous and free. When we try too hard to do anything, we lose contact with our essence, our deepest being, our soul. In seeking perfection, we are craving approval and sacrificing our true natures in the process. Why do so many of us, children and adults, abuse ourselves with

drugs and alcohol? Could it be that the stress and strain of having to be perfect in every way (perfect grades, perfect looks, perfect body, perfect clothes, perfect house) cuts s off from the visceral joy of being ourselves, of being alive. It's time to be kind to ourselves and stop cracking the whip. So forget going for the burn. Go for the “Magic Moment”.

WHAT IS FITNESS?

What exactly is fitness? How does one know when he or she is fit? How do you go about it? Today it is widely recognized that aerobic exercise must be the main component of any true fitness program. To be aerobically fit generally means that you can sustain physical activity for extended periods of time without undue fatigue. The aerobic energy system of the body converts oxygen into energy and so improving its efficiency increases your energy and overall endurance. It also burns fatty tissue off more efficiently than calisthenics, stretching, or weight training, and strengthens your heart, while lowering cholesterol levels.

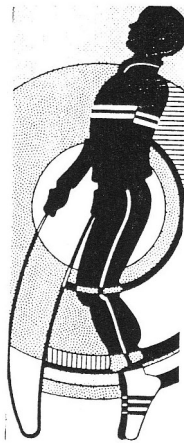
Weight training and calisthenics improve muscle tone and strength. They are not designed for weight loss. This is where many people get confused. They see magazine articles and books promising flatter stomachs, thinner thighs and tighter derrieres in 48 hours by doing three magic exercises. We also see celebrities promenading their slim-trim bodies while pumping iron on various health club T.V. Commercials. You really would need some magic to achieve significant weight loss through these approaches. Calisthenics and weight training are not as effective for eliminating fatty tissue as aerobic exercise. If you want to lose that stomach then those twenty minutes spent doing various abdominal exercises would be much better spent walking or bicycling. Leg presses on a weight training machine are nowhere near as effective as jogging or dancing for losing fatty tissue around your thighs.

By the way, aerobic exercise is any exercise that elevates your heart rate for a sustained period of time, for example: walking, jogging, running, skipping, dancing, bicycling, tennis, basketball, swimming, aerobic classes and jumping rope. To achieve minimum aerobic fitness it is suggested that you do approximately one hour of aerobics a week, perhaps every other day for about 20 minutes. The old recommendation was to keep the heart rate at 70-80% of one's age related to maximum for the entire twenty minutes. This was called your target heart rate and was determined by subtracting your age from 220 (an infant's heart rate at birth). This gives you your age related maximum heart rate (MHR). If you are 50 years old, then your MHR would be 170. Then 75% of that would be approximately 128 BPM. This would be the THR (target heart rate) or heart rate you would aim for. Now we have loosened up a bit and the

However as long as you elevate your heart rate on a regular basis you'll get benefits.

Generally, I suggest to adults who want to improve fitness to do the following:

1. Have a check-up by their physician. In particular, have an EKG or stress test performed. Ask for a suggested heart rate range.
2. Start by stretching, taking some moderately hot baths, and get some massages to loosen up your musculature.
3. Do some regular aerobic exercise – Walking for beginners or a good aerobic exercise class for the more adventurous. Bicycling, jogging and swimming are great too.
4. Keep your heart rate between 100-140 BPM. There is no need to push it up to the 180-200 range no matter what your age or level of fitness.
5. Make exercise fun and enjoyable, forget the “no pain, no gain” thing. When you're ready to do a little more, push a little harder.



HAPPY EXERCISE FOR HEALTHY KIDS

(Written for & Published in McCall's Magazine a while back)

Nurturing in our kids the habit of exercising regularly can be a great gift as well as a tool they will use all their lives. And they need the encouragement: The average American child is woefully out of shape. Less than half of kids between the ages of ten and 18 say they regularly exercise hard enough to breathe heavily or work up a sweat, according to a National Children and Youth Fitness Study. And a ten-year study conducted by the Amateur Athletic Union through Indiana University reveals that children ages ten and up showed a disturbing decline in cardiovascular endurance. Why is this? One reason is that playing games like kickball and tag hold little attraction when compared with the slick, high-tech entertainment offered by Nintendo Wii, Xbox 360 or Playstation 3. And offering exercise in school isn't working either: Only 36 percent of students have physical-education classes every day. Finally, while sports can teach kids about teamwork, fair play and good sportsmanship, games such as softball and football don't offer enough continuous aerobic exercise to enhance fitness. Better choices would be swimming, running, and bicycling.



Fortunately, you can do much to help your children avoid the pitfalls of inactivity, starting when they're young. The key is to make it fun. Toddlers and preteens possess a natural energy, exuberance and love of movement for its own sake. Seek out and nurture these qualities in your children. Too often we associate exercise with huffing, puffing, straining and groaning when in fact physical activity should be a pleasure.

EXERCISE AS QUALITY TIME

Make exercise a treat, a reward, a special time set aside for you and your children to play together. Consider it quality time. If you make it mandatory, it will become something to wiggle out of, like making the bed or practicing the piano.

Exercise to your children's favorite music. Wear comfortable clothes that allow freedom of movement. On a nice day, go outside on the grass with an iPod or portable CD player and enjoy the fresh air.

The three ingredients essential to a well-rounded workout are stretching, aerobics and relaxation.

Stretching

Before you do any kind of aerobic activity, you should loosen up your muscles by stretching. Make it a game of Simon says: Reach for the stars, touch your toes and roll your shoulders. Engage your child's imagination. Pretend to be an elephant hunting for peanuts on the ground using your arms as an imaginary trunk. Get down on all fours and stretch like a cat. Make funny faces – facial muscles can tighten up too. Do what feels good. Don't strain or bounce. Laughing, singing while exercising is great to do while exercising and should be encouraged. Laughter automatically loosens you up.

Aerobics

Now that you and your children are loose, the goal is to elevate your heart rates. Preschoolers may tire or grow bored more quickly, so 10 to 15 minutes at least twice a week is sufficient. Ring-around-the-rosy, follow the leader and musical chairs are all games that will keep them moving and interested. With school-age children, 20 minutes at least three days a week is optimal. Instead of games, try dancing.

Relaxation

A few minutes of cooling down should follow the faster-paced aerobics. Lower the music, slow the pace and end with a little more stretching now that the muscles are warmed up and limber.

ENERGIZE WITH OXYGEN

Breathing is the means by which you take in oxygen – which energizes the body and increases stamina and endurance – and expel carbon dioxide, a waste product that can cause feelings of stress and anxiety. Most of us don't breathe deeply enough. We've been taught to keep our stomachs in and chests out. This makes it impossible to breathe properly, which is by expanding and contracting the belly, not just the chest.

To teach your kids proper breathing, have them pretend they're balloons. Expand the stomach and chest on all sides when inhaling; collapse and contract the muscles when exhaling. Remember to take these same deep, full breaths when exercising. Stop if you begin to feel lightheaded; that means the body has more than enough oxygen.

EXERCISE: WHY BOTHER

Throughout evolution, man has depended on his body for survival. Our ancestors were hunters, farmers, builders, physical laborers. The human body was designed for movement and high performance. Twentieth century technology has changed all that for most of us. We have become sedentary. We no longer depend on our physical strength and prowess for survival. We sit behind desks, ride in cars, trains and buses, take elevators and escalators and very rarely exert ourselves. This creates a very unhealthy situation. It is like taking a high-spirited race horse that has been bred through the centuries for running at full speed and placing it in a kiddie ride where it goes around and around in circles, day after day, month after month, year after year. Before long, that proud horse's spirit would be broken. Or it's like taking a car that was built to race at the Indianapolis 500 and only driving it 20 mph back and forth to the supermarket once or twice a week. Before long, the car would begin to break down because it's just not designed to function at that reduced capacity.

