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ABSTRACT

This self-help book provides information about stress and stress management. The first part focuses on awareness of stress. A number of activities are included to help the individual understand and analyze stress reactions. Information is provided about stressors, performance stress, cumulative stress, and several other aspects of stress reactions. Also included is information about negative effects of excessive stress including physical, psychological, and behavioral difficulties. Finally an approach to managing stress which requires an understanding of the stress interaction model is discussed. The second part focuses on relaxation approaches to stress management. Approaches focus on body relaxation. A format for assessing current relaxation methods is presented, as well as information on several specific approaches to relaxation. A discussion on meditation, and a presentation of progressive deep muscle relaxation are also included. The third part focuses on nutrition and exercise. Principles and suggestions are provided for improving dietary habits and developing an effective exercise program. The fourth part focuses on mind approaches to stress management. Four different aspects of cognitive processes as they relate to stress management are examined. Actual thinking processes are examined, and modifying inaccurate thinking to improve stress management is discussed. The fifth part examines broader life-style issues. The focus is on how choices are made about important life issues, and how these choices influence one's personal environment.

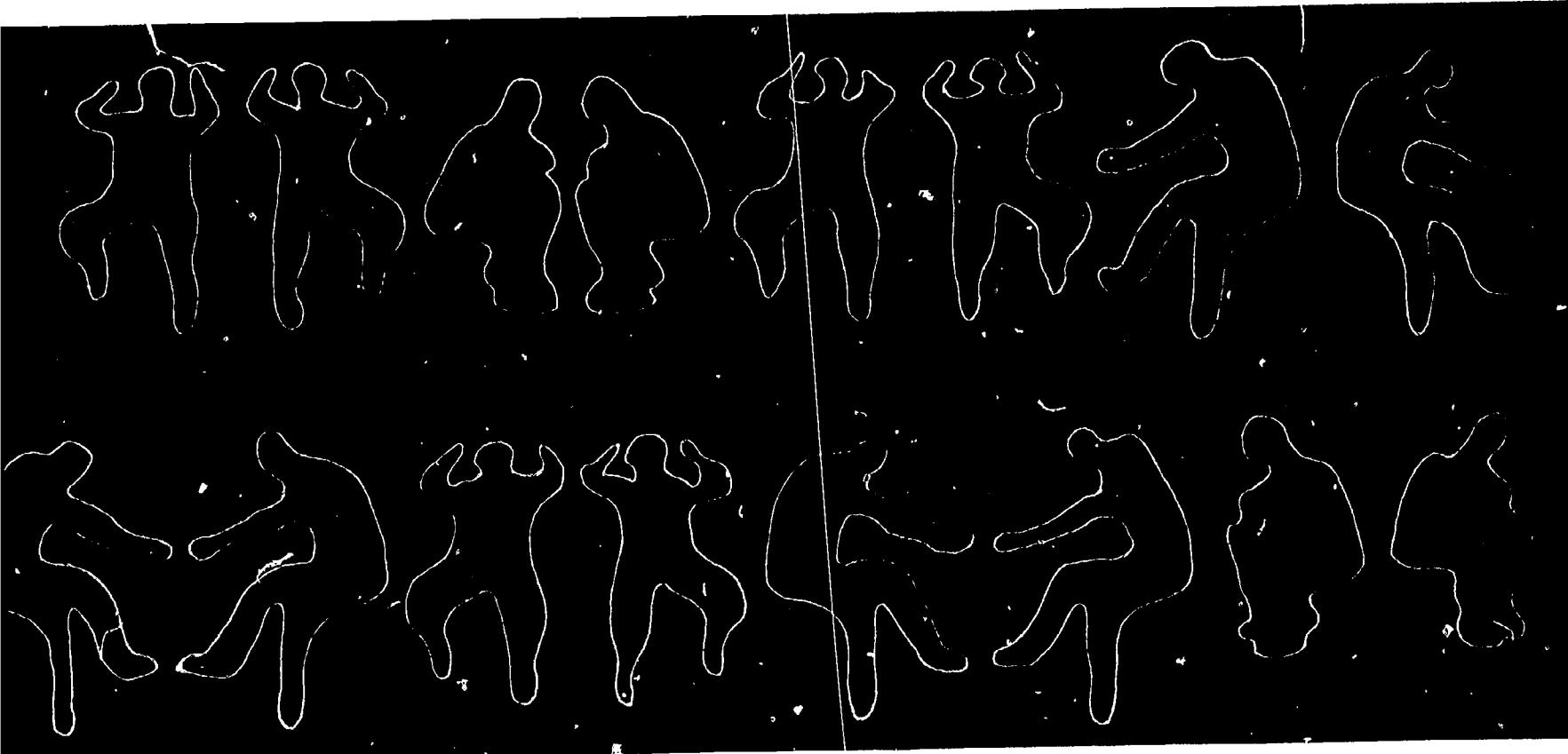
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MANAGING ANXIETY and STRESS

SECOND EDITION



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MANAGING ANXIETY AND STRESS

Second Edition

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ACCELERATED DEVELOPMENT INC.

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Muncie Indiana

MANAGING ANXIETY AND STRESS

Second Edition

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PREFACE

This is a self-help book. It is designed as a workbook to provide you with information about stress and stress management, and to help you learn about the many different ways to manage stress. It contains material about a number of different theories and approaches. Each chapter includes written activities to help you examine your own stress and to apply the method described in that chapter. I have tried to make the theories and approaches simple and understandable. The most difficult part of the book will be finding the time and energy to try out and use what you read. Don't attempt to go through the book too quickly. Take each chapter one at a time and give yourself time to apply what you learn.

Although this is a self-help book and can be done individually, I encourage you to discuss the material and the activities and self-assessments with family and close friends. Other people are an invaluable resource in helping you understand your own stress process, and in giving you feedback and advice on your stress management efforts. In fact, if you are not involved in some kind of group, workshop, or class, I would recommend that you try to find a partner to complete this program with you.

This book is not a substitute for professional help. It may, in fact, point out some areas in which you need help from a counselor or psychologist. Managing stress is no easy task. Unlike many self-help books, this one does not guarantee success. We know from research and clinical experience that people can use books like this very successfully; however, we also know that many times a professional person's perspective is needed. Don't hesitate to get help if you think you *may* need it. If you still hold the outmoded view that seeking help is a sign of weakness or that you have to be crazy to see a counselor or psychologist, give it up.

In this book I have presented many different theories and approaches, all within the framework of a simple stress interaction model. I also have attempted to confront some rather profound life issues—relationships, values, transitions, time use, meaning, and spirituality. I have included these issues, which can involve much stress and anxiety, knowing that they are much too complex to be covered in one chapter of a stress management book. My rationale was to at least introduce these topics as important in stress management. Too many of the available books don't attempt to deal with these larger issues. Certainly, simple techniques like relaxation or meditation are useful, but you also must attend to some of the more difficult issues that determine how you live and why you make the choices that you make.

My overall goal is to provide you with many different ways to approach stress management. If you complete all of the activities, you will get "hands-on" knowledge for each approach. The ultimate goal is for you to pick out the methods that work best for you and develop a personal stress management plan.

This book and the stress management training program that it contains can be used in workshops and classes as well as individually. In fact, in most of the activities a discussion and/or working with others would be quite valuable. The program is designed to be completed over some period of time. The workshop leader or course instructor should not expect to complete this program in a few sessions or a long weekend. Participants need time to process the information and to apply it to their own lives. The program would work very well for a weekly class or on-going workshop where a different chapter could be discussed and worked on every week.

I am greatly indebted to the originators of many of the approaches that I have used in this book. In many instances my contribution has been to help the reader use and apply the method. I have tried to simplify and provide many examples and opportunities for application, while maintaining the basic integrity of the different approaches. My understanding of how anxiety and stress can be managed with different approaches comes from my experiences with hundreds of students and clients. I am grateful to all of these people for their willingness to trust me and their courage in attempting to confront and overcome negative forms of anxiety. I also am grateful to colleagues and to my wife and family who often have helped me better understand and manage my own stress.

James Archer, Jr.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

PREFACE	iii
LIST OF ACTIVITIES	ix
LIST OF FIGURES	x
PART I AWARENESS OF STRESS	1
 1 STRESS AND ANXIETY	3
Background and Definitions	3
Body Response to Stress	4
Excessive Stress	7
Performance Stress/Anxiety	9
Accumulated Stress	12
Personal Checkpoint	13
Summary (Definitions and Assessment Information)	13
 2 MANAGING STRESS	15
Stress-Interaction Model	15
Environment	16
Worrying	18
Feedback Loop	19
Identifying Stressors	19
Stress Journal	21
Phobias and Stimulants	22
General Approach	23
Relaxation Approaches	23
Mind Approaches	23
Environment/Life-Style	24
Personal Checkpoint	24
Summary	25
PART II RELAXATION APPROACHES TO STRESS MANAGEMENT	27
 3 GENERAL RELAXATION METHODS	29
Deep Breathing	31
Visualizational/Daydreaming	33
Enjoying Natural Surroundings	35
Personal Checkpoint	35
Summary	35
 4 MEDITATION/RELAXATION RESPONSE	37
Meditation and Stress	38
Learning to Meditate	39
Developing a Plan	41
Personal Checkpoint	44
Summary	44
 5 PROGRESSIVE DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION	45
Process of Progressive Deep Muscle Relaxation	46
Meditation Versus Muscle Relaxation	47
Learning Progressive Deep Muscle Relaxation	47
Developing a Plan	50
Active or Cue-controlled Deep Muscle Relaxation	51
Personal Checkpoint	52
Summary	53

PART III NUTRITION AND EXERCISE 53

6 NUTRITION	57
Balanced and Healthy Diet	58
Modifying and Improving Your Diet	61
Effects of Specific Foods on Stress and Emotions	65
Caffeine, Alcohol, and Other Drugs	66
Vitamins	70
Personal Checkpoint	71
Summary	71

7 EXERCISE	73
Types of Exercise	74
Exercise Benefits	74
Choosing an Exercise Program	75
Medical Considerations	79
Developing a Plan	79
Personal Checkpoint	85
Summary	86

PART IV "MIND" APPROACHES TO STRESS MANAGEMENT 87

8 IRRATIONAL BELIEFS	89
Irrational Beliefs	89
Identifying Your Own Irrational Beliefs	95
Changing Your Irrational Beliefs	96
The A B C Method	98
Steps for Changing Your Irrational Beliefs	102
Personal Checkpoint	106
Summary	106

9 THINKING MISTAKES	109
Thinking Mistakes—Tunnel Vision	109
Thinking Mistakes—Black and White Thinking	110
Thinking Mistakes—Over-generalization	111
Thinking Mistakes—Faulty Assumptions	111
Correcting Thinking Mistakes	113
List Your Evidence for Generalizations	114
Challenge Faulty Assumptions	114
Expand Tunnel Vision	115
Expand Thinking Dichotomies	115
Personal Checkpoint	117
Summary	118

10 STRESS INOCULATION	119
Problem Solving	120
Problem Solving Model Application	121
Self-instructional Positive Coping Statements and Relaxation	122
Applying the Method	125
Personal Application	129
Personal Checkpoint	133
Summary	133

11 STRESS AND PERSONALITY	135
Jung's Theory of Type	136
Basic Description of Attitudes and Functions	136
Preferences and Stress	141
Extroversion	141
Introversion	141
Intuition	141

Sensing	142
Thinking	142
Feeling	142
Judging	143
Percieving	143
Implications of Personality on Your Stress Process	143
Personal Checkpoint	146
Summary	146
PART V ENVIRONMENT AND LIFE-STYLE ISSUES	147
12 TIME MANAGEMENT	149
Type A Behavior	150
Planning and Managing Your Time	156
Setting Goals and Priorities	156
Daily and Weekly Scheduling	159
Balance	163
Procrastination, Distraction, and Other Problems	164
Personal Checkpoint	165
Summary	165
13 RELATIONSHIPS	167
Supportive Relationships	168
Feeling Good about Yourself	169
Effective Listening	169
Conversations and Small Talk	169
Self-disclosure	169
Devote Time and Participate in Activities	172
Foster Intimate, Supportive Relationships	173
Assertiveness	175
Personal Checkpoint	179
Summary	180
14 LIFE TRANSITIONS	181
Understand and Accept the Process of Developmental Change Throughout Life	182
Erikson's Stages	183
Stress in Life Span Development	186
Recognize and Accept Emotions Related to Unexpected Life Events	186
Identify New Developmental Tasks and Needs and Confront Them	187
Maintain Your Independence and Self-reliance	190
Practice Good Health and Stress Management During Times of Transition	190
Personal Checkpoint	190
Summary	191
15 VALUES AND SPIRITUALITY	193
Values	194
Value Clarity	195
Value Confrontation and Change	198
Conflict Between Values and Behavior	200
Lack of Commitment and Involvement	200
Spirituality and Stress	202
Personal Checkpoint	203
Summary	204
BIBLIOGRAPHY	205
INDEX	209
ABOUT THE AUTHOR	214

LIST OF ACTIVITIES

1.1 The Fight and Flight Mechanism	5
1.2 Stress Indicators	7
1.3 Performance Stress	10
1.4 Stress Level Throughout the Day	12
2.1 Stressor Identification	19
2.2 Stress Journal	21
3.1 Relaxation Survey	30
3.2 Regular Deep Breathing	32
3.3 Stress-Releasing Relaxing Sigh	32
3.4 Relaxation Scene	33
4.1 Initial Meditation	41
4.2 Meditation Plan	43
5.1 Deep Muscle Relaxation	48
5.2 Muscle Relaxation Plan	51
5.3 Active Relaxation	53
6.1 Diet Log	59
6.2 Modifying Dietary Habits	63
6.3 Analysis of Alcohol, Tranquilizer, and Marijuana Use	68
7.1 Choosing an Appropriate Exercise	76
7.2 Developing an Exercise Plan	82
8.1 Personal Irrational Beliefs	96
8.2 A B C Practice	99
8.3 Analyzing Irrational Beliefs	101
8.4 Rational Statements and Arguments	104
8.5 Disputing Irrational Beliefs	106
9.1 Identifying Thinking Mistakes	112
9.2 Identifying Personal Thinking Mistakes	113
9.3 Challenging Thinking Mistakes	117
10.1 Developing Positive Self-statements	125
10.2 Personal Application	130
10.3 Rehearsing Stress Situations	132
11.1 Assessing Personality	138
11.2 Personal Implications	144
12.1 Type A Behavior Inventory	151
12.2 Changing Type A Characteristics	153
12.3 Goal Setting	158
12.4 Developing a Time Schedule	163
13.1 Active Listening	170
13.2 Self-disclosure	171
13.3 Relationship Time	173
13.4 Support Systems	174
13.5 Assertiveness Assessment	176
14.1 Developmental Assessment	185
14.2 Confronting Developmental Tasks	188
15.1 Value Influence	196
15.2 Choosing Opposites	197
15.3 Conflicting Values	198
15.4 Values and Behavior	201
15.5 Spirituality	203

LIST OF FIGURES

1.1 Performance Graph	9
2.1 Stress Interaction Model	17
7.1 Illustration of a form for charting progress when exercising	80
9.1 Example of a black and white thinking line with illustration of possibilities between the two poles	116
12.1 Example of a weekly schedule	162

PART I

AWARENESS

OF

STRESS

Part I

AWARENESS OF STRESS

The first two chapters in this book cover some basic information about stress and anxiety. Also, a number of activities are included to help you understand and analyze your own stress reactions. You will learn about stressors, performance stress, cumulative stress, and several other aspects of stress reactions. You also will learn about the many negative effects of excessive stress including physical, psychological, and behavioral difficulties that are related to too much stress.