So it is with the human body. By becoming sedentary, we are fooling with Mother Nature. Our bodies can become tight, contracted, tense, reducing circulation, creating bad moods, giving us the feeling of being chained and trapped.

NEW EXERCISE VS. OLD EXERCISE

The word exercise for many people is synonymous with pain, punishment, forcing and straining. This goes along with the old school of thought "no pain, no gain" theory. Though that concept has some validity for the serious athlete, for most of us this need not apply. It's not how far you can go, how many you can do, how perfect you look that's important, but rather how relaxed you can feel, how naturally you can move, going at your own pace, as far or as often as you feel comfortable. That you exercise on a regular basis in a way that suits your particular life-style, level of fitness, personality and time schedule is what really counts. If you're going to exercise regularly for years to come, you have to find a form of exercise you can enjoy doing. Developing the right mental attitude is very important. Try to look at exercise as a necessary pleasure that will give you enormous physical and psychological benefits. Developing the right mental attitude is very important. Try to look at exercise as a necessary pleasure that will give you enormous physical and psychological benefits.

EXERCISE IS A NECESSARY PLEASURE.

TENSION PREVENTION STRETCHING EXERCISES

Stretching exercises are an easy way of loosening up tight muscles and are fun and enjoyable to do. You don't have to wear special clothing or even break into a sweat. Stretch on a regular basis and you will help keep yourself feeling more relaxed all day long. Stretching feels good.

GENERAL STRETCHING EXERCISES

Relax and ease your way into all your stretches. Do not bounce, force or strain yourself. Take your time, stretch slowly just the way you do the first thing in the morning after you have awakened from a good night's sleep. Only do those stretches you find comfortable and easy. Enjoy yourself.

Breathe slowly and deeply through an open mouth, always exhaling as you stretch towards your maximum extension. Do not hold your breath; this will tighten muscles, which is the opposite of what you want to achieve. Do some stretching on a regular basis before breakfast, on lunch break, after work, before sleep.

Note: If you have any medical condition such as high or low blood pressure or have had any spine problems, consult your physician before doing these exercises.

BE CAREFUL WHEN CHOOSING AN EXERCISE CLASS

On practically every street corner someone is selling 'thinner thighs', 'flatter tummies', 'lose inches', 'shape up' and 'slim down'. How can you tell which are legitimate and which are not? Here are some guidelines to help you choose.

Safety First

If you have a serious weight problem or any kind of medical condition (i.e. heart ailment, high or low blood pressure, pinched nerve, diabetes, back/spinal problem, arthritis, phlebitis, varicose veins, smoke cigarettes, are pregnant, had a recent operation, take medication or have not been exercising regularly all your life), you should check with your family physician before you start any kind of exercise program. Ask your doctor and instructor which exercises to avoid (i.e., people with high blood pressure should not bend over and let the blood rush to their head, which could cause them to feel faint and pregnant women should avoid jumping type aerobics).

Quality Next

The most important consideration when choosing an exercise class should be the knowledge, skill and experience of the instructor. Do not hesitate to ask your instructor or health club about training, and background. Since there is no mandatory licensing or regulation of the field, it's up to you to be selective.

A Good Exercise Program

A quality program should combine elements of stretching for flexibility, aerobics for cardiovascular fitness, some calisthenics or weight training for muscle tone and strength. There should be at least 10 minutes of warming up and 10 minutes of cooling down. The emphasis should not be on making it burn, pushing through the pain, or working harder and harder. Rather you should be encouraged to breathe deeply, relax and work at a pace that's comfortable for you, stopping whenever you need, working harder when you are ready. Getting into shape is an exact science. A knowledgeable professional should help you to see results quickly and pleasantly. If every bone in your body aches after you workout, then something is wrong.

Aerobics

In all aerobic type workouts the instructor should monitor your heart rate, primarily as a safety precaution. He or she should know the formula for determining your age related target heart range and be familiar with the works of Dr. Kenneth Cooper, the father of the “Aerobic Exercise Concept” in this country. He should explain to you why aerobics is a better way to improve overall fitness and lose weight than calisthenics or weight training along.

Exercise Not Dance

The instructor should face you and not be staring at him or herself performing in the mirror. You should get a strong feeling that you are participating in an exercise workout – not a dance class.

Dangerous Exercises

Any exercise that even remotely looks like it could damage or inflict unnecessary pain or suffering should be avoided. The most commonly used exercises that have a lot of potential for causing injury are: 1. Deep Knee-Bends or any kind of excessive strain or shock to the knee joint, including squats, squat thrusts, duck walks, or excessive lateral stretching of the knee ligaments; 2. Leg Lifts or other exercises that put undue strain/shock to the lower back. In particular, watch those hydrant and abdominal exercises. Remember, no herky/jerky movements – move slowly, evenly, breathe slowly and deeply; 3. Excessive Jumping Aerobics – aerobic exercise is any exercise that raises the heart rate for a sustained period of time. Jumping for more than a few minutes tends to put too much shock and strain on lower extremity joints, muscles, tendons and ligaments. Mix your routines up, emphasize more upper body/arm movements; skip, dance, stay flat-footed as much as possible (think – “low impact aerobics”). Wear sneakers with good shock absorption, plenty of arch support, and little traction. Strive for heel-toe foot striking, rather than staying up on the balls of the feet; 4. Back Twists – avoid excessive herky/jerky lateral twisting of the back. 5. Squeeze-It-Tight – squeezing your backside as tight as you can is good for producing hemorrhoids, constipation, and numbness from the waist down, and little else. 6. Ballistic Exercise – avoid all bouncing, forcing, straining, herky/jerky type exercises, as they can result in serious muscle, tendon and skeletal injuries.

There are so many safe, effective and enjoyable exercises to choose from that it is just not worth taking any chances with any of the above.

Toning vs. Tightening

To tone a muscle is to strengthen it and bring it up to a higher level of efficiency. To tighten a muscle is to restrict and inhibit its efficiency; i.e., “my muscles are tight and sore”. Tight muscles are more prone to injury. A tight musculature leaves a person feeling tense and trapped in their own body. Tone and loosen up – do not try and “tighten” up. Most of us are already too tight and tense. Exercise should leave you feeling free, relaxed, loose, and energized. Try for spontaneous, free-flowing, fluid movement, rather than rigid, mechanical, tedious motion. The problem here comes from the misconception that by tightening muscles, one will appear thinner. Fat is fat and muscle is muscle. To lose weight, get rid of the fat – do not tighten up and hold yourself in.

Make It Burn

Bringing a muscle to the point of complete exhaustion causes a burning sensation due to muscle waste product (lactic acid) build-up. This is one of the more unpleasant training techniques used for increasing anaerobic conditioning or making muscles stronger. Contrary to popular opinion, the burning sensation has nothing to do with burning fat off and is a good example of the kind of misleading, “over-kill” physical fitness training taking place today. Avoid it.

Myths

You should not be misled into thinking that performing specific exercises (i.e., sit-ups, belly crunchers, etc.) will cause significant weight loss in specific parts of your body. You should be informed that aerobic exercise burns fatty tissue far more effectively than calisthenics or weight training. You should be warned against wearing heavy sweats or rubber suits. Your body temperature could rise to a dangerous level and besides “sweating” weight off is ineffective being that it's only water loss which you drink right back anyway.

JOGGING

Recent surveys indicate that between 8 and 14 million Americans have discovered this very effective form of aerobic exercise and tension release. Many say the benefits are so numerous, they find it almost addictive. Jogging is not for everyone, but if you want to give it a try, make sure you start off on the right foot!

Men and woman over 30 should get an E.K.G. from their doctor before starting.