Finally, you will learn about an approach to managing stress which requires an understanding of the stress interaction model. You will discover how stress management can occur at many different places in the stress cycle and you will be introduced to the plan for stress management followed in this book.

STRESS AND ANXIETY



We all feel stress overload at times.

We have all experienced stress and we all know what it is like to feel anxious. Stress and anxiety are natural human reactions, sometimes helpful, sometimes not. Although the two terms, stress and anxiety, are used interchangeably in our society, they originally had somewhat different meanings.

BACKGROUND AND DEFINITIONS

Stress referred to the reaction of the body to a physical or psychological threat. The term itself became well known as a result of the work of Hans Selye. Dr. Selye did much of the early research and writing on the stress response, describing the biochemical and physiological changes that take place in the body.

The most widely recognized and most easily identified stress response, one that has been with us since ancient times, is called the "fight and flight" response. This response, which will be described more fully later, provided our early ancestors with an ability to fight off predators and to escape quickly when necessary. Stress, in this case, created increased strength, energy, and speed.

The term **anxiety** has usually been used to describe an emotional state without specific reference to the accompanying physiological responses. Freud's work increased society's understanding and awareness of anxiety as an emotion. His concept of anxiety was rather complex and included a definition of anxiety as an emotion that could be related to unconscious thoughts and feelings. The concept of anxiety also has been examined from a philosophical perspective. John Paul Sartre described a kind of existential anxiety that is part of life for everyone. Many other philosophers and theologians have described the sources of anxiety for us as a species and as a civilization.

Although the terms stress and anxiety have historically had somewhat different meanings, the modern practice of using them interchangeably will be followed here. The material in this workbook, however, will cover stress primarily as it relates to the individual. The religious and philosophical aspects will be discussed only as they relate to the individual experience of anxiety.

The terms stress and anxiety often have negative connotations. However, these feelings are certainly not always harmful. The energy that comes from stress can be useful, and help us maximize our performance in many areas, and the source of dissatisfaction that comes from anxiety can push us to grow and develop in positive ways.

BODY RESPONSE TO STRESS

Although stress and anxiety are not always caused by a simple or easily identifiable event or situation, you can almost always feel them in your body. Clearly, a physiological component is related to being stressed and to feeling anxious. We experience this physical component of stress as a result of the incorporation of the "fight and flight" mechanism into our make up.

What is involved in this mechanism? You have probably experienced it yourself. The response occurs involuntarily whenever you are very frightened or threatened. Think about what you feel like when you almost have an automobile accident, or after you have some other life-threatening close call? You feel up, energized, ready to act. Your heart beats faster, you breath faster, your blood pressure goes up, your muscles tense, your senses become more acute, and in general you are ready for action. These reactions can be very helpful if some kind of quick or strong physical action is required. You have probably heard or read stories about someone performing an impossible task, like lifting a car, during a time of crisis. This extra strength comes from energy released during the "fight and flight" response.

The same kind of internal reactions occur during any stressful situation or experience of threat. The intensity might not be as great, but the internal reactions, such as increased heart rate and breathing, are similar. For example,

when you have to take a very important test or when you have to perform in front of a large audience, you probably have some of these reactions. Even when you are just feeling anxious, for no apparent reason, you may feel some variation of this excitation response in your body.

The important thing to remember is that the mechanism, which is part of our evolutionary heritage, occurs whenever you feel fearful or threatened, even if that threat isn't really dangerous. Because the internal body responses associated with the "fight and flight" mechanism are such an important part of any stress response, take a few minutes to complete Activity 1.1 which is designed to increase your understanding of your own "fight and flight" response.

Activity 1.1 **The Fight and Flight Mechanism**

1. Describe two times when you can recall having an intense stress reaction that elicited your "fight and flight" mechanism. It may have been during a life-threatening situation or just during a very stressful event. For this activity, concentrate on very noticeable, acute kinds of stress reactions.

a. _____

b. _____

2. Now try to remember what kind of physiological reactions that you had in these situations. Rate every item: (0 = None, 1 = Some, 2 = A Great Deal)

Rapid breathing	_____	Tension—back, neck	_____
Heart pounding	_____	Tension—legs, feet	_____
Sweating	_____	Felt up, energized	_____
Increased energy	_____	Tension—shoulders, neck	_____
Felt hot, flushed	_____	Senses heightened	_____
Stomach tension	_____	Other _____	_____
Tension—shoulders, arms	_____		

3. In addition to physical reactions during intense stress reactions, people often experience intense emotions. Check off the emotions that you felt during and after the two situations that you identified.

During	After
Fear	_____
Anxiety	_____
Worry	_____
Desperation	_____
Frustration	_____
Anger	_____
Anticipation	_____
Hostility	_____

Keep your "fight and flight" response patterns in mind and try to confirm your perceptions during the next stress reactions that you experience.

EXCESSIVE STRESS

Since the "fight and flight" mechanism is a part of our evolutionary heritage and has helped us survive, and since we know that stress and anxiety can play a positive role in our growth process, why is it important to "manage stress"? Two basic answers can be given to this question.

First, the "fight and flight" mechanism is, in many ways, obsolete. We just don't need to be able to physically fight and flee very much in our current society. Rather, we are usually called upon to cope with various stressful, but not life-threatening, situations without resorting to physical activity. Thus, our tendency to get ready for action can create a kind of excessive physical preparation. This problem is compounded by the fact that we have a built-in feedback mechanism that increases our excitation if we don't act physically in some way.

Second, convincing evidence is available that too much stress can create a great variety of problems for our bodies and our psyches. The great difficulty here is in defining excessive stress. Each person must determine what is excessive stress for himself or herself. People vary widely in how they cope with life events and in how they experience stress. As the old saying goes, "One person's poison is another person's pleasure."

Because of this great variability, one cannot say with certainty that stress actually causes anything. We can say, however, that too much stress over time is probably harmful. The most frightening result of excessive stress can be death. Life-threatening diseases like cancer, cardiovascular disorders, arthritis, and respiratory disease all appear to be related to stress. This doesn't mean that they are necessarily caused by stress, only that stress can play some role.

One way to determine if you are experiencing excessive stress is to examine some physical and psychological symptoms that can be indicators of stress. Take time to answer the questions in Activity 1.2.

Activity 1.2 Stress Indicators

Please rate the following with the scale given below. None of these indicators are necessarily signs of excessive stress, but stress can be an important component of each of them. You will have to make your own decision about which of the indicators are signs of too much stress for you. If you rate yourself in the "often" or "very often" category on a number of these indicators, you may be experiencing excessive stress.

If you complete the material in this workbook and use what you learn for a reasonable period of time, you should see positive results and a decrease in your scores on many of the items. Use the following scale to rate the frequency that you experience each item.

0 = Never
1 = Seldom
2 = Occasionally
3 = Often
4 = Very Often

Physical Indicators

Headaches	_____	Cardiovascular Problems	_____
Arthritis	_____	Cancer	_____
Neck Pain	_____	Back Pain	_____
Jaw Pain	_____	High Blood Pressure	_____
Allergies	_____	Asthma	_____
Stomach Cramps	_____	Constipation	_____
Diarrhea	_____	Viral Infections	_____
Fatigue	_____	Overeating	_____
Poor appetite	_____		

Emotional

Nervousness	_____	Anger	_____
Hostility	_____	Phobias	_____
Depression	_____	Low Self-confidence	_____
Low Self-worth	_____	Boredom	_____
Apathy	_____	Annoy Easily	_____
Hypersensitivity	_____	Poor Concentration	_____
Poor Memory	_____		

Behavioral

Drug Abuse	_____	Alcohol Abuse	_____
Poor Relationships	_____	Poor Performance (School/Work)	_____
Sleep Problems	_____	Sexual Performance Problems	_____
Compulsive Thoughts	_____	Eating Problems	_____
Nervous Fidgeting	_____		

NOTE: If you are alarmed by the number of these indicators that you have rated as "often" or "very often," you may want to get the advice of a physician concerning the physical problems and a counselor or psychologist about the role of stress in your life style.

PERFORMANCE STRESS/ANXIETY

Most people become aware of stress as a problem when it interferes with their performance in some way. When you do poorly on a test because you are very nervous, you become aware of the fact that stress inhibits mental performance. When you speak poorly and don't express yourself well in a speech or talk, you realize that stress can decrease your verbal performance.

On the other hand, stress can be helpful and improve your capacity. The extra energy and alertness that you feel before a difficult performance of some kind can be quite useful. Only when the stress becomes excessive can the energy and alertness turn into negative reactions like shakiness, too much tension, or inability to think clearly. In other words, when the "fight and flight" mechanism comes on too strongly you feel the negative effects. Take a look at the graph in Figure 1.1 as a way of examining this phenomena.

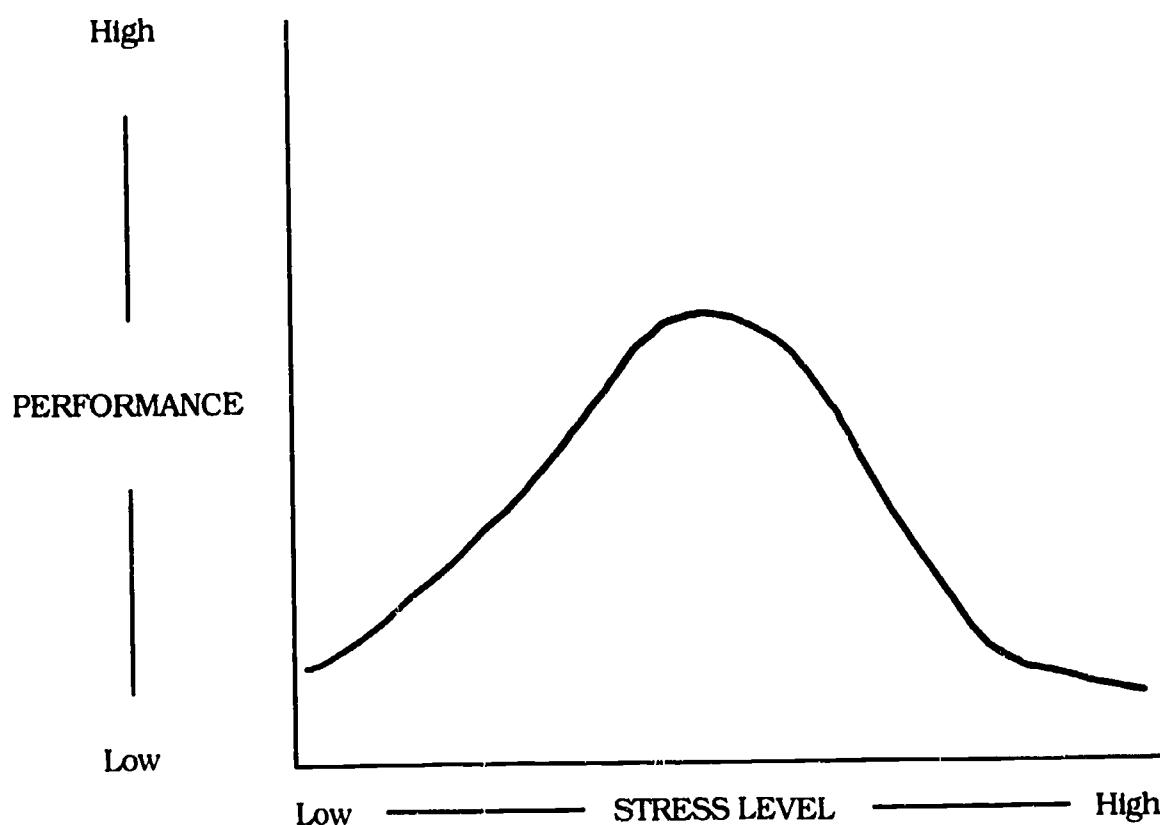


Figure 1.1. Performance Graph

From this graph you can see that, as stress level goes up, performance improves, up to a point. Then, as stress gets too great, performance begins to decrease. Take the following example:

John is about to give a presentation to a staff meeting at work. As he begins his talk he feels a little nervous, but he is energetic, alert, and ready to approach the task. As he continues, he looks around and sees two people he knows will disagree with him. This makes him very nervous. He starts to stammer and sweat profusely and can't remember what comes next in his presentation.

The peak of the graph for John comes when he starts to feel so anxious that his ability to deliver his briefing begins to go downhill.

The challenge in dealing with performance stress is, of course, to keep your stress level on the up side of the performance graph. A potential danger should be noted. Some people develop a pattern of using stress as a motivator to perform. Even if this strategy works (like waiting until the last minute to do something so that you are forced into it), it may still take a negative toll on your body. You may continue to perform well with this strategy, but the extra stress will likely catch up with you. Examine the negative effects of your own performance stress by completing Activity 1.3.

Activity 1.3 **Performance Stress**

Identify your own performance stress by listing the performance situations in your own life where stress plays a negative role. After you list the performance situations (they are divided into general life areas), rate the degree to which stress usually decreases your performance in each situation. Try to list one or two situations for each life area. Some examples are given for each area. List the situations and use the following scale.

- 1 = Moderate negative effect
- 2 = Strong negative effect
- 3 = Very strong negative effect

Work/School

Examples: Final exams
Briefing boss

Rate: 2
Rate: 3

1. _____

2. _____

Family

Examples: Assertiveness with father
Disciplining son

Rate: 2
Rate: 1

1. _____
2. _____

General Relationships

Examples: Meeting new people
Sexual performance

Rate: 2
Rate: 3

1. _____
2. _____

Athletics/Physical Activities

Examples: Serving in tennis
Dancing with a partner

Rate: 2
Rate: 1

1. _____
2. _____

Other—List any other examples of performance stress.

1. _____
2. _____

After following the stress management program presented in this workbook, you should be able to improve your performance in the problem areas you identified.

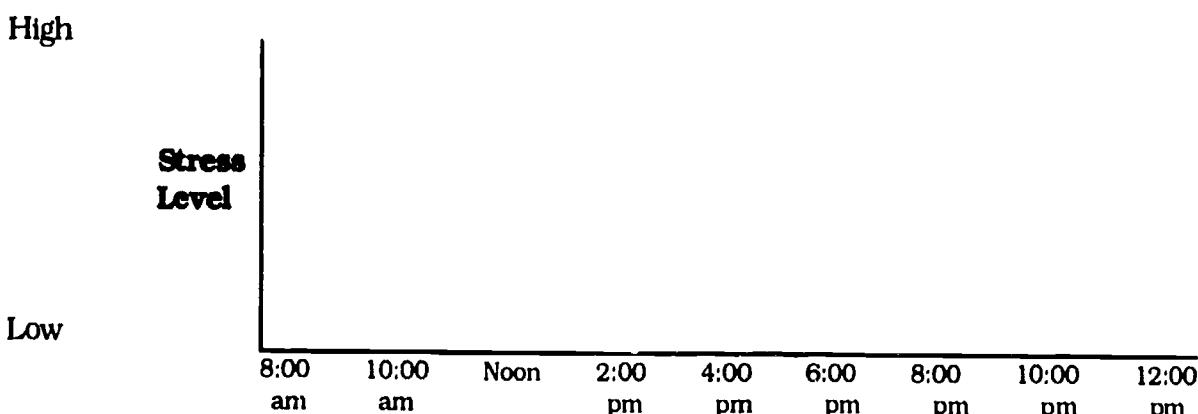
ACCUMULATED STRESS

The acute stress that you feel when you are reacting to something concrete is easy to identify. But what about the stress that comes from everyday encounters? What about the stress that you seem to carry around and that grows, often as the day progresses? This kind of stress can be called **accumulated stress**. Although stress is not really an entity that you carry around in a particular place in your body, our bodies and our minds do seem to accumulate stress in the sense that our tendency to become overstressed increases as we experience stressful situations.

Think of your own level of stress throughout a typical day. You probably feel more stress (in this case the physical symptom is likely to be muscle tension) as the day progresses. On some days, we all feel like a bundle of nerves by the time we finish out the day. Take a minute to chart your own typical stress level during the day by completing Activity 1.4.

Activity 1.4 Stress Level Throughout the Day

Make two different lines representing your stress level on the following chart, one for your typical day at work or school and one for a weekend day or day when you don't have to go to work or school. An example is given on the chart below. In addition to the example line, mark two lines for yourself:



Understanding these daily stress patterns is important because it can help you determine when you need to stop, break the stress cycle, and apply a stress management technique. In addition to accumulating daily, stress can accrue over longer periods of time. Most of us have had periods in our lives when we felt an increasing level of stress over periods of weeks, months, or even years.

This often occurs when a major aspect of your life is not working well and you are constantly undergoing stress from that situation. Living in a very stressful family situation is a good example. People who are in ineffective marriages or who have chronic difficulties with children report considerable relief from accumulated stress once they deal effectively with family problems.

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

Personal checkpoints will be included at the end of each chapter to help you review what you have learned and to "check" your progress before you go on to the next chapter. At this checkpoint, you have learned some basic definitions of stress and anxiety and you have begun to assess and look closely at your own experience of stress. In Activity 1.1, you examined the characteristics of your own "fight and flight" mechanism. You should have identified both physical and emotional components.

You also have learned that the term "excessive stress" has no general definition that applies to everyone. Each person must determine his or her own threshold for what is excessive. In Activity 1.2, you looked for signs of excessive stress in terms of your own physical, emotional, and behavioral indicators. Understanding and recognizing your own physical and emotional signs of stress and being able to recognize signs of excessive stress are crucial foundations for stress management. If you need to spend more time on these, go back and review the activities before you continue to the next chapter.

You also have learned how stress affects performance and how it can be both negative and positive. Several examples of how stress affects your own performance should stand out for you as a result of Activity 1.3. In addition to performance stress, you have become familiar with the concept of accumulated stress and you have spent time charting your own stress level throughout different kinds of days. This should give you some sense of the rhythms of your own stress. If you don't have a clear understanding of how you experience and respond to performance and accumulated stress, give yourself more time to work on this part of your stress assessment. You also may find it helpful to discuss your self-assessment with a close friend, just to check your own perceptions. If you are doing this workbook in a small group or class, you will probably have the opportunity for small group discussion.

SUMMARY **(Definitions and Assessment Information)**

1. The terms stress and anxiety are often used interchangeably.
2. Stress has historically been used to describe the process that we undergo when we experience threat. Hans Selye did much of the early research describing the biochemical and physiological changes that occur during stress responses.
3. Anxiety has historically been used to describe an emotional state. Sigmund Freud developed a view of anxiety that was related to unconscious thoughts and feelings. Philosophers and theologians have discussed anxiety as a part of the human condition.
4. The "fight and flight" response evolved as an internal mechanism for preparing early men and women for battle or to flee. It involves a general excitation of the heart, breathing, and other functions that serve to increase strength and ability for action.

5. Because the "fight and flight" mechanism helped us survive, it evolved as an important human characteristic. The mechanism itself is somewhat obsolete since we don't often need to fight or flee in modern society, but it remains as our typical response to any stress or threat.
6. Excessive stress has been related to several life-threatening diseases and to many other physical and emotional difficulties. The definition of what is excessive varies from person to person.
7. Stress can be both helpful and harmful to performance in many different life areas. We are usually most aware of stress when it interferes with our performance in some area.
8. Although stress is not actually a physical entity, we often respond as if it accumulates. In other words, each stress reaction is not an isolated instance. You tend to respond according to the previous pattern of stress reactions.

2

Chapter

MANAGING STRESS



Managing stress is important to everyone.

Now that you have learned some basic information about stress and anxiety and examined your own stress reactions and processes, you are ready to tackle stress management. First, you must understand the interactional nature of stress.

STRESS-INTERACTION MODEL

Think of a stress reaction as having three main components: **Mind**, **Body**, and **Environment**. Information from the environment is received through your senses, processed in your mind, and experienced or felt in some way.

In stress reactions this experience usually includes emotional and physiological reactions. These emotional and physiological reactions are a result of biochemical processes.

For example, when you perceive a stressful situation the hypothalamus, a part of the brain that helps regulate the autonomic nervous system (which controls the ongoing body processes like heart rate and blood flow), stimulates the adrenal glands to produce hormones, such as adrenalin, that increase heart rate, blood flow, and other responses associated with the "fight and flight" mechanism. A number of other hormonal and nervous system reactions take place.

The basic stress-interaction model (mind, body, and environment) is not as simple as it seems. The interactions between these three components are often complicated and reciprocal. (See Figure 2.1)

ENVIRONMENT

Take the **environment**, for example. Just what is meant by this term? Is it everything outside of and around the individual? In a way this is true. But the environment is not independent of the person. We know that people can create and influence their environment. We also know that different people perceive the environment in very different ways. Perception is affected by internal factors such as personality, emotional state, and beliefs. The individual in many ways creates his or her environment, and his or her perceptions are influenced by many internal factors. Some of these internal factors (memories, beliefs, personality, and mood) are included in the diagram representing the mind in Figure 2.1.

Aspects of the environment that appear to cause stress are often called **stressors**. The interactional nature (as illustrated in Figure 2.1) of the stress reaction is often misunderstood when people talk about stressors. Consider the following example:

Example: Adam is a school teacher in a suburban high school. He is 27 years old and has been teaching for about 5 years. He is married with two small children. He complains a great deal about his boss, the principal. He describes her as a tyrant and labels her as the primary stressor in his life. He has been experiencing considerable neck pain and his physician says that it is caused by tension and nervousness. The doctor has prescribed muscle relaxants, but they don't seem to be helpful, except for alleviating the symptom for a few hours.

You might be tempted to conclude that the "tyrant principal" is an environmental stressor who causes stress for Adam (the work/school category in Figure 2.1). The stressor is perceived by Adam, and that perception creates a feeling of anxiety and tension in his neck and other parts of his body. But wait, what if the principal really isn't a tyrant? What if Adam is really unhappy with his career and is somehow perceiving the principal as responsible for his anxiety? That would mean that the problem is partly in Adam's mind. That is, his **interpretation** of the principal's behavior is what makes it negative and

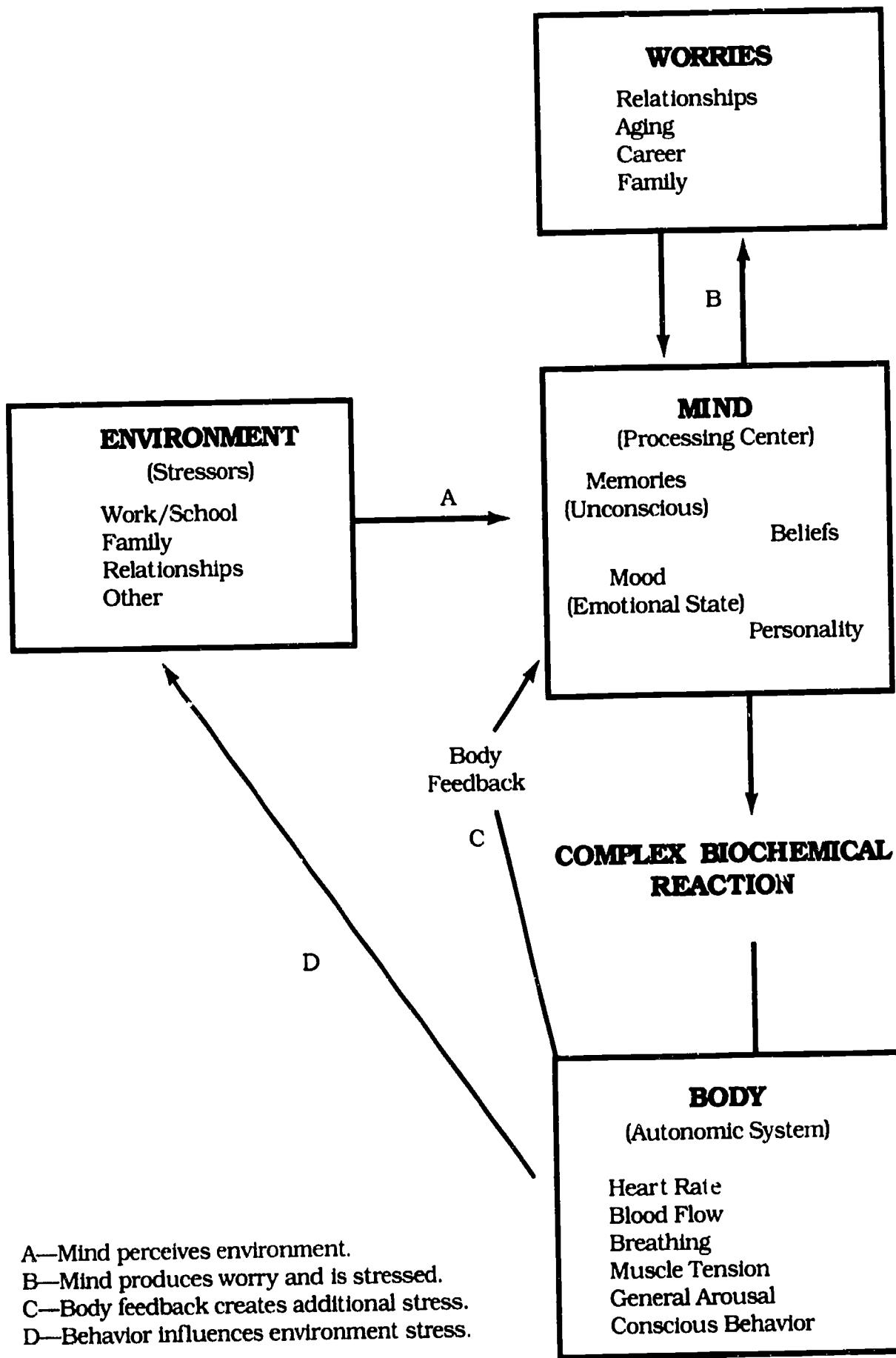


Figure 2.1. Stress-Interaction Model.

therefore stressful. Or, what if something about Adam's personality is involved in this interaction? What if Adam has always been a perfectionist and the unhappiness with his principal is really a result of his not being a perfect teacher?