Wear loose-fitting clothing and shoes specifically designed for jogging or running. Walk for 20 minutes three times per week for two weeks, then walk/jog (walk for a few minutes then jog for a few) for 30 minutes three times a week the next two weeks to start off with. Warm up by stretching for at least 10 minutes prior to all walking or jogging.

Make sure you breathe deeply and relax while jogging.

Don't force or strain yourself.

Start jogging for about 15 minutes three times a week for the 4th and 5th week. Then take it from there on your own or look into joining your local running club for some coaching. Many people claim they experience a tremendous release of tension, clarity of mind, and even a natural high from jogging. It is thought to be an excellent anti-depressant and very effective for losing weight.

Try it! You may like it!

MONITOR YOUR PULSE RATE

Pulse monitoring is a way to make sure you achieve minimum cardiovascular benefits and do not strain yourself.

When performing aerobic exercise (any exercise which elevates your heart rate for sustained periods of time, i.e. walking, jogging, bicycling), try to keep your heart rate around 75% of your age related maximum heart rate. To calculate your target heart range, subtract your present age from 220 (the rate at which a newborn's heart beats), then multiply it times 75%.

This is your THR or target heart rate. Do not exceed this rate unless you are working with a trained professional.

WARNING: People on beta-blocker medication should consult their physician for a prescribed THR. (Generally, not to exceed 120 b.p.m.).

RUNNING TIPS

Whether you are just starting out or are a veteran runner, it always helps to focus on the basic principles for all exercising and sports participation...

BREATHE, RELAX AND ENJOY YOURSELF!

PRINCIPLE #1: BREATHE

Breathe slowly and deeply through an open mouth, expanding your abdominal area when you inhale, contracting it as you exhale. This is known as belly breathing and is the natural, most efficient way to breathe for maximum strength and endurance.

This is the way children and animals breathe automatically. This is the way adults forget to breathe when they start holding in their stomachs to appear thinner, more muscular or for “proper” posture. This is the way we re-learn to breathe through Lamaze, Singing or Yoga Training for increasing stamina and relaxation. This is the way you breathe when you are lying on your back relaxing or sleeping. This is the way to breathe to immediately increase your energy and endurance while running or during any other physical activity.

Practice natural breathing by lying on your back with your knees bent, feet flat on the floor, and your hands on your abdominal area. Notice how, in this relaxed position, natural breathing automatically occurs. When you inhale, the stomach rises then the chest expands. When you exhale, the stomach and chest contract. Try breathing this way while sitting, standing, walking, jogging, running...any time is a good time to feel more relaxed and energized too.

What is the main cause of fatigue when running? Oxygen debt! What causes light-headedness when you take deep breaths while sitting still? Too much Oxygen! What will happen if you take slow, deep, belly breaths when you start to feel fatigued the next time you are running? Try it and be pleasantly surprised!

PRINCIPLE #2: RELAX

When running try and concentrate on relaxing all the muscles in your body from the top of your head to the tips of your toes. In particular, keep your shoulders, arms and hands relaxed. Occasionally, let your hands drop to your sides and dangle free while shaking your arms and hands loose. Tight shoulders, back and chest muscles inhibit full breathing thereby limiting your endurance. Stretch out your chest, shoulders and back as well as your legs while warming up.

PRINCIPLE #3: ENJOY YOURSELF

Try and emphasize breathing, relaxing and letting go rather than how far, how fast, how many. Loosen up and enjoy yourself.

Don't always feel you have to run to your maximum. Be playful, run sideways, skip, take tiny steps, big strides, try swinging your arms, listen to the sounds in your environment. Sing/hum out loud or to yourself. Let running be a joyful, creative experience of letting go and pleasurable movement for movement's sake.

STRIDE WORK – TRY FLOATING

To improve the efficiency of your form, and derive more pleasure from running, try getting light on your feet, open your stride, push off with the balls of your feet more, bring your knees up a little higher, kick back further. Experiment! Pretend you are a show horse prancing down the street, a race horse with long powerful strides, go back to being a work horse plodding with short, little steps. Find which way of running feels best for you. All too often folks get locked into the jogging/plodding style of running which biomechanically speaking, tends to cause more shock to be absorbed by the feet and knees. This leads to a higher potential for injury whereas the floating style tends to disperse the shock more evenly throughout the body, even using it as a propelling force.

WALKING

One of the easiest, most effective, yet most overlooked ways of improving physical fitness is walking. Lunchtime, after dinner, coffee breaks, anytime is a good time to slip on some comfortable shoes and walk your way to fitness. You'll burn off calories, release tension, tone and loosen your muscles, exercise your heart, improve stamina, increase your energy, clear your head and perhaps sport a rare Purple Finch or two.

- Make some time each day to shake the cobwebs out. You owe it to yourself and you'll feel better too! Walk quickly and far enough to feel like you've done something good, but do not strain. Stop and take your pulse occasionally and see that you are not exceeding your limit. (To determine your target heart rate, subtract your age from 220 and multiply it times 75%. Do not exceed that number.)
- Breathe slowly and deeply through an open mouth and concentrate on relaxing all the muscles in your body; particularly your abdomen, shoulders and neck. Let your hands be open and relaxed. Allow your arms to swing freely at your sides. Occasionally swing them over your head, stretching your shoulders, back and chest muscles can also roll your shoulders forward, back, take big steps, little steps, play with it, enjoy yourself...breathe and relax!

Gradually you should feel some subtle changes as your physical fitness improves. If you feel any light-headedness or aches & pains, stop and rest. If it does not go away within a few minutes or if it reoccurs every time you exercise, consult with your physician. In fact, anyone undertaking an exercise program, who has not been exercising regularly, should have a check-up with a doctor as a safety precaution.

PREVENTING INJURIES & IMPROVING SPORTS PERFORMANCE

The over-emphasis on winning and being the best is behind numerous “overuse syndrome” sports and exercise injuries in children and adults today. It also creates a negative attitude towards physical fitness in those who are not competitively oriented and an exaggerated over-achiever attitude in those who are. The “overuse syndrome” refers to an injury caused by exceeding the body's natural limitations to the point of muscle, tendon, bone or ligament tissue breakdown. In my experience, particularly with runners and exercise class participants, this is the #1 cause of injury. How can these injuries be prevented? Begin by recognizing that pain is the body's warning signal that something is wrong. There is a certain temporary discomfort that may accompany vigorous physical activity; however, any continuous pain, sharp or dull, local or general that consistently appears before, during or after a workout is a clear indication that something is wrong, either in the training procedure or specifically in the person's body.

While I was a serious competitive track and baseball athlete during the middle to late sixties, an injury was considered to be in your mind. It was an indication of some kind of mental weakness. The prevailing attitude towards injury was that you had to overcome it and work through the pain to prove yourself a man. Though Sports Medicine has done much to change this thinking by defining injuries and developing treatments for their cure and prevention, a Spartan-like “if it hurts it must be good for you” philosophy remains.