Here is another example to consider:

Example: Janet is a junior in high school and writes for the school newspaper. She has been assigned a story dealing with the school Letterman's Club. For the story, she needs to interview several boys in the club. She is very stressed by this assignment and views these interviews as very difficult stressors. The night after receiving the assignment she is not able to sleep and she puts off the interviews until the last minute. At that point she feels very ill and is not able to go to school.

In this case, the apparent stressor is the assignment to interview members of the Letterman's Club. However, if you consider Janet's personality and her past experience, the role of her interpretation becomes clearer. Janet is a very shy, introverted young lady who has never felt comfortable talking to boys. Her introversion and social awkwardness make the assignment very scary and frightening to her. In other words, the stressor itself is not responsible for her stress reaction. Her personality and social experience are what make the interviews so difficult and stressful.

WORRYING

A stress reaction can be triggered by your thoughts alone, with no environmental stressor. The thought of a particularly difficult or stressful situation can create a stress reaction just as strong as one that is triggered by a real environmental stressor:

Example: Marty is a middle-aged man, married with three children. He is an auto mechanic and has had a secure job with a Ford dealership for 20 years. He is happily married, and although he seldom has enough money, his family life is generally good. One day he sees the owner of the dealership talking with several very well-dressed men who spend several hours touring the dealership facilities. On his way home, it occurs to him that perhaps they are going to buy the dealership.

He begins to imagine that the dealership is being sold. This causes him to begin to worry about his job and what he and his family will do if he loses his income and seniority. That evening he has great difficulty sleeping and wakes up in the middle of the night in a cold sweat. The next morning he is feeling very anxious and can't eat breakfast. That day at work he is uncharacteristically unpleasant to his fellow mechanics, and at times finds himself feeling very anxious and breathing too rapidly.

In this example, then, you can see how someone's imagination can produce a series of very real stress symptoms. In case you wondered, his boss was only showing the dealership off to some relatives.

FEEDBACK LOOP

Stress symptoms themselves also can serve as a cue for additional stress. When Adam (the school teacher in a previous example) felt the tension and pain in his neck, the feedback of this tension to his brain may have created even more tension. He might have said something to himself like, "Damn, I'm all tensed up again. I wish that woman would give me a break." This thought, triggered by the tense muscles, could increase the tension and add to the already stressful situation. In other words, the stress symptom (muscle tension) can become a stressor and a signal for more muscle tension. Of course, if he understood his stress process and had studied stress management, he would take the initial neck tension as a signal that he needed to begin applying some stress management techniques. More about that later.

IDENTIFYING STRESSORS

You can see that labeling a person, event, or situation, as a stressor that causes stress is a tricky business. Stressors usually don't really cause stress. They are only a part of the stress interaction process. We all have a tendency to externalize and to look outside ourselves for the cause of our difficulties, but, as the examples show, we need to look very closely at these stressors. Take some time now in Activity 2.1 to identify and analyze some of your own stressors.

Activity 2.1 Stressor Identification

Stressors can involve major life situations (like a boss who hates you, or a relationship that is always up and down) or they can be small things that continually aggravate you (like a certain stretch of road during your commute or the way your younger son yells at his sister). In this activity please list three of your own **major stressors** and three **minor stressors** and then analyze each one in terms of the *Stress Interaction Model*. First, list three of your major and three minor stressors in a few words.

Major Stressors:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Minor Stressors:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Now, examine how your experience of stress related to a particular stressor is affected by your own behavior/thoughts, memories, feelings, experiences,

interpretations, and personality characteristics. To do this, ask yourself the following questions and think about the Stress Interaction Model. Another helpful procedure is to discuss your stress reactions with a family member or friend.

1. How do my thoughts and beliefs affect my interpretation of the stressor?

2. How do I react physiologically? Do I get even more stressed as a result of feedback from muscle tension or other physiological signs of stress?

3. How do my personal feelings color my perceptions in this stress situation?

4. How does my external behavior affect my experience of the stressor? Do I habitually create this or similar situations?

5. Do my expectations and past experience strongly influence this stress interaction?

6. Are there aspects of my personality that make this a stressful situation?

Analyzing these stressors in terms of the *Stress Interaction Model* is not easy. If we understood our own part in our stress reactions, it wouldn't be so difficult to change. Many of the chapters in this book will, in fact, key into your part of the stress reaction, so don't be discouraged if you had trouble with this activity.

STRESS JOURNAL

One of the most helpful ways to learn more about your own stress process and how to manage your stress is to keep a *daily stress journal*. Taking the time to reflect on your life periodically, and in particular on your experience of stress, is very important. It will help you in many ways. First, it will increase your awareness of feelings, attitudes, and behaviors related to your experience of stress. This, in itself, may help you decrease some of your stress. Research in behavioral psychology has shown that often just keeping track of troublesome behavior can help decrease its frequency.

Keeping a journal will also force you to focus on stress and how it impacts your life. In a way, it will help direct your energies toward improvement. A journal also will help you remember and identify patterns in your life that relate to stress. It will probably help you highlight the people and situations that are stressful and also the ones that help you unwind and relax. Finally, an ongoing journal, while you are using this book, will help keep you motivated and focused on the different stress management techniques.

Activity 2.2

Stress Journal

A Stress Journal should include a brief entry for each day. Develop a habit of taking a few minutes to write in your journal each day. Try to set aside the same time every day. Maybe just before bed, after lunch, on the commute home, or whenever you can spend a few minutes. Don't worry about the form or format. Write sentences if you are comfortable; make charts, diagrams, whatever you find helpful. Make it honest and keep it private. In order that your entries can be kept together, you may want to buy a notebook, diary, or some other book in which to keep the entries. Although the format can vary, you should try to include the following:

- General feelings and stress level
- Stressful events
- Stressful thoughts
- Successful relaxation/stress management
- Relationships and stress
- Accumulated stress
- Physical problems
- Tension
- Other

Don't make your journal a chore. Experiment until you can come up with a method and format that works for you.

PHOBIAS AND STIMULANTS

Phobias are a type of stress reaction where a person has a strong fear reaction to a particular situation or stimulus. They are fairly common and can be described as automatic stress/fear reactions. In terms of the *Stress Interaction Model*, the environmental cue automatically causes a strong stress reaction without much effect from the normal mediating factors like personality, beliefs, interpretation, etc. You have probably heard of snake phobias, claustrophobia, fear of enclosed spaces, or phobias related to a fear of heights. In these reactions, an individual usually has a very strong anxiety reaction. It is almost as if the body reacts automatically to the fear stimulus.

Psychologists say that this is a kind of automatic, learned fear reaction. We really don't know how people develop these reactions, although sometimes they can be traced to an early traumatic event. For example, a child may have been stung very badly by a swarm of bees when he or she was 5 years old and from then on have a strong bee phobia. Most phobias, however, don't have easily identifiable antecedents. Phobias, then, are different from many stress reactions because they involve an intense, quick, and automatic fear reaction. Most people who have phobias avoid the situations to which they are phobic; but, at times, doing so isn't possible. Phobias are probably best treated with behavior therapy by a professional. However, some of the approaches to stress management in this book can be helpful.

Another type of stress that doesn't fit the Stress Interaction Model very well is stress caused by stimulants. Basically, anything that you put in your body that stimulates your autonomic nervous system, similar to the "fight and flight mechanism," fits in this category. Caffeine and amphetamines (speed) are two common examples. In essence, stress (increased arousal) is caused by an artificial stimulant. In this case, no real *stress interaction* exists except that the arousal may become a cue for greater arousal and this state of excitation may cause you to overreact to normal situations. Take the case of Fred.

Example

Fred is a community college student living with his parents. During a difficult exam period, he had to stay up all night to study for a test, and because he had a paper due the next day he had to drink about ten cups of coffee to stay awake. All this caffeine kept him awake, but the stimulant effect made him feel very hyper and on edge. When his mother came home from work and asked him if he was done with his paper yet, he lashed out at her and said, "Why don't you get off my back and quit criticizing me all the time. I don't need this kind of crap." Actually, his mother was going to ask him if he needed any help typing the paper, but instead she just got angry and left the room.

Although caffeine may not be the only cause for Fred reacting so strongly to his mother, his level of nervousness and stimulation clearly helped him overreact to what she said. The same thing can happen after you have a

day filled with minor stresses and irritations that create tension. More information and discussion about caffeine and other aspects of nutrition will be included later.

GENERAL APPROACH

The overall goal of this book is to help you learn to better manage your stress. Each of us must determine what excessive stress we need to manage. **The goal is not to eliminate stress, but to reduce and manage it.** We couldn't eliminate it, even if we wanted to, and without stress our lives would be rather boring and void of excitement and stimulation.

The different stress management techniques and approaches in this book are organized around the three parts of the *Stress Interaction Model*. Some of them focus on the **body** and your physiological reactions, some on **mind** and the thoughts and beliefs that affect the interaction between you and your stressors, and some directly upon your **environmental** stressors and your decisions and behavior relative to these stressors. Following is a short description of each of these sections and a listing of the chapters to be included.

RELAXATION APPROACHES

Parts II and III of this book include chapters on specific relaxation techniques, nutrition, and exercise. The relaxation techniques covered, and most others, all work in a similar fashion. They can provide you with a tool for achieving a periodic sense of profound relaxation. If practiced regularly, any of these techniques can have a great calming effect on your life and make a dramatic impact on your cumulative stress level.

Relaxation techniques are easy to learn because they come very naturally. Dr. Herbert Benson, author of a classic book in the stress management field, *The Relaxation Response*, suggested that this response is a kind of natural antithesis to the "fight and flight" mechanism. These relaxation techniques are part of the Body component of the *Stress Interaction Model* because they are primarily focused on creating a deep sense of physical relaxation. They also, however, create great mental calmness, and the connection between body and mind becomes quite apparent when you learn these techniques and experience the profound sense of calmness that accompanies the centering and slowing down of your body processes.

Part II includes Chapter 3, General Relaxation Methods; Chapter 4, Meditation/Relaxation Response; and Chapter 5, Progressive Deep Muscle Relaxation. In Part III, are Chapter 6, Nutrition; and Chapter 7, Exercise. The chapters on exercise and nutrition are somewhat different than those on relaxation techniques, but they are crucial aspects of stress management and fit best as part of the "body" approaches.

MIND APPROACHES

These approaches, provided in Part IV, focus on the way in which you think about and interpret the events that are stressful. Changing or correcting

thoughts and interpretations requires insight and a willingness to work hard at changing specific thoughts and beliefs. Chapters included are 8, Irrational Beliefs; 9, Thinking Mistakes; 10, Stress Inoculation; and 11, Stress and Personality. Please remember that this focus on "mind" isn't meant to set up a discrete category of stress management. A very important interaction exists among all stress management areas. Also, Chapter 11, Stress and Personality, is different from the others in that it doesn't focus on coping mechanisms. Rather, it attempts to help you understand how your personality, in general, relates to stress and stress management.

ENVIRONMENT/LIFE-STYLE

Life-style is probably a good way of characterizing your own personal environment. It is a particularly good term because it implies that your life-style is something that you create. Therefore, your environment is something that you have a strong hand in creating. Many aspects of life-style could profitably be examined. However, Part V of this book will be limited to four Chapters: 12, Time Management; 13, Relationships; 14, Life Transitions; and 15, Values and Spirituality.

Since the three parts of the Stress Interaction Model (body, mind, and environment) are so clearly interconnected, when you learn to manage stress with a technique that focuses on one area, you often automatically help manage stress related to the other areas. For example, deep muscle relaxation is a technique that focuses on body relaxation. Yet, when you relax this way your mind feels calmer, your perspective often improves, and afterward you may deal with environmental stressors in a much more constructive way.

In general, each chapter will contain information and a description of the approach or technique being covered along with a number of personal activities to help you apply what you have learned. Although most of the techniques and behaviors suggested are not terribly complicated, you will find that to change one's behavior, or to add a stress management technique to your life-style may not be easy. You must be motivated and persistent. Don't expect any miraculous changes. Your progress will be gradual and this program will work better if you work on it over a period of time so that you have many opportunities to apply what you are learning and then restudy the approach or technique.

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

The primary purpose of this chapter has been to teach you about the interactional nature of stress. A model which includes three basic parts of a stress interaction—environment, body, and mind—was introduced. You should understand this model and particularly the fact that the categories are very strongly related and interactive. The importance of considering this interaction when looking at personal stressors is crucial. Your examination of your own stressors and your role in the interpretation and creation of them should help you further understand the interaction of different parts of the stress management model.

You also should understand the underlying philosophy and meaning of the term *management* relative to stress management. The goal in stress management is not to eliminate stress, it is to reduce and manage it. Remember that all stress is not negative and that it needs to be managed only if it affects you negatively in some way.

As you begin to focus on different stress management approaches, you have identified some of your own stressors and you have examined them in light of the stress interaction model. A sample procedure for keeping a "stress journal" also has been presented. You should record regularly in this journal as you go through the chapters of this book.