Although the basic principal for constantly improving physical fitness is progressive overload (increase the duration, frequency or intensity of your workouts) exercise does not have to be synonymous with pain. If it hurts it's not necessarily good for you. Besides, why would you want to constantly improve? There has to be a limit somewhere! At what point will you stop trying harder and harder, and just appreciate and maintain the level you have achieved? Recent studies show that exercise helps because it makes you breathe, not because it makes you hurt. The process is called oxygenation and the benefits are enormous. Adults and children should be educated to see sports and exercise as playful, pleasurable movement, a fun, creative release of bad feelings (tension and stress), a source of renewal and energy, and a time for soulful reflection or friendly social interaction. This “do or die, I've got to be the best, bust a gut, if you don't win you are a loser, type 'A' attitude” is why so many children and adults ignore their bodies' early warning signals and continue to abuse themselves to the point of serious injury. It is also the reason why so many people are completely turned off to any kind of physical fitness activity. Following are some recommendations for approaching physical fitness with a healthy, positive attitude preventing unnecessary injuries:

1. **Learn The Basics: Relax, Breathe and Enjoy Yourself** – before any kind of physical activity, adults and particularly children should be made aware of the basic, essential ingredients for successful exercising, sports participation and biological function. Relax and Loosen Up; tight muscle, tendons and ligaments tend to be more prone to injury than loose ones. The more relaxed you are the looser and more flexible you will be. This increases range of motion which increases power, strength and efficiency. Also, the more relaxed you are, the more you can enjoy the simple pleasure of movement for movement sake. Breathe - rhythmically through an open mouth, inhaling deeply and exhaling completely as you exercise. This will maximize the oxygen/carbon dioxide gas exchange in the body and increase endurance by improving the efficiency of your Aerobic Energy System. It also helps you to feel the movement more and stay physically relaxed thereby increasing range of motion, power, strength and endurance. In Japan, when they teach someone archery using the Zen Method, the first year of training is spent learning how to coordinate your breathing and physical movement. Enjoy Yourself – try to concentrate on breathing, relaxing, feeling and enjoying your movement rather than how far, how many, how perfect. Learn to derive pleasure and satisfaction from the movement itself (i.e., swinging the racquet, moving your legs, hitting the ball) rather than the goal of hitting a homerun or improving your time. The funny thing is when you do learn to enjoy yourself by being loose, moving freely, breathing, relaxing and letting go, you will find that you will perform better than when you try so hard you tighten up and inhibit your full potential.
2. **Warm Up and Cool Down:** Prior to any vigorous physical activity, from participating in a sport to shoveling snow, spend at least 5-10 minutes stretching your entire body. The stress of daily living tends to cause the muscle in the body to tighten up as a survival defense mechanism. Stretching helps to loosen and warm up tight muscles, tendons and ligaments and prevents many unnecessary injuries. After an activity, spend at least 5-10 minutes walking or stretching to prevent soreness from lactic acid (muscle waste product) build up
3. **IMPROPER TRAINING PROCEDURES**
 - A. **Ballistic Exercises:** bouncing, forcing, straining calisthenics type exercises have been documented for years now to cause muscle trauma and possible vertebrae displacement. Avoid them altogether or replace them with gentler, breathing coordinated, relaxed pulsating type movement.

- B. Steps and Hill Work: though excellent for improving endurance, training by running up and down steps and hills should be used in moderation or avoided entirely as again too much strain can be put upon knee and ankle joints.
- C. Indoor Track, Beach and Street Running: generally speaking, and speaking, any track smaller than 1/8 of a mile (220 yards) can cause injury due to the pressure put upon the inside leg from shifting the body weight to compensate for the lean necessary to navigate the tight turns. This also applies to running on streets and by the ocean where the surface is slanted. Avoid where possible, or compensate through reversing the angle by running the opposite way half-way through. Also try running on dirt paths rather than hard streets as harder surfaces cause more shock to the body and can increase the potential for injury.
- D. Trying to improve physical fitness by always increasing the intensity (pushing to your maximum every time) can be physically and psychologically harmful. For best results take it easy some days and just work on increasing the amount of time you work out (duration) or the number of times in one week (frequency). Don't "bust a gut" every time or eventually your "gut may bust." Enjoy yourself!

WHAT PRICE GLORY?

The first man in recorded history to run a marathon dropped dead as he completed the 26 mile run to announce at the city gates of Athens that the Athenian army had defeated the Persians at the Battle of Marathon, thus the name but obviously not the lesson. Although completing a marathon is a notable achievement, the amount of trauma and shock absorbed by muscles is excessive and invites serious injury.

What price glory! I have had many discussions with former champion athletes who, as they reach middle age, are starting to pay the price for pushing their bodies too hard. Some can't walk without pain; some have seriously damaged their backs and necks. I feel everyone who is heavily involved with aerobic exercise in particular, from young track runners to marathoners, from aerobic instructors to tennis players, should have an EKG or stress test performed every few years to determine whether or not any heart damage is occurring.

There just isn't enough long-range scientific data to determine the side effects of too much exercise. I have seen it in my own experience and observed it in the thousands of people I have worked with: too much exercise can be a dangerous thing! There is a point of diminishing returns. The human body is a lot like an automobile. Each car has a built-in amount of mileage. No matter how well you take care of it, sooner or later some of the parts start to wear out. You can either put all of your mileage on your car in a few years or you can stretch it out over a lifetime.

Recent studies indicate that too much exercise may actually decrease the efficiency of the immune system. One such study demonstrated that sedentary people had a better immune system response than marathoners.

The very nature of competitive sports calls for the individual to supersede his or her body's natural limitations. That is the foundation of heroism; to push beyond pain, to sacrifice life and limb, to risk everything, to achieve the unattainable. Considering this, it is also the nature of competitive sports for people to injure themselves, very often permanently. The sports medicine industry that services these injuries is indirectly helping to promote this cycle.

Rather than always rushing to treat the symptom and return the individual to the dangerous training procedures that most likely contributed to the injury, why don't we first look at the cause of the injury? Even if you fix the symptom, the problem will only return, as most injuries are caused by over-use, wrong training methods, or structural imbalance.

Moderation and balance are keys for success in life and in health and fitness as well. Achieving goals, breaking records, trying to be the best are all beautiful pursuits; I am just saying be careful not to exceed your body's natural limitations. Also, we should not build a cult around pain and suffering. For those few unique individuals who were born to hold the world record in the mile, climb Mount Everest, or break the sound barrier, the risk of life and limb is part of their destiny. For the rest of us, life offers infinite possibilities for pleasure, fulfillment, joy, thrill, accomplishment and satisfaction. Why get involved in fitness practices that have the potential to injure or end in disaster?

EXERCISE: MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE

There's more to exercise than just losing weight, reducing tension and stress, looking beautiful, improving cardio-vascular fitness, and increasing strength, endurance, flexibility and lung capacity – much more! Take the martial arts for example; the true masters saw karate, judo, tai chi ch'uan, etc. as a means for self-mastery, a path towards greater knowledge of life and truth. Hatha yoga was developed in ancient India to prepare the seeker for his ascent on the ladder of self-realization; the first step towards fulfilling his human and spiritual potential. Greek children during the Golden Age spent the first years of their education studying “gymnastics and art.” Reading, writing, mathematics and science came after the foundation of a “sound body, sound mind” was constructed.

Exercise can be a vehicle for increasing self-awareness, understanding basic life principles and deepening our connection with life and the universe around us. It is an opportunity for renewing and recharging ourselves. It's a temporary vacation from what ails us, leaving us refreshed and revitalized to continue life's battles with a new perspective. Through exercise we can learn many important lessons of life such as how to persist and overcome, how to be disciplined, how to let go, how to set and achieve goals. Exercise can mobilize your energy, get you moving, help lift depression and improve your concentration. It can teach you the importance of breathing properly and relaxing for maximum physical and mental efficiency.

Movement is life, no movement is death. What is the difference between the newborn infant and the corpse in a coffin? The baby is a joyful bundle of spontaneous free-flowing movement, full of energy and life, in almost constant perpetual motion. The corpse is rigid, hard, stiff, dead, no life, no energy, no movement. This is another reason why we need to exercise! As soon as we are born, the training to inhibit us from expressing our natural emotions and moving in a free, spontaneous way begins. We are taught to sit still, not to fidget, not to run around too much, walk like a man, sit like a lady, hold our stomachs in, stand and sit too straight, don't cry or laugh too loud, hold in our anger and our fears. What effect does this socialization process have on us? We end up holding back our natural physical and emotional expressions by tightening and tensing the muscles throughout our bodies. Think about your daily routine. We sit, stand, walk and ride pretty much the same constricted way, day in and day out. We rarely exert ourselves, speak, move or express emotions beyond the accepted range of social behavior. This has a very destructive effect on us both physically and mentally. Muscles and organs contract, circulation is constricted, emotions become difficult to express, breathing becomes shallow, leaving us feeling chained and trapped within our own bodies. Exercise enables us to temporarily break the bonds of social physical restrictions by allowing us to move freely and spontaneously. We can for a time, let go and once again experience the joy of life. The popular concept of exercise often portrays exercise as something mechanical and goal-oriented, primarily for beauty and physical improvements. However, there is more to exercise than meets the eye.

Chapter 4

DIET AND STRESS CONNECTION

This chapter explains how diet and stress affect each other.



THE DIET & STRESS CONNECTION

Stress is the body's way of adapting to any change in the environment. It is also referred to as the “fight or flight” response. It's a survival mechanism we could not have made it to this century without. Here's how it works: Let's go back a million years. You're walking down a jungle path when suddenly a saber-toothed tiger leaps out and is about to devour you. Your brain unconsciously sends out a message to the body for extra strength for a fight or flight. The pituitary glands signals the adrenal glands and the adrenal glands signal the liver to send out extra glycogen or body sugar into the blood-stream. Your heart beats faster, your blood pressure goes up and your blood sugar levels skyrocket, giving you extra energy and strength.

The tiger is the stressor and your body feels stress. You are now in a heightened state of efficiency to do whatever you can to survive.

Today, we still have this stress response, but it is triggered by simpler things such as conflicts with the boss or family members, bills, commuting, inflation, illness, weather, death of a loved one, marital problems, and child rearing. Just about anything can and does trigger the stress response. So, picture this: you're driving to work or to the store, a car cuts you off, your body goes into the stress response and you end up with elevated blood sugar, which most likely you will not expend through fighting or running away. So your pancreas, whose job is to keep your blood sugar levels stable, secretes an abundance of insulin, which pulls your blood sugar down. This can leave you with low blood sugar. How do you feel with low blood sugar? Tired, anxious, snippy, and you can be left with a craving for more sugar to get your blood sugar level back to normal.

But what happens when we then eat more refined sugar in the form of cake, candy, ice cream, cookies or even coffee, tea, soda or cigarettes, which all raise blood sugar? Your blood sugar level skyrockets back up again, you feel good for a while until the pancreas does its job again and leaves you with low blood sugar, and then after a while you've craving the quick sugar fix again. This can go on all day long. Break the cycle. Eliminate junk food, caffeine, nicotine, excess refined sugar and you will feel and function better immediately.



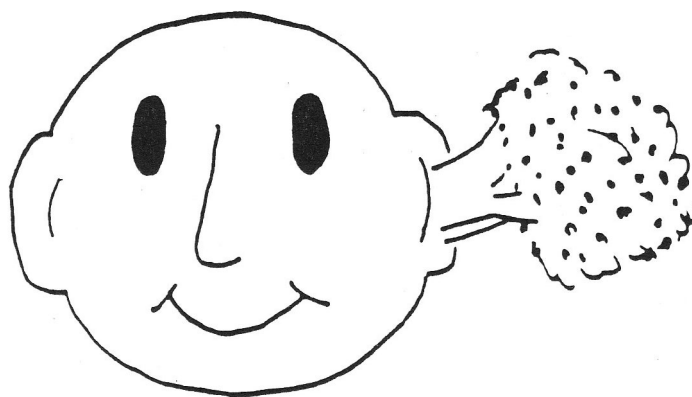
WEIGHT LOSS: “Aerobic Exercise” (e.g. Walking, jogging, bicycling, racquetball, swimming, tennis, dancing) is the most efficient way to burn off fatty tissue. Calisthenics, weight training and body toning machines improve muscle tone and strength, but are not designed for weight loss.

NUTRITION TIPS

There is a great deal of controversy taking place today over what constitutes good nutrition.

Most experts agree in some and disagree in others. The main thing they all have in common is they get people to stop eating junk foods. They make people more conscious of quality eating and the need for improving their diets. It is common sense and pretty widely accepted that vegetables and fruits are important for their vitamin and mineral content as well as their value as roughage in the excretion system. The U.S. Government has suggested that we cut back on our red meat consumption and increase our fish and poultry intake to reduce the amount of cholesterol we take in. However, here again there's quite a controversy over whether or not cholesterol really does lead to heart attack, arteriosclerosis and stroke. If you think you may have a cholesterol problem, see a doctor for a cholesterol test.

It's pretty well accepted that sugar, caffeine, and nicotine, in excess, are bad for you. White flour, white bread and white rice aren't as good for you as whole wheat flour, brown breads (rye, pumpernickel, whole wheat) and brown rice. Steaming your vegetables will prevent vitamins and minerals from being lost as is the case with boiling.



The main thing to remember is you are what you eat. Last month's broccoli is today's ear; last week's soda becomes tomorrow's blood. Moderation is a good rule of thumb. Eat wisely and eat well from the various food groups. **DON'T EAT JUNK** and remember the Diet and Stress Connection.

CHILDREN AND REFINED SUGAR

Does your child appear moody and hyperactive? Maybe it's those chocolate covered cup cakes, or ring dings or coco-chocolate vampires you are feeding him? No matter how much they cry, rattle, rock, or roll, eliminate junk foods and particularly excess refined sugar from their diets. Cookies, cake, candy, ice cream, soda, high sugar breakfast cereals, and phony juice drinks all contain too much refined sugar. Excess refined sugar can cause blood sugar levels to skyrocket and then crash leaving one with low blood sugar and craving more sugar highs. Low blood sugar can leave one feeling depressed and angry, anxious and stressful. It can cause headaches, insomnia, difficulties with concentration. Having a sweet tooth is a nice way of saying you are "ADDICTED" to sugar. Do yourself and your children a favor, replace the "sweets" with fruits, nuts, dates, cheese, celery, carrots, figs, yogurt, real juice drinks, grain cereals without refined sugar. You may be amazed at the difference.

SOME BASIC NUTRITIONAL GUIDELINES

<u>Good</u>	<u>Not So Good</u>
Fresh fruits and vegetables	Caffeine
Frozen Vegetables (steam vegetables when cooking)	Refined Sugar
Fish, poultry, lean red meats	Nicotine
Cereals:	Fried Foods
Grape Nuts	Canned Foods
Shredded Wheat	Preservatives and MSG
Familia	Excess Salt
Wheatena	Excess Red Meat
Whole wheat or other grain breads	High Sugar Cereals
Low fat milk	Cakes
Natural Vitamin Supplement:	Ice Cream
Stress Formula	Candy
or	Excess Butter and Fats
Multi Vitamin and Mineral	Soda
or	Pies
B-Complex & Vitamin C	Potato Chips
Yogurt	
Fruit Juice	
Herbal Teas:	
Chamomile	
Rose hips (high Vitamin C)	

Remember: Have your cholesterol levels checked periodically and ask your physician or nutritionist to prescribe a specific diet for you if you are in doubt about what to eat.

BREAKFAST TIPS

Take the word breakfast apart and what do you have? Break-Fast! And that is what you are doing – breaking the fast from the previous evening meal which may have been anywhere from 6 – 12 hours earlier. The body needs fuel to run on. Coffee and rolls are not enough. Raise your blood sugar evenly and give yourself some energy to make it through the morning by taking the time to eat something solid before you start your day. Stay away from the sugary breakfast cereals and chemical breakfast drinks. Eat a solid breakfast.

LUNCH TIPS

A lunch meat, (particularly bologna) sandwich on white bread, frankfurters or fast food hamburgers won't do much for you except fill you up with starch and chemicals. Turkey breast and baked Virginia ham are good as lunch meats go because they don't have as much chemical preservatives and salt as the other lunch meats have. Again, eat something solid and try to add a salad or some fresh fruits or vegetables.