SUMMARY

1. Experiencing stress is usually an interactional process that involves receiving information from your surroundings (environment), processing it (mind), and experiencing the emotional and physiological (body) results of the biochemical reactions that occur as a result of the processing.
2. Stressors, which are commonly thought of as external to the person, are often strongly affected by the person's perceptions and interpretations. These are, in turn, affected by personality, beliefs, mood, memories, and many other factors.
3. Worrying about imagined events can create a stress reaction without any external stressor.
4. Because we can become conscious of stress symptoms like muscle tension, these symptoms can, themselves, become cues for additional anxiety. This feedback loop can create a dangerous cycle of anxiety and stress.
5. Phobias are a special kind of "automatic" fear reactions that don't appear to be affected by factors like beliefs, personality, or mood.
6. Stimulants, such as caffeine, can create stress-like physical symptoms, and cause a person to overreact to minor situations that might not normally be stressful.
7. The term life-style can be used to describe one's environment. It is particularly appropriate because it implies that one has considerable control over one's immediate environment.

PART II

RELAXATION APPROACHES

TO STRESS

MANAGEMENT

Part II

RELAXATION APPROACHES TO STRESS MANAGEMENT

How many times have you heard someone say, "Relax, don't be so uptight," or something similar? Relaxation is the antithesis of tension and is certainly a major way to manage stress. You just can't be tense and stressed if you are relaxed. If you can learn to relax on a regular basis, you can greatly decrease the negative effects of stress and anxiety, and increase your general level of functioning and comfort.

As you learned from the *Stress Interaction Model*, physical relaxation doesn't occur in isolation from your mind or the environment. When you physically relax, you also relax mentally, and you tend to handle environmental stressors better. So, although approaches in this section are generally focused on body relaxation, their effects are far-reaching. In Chapter 3, a format for assessing and evaluating your current relaxation methods is presented, as well as information on several specific approaches to relaxation. Chapter 4 contains a discussion of meditation and Chapter 5 is a presentation of progressive deep muscle relaxation.

Many ideas and approaches will be covered in these chapters. This is your opportunity to explore some ideas that are new to you and to revisit some things you already know. You don't necessarily have to use or practice all of the different approaches, but take the time to try them out and to complete the activities so that you can begin to formulate your own stress and anxiety management plan.

3

Chapter

GENERAL RELAXATION METHODS



Walking in the mountains can be a powerful anxiety management technique.

How do you relax? Do you do it often? Does it take special arrangements? Are you alone? With others? Do you have to spend money? Does it slow your body down? Do you have difficulty finding the time? Relaxation is not as easy as you might think. Americans seem to be obsessed with work and activity. Instead of the decrease in working hours and increase in leisure that was predicted twenty years ago, Americans have actually increased work hours and decreased leisure time.

A number of factors affect relaxation habits. Cultural and personal values play a part. If you don't value the idea of relaxation and you value work and achievement above all else, you will have difficulty finding time to relax. Family and friends also play a role. Their values and demands on your time can make a great difference, as can what you learned from your parents about relaxation.

and its value. Knowledge, skill, and technique also are important. In addition to valuing relaxation and finding the time for it, you have to know how to relax. As a way of examining your own relaxation behavior, complete Activity 3.1, which is a survey of your own relaxation attitudes and behavior.

Activity 3.1 **Relaxation Survey**

List the ways you relax. Record anything that helps you relax. Try to identify at least ten ways you currently relax.

Rating Dimensions: PR = Degree of physical relaxation
MR = Degree of mental relaxation
Tl = Amount of time you spend doing it
EP = Expense and preparation necessary
FG = Feel guilty when you do it
AFD = Depends on alcohol, food, or drugs

Relaxation Activity	Rating Dimensions					
	PR	MR	Tl	EP	FG	AFD
Examples: taking a nap	—	—	—	—	—	—
drinking a cold beer	—	—	—	—	—	—
watching TV	—	—	—	—	—	—
playing softball	—	—	—	—	—	—
collecting stamps	—	—	—	—	—	—
1. _____	—	—	—	—	—	—
2. _____	—	—	—	—	—	—
3. _____	—	—	—	—	—	—
4. _____	—	—	—	—	—	—
5. _____	—	—	—	—	—	—
6. _____	—	—	—	—	—	—
7. _____	—	—	—	—	—	—
8. _____	—	—	—	—	—	—
9. _____	—	—	—	—	—	—
10. _____	—	—	—	—	—	—

Now go back over your ways of relaxing and rate them on the following dimensions (scale 1 = A great deal, 2 = Some, and 3 = Very little)

As you examine your ways of relaxing, keep in mind that all methods don't work equally well. Some forms of relaxation that depend upon a substance like food, alcohol, or drugs, can also be harmful to you. Others, like reading or watching TV may be useful, but they don't really give you the same deep sense of relaxation that you can get with some of the other methods you will encounter in this book.

Keep your list and rating of your relaxation methods for further reference. You may want to modify your list after you learn some new techniques and approaches. Also, think about your level of commitment and any difficulties that you have doing the things that relax you.

In addition to the two specific relaxation techniques, meditation and deep muscle relaxation, to be discussed in Chapters 4 and 5, many specific methods can be useful. Some of these—deep breathing, visualization, and enjoying natural surroundings—are included in this chapter. Many others such as massage, biofeedback, autogenics, and self-hypnosis are not covered in this book. The relaxation effects of these techniques are somewhat similar to those of meditation and deep muscle relaxation. They all involve a relatively easy activity that produces profound physical and mental relaxation.

DEEP BREATHING

A number of books exist just on breathing, and disciplines like yoga include extensive training in different forms of breathing. To simplify greatly, we will concentrate on two very important aspects of deep breathing, **regular deep breathing** using the diaphragm, and a periodic, **stress-releasing relaxing sigh**.

Breathing deeply may sound simple, but it is a very important relaxation technique. Many of us don't breathe properly. We have often been taught to pull our stomachs in and push our chests out. This may provide attractive looking posture, but it often causes us to breath shallowly with our chests rather than deeply through the diaphragm. Deep breathing is an important stress reducer. When you breathe deeply, you are receiving more oxygen and your heart can pump more slowly. This is quite different from the shallow breaths with quickening heart rate that characterize breathing in stressful situations. In a sense, deep breathing and tension are mutually exclusive, so that when you breath deeply you automatically counter the tension associated with quick shallow breathing.

Another variation of deep breathing that has a remarkably relaxing effect is the stress-releasing sigh. You may do this naturally when you feel tense. It involves breathing in deeply, holding your breath for a few seconds, and then exhaling slowly. This kind of refreshing and relaxing sigh can go a long way toward eliminating body tension. Many participants in stress management workshops have found that a helpful procedure is to develop a cue that reminds them to take a relaxing deep breath frequently during their normal work day.

You can monitor your breathing and learn the advantages of deep breathing with Activities 3.2 and 3.3.

Activity 3.2

Regular Deep Breathing

Lie down on your back on a comfortable rug or other firm surface. Loosen any constricting clothing and take off your shoes. Place one or both hands on your stomach and feel your breathing process. If you don't feel your stomach moving up and down as you breathe, you are probably breathing shallowly from your chest and not using your diaphragm to breathe deeply. Concentrate on breathing deeply and breathe enough for your stomach to move gently. Ideally, you should inhale and exhale mainly through your nose. Take about five or ten minutes to continue deep breathing while you monitor the rise and fall of your stomach. After you have finished this activity, notice how much more relaxed you are and how relaxed your body feels.

Activity 3.3

Stress-Releasing Relaxing Sigh

List at least five cues that you might use to remind yourself throughout the day to take a relaxing sigh. The cue can be a regular behavior, a visual sign, a sound, or any combination of these. Use anything that will cue your stress-releasing sigh frequently, particularly during the stressful part of your day. List below five ideas for a personal cue.

Example: Using the intercom buzzer on my phone.

Turning on my computer or typewriter.

Taking a piece of paper from my "in" basket.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____
5. _____

Now pick one or two of the cues and experiment for a day or two with taking a stress-releasing sigh every time the cue is presented.

VISUALIZATION/DAYDREAMING

Your mind can be a great ally in helping you relax. Stress often occurs when we get so involved with our work or other activities that we seem to lose perspective and forget that our involvement, whatever it is, is not as significant and important as it seems. If a report doesn't get done, it won't be the end of the world, or if a test is failed, it isn't exactly fatal. Short of a two-week vacation in Hawaii, daydreams and visualizations can help separate you from your current task and give you a brief and often pleasurable respite.

We all daydream in one way or another. People who worry a great deal often have stress-producing daydreams where they live out their worst fears. Others use daydreams as a way to get away from reality briefly and to feel pleasure and relaxation. The term daydream is used here to describe a mostly deliberate fantasy or visualization. Like imagining that you are in a rowboat on a mountain lake, basking in the sun with dramatic, white capped peaks rising all around you. Dreams that occur when you sleep are different. They are not deliberate, and are a result of an unconscious process at work. A daydream or visualization occurs when you consciously think about a place, activity, or some other scenario. They are not totally conscious because often the initial scene triggers related thoughts and feelings.

In using daydreams for relaxation you capitalize upon the fact that relaxing thoughts and feelings accompany certain scenes. If you can produce the relaxing scene in your mind, you may well experience some of the warm, comfortable feelings that you have associated with that scene. Of course, you need to be careful about daydreams and visualizations. If you can't control them, and use them to your advantage, they can actually produce stress. For example, if you daydream to avoid getting a task completed, the consequences of not finishing the task may be very stress-producing. On the other hand, if you can daydream for five or ten minutes when you are stuck or feeling very stressed, you may be able to come back and feel more relaxed and be more productive. Take some time in Activity 3.4 to describe a daydream or fantasy scene that you can use to generate a feeling of calm and relaxation for yourself. Remember to pick something that you know generates feelings of relaxation and comfort.

Activity 3.4 Relaxation Scene

Think of at least two scenes that come to you easily and that you find very restful and relaxing. Try your hand at describing each scene in some detail to help you immerse yourself in it.

Example: I am thinking of a scene from last summer when I was staying with a friend at this cottage in the mountains. We would sit out on the porch after supper and watch the sun set over the lake. It was comfortably warm, with a wonderful breeze blowing off the lake. We could hear birds singing and sometimes the faint rustle of the trees in the wind. The sun would gradually go down over the horizon and turn into magnificent reds and oranges, and the reflection off the lake was like nothing I've ever experienced. We would sit, sometimes for long periods, without

talking, deep in our own enjoyment of the moment, but with the sense of warmth and trust that comes from being with someone you have known for many years.

Describe in detail two scenes that you can use for a relaxing visualization.

1. _____

2. _____

After you have created some scenes in Activity 3.4, try using them for five or ten minutes when you are feeling stressed or tired. If you aren't used to controlling your dreams, the procedure may take a little practice, but you may discover a very useful stress management technique. And, of course, when you can arrange an actual vacation to your relaxation scene, that will help too.

ENJOYING NATURAL SURROUNDINGS

The exercise using relaxing visualizations is a very good lead into a general discussion of nature and its uses as a relaxation technique. Your relaxing scenes probably involved some kind of natural setting, away from it all. We all seem to be able to experience a sense of relaxation, calmness, and renewal when we are somewhere that is characterized by natural beauty and the quiet solitude that comes from being away from most other people. Whether it is a week in the backwoods or a fifteen-minute hike down a nature trail, a great deal can be gained from getting away from civilization.

Our sense of time seems to be altered when we are enjoying the beauty of a stream or the majesty of a hundred-year-old tree. For a time, we can forget the many deadlines and obligations, and somehow realize their relative importance when compared to the vastness, complexity, and beauty of nature.

If you don't regularly enjoy getting out in the woods, the mountains, or to the beach, plan some trips. Try to identify places nearby (local parks, hiking trails) where you can go without much planning or preparation. Even if you are normally a very social person, try taking a walk by yourself. Don't make it a time to solve your problems and reflect on your goals, although that is okay sometimes. Just allow yourself to be there and to enjoy and notice everything around you. One way of heightening the experience might be to record your thoughts and feelings in your stress journal. Or better yet, take your journal with you and find a spot where you can relax and write.

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

In this chapter you have had an opportunity to examine your current relaxation methods and to learn about deep breathing, visualization, and enjoying natural surroundings. As you go through this stress management program, you need to try each of these techniques and methods described. You may decide to keep or reject different approaches, but you can't really evaluate their potential unless you give them a try. Take the time to try those methods in each chapter before continuing to the next chapter.

SUMMARY

1. There are many different ways to relax. Cultural and personal values, family members and friends, and relaxation skills and knowledge all affect a person's relaxation behavior.

2. Some methods and techniques are more effective than others in providing a deep and profound sense of relaxation.
3. Regular deep breathing and the regular use of the stress-reducing sigh can have great relaxation benefits.
4. Visualization and daydreaming focusing on previously experienced relaxing scenes can provide a welcome relaxation break and change in perspective during a stressful day.
5. Enjoying natural surroundings, whether by spending a week in the woods or taking a silent hike, can provide a deep sense of calmness and relaxation.

MEDITATION/RELAXATION RESPONSE



You need to be in a comfortable position to meditate

For many people, the word meditation conjures up visions of long-bearded gurus walking across hot coals or monks chanting at dawn in cold cells. Although many religions and philosophies include some kind of meditation, accepting a specific religious or philosophical orientation is not necessary in order to use meditation as a relaxation technique.

Although meditation has been adapted in modern times for use as a relaxation technique, its roots go back thousands of years. A number of different kinds of meditation exist in both Eastern and Western traditions. Although the form or method may vary, each method seems to have an inward

focus and restriction of external perception as the common elements. Doctors Naranjo and Ornstein, in a book titled *On the Psychology of Meditation*, discussed this commonality in each of the major eastern meditative traditions:

The strong common element seems to lie in the actual restriction of awareness to a single, unchanging process. It does not seem to matter which actual physical practice is followed: whether one symbol or other is employed; whether the visual system is used or body movement repeated; whether awareness is focused on a limb or on a sound or word or prayer. (Naranjo & Ornstein, 1971, p. 161)

Dr. Herbert Benson, in his book *The Relaxation Response*, identified four elements as basic to all types of meditation. The elements are

1. quiet environment,
2. mental device,
3. passive attitude, and
4. comfortable position.