Sit down and relax while you eat. Remember, it's called a lunch break. Get your mind off your work, concentrate on the taste of your food and use the time to slow down and clear your head before you get back to work or whatever else you were doing. Enjoy yourself.

DINNER TIPS

Light a candle or put on some soft music. Try to get very relaxed before and during all your meals. Sit comfortably, relax and uncross your legs for better circulation, relax your neck, stomach and shoulders. Don't rush. Give your stomach time to send the "I'm full" message to your brain. Concentrate on tasting and enjoying your food. Avoid the instant soups, canned and TV dinners. They contain a lot of sugar and chemicals as a rule. Make dinner time relaxation time; a quiet, restful, peaceful interlude from a busy day.

BEFORE SLEEP

Try not to eat anything substantial before you sleep as your blood sugar levels may go up, causing you to toss and turn from the sudden increase in energy.

The following may help you relax and sleep better:

Herbal Teas:

Chamomile	Warm milk with a touch of honey
Spearmint	Bath
Peppermint	
Celestial Seasons "Sleepy Time"	

IN-BETWEEN SNACKS

All of the below are pretty good for keeping your blood sugar levels steady and aren't too high in calories:

Fruit	Raisins	Cold cereal
Tossed salad	Figs	Juices
Health salad	Dates	Club soda
Cheese	Boiled eggs	Corn/bran muffins
Yogurt		

DESSERTS

Try and break the "must end the meal with something sweet" habit. It is a ritual, not a necessity. The following are all pretty health, fairly low FAT desserts:

Yogurt (low fat, mix with fruits)	Honeydew	Blueberries
Watermelon	Cantaloupe	Nuts
	Strawberries	Fruit salad

HOLIDAY STRESS

The time for celebrating and making merry can also be a time of increased stress, strain and worry. What to buy? Who to see? Where to go? When to go? Do I have to go? A recent study indicated that the average American adult gains 10 pounds between Thanksgiving Day and New Year's Day.

Unhappy memories, being alone, recent death in the family, far from home, eating or drinking too much, was it a very good year? Then there are resolutions, Christmas Cards, office parties, family gatherings, friends are coming, etc. Everyone wants the holidays to be happy, joyous, and perfect. We all work so hard at it.

TIP #1 – Avoid cookies, cake, candy, ice cream, pies, soda and in particular those incredibly high sugar alcohol drinks like egg nog and liqueurs. The high amount of refined sugar consumed around this time of year will not only contribute to extra weight, but will wreak havoc on your blood sugar levels. It can turn you into a “holiday manic depressive.” One minute you're feeling hyper and happy from the sugar high, then moody, depressed and anxious the next minute from the corresponding blood sugar crash that always occurs when you take in too much refined sugar. And keep those candy canes and such away from your children. There is nothing like sucking a solid chunk of refined sugar for turning kids into hyperactive, cranky, anxious little elves.

TIP #2 – RELAX AND ENJOY YOURSELF – Don't forget the definition of the word “holiday”: a day free from work which one may spend at leisure – a day off, time to celebrate a particular event. Around this time of year we all need a break. Most of us have had our noses to the grindstones for months. We really do need the momentary pause and vacation that the holidays offer. Also, it's a great time to forget business and financial worries and just enjoy the spirit of love, thanksgiving, charity, hope and brotherhood. It's a time for renewing, recharging and rebirth. So don't overextend yourself. Relax, recreate, remember it's the spirit and thought of the season that really counts.

TIP #3 – EXERCISE, BATHS, MASSAGE – And while we're so busy running around giving and doing for others, make sure you don't forget to take good care of yourself. Pamper, treat, and reward yourself for the hard work of the year coming to an end. You deserve to feel good! Make time to exercise, relax in the tub, and get a massage. Do things that are healthy, happy and fun.

CHAPTER 5

COPING STRATEGIES

How we interact with day to day life experiences can either leave us feeling fulfilled and satisfied or stressed out and unhappy. This chapter explores some of the attitudes prevalent in our upbringing that contribute towards feelings of stress overload. A wide variety of suggestions on how to cope with stress are also covered.



COPING STRATEGIES

1. DON'T PERSONALIZE ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR

(You are not necessarily the target)

When someone treats you unfairly, it's not always meant for you. That person may be in a bad way and needs to vent it on someone or they may treat everyone that way. Try not to take their behavior personally. You may remind them of someone they don't like or they're just too insensitive to behave rationally. You may be able to take some solace that a person who is constantly dishing it out is often suffering inside or doesn't really like themselves very much – so how can you expect them to like you or treat you fairly. Try to see the abusiveness from whence it comes. Just relax. Be objective. They may be angry at their wife, kids, boss, or husband. Maybe no one loves them, they don't love anyone, and you just happen to be in the way.

DO NOT PERSONALIZE ABUSIVE BEHAVIOR. YOU ARE NOT THE TARGET! You can walk away at some point. They have to live with themselves.

2. EXPRESS YOUR FEELINGS!

Holding in emotions is a major cause of unnecessary anxiety and tension. Blow off a little steam! Get it off your chest! Be human! We all have feelings of unhappiness, sadness, depression, anger and frustration, fear and weakness from time to time. Don't let it build up to the point where you're about to explode or become resigned. Holding in your feelings can interfere with everything from your work function to your sex function. Studies indicate that ulcers, colitis, migraines, insomnia, high blood pressure and even heart attacks may be associated with pent- up emotions which need to be release.

Be careful about who you open up to. Not everyone has the sensitivity to appreciate your honesty. The right person or persons will respond and appreciate you more for confiding in them. If you have a mate you can talk to, you're fortunate. If not, perhaps a close friend or relative. If not, there is always a professional listener. (See section on counseling.)

3. SUPPORT SYSTEMS

Human beings need to feel loved, understood and respected. We need encouragement, appreciation, warmth, compassion and love. “No man is an island.” As much as we have been brought up to be independent, we still have that basic human need for contact with people that like and care for us.

During stressful times, try not to hesitate to confide in someone you trust. Express your feelings; get it off your chest. Be human! Let someone help and support you.

“Support systems” refers to a network of friends, family, co-workers, mentors, clubs or organizations that support you and give you strength to carry on when you are experiencing stress.

If you find you do not have the support you need, then perhaps you should consider seeking out a professional support person.

We all need someone to confide in.

Someone who won't judge us.

Someone to trust.

Someone who understands and cares.

Someone we don't always have to be perfect or “on” for.

Someone who likes us for who and what we are.

A place where you don't have to be up or in a good mood.

Where you can be angry or sad, happy, glad.

Where you can laugh or be silly.

Where you can say what you feel.

Somewhere you can be real.

Somewhere you can be yourself.

4. ACCEPTANCE

Acceptance of a stressful situation often reduces the stress of the situation. Let's say your job is very stressful and every day you come in dreading it. Then one day you say "OK that's how it is. I accept the fact that it's going to be stressful. I take responsibility for my decision to work here. I'll do the best I can and quit complaining." Bingo, the stress grows less. You function better. Humans are very adaptable that's why we are here. Remember....The initial shock of a change or stressful occurrence is the worst. After the initial impact, you begin to accept and integrate it into your life; and it can ease up just by your conscious acceptance of it.

RELAX AND TOLERATE.

5. BECOME AWARE OF YOUR STRESS PRODUCING ATTITUDES

STRESS PRODUCING ATTITUDE #1 – Trying too hard to control everything. If you think you can go around controlling people and the outcome of your life, you're in for a rough go of it. The most you can do is try your best. Life is a constant interplay of numerous variables, some of which are within our control, most of which are beyond it. Don't get down on yourself when things don't work out.

Learn from your mistakes. Relax and learn to flow with the tide. Sometimes you can try too hard to get what you want. It may not be the right time, place or situation for whatever it is to work out. Maybe you'll be better off without it right now. Maybe it'll come in another form. Maybe tomorrow, next week or not at all. Make the best of things and try and enjoy what you've got, where you are, who you are.