Benson quoted a variety of Christian mystics, Eastern religious philosophers, and secular writers to illustrate the universality of these basic elements. *The Prayer of the Heart* described in a compendium of Greek and Byzantine writing incorporates all four of these elements:

Sit down alone and in silence. Lower your head, shut your eyes, breathe out gently, and imagine yourself looking into your own heart. As you breathe out, say "Lord Jesus Christ, have mercy on me." Say it moving your lips gently, or simply say it in your mind. Be calm, be patient and repeat the process frequently. (Benson, 1975, p. 122)

The passive attitude and use of an object on which to dwell can be seen in a quote from Al Ghazali, a Sufi Moslem:

And let him see to it that nothing save God most high enters his mind. Then as he sits in solitude, let him not cease, saying continuously with his tongue, "Allah, Allah," keeping his thought on it. At last he will reach a state when the motion of his tongue will cease, and it will seem as though the word flowed from it. Let him persevere in this until all trace of motion is removed from his tongue, and he finds his heart persevering in thought. (Benson, 1975, pp. 131, 132.)

MEDITATION AND STRESS

If you have never meditated before, you are in for a very positive experience. The effects of meditation can be profound and experienced on many levels. In this book, we are most concerned with the use of meditation as a relaxation technique. However, many people who meditate use it as a centering technique, a way to experience different states of consciousness, and as part of a lifestyle that rejects contemporary materialistic values.

A number of measurable, physical effects of meditating can be observed. These have been studied and documented. They include

1. decreased oxygen consumption,
2. decreased respiratory rate,
3. decreased heart rate,
4. increased alpha brain waves,
5. decreased blood pressure, and
6. decreased blood lactate levels.

Dr. Benson described these changes as representing a **hypometabolic** state associated with generally decreased activity in the sympathetic nervous system. This state is in direct opposition to the **hypermetabolic** state related to arousal and the "fight and flight" mechanism. Benson believed that this relaxation state is a natural counterpart to the "fight and flight" arousal state. He contended that although a natural relaxation response exists, it is not used very frequently in our culture.

It is unusual, in our work-oriented, achievement-oriented culture, to see someone sit quietly and turn his or her attention inward. In a sense, we have lost this natural form of relaxation that often has been associated with religion. If you can rediscover this ancient way of relaxing and centering yourself, you will have developed a powerful and simple stress management tool.

Regular meditation, in addition to providing you with an immediate profound sense of rest and relaxation, can help decrease your cumulative anxiety and stress. Recall the daily stress curve which generally rises during the day. One or two sessions of meditation will decrease your stress curve and may help prevent the physical problems and diseases related to accumulated stress and tension.

Although meditation is not generally useful in specific stress situations, it can greatly reduce your response reactivity to stressors. That is, you will be less tense overall and better able to cope with a variety of problems in a calmer manner. If, through regular meditation, you are able to stay calm and cope with a number of stressors at work, you are less likely to be upset by instances such as your son spilling his milk at the dinner table. Because of this improvement in general coping ability, people who meditate regularly have reported increased energy, higher self-esteem, greater self-confidence, better relationships, and better work performance.

LEARNING TO MEDITATE

Basic meditation, what Dr. Benson called the **Relaxation Response**, is not difficult to learn and once mastered it is a natural, self-rewarding process. Although meditation can be learned and practiced independently, having supervision by an experienced teacher is helpful. You probably are more likely to follow through with the regular practice of meditation if you are in some kind of formal training program. In general, motivating yourself to practice on a regular basis is more difficult than learning the technique itself.

Let us review the basics and then you can start your own meditation plan. Remember four basic directions.

1. Find a Quiet Place

You need a quiet room or place where you won't be disturbed. Try to find a place where you won't hear distracting noise or conversation. A quiet environment is particularly important when you are starting out. After you have meditated for a while you will be able to more easily screen out external noises and other distractions.

2. Identify A Mental Device

By repeating a word or phrase to yourself you will be able to focus your energy inward and ignore outside stimulation and thought. The word or phrase seems to merge with your heartbeat to form a kind of regular rhythm. The repetition will help you screen out distracting thoughts. You can imagine that thoughts move into the rhythm or cycle of the repetition and then gently float back out without your having to attend to them. In many meditation traditions this repeated word or sound is called a mantra.

3. Maintain A Passive Attitude

Being passive means that you let the relaxation response come to you naturally. You don't try to produce it. If you find yourself trying too hard or worrying about whether or not you are being successful, you have lost the passive attitude. Giving up control is difficult, but try to do so when you meditate. Trust that the response will work for you and don't worry about the process. This is a time when you don't want to analyze, or evaluate.

4. Find A Comfortable Position

Although many traditional meditating positions are possible, the simplest is probably a chair that allows you to lean back and relax. Other alternatives such as using a simple straight back chair or sitting comfortably on the floor in a yoga, cross-legged position will also work. Avoid meditating while lying down because of a tendency to fall asleep.

Now that you have learned the basics you are ready to try meditating. Normally one meditation time period is about 15 to 20 minutes long. If you are worried about falling asleep, set a gentle (music radio) alarm. After you have completed your first 15 to 20 minute meditation period, complete the questions in Activity 4.1.

Most people have a reasonably good first experience with meditation. Don't give up if it wasn't what you expected or if you had a problem getting into it. Keep trying, perhaps in a day or two. Remember that this process takes some practice. Results will improve over time and it will get easier as you go along. Many people who have meditated for a period of time are not conscious of the repeated sound; they seem to go into a kind of automatic, relaxed state. This might be called a **conditioned relaxation response** from a psychological point of view.

Activity 4.1 **Initial Meditation**

DIRECTIONS: Write out your reactions related to the following areas.

General feelings _____

Physical sensations _____

Sense of relaxation _____

Mental sensations (thoughts) _____

Problems _____

One of the nice things about meditation is that the chance of a negative effect is almost nil. Meditation is a natural, simple activity. In essence you are sitting quietly and resting, while you focus inward. Of course, too much meditation (more than a few times per day) may interfere with your life and result in too much focus inward. For people who are severely depressed or who have serious psychological disorders, this may be a problem. Also, the peace and calmness that comes with regular meditation may challenge you to rethink a hectic life-style.

DEVELOPING A PLAN

Now that you have tried to meditate and had some success, the next step is to think about planning for regular meditation. The challenge is to develop a way to meditate on a regular basis. The following six suggestions will help.

1. Create a Satisfactory Environment

Find a place to meditate that you can use consistently. Finding a quiet spot that is easily available to you may be more difficult than you think. You may need the cooperation of family, friends, or roommates. You should not be disturbed when you meditate and people around you should respect your need for quiet and privacy. Remember also to turn your phone off, and put a note on your door if necessary.

2. Meditate at the Same Time Every Day

Meditating twice a day for fifteen to twenty minutes generally gives the best results. By meditating at the same time every day you can maximize the conditioning effect. When you sit to meditate in the same location at the same time you will almost automatically go into a relaxed, meditative state. Some people who meditate report that they develop a dependence on meditation and they seem to need it at a regular time of day. This is probably similar to what has been called a **positive addiction** regarding regular exercise.

3. Find Your Own Best Time and Length of Meditation

Most people seem to have a meditation cycle that automatically falls between fifteen and twenty minutes. If you feel as if you may fall asleep or meditate longer than twenty minutes, you should wear a watch or have a clock available so that you can glance at the time periodically, or you may want to use a clock radio with an alarm that can be set at a quiet music station. Try to avoid loud noises, as they can be quite jarring if you are meditating deeply.

Meditation seems to be easiest and most useful when practiced on an empty stomach. Arranging your meditation times before meals usually is best. The most universally helpful time seems to be before dinner. For most people this is a time when they need to relax and renew themselves after a full day of activity. Some people also meditate before lunch and some start out the day with meditation before breakfast.

4. Use Social Reinforcement

When you are first learning to meditate, find someone else who is also learning and compare your experiences with that person. This way the fun and excitement can be shared, and you also can discuss your reactions. Remember, though, not to worry about how well you are meditating. If you find yourself worrying, you have violated the requirement to maintain a passive attitude.

5. Expect Different Experiences

Your meditation experiences will vary. At times you will be conscious of repeating your word or phrase, while at other times you will be totally unaware of them. During some meditations you will have a number of interfering thoughts while at other times your mind will be blank. Sometimes you may be aware of colors or scenes and at other times just blank space. Part of the enjoyment of meditation involves these different experiences, and remember that during all of these **subjective** experiences your body and mind are relaxing.

6. Do Not Force Meditation

At times you cannot, or do not feel like meditating. Do not force yourself. Certainly, nothing is wrong with deciding not to meditate on specific occasions. Watch out, though, that you do not begin to find other things to do and lose the meditation habit.

In developing your meditation plan you need to attend to a number of factors. Activity 4.2 will help you with this.

Activity 4.2 **Meditation Plan**

DIRECTIONS: Check those items that you have included in your plan.

1. Quiet Place

Identified a place where I won't be disturbed. _____

Obtained cooperation from family/roommates. _____

Have a place free from significant outside noise. _____

Arranged to turn off phone or hold calls. _____

Have a comfortable chair available. _____

2. Time

Have set a regular time(s). _____

Arranged my schedule to accommodate this time. _____

Have clock or radio alarm. _____

Obtained cooperation from family/roommates. _____

3. Social Reinforcement

Arranged to discuss meditation experiences with a partner. _____

Have a friend/family member with whom to discuss results. _____

4. Passive Attitude

Willing to suspend evaluation. _____

Willing to accept different experiences. _____

5. Identifying Blocks

List three things that you think may get in your way when you try to set up a meditation schedule, then brainstorm and discuss ways of overcoming them with a friend or family member.

a. _____

b. _____

c. _____

You are now ready to try meditating for a few weeks. Don't be afraid to experiment with different places, times, conditions, etc. Also, record your subjective experiences in your stress journal.

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

You have now learned one of the best and simplest stress management techniques. The basic meditation process has been presented and many suggestions have been made to help you set up a meditation plan. Give meditation an honest try, but remember that this is only one specific relaxation technique. It may be one that you will incorporate or perhaps you will find an equivalent method that works better. (Deep muscle relaxation which is covered in the next chapter is one viable alternative or you may have decided that one of the relaxation methods previously covered works for you.)

SUMMARY

1. Although meditation often is associated with religion or a particular philosophy of life, it is possible to use it as a relaxation technique without adhering to any particular religion or philosophy. (If you use it regularly, however, the calmer approach that it gives you may affect your own philosophy of life.)
2. Meditation has a very long history and all forms of meditation seem to have common elements.
3. Dr. Herbert Benson has identified four common elements of meditation: a quiet environment, an object or word to dwell on, a passive attitude, and a comfortable position.
4. A number of physical and mental changes take place during meditation. They appear to be opposite what happens during the "fight and flight" mechanism.
5. The regular practice of meditation can help combat the accumulation of stress, and by increasing your sense of calm and balance can help you better cope with daily stressors.
6. Meditation can become a kind of conditioned response if you practice it at a regular time every day.
7. Maintaining a passive attitude and fitting meditation into your daily schedule are two of the most difficult aspects of meditation. The technique, itself, however, is simple and easy to learn.

5

Chapter

PROGRESSIVE DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION



Deep muscle relaxation involves tensing and then relaxing various muscle groups.

Progressive deep muscle relaxation is another technique that can be used to achieve a very deep state of relaxation. It was first described by Dr. Edmund Jacobson in 1938. Dr. Joseph Wolpe later used the technique as part of a behavior therapy technique called **systematic desensitization**. In this approach the client is taught to relax (conditioned) and then taken through a visualization of his or her anxiety problem and asked to produce the conditioned relaxation response to counter the anxiety that he or she feels during the visualization of the stressful situation. Eventually

the client is conditioned to relax during the presentation of the anxiety cues, and since he or she can't feel anxious and relaxed at the same time, the anxiety and stress feelings are eliminated or greatly lessened. The technique has been very successful with phobias.

The technique has been borrowed for use in general stress management because it is such an easy and powerful way to develop a conditioned relaxation response. Two basic uses are employed in general stress management. In the first, **progressive deep muscle relaxation** is used as a regular daily method for reducing accumulated stress. It is quite similar to meditation and can have the same dramatic effects. This general reduction of stress can create a very positive life-style, and beneficial behavioral and attitudinal changes.

The second use is called active or **cue-controlled relaxation**. In this use, you learn to produce the conditioned relaxation response to provide an "on-the-spot" decrease of tension during stressful situations. If your hands shake, or your mind goes blank during a test or speech, an active elicitation of the relaxation response will help decrease the tension and stress symptoms. Both approaches will be covered in this chapter.

PROCESS OF PROGRESSIVE DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION

The process of progressive deep muscle relaxation is simple. Basically, you systematically tense and then relax various muscle groups in your body. The sensation that you have after clenching your fist or other muscle group, and then relaxing it, is a kind of exaggerated relaxation. Because of the energy that you use to tighten the muscle, a period immediately after the tensing exists when the muscles are in a state of recovery. This state is one of very profound relaxation. By tensing and releasing various muscle groups, you create a progression toward an overall state of deep relaxation. As you notice the difference between tension, your normal state, and the exaggerated relaxation, you will progressively release tension throughout your body. If you tend to carry tension in a specific area, you will notice the contrast between that tension and your overall relaxed state. As this progressive relaxation state begins to overtake you, your mind will become calmer and you will care less about the worries and difficulties which might be present in your mind. Just as calmness of mind in meditation moves to your body, the deep muscle relaxation in your body leads to calmness of mind.

In addition to the muscle tensing and relaxing, two other important factors are part of progressive deep muscle relaxation. The first is **deep breathing**. As you progress through the muscle groups tensing and relaxing, you will also be concentrating on deep breathing. Tension is released every time you take a very deep breath. The stress-releasing sigh also can be used to increase the relaxation effects of this procedure. The second important factor is **suggestion**. Although this is an approach that focuses on your muscles, you will be able to relax more deeply by focusing on the expected systematic relaxation. In fact, you need to expect that after each muscle relaxation the relaxation will spread to the rest of your body. **Relaxing visualizations** are also sometimes a part of this technique.

MEDITATION VERSUS MUSCLE RELAXATION

Although meditation and progressive deep muscle relaxation appear to accomplish similar states of relaxation, people sometimes have different reactions to the two techniques. Some find one technique easier or more productive than the other. In a way, the relaxation that both techniques produce is a kind of conditioned response that people learn to produce while they sit quietly. For some, meditation is easier because it does not involve muscle tensing and releasing. These people tend to achieve the relaxed state more easily through their minds. Muscle relaxation is often preferred by people who have difficulty with meditation or who have specific muscle tension areas. One advantage of deep muscle relaxation is that the conditioned response can be triggered with a cue and used actively in particular stress situations.

LEARNING PROGRESSIVE DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION

Before you learn how to practice the technique, a word of warning needs to be expressed. Watch out for any muscle, joint, or other physical problems that might be negatively affected by the tensing of a particular muscle group. If you need to, skip a muscle group. As you are going through the procedure of tensing and relaxing muscles, remember the following:

1. keep your eyes closed;
2. sit or lie in a comfortable position (the instructions for muscle tensing and relaxing are for a sitting position, but they can be modified for using the technique in a prone position);
3. wear loose, comfortable clothing;
4. find a place where you won't be disturbed;
5. try to concentrate on the difference between tension and relaxation;
6. imagine that tension is flowing out of your body; and
7. take deep, relaxing breaths, try to breathe from your abdomen.

You may want someone to read over the instructions for tensing and relaxing to you the first time you try it, or you can record the instructions yourself and then listen to the tape. Commercially recorded tapes also are available at many bookstores. Most people report better initial results if they listen to the instructions; however, remember that your ultimate goal is to be able to produce the conditioned relaxation response yourself.

For each muscle group mentioned, you are to tighten a muscle, hold it five to fifteen seconds, and then slowly relax that muscle group. Repeat each muscle group at least once, more if that is a particularly tense area for you. Set your own pace, but relax for at least five seconds before you

move on to the next muscle tensing. After you have practiced regularly for a week or so, you may be able to use the abbreviated set of exercises and eventually, as you develop the condition relaxation response, you may use only one or two muscle-tightening procedures to achieve a relaxed state.

Activity 5.1 **Deep Muscle Relaxation**

General Directions

Sit back quietly, relax, and breathe deeply. Begin to imagine that all the tension is slowly going out of your body. As you go through the progressive deep muscle relaxation you will feel more relaxed each time you tighten and relax a specific muscle group. In order to develop a conditioned response, say the word "relax" to yourself every time you relax a muscle group. Keep your eyes closed and try to screen out any external noises or distractions. Begin with the muscles in your arms and shoulders.

A. Arms and Shoulders

1. Put your arms out in front of you and clench both fists (keep the muscles tensed for five to fifteen seconds). Note tension in your forearm and hand. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
2. Now, put your arms out in front of you with palms up and bring your fingers up until you touch your shoulders. Notice the tension in your biceps and upper arms. Now relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
3. Straighten and stretch out your arms with your fingers spread out and forward as far as possible. Note the tension in your upper arm and fingers. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat. (Remember to breathe deeply and notice how your body is getting more and more relaxed.)

B. Face, Neck, and Shoulders

1. Wrinkle your forehead. Note the tension around your eyes, temples, and forehead. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
2. Close your eyes tightly. Note tension around your eyes and temples. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
3. Press your tongue up on the roof of your mouth. Note tension in your mouth and jaw area. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
4. Press your lips together tightly. Notice tension in the mouth and/or jaw. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.

5. Press your head back until you feel tension in your neck and shoulders. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
6. Push your head forward, moving your chin down toward your chest until you feel tension in your throat and neck. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
7. Shrug up your shoulders. Raise them until you feel tension in the shoulders and neck. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat. (Remember to breathe deeply and notice that you are becoming progressively more relaxed.)

C. Chest, Stomach, and Lower Back

1. Arch your back, move away from your chair, and push your elbows back. Note tension all along your spine. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
2. Take a deep breath and hold it. Notice the tension in your chest and stomach. Relax and exhale slowly. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
3. Suck in your stomach and try to make it reach your spine. Notice the tension in your stomach and lower back. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
4. Push your stomach out. Note the tension in your stomach and along your sides. Relax. Notice the difference between relaxation and tension. Repeat. (Remember to breathe deeply and notice how you are becoming very, very, relaxed.)

D. Hips, Thighs, Legs, and Feet

1. Tense your buttocks by lifting up. Note the tension in your buttocks, back, and upper legs. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
2. Straighten your legs out so that your knees are stiff, your legs are up off the chair, and your toes point away from you. Note the tension in your legs, calves, upper feet, and knees. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat.
3. Straighten your legs out so that your knees are stiff, your legs are up off the chair, and your toes are pointing toward you. Note tension in your legs, calves, ankles, and knees. Relax. Notice the difference between tension and relaxation. Repeat. (Keep breathing easily and deeply. You are becoming more and more relaxed.)

Note: After you complete the muscle relaxation, take some time to enjoy the relaxed state. You may want to use a visualization to further deepen your relaxation.

After you have achieved a state of deep relaxation with the complete version you can begin to experiment with shorter, abbreviated versions. Here is one suggestion for an abbreviated version.

Combining Muscle Groups

1. Tense several facial and neck muscles at the same time. (B1 through B7)
2. Tense several muscles of the arms and trunk together. (A1 through A3 and C1 through C4)
3. Tense some of the lower body muscles together. (D1 through D3)

DEVELOPING A PLAN

You will probably notice that the directions for developing a plan for progressive deep muscle relaxation are quite similar to those for meditation. This is because the practice of the two techniques is so similar. The following are four suggestions for developing a plan.

1. Create A Satisfactory Environment

Find a place to do progressive deep muscle relaxation that you can use consistently. Finding a quiet spot that is easily available to you may be more difficult than you think. You may need the cooperation of family, friends, or roommates. You should not be disturbed while you are practicing deep muscle relaxation and people around you should respect your need for quiet and privacy. Remember also to turn your phone off and to put a note on your door if necessary.

2. Practice Deep Muscle Relaxation at the Same Time Every Day

By doing muscle relaxation at the same time every day you can maximize the conditioning effect. When you practice deep muscle relaxation in the same location at the same time you will almost automatically go into a relaxed state.

3. Use Social Reinforcement

When you are first learning to do deep muscle relaxation, compare your experiences with someone who is also learning. This way the fun and excitement can be shared, and you also can discuss your reactions. You also will have someone available to read the instructions to you for the first few times you try the technique.

4. Expect Different Experiences

Your experiences will vary. Some people find it easy to go through all of the muscle groups, others can abbreviate and achieve the same relaxational state. Levels of relaxation and accompanying mental experiences will be different. Some experience a kind of semiconscious state where they forget all about the muscle tensing, while others need to continue with the tensing and relaxing process. Also, of course, the type of experience that each person has varies from day to day.

In developing your plan, you need to attend to a number of factors. Activity 5.2 will help you with this.

Activity 5.2 **Muscle Relaxation Plan**

DIRECTION: Check the items that you have included in your plan.

1. Quiet Place

Identified a place where I won't be disturbed. _____

Obtained cooperation from family/roommates. _____

Have a place free from significant outside noise. _____

Arranged to turn off phone or hold calls. _____

Have a comfortable chair available. _____

2. Time

Have set a regular time(s). _____

Arranged my schedule to accommodate this time. _____

Obtained cooperation from family/roommates. _____

3. Social Reinforcement

Arranged practice with a partner. _____

Have a friend/family member with whom to discuss results. _____

4. Identifying Blocks

List three things that you think may get in your way when you try to set up a plan to practice deep muscle relaxation on a regular basis, then discuss ways of overcoming them with a friend or family member.

- a. _____
- b. _____
- c. _____

ACTIVE OR CUE-CONTROLLED DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION

The second use of deep muscle relaxation is to help you cope with specific stressful situations. It involves the use of a personal cue or signal to trigger the conditioned relaxation response that you have learned through the regular practice of deep muscle relaxation. For example, imagine that you have been asked by a very good friend to lend her \$1,000 and you are about to call her and tell her that you are not willing to make the loan. As you approach the phone and begin dialing, you become aware of tension in your neck and throat. You realize that you are very anxious about making the telephone call and you are not even sure you can do it. At this point, if you have learned how to actively use the relaxation response, you can take a deep breath, say relax to yourself, or use whatever cue you have developed to bring on the response. You will feel the relaxation come over you and it

will help cancel out the stress and tension you feel about making the call. This same process can be used in any stressful situation. You may not eliminate your stress, but you can probably decrease it to a manageable level.

If you want to use the conditioned relaxation response to help you deal with specific life situations, you must learn to relax in various settings. Remember that when you initially learned deep muscle relaxation you were in a comfortable chair in a quiet environment. Much additional practice and a strongly conditioned response is necessary to achieve a relaxed state at various times and places.

To practice this approach you should learn to relax in different settings and in different body positions—sitting, walking, standing, etc. You may want to rehearse relaxation in a setting that you know is stressful for you. For example, if you get very stressed making presentations at work, go to the room where you make the presentation and practice the relaxation response there when no one else is around; or if taking tests really makes you tense, go into the classroom where you take the tests and practice relaxing. Another helpful method is to use visualization to "desensitize" yourself to the stressful situation. Relax in your normal deep muscle relaxation location and then imagine the stressful situation. As you begin to feel tense, drop the visualization and go back to a state of relaxation. If you do this several times, you will be able to condition yourself to relax when the stress-producing situation comes up in real life.

Remember that when you are using this kind of active relaxation, you are not actually tensing and relaxing your muscle groups. You are using the conditioned, cue-controlled relaxation that you have learned to counter stress without necessarily relaxing the muscle groups. You may use a particular muscle group as part of your cue to bring on the response. A deep breath and tensing your fists might work for you, for example.

In order to learn this active approach you must first learn to achieve a conditioned relaxation response by practicing the regular deep muscle relaxation approach. After you can easily bring the relaxation response on, you are ready to try Activity 5.3.

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

In this chapter, you learned an alternative to meditation for achieving a profound relaxation state. At this point, you can compare how the two different methods worked for you. Pick one of them as your regular relaxation method and continue practicing it at least once each day. If you are also trying the active relaxation approach during specific stressful situations, continue with that process also.

If you are unable to practice one of these techniques regularly, you are missing a very valuable stress management tool. If that is the case, perhaps a good idea would be for you to discuss your difficulty with a friend or counselor. You may need additional help and training in using one of the techniques or you may need to explore your resistance to fitting it into your life-style.

Activity 5.3

Active Relaxation

DIRECTIONS: Go back to Activities 1.4 and 2.1 and pick out three situations that are typically quite stressful for you. List the three situations below.

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Next, put yourself into a deep relaxed state using deep muscle relaxation. After you are relaxed, imagine each stressful scene until you can feel some of the stress and anxiety. After you feel the stress, use your cue and focus back on just relaxing. Do this several times until you are so relaxed that you can't feel any stress when you think about the situation. Reaching such a stage of relaxation may take a few sessions. If you can, go to the place where you experience this stressful situation. Imagine the actual stressful situation and then try to cue the relaxation response. One reminder, if you haven't practiced muscle relaxation for a few weeks and really learned the relaxation response, this cue-controlled, active approach won't work. You must first have learned the conditioned relaxation response.

Now you are ready to try the technique out when you actually encounter the stressful situation. Record the situation and report briefly on your use of the active relaxation responses in your stress diary. If it doesn't seem to work, go back and practice the deep muscle relaxation response for another week or two and then practice the visualization and "on location" practice again.

SUMMARY

1. Progressive deep muscle relaxation is a powerful method of relaxation. The profound relaxation that you learn is incompatible with tension and anxiety and can greatly inhibit stress.
2. A key ingredient in progressive deep muscle relaxation is the feeling of exaggerated relaxation that comes after you tense a particular muscle group. Suggestion and the deep breathing also are important ingredients.

3. Deep muscle relaxation can be used as a regular relaxation technique to help you reduce your overall tension level. It is very similar to meditation and can help you achieve a similar relaxation response. Some people find one technique preferable to the other.
4. In order to achieve the conditioned relaxation response you must practice progressive deep muscle relaxation regularly for several weeks.
5. The relaxation response that you learn from progressive deep muscle relaxation can be used to decrease stress in specific situations. This is called active or cue-controlled relaxation.
6. In order to use active or cue-controlled relaxation, you must be aware of your stress reactions and of the early signs of stress.
7. Rehearsing your stressful situations while you are relaxing and practicing active relaxation in the stressful settings (without the actual stressors present) can help you learn active relaxation.

PART III

NUTRITION

AND

EXERCISE

Part III

NUTRITION AND EXERCISE

Keeping yourself in good physical shape can greatly improve your ability to manage stress and anxiety. If your body and mind are operating at maximum efficiency, you will have a much better chance of coping with daily life stressors, and your body will be better able to handle the negative physical and mental effects of stress. Consider the following example:

Terry is a 32-year-old store manager. He is about fifteen pounds overweight, never exercises, and pays little attention to his diet. He can usually be found with a candy bar or coke in his hand at work. When he comes home at night, he is exhausted and has little energy left for his family. The everyday stresses at work seem to get him down and he doesn't look forward to going to work. He has an almost constant feeling of anxiety and low energy, and often has trouble sleeping. His wife is not happy with their marriage and they almost never talk to each other.