STRESS PRODUCING ATTITUDE #2 – Trying too hard to be perfect. To try and be perfect all the time is very stressful. It means trying never to make a mistake, to always say the right thing, look and act the right way.

Being human means making a goal out of trying to be yourself, accepting your mistakes, being tolerant and patient with yourself and others, learning to flow, relax and let go, not getting so upset if everything is not just perfect. No one, nothing, and nowhere is perfect. It's only a false illusion in our minds which creates unnecessary stress and tension.

STRESS PRODUCING ATTITUDE #3 – Constantly avoiding stressful feelings. Stress and anxiety are often motivating forces. They accompany feelings of pleasure, success, anticipation, accomplishment, joy, fulfillment and satisfaction, as well as negative feelings. Change is often precipitated by a build-up of stress and tension that is no longer tolerable, so one changes. Many people refuse to admit they are feeling stress until it's too late. There are usually many warning signals before you get that headache, ulcer and heart attack. Stress is also a human feeling. Accept it, deal with it. Determine its origin and figure out a short and long-range solution. Some Eastern philosophies are partially based on the supposition that life is a series of problems you must learn to master before you can reach the next level.

STRESS PRODUCING ATTITUDE #4 – Unrealistic Expectations. Let's face it. We live in an imperfect world of human beings who have all sorts of problems. Life is difficult. No one is perfect, and you cannot always control how things are going to turn out. We can't get everything we want. We're lucky if we can get most of what we need. We can cut down on a great deal of stress if we realize that as human beings we can only do our best, give 100%, nothing more. We rarely, if ever, can be “the” best or even second best at anything. If we set our expectations too high, we're going to be disappointed a lot. Set them too low and you'll be safe, but under stimulated. The most we can expect out of another human being is that they be honest, treat us fairly, with respect and dignity and that they do what they say or have contracted to do; and you don't get that all the time. So, if we can try and make our expectations realistic, we may be on the road to cutting down a good amount of stress. If people disappoint you a lot, chances are your expectations of them and possibly of yourself are a little too high. Try to be more accepting of this world. Constantly strive for happiness and success in everything you do, but remember what the Buddha said: “The road is rough.”

Try not to get all bent out of shape when someone lets you down or doesn't quite fulfill your expectations. That's part of it.

“Up in April, shot down in May”

I just pick myself up and get back in the race.

“That's life” (Lyrics by Paul Anka for Frank Sinatra)

6. SELF-TIME. People need people, but they also need time to be by themselves. Time to reflect, analyze, contemplate, meditate, integrate what's been happening, where they are going. "Am I happy with this situation, how can I change and improve it. Do I really like this or that?" Time to think, feel, consider, understand. Time to be creative, to get centered, to relax and recharge. Time to pursue hobbies and outside interest. Time to just be alone, far from the maddening crowd.

A Few Self-Time Activities

Listening to music	Reading
Meditation	Knitting
Writing	Crocheting
Painting	Walking
Drawing	Sitting
Playing an instrument	Jogging
Hobbies	Organizing
Watching sunrise or sunset	Planning

7. LET GO. Relax. Take a break, go for a walk, get your mind off it, back off, don't force it, read a paper or magazine, take a mini-vacation, get away from the stressful situation for a few minutes, hours, days, weeks and you'll come back feeling better with a clearer perspective.
8. COUNSELING. For many years, going to a counselor or therapist was considered to be a stigma. You obviously had cracked up or couldn't handle things, so you had to see a "shrink." Today, that has all changed. Seeing a counselor is now in vogue. In fact (in many areas or the country), if you haven't been psychoanalyzed, or gestalted yet, you just haven't lived. But seriously, a counselor is a "feelings teacher." In school we had science teachers, math teachers, English and art teachers. The one teacher we needed the most, we never had: a feelings teacher. Someone to teach us what to do with our feelings of anger, sadness, jealousy, self-consciousness, unhappiness, weakness and depression. These are all perfectly natural human emotions that needed to be dealt with but rarely, if ever, were. Warning: If you decide to go to a counselor or therapist, make sure he or she is licensed and comes highly recommended, because as is the case in every profession, there are good ones and bad ones. If you just want someone to talk to, to try and help you sort out some of your feelings, try seeking out a M.S.W. Or Master of Social Work. They are usually pretty down-to-earth, inexpensive and don't

get you involved in a therapy that will take forever to complete. Stay away from the very commercial weekend “quick cure” therapies. They try to break down defenses too rapidly and rush you through changes that would normally take much longer to occur. You may end up worse off than when you started. Change takes time and cannot be forced.

9. RECREATION. Take the word recreation apart and you have re-creation and that is what it's all about! Recreating, renewing, revitalizing, and refreshing yourself by getting away from the stress of your regular routine. Go to a movie, play, concert, out to lunch, dinner, a sporting event, walk in the woods, by the shore, play ping-pong, scrabble, do something – anything – that will give you a break, you will feel relaxed and refreshed, with a clearer, more productive mind and better perspective on what to do to solve your stressful situations. It's therapeutic and fun, too.
10. EDUCATION. The very nature of life is constant change. Seasons change, the sun rises and sets, the world turns, the planets rotate. When a person feels stuck or stagnant, that he or she is not growing, expanding or changing, they may feel out of step with life. Very often, education may be helpful in reducing this kind of stress. Take a course, any course, that may expand your horizons or bring in new and interesting information to your life. There are many, many self-growth and exercise classes available through local colleges and adult education programs. Learn to play an instrument, basket weave, take a workshop or seminar in anything that strikes your fancy. It will stimulate you, be a change in your routine, help you to meet new people and bring you in step with the very nature of life – CHANGE.
11. PERSISTENCE. No matter how stressful a situation appears there is always something you can do to improve it. We must be persistent and determined in our quest for greater happiness, understanding and freedom from stress. Never give up, have patience and tolerance, have courage, be persistent.

The very nature of the human spirit is to fight back, to try again. If you become resigned and give up reaching for more happiness, then stress will certainly overtake you.

Keep a positive mental attitude!

CHAPTER 6

LEADING EXERCISE SESSIONS

Tips for helping students, children, friends, clients, family members, or co-workers with exercise and relaxation.

REWARDING EXPERIENCE

Whether on a professional or casual basis, helping others through exercise can be a rewarding experience. When performed correctly, exercise makes people feel alive and healthy. It can improve physical fitness and one's overall outlook. It can revitalize, refresh and re-energize. Develop a creative, caring approach towards leading exercise and you will seldom be bored, as each session can be a learning experience for both you and your students. You can derive tremendous personal satisfaction from seeing someone progress each week...from being out of shape and self-conscious about moving, to being in good condition and confident.

GENERAL OUTLINE

Play some of your favorite music and start off with some stretching exercises from either of the exercise charts in Chapter 3 or follow the Classroom Fitness wall poster along with the audio cassette or video tape. Of course, anyone with a medical condition should check with their physician before starting any kind of exercise regimen. After stretching for 10 or 15 minutes, try doing 10 to 30 minutes of light aerobic exercise (i.e. aerobic dancing, basketball, running, walking, jogging, bicycling) then cool down with 5 to 10 minutes more of stretching.

PHILOSOPHY

Your primary goal in teaching should be motivating others towards greater health and fitness. Don't get caught up in specifics such as perfecting each movement. The main thing is to see exercise as a fun, enjoyable experience.

Focus on FEELING over form. You're not teaching dance. You're helping people get in shape, lose weight, loosen up, and reduce tension and stress. Remind them that they do not have to perform each movement perfectly, but rather they should concentrate on breathing naturally, relaxing and “letting go”. Tell them, as long as what they are doing is a reasonable facsimile of what everyone else is doing, and they are not hurting themselves, they're okay.