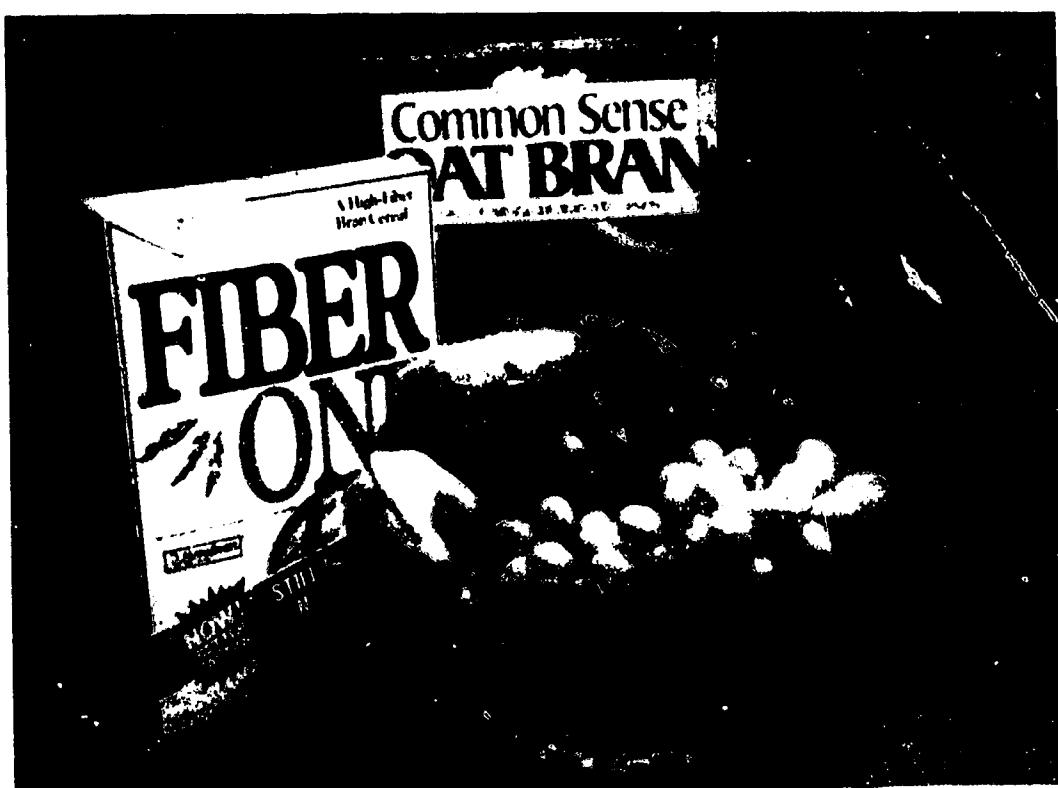
In addition to the higher risk of heart attack and other diseases that Terry is creating for himself, his unhealthy life-style makes it much more difficult for him to manage stress. By not exercising and eating properly he feels tired and sleeps poorly. This often makes him irritable and causes him to overreact to the many stressors that go with his job. He also has little energy left for his family. Good nutrition and exercise may not be the only kind of stress management help that Terry needs, but being in better physical condition would help him a great deal.

In addition to helping you cope with stress, good general health, which involves adequate exercise and good nutrition, will also greatly improve your general functioning and allow you to feel better, accomplish more, and live longer! Recent research strongly supports the importance of good nutrition and exercise to overall mental and physical health. Of course, we have all heard about the beneficial effects of nutrition and exercise since we were children, yet many of us find it quite difficult to maintain a healthy life-style. These chapters on Nutrition and Exercise will provide you with principles and suggestions to help you improve your dietary habits and develop an effective exercise program.

6

Chapter

NUTRITION



Good nutrition can help your body handle stress.

Nutrition is an important and complex topic. Literally hundreds of different diets and approaches to nutrition are available. Therefore, this chapter will contain only a summary of basic principles, some specific information on the effects of certain foods and substances on stress, and suggestions for changing and improving your nutritional behavior.

Most diet books and nutrition manuals contain variations on the themes of eating balanced meals, limiting calories, limiting fats, and eating enough fiber. However, some of them are quite far afield and have little empirical support. Because the body houses such a complex combination of biochemical reactions and because we vary considerably in our reactions to chemicals and foods, each individual must develop an individualized set of personal nutritional guidelines within the general framework of good nutrition. This

should include some consideration of the effect of various foods and chemicals on your emotions and on your stress reactions.

You might conceptualize the development of a good dietary plan for stress management purposes as having two steps. The first step is the development of a sound basic dietary approach—one where you insure balance, low fats, appropriate calories, and adequate fiber. In the second step you can begin to evaluate how specific foods, vitamins, and chemicals effect your stress level and management abilities, and make plans for improvement. You may, for example, decide that caffeine effects you very negatively or that certain foods seem to increase your feelings of stress. To facilitate this two-step approach to stress management and nutrition, the following sections will be included in this chapter: (1) Balanced and Healthy Diet; (2) Modifying and Improving Your Diet; (3) Effects of Specific Foods on Stress and Emotions; (4) Caffeine, Alcohol, and Other Drugs; and (5) Vitamins.

BALANCED AND HEALTHY DIET

1. Eat at Least Three Meals Daily

Within those three meals include a substantial breakfast, and throughout the day include foods from the four basic food groups. The four food groups and recommended amounts are as follows:

Fruits and Vegetables—Four servings per day including one citrus fruit and one green or yellow vegetable.

Bread and Cereal—Four servings per day.

Milk and Milk Products—Two servings per day (more for children).

Meat, Poultry, and Fish—Two servings per day.

The amount of each serving must be determined by your size and activity level. The USDA recognizes a fifth food group, **fats, sweets, and alcohol**, which provides mostly calories and few nutrients. The typical American diet has too much food from the Milk and Milk Products group, and from the Meat, Poultry, and Fish group. Senator McGovern's committee on nutrition in America suggested the following changes:

1. more fruits, vegetables, and whole grains;
2. decreased refined sugar and high-sugar foods;
3. decreased animal fat and higher percentage of unsaturated fats;
4. decreased animal fats (meat) and increased fish and poultry;
5. low-fat and nonfat milk;
6. decreased butter fat, eggs, and high cholesterol items; and
7. decreased salt.

Activity 6.1 is designed to help you evaluate and monitor your own diet.

Activity 6.1

Diet Log

In a log using the format below, record exactly what you eat and drink (include alcohol and any other drugs) for approximately three days. If your diet changes substantially on the weekends, then extend your log to four or five days so as to include a weekend and some weekdays.

Day 1—(Sample Format)

Time/Meal	Food/Beverages/Amount
Breakfast	
Lunch	
Dinner	
Other (Include everything else)	

After you have completed your diet log for several days, examine what you eat in terms of the four food groups. Do you approximate the recommended servings? Keep your diet log for use in examining other aspects of your diet.

2. Maintain a Reasonable Weight for Your Size

Obesity creates a considerable strain on your entire system and puts you at higher risk for heart attack and other life-threatening diseases. Death rates from heart attack are 50% higher for obese people and the risk of death increases about 2% for every pound over "recommended" weight. Obesity is generally defined as a weight at least 20% above your recommended weight. If you are unsure of whether or not you are overweight examine a weight chart. You also can have your percentage of body fat checked. If you are overweight, consider trying to modify your eating habits and develop an exercise program. Avoid fad diets and short term solutions. The only real way to lose weight is to eat less and exercise more. Several suggestions will be included later concerning weight loss. You also may want to discuss being overweight with your physician or a dietitian.

Unfortunately, the need for a reasonable weight is sometimes translated into rather unreasonable expectations because of the emphasis on appearance in our society. Women, in particular, sometimes become obsessed with slimness and develop dangerous conditions like anorexia nervosa and bulimia. A person with anorexia starves herself/himself because of a distorted view of body size and other psychological factors. The bulimic individual tends to eat large amounts and then purge them through vomiting and laxatives. This condition is also related to other psychological variables. These approaches to diet and nutrition are not healthy and can be life-threatening. If you think that you might have one of these conditions, or if you feel obsessed by slimness and weight control, you need to consult a physician, psychologist, or counselor to work out the psychological issues before you can develop a healthy nutrition plan.

3. Eat Foods High in Dietary Fiber

Dietary fiber has recently been recognized as an important ingredient in any healthy diet. Although research is still underway, some evidence is available that fiber can help prevent various kinds of cancer and other diseases, and that certain types of fiber can help absorb fats and decrease cholesterol levels. Fiber also helps the digestive tract work and can reduce constipation by softening stool.

Dietary fiber comes from plants and unprocessed whole grains. Many cereals, fruits, beans, nuts, and vegetables contain significant amounts of dietary fiber. Most cereals now have the amount of dietary fiber per ounce printed on them. If you eat a balanced diet with sufficient foods from the vegetable and fruit and cereal and grain groups, you probably will get sufficient amounts of fiber. Since much of the baked and processed foods have much lower fiber content, you do need to use whole grain and unprocessed food as often as possible. By eating a high fiber cereal every morning, you can greatly increase your fiber intake. Any increase in dietary fiber can cause diarrhea and excessive gas. To avoid this increase the amount of fiber slowly.

4. Avoid High Fat Foods

Cholesterol and saturated fats are related to heart disease. In addition, fats add unnecessary calories to your diet and can cause weight problems. If you haven't had your blood cholesterol tested, do so. People vary considerably

in how they metabolize fats, therefore your diet should be set after you identify your cholesterol level. Some people need to be much more rigorous in limiting fats than others. Following is a very brief list of foods that have a high saturated fat content. You should consult a more extensive list if you find that you have a cholesterol problem.

- Eggs (Yolks)
- Butter
- Whole Milk Products
- Ice Cream
- Cheese
- Cream
- Animal Fat (Shortening)
- Gravy
- Palm, Coconut Oil
- Fatty Meats (Beef, Pork, Chicken Skin)
- Bacon
- Hamburger
- Liver and other Organs

This is only a partial list of some of the highest sources of saturated fat. Remember that much of this fat is hidden in packaged items, baked items, and other places. Also, almost all fast foods are very high in fat and salt content.

5. Avoid Large Amounts of Processed Sugar

Too much processed sugar provides excessive calories, little nutrition, and may have a negative effect on blood sugar. Many people equate excessive sugar with hyperactivity in children, and adults often find that sugar, especially when used in combination with caffeine, produces stress-like symptoms.

MODIFYING AND IMPROVING YOUR DIET

Now that you have analyzed your diet and paid special attention to calories, fats, and fiber, you may want to modify your diet. This is no easy task. It takes sustained effort and requires a concurrent exercise program. To control what you eat without also controlling how you exercise just doesn't make sense. The key is to modify your general eating and exercise habits. (Exercise will be covered in the next chapter.) Several general principles can provide you with help. The following eight are basic.

1. Get Motivated

None of the approaches to diet control will work unless you are motivated to change. Psychological issues may exist that keep you unmotivated. For example, you may be keeping yourself heavy in order to avoid intimate relationships, or you may be eating to try to fill up an empty spot in a nonsatisfying life. You might even be maintaining your weight out of anger at a parent or spouse. You also may just have bad eating habits and see no reason to give up hot fudge sundaes in order to avoid a heart attack in 25 years. Do whatever you can to get yourself motivated to change. Perhaps it will take a talk with a counselor or best friend, or a trip to your doctor to discuss health risks.

2. Keep Track of What You Eat

One of the most effective ways of changing eating behavior is to begin to attend to what you are eating. The best way to do this is to write down everything you eat and then look back over it (as you did in Activity 6.1). Being aware of what and how you are eating will help you improve.

3. Gain Support of Family/Roommates

In order to modify your diet you have to have some control over your meals. This means that you need the cooperation of those people with whom you have meals. Discuss your nutrition goals with these people and try to enlist their support. If you eat out a great deal, you may have a problem. You need to find out which restaurants can provide you with balanced and healthy meals. Avoid typical fast-food restaurants unless you are prepared to eat salads.

4. Control the Foods That You Buy

Psychologists call this stimulus control. If you don't buy high caloric or fatty foods, you are less likely to eat them. In order to control your food buying habits, you need to avoid compulsive buying. This is also a form of stimulus control—not responding to all of the wonderful pictures and packaging. Probably the best procedure is to shop when you are not hungry and to shop only when you have a specific list that was prepared ahead of the shopping time.

5. Use Prearranged Menus

Grabbing a quick bite of whatever you can find is often much easier than cooking a balanced meal. Avoid this temptation. Food preparation takes time and finding time to cook is sometimes difficult. One method that works well is to cook large batches of healthy foods and freeze them into meal-sized portions. Also, some frozen dinners with moderate fat and calorie counts can provide a good balanced meal.

6. Monitor and Reinforce Your Progress

Keep track of how you are doing and reward yourself for improvement. If you are trying to lose or gain weight, check the scale regularly and perhaps make a weight graph. If you are just trying to eat more balanced meals, give yourself a good mark for every day that you eat from the proper food groups. Likewise, if you are trying to lower your cholesterol, check it often and chart your progress. You also may want to develop some specific rewards for your dietary achievements. For example, if you are trying to lose weight, allow yourself to buy a new outfit when you reach a smaller size.

7. Schedule Time for Regular Meals

Although there is nothing magical about having three meals per day, it is somewhat easier to keep track of eating if you follow a traditional schedule. The important thing is to eat each meal so that you don't become hungry and lose your ability to regulate what you eat. Breakfast is particularly important. If you can't eat when you get up, you need to arrange for a nutritious midmorning snack.

8. Avoid Non-nutritious Snacks

This is the area that gives many people a great deal of trouble. You can have the most balanced meals in the world, but if you frequently snack on junk foods, you may as well not bother. If you are a "snacker," plan to have nutritious