Remember to breathe and relax while you are leading exercise session. Loosen up and be a good example; let your own body pulsate freely without being self-conscious while doing various exercises and dance movements and your students will mimic you.

Focus on your students needs. Are they overweight, tense, tired, nervous, or self-conscious? Adapt the exercises to their particular temperament that day. Don't teach from an “ivory tower” – be sensitive to them. One of the biggest mistakes teachers make is teaching their classes at their own level of fitness rather than at their students’ level.

RELATE TO YOUR STUDENTS

Relate to your students, ask them how they feel. Are they tired? Can they do more? Is it too hard? Too easy? Don't be afraid to ask them what they think. Be concerned about them as individuals. During breaks go over and ask them, “how's it going?”, “are you exercising at home?”, “were you sore after last week's class”. You're trying to get them to relax and move naturally, so act naturally yourself.

When correcting someone, don't talk down to them. Politely suggest improvements, don't bark orders like a drill sergeant. Use the tone and volume of your voice to either energize or calm them. Make contact with your students. Make them feel like they belong by walking around and correcting or suggest something to each person. Don't let your students stare at themselves in the mirror. You are trying to teach them to feel their movements, to breathe, relax and move naturally. When they watch themselves, they tend to focus too much on “how they look” and not enough on “feeling and letting go” to their movements.

Most importantly, create an atmosphere wherein people can enjoy themselves – a place where they can get away from the stress and strains of daily living – a time when they can do something healthy and positive for themselves while having fun at the same time.

THE BREATHE, RELAX & ENJOY APPROACH TO EXERCISE & LIFE

What if I told you there was a technique that you could apply to exercise – sports, dance, walking, all movement-related activities that would actually increase your enjoyment not just of a particular activity, but of life itself? That this technique would increase your energy, strength, endurance and enhance your potential for creativity, work and love. That you would look younger and have more zest for life? That you would immediately improve your sports performance. What is it? I call it “Breathe, Relax and Enjoy.” Breathe deeply, relax into your movements and just let go and enjoy yourself.

If you can learn how to do that, every moment of every day, then every kind of activity will be enhanced with increased vitality, energy, awareness, strength. You'll be more relaxed and feel more connected with others and the universe around you. You'll be more able to adapt to changes and you'll gain self-confidence. And the same thing can happen for people you teach this method of movement to.

What we are after is to show people how to breathe slowly and deeply from the diaphragm, inhaling and exhaling in coordination with their exercise movements. Then encourage them to relax and move in a fluid, free-flowing spontaneous way, surrendering to the movement. The emphasis should be on the process of doing and feeling the exercise so that they enjoy themselves, rather than proving how “perfectly” they can move.

SUGGESTED AEROBIC EXERCISE ROUTINES TO MUSIC

Flat-Footed Disco Routine – With both feet flat on the ground, participants are encouraged to move their hips laterally and their knees alternately forward and back while loosely moving their shoulders, arm, torso and neck in a basic disco-style motion. The arm variations are infinite, ranging from a rhythmic punching movement to a synchronized “riding the horse” bounce. The hop and knee motions are varied, and people are encouraged to make up their own movements, improving on these forms. The emphasis is on breathing properly and relaxing. The speed at which these movements are done varies from slow to medium to double time, which leaves each person free to work at his or her pace. Encourage participants to find their own tempo and see to it that those going slow don't feel inadequate.

Walk-Jog-Skip-Aerobics: This routine involves alternating the speed at which the aerobic steps are performed. Consequently, the heart rate goes up and down, rather than remain elevated for a long period of time. Runners call this “speed play” training. Participants first walk, then skip, and finally jog, forward and back, or side to side. Unlike most aerobic programs, the speed of the heart rate is thereby varied. Again, arm movements are included throughout and there are many variations of the walking-skipping-jogging routine. This type of conditioning is particularly attractive to those who are not dance-oriented, because keeping on step is not a problem, but it's also enough like dancing to keep the dancers in the group happy.

Jump-Aerobics: Standard aerobic dance movements, such as the modified chorus-line kick, alternated with a martial arts-stylized kick, performed to music. The feet are kept close to the ground so although the motion of most of the body is the jumping/jogging/high kick, the impact on the legs and feet is minimal. Participants also switch from one step to the next frequently so that less shock is then absorbed by any one part of the body.

Fancy Footwork: A variety of simple forward and back, then side to side, steps accompanied without various arm movements. This can be done one leg at a time or by alternating legs. This tones the legs as well as gives excellent cardiovascular benefits.

Circular Routines: If space allows, participants walk, skip, jog, run, dance, forward or sideways in a circle, using their arms in a variety of movements, ranging from swings to punches to callisthenic movements.

Specialty Routines: With the appropriate music, loosely simulate the Cha Cha, Lindy, Charleston, tap dance, martial arts, spots, or any other familiar movements.

Combinations: Any and all of the above can be combined, which makes the experience more spontaneous and creative. People love the variations, which prevents the boredom of many aerobic workouts. Everyone should be encouraged throughout to vary the steps to suit themselves. The main thing is to loosen up, tone muscles, infuse the body with oxygen, while elevating the heart. “What” you do is not as important as “how” you do it – breathing, relaxing, and enjoying oneself. Have fun. Think “happy exercise”!

Each routine should last 3 – 6 minutes or the length of one song. Stop and rest in-between each routine. Take time to catch your breath.

Cool Down and Relaxation: Aerobic routines are performed from 10-30 minutes, depending on the needs of the individual. The cool down period, from 10 to 15 minutes, consists of various stretching and toning exercises, done either sitting or standing.

WHAT'S WRONG WITH TODAY'S APPROACH TO FITNESS?

Today all too often the popular approach to fitness puts the emphasis on trying to achieve “body beautiful” and other narcissistic improvements instead of true health and fitness. And certainly it is the obsession with physical beauty and enhanced strength and performance that has led to the current abuse of steroids by athletes of all ages from school age kids to professionals.

Our society glorifies beauty and perfect bodies over true health & fitness goals. This is unhealthy both psychologically and physically and sets people up for failure as having a so called perfect body is an unrealistic expectation for most people past middle age or younger. Weight training equipment companies sell health clubs and the public on buying fancier, more complex and more expensive equipment by suggesting that muscles equal fitness. Muscles do not reflect health or fitness, but only the fact that an individual has done a lot of weight-bearing exercise. True fitness is a combination of things. Muscle strength is only a minor factor. And yet at health clubs around the country you will find overweight men and women using weight training machines to lose their spare tires and fat thighs. The truth is that weight training is designed to increase muscle strength. It's one of the least effective ways to lose fat.

In addition, this type of training tightens up muscles, when what people need most is to loosen up! In spite of the magazines and health clubs who would like us to believe the contrary, weight training is not necessary for achieving realistic fitness goals.

CHILDREN'S PROGRAMS

Too often the emphasis in children's sports and fitness programs is on winning and only on winning from Little League on through. No wonder surveys show American children are in such poor physical condition. Who wants to participate in programs where the old Vince Lombardi "Winning isn't everything, it's the only thing" mentality still prevails? What about children who are not competitively oriented? What if they are not inclined towards smashing heads on the football field? Why do we allow children to participate in dangerous sports such as tackle football at all? The idea that "if you are not the winner you are a loser!" must be replaced with "everyone who participates is a winner!" Children are born loving movement, but the current approach to fitness in this country too often turns them into couch potatoes before they are teenagers.

We need to promote the spirit of enjoyment over competing and winning at all costs for adults, children and coaches alike. We have to emphasize pleasure over pain; having a good time over 'do or die'. It's time to encourage children, athletes and coaches to focus on breathing, relaxing and enjoying sports and exercise. It's time to make fitness available and appealing to everyone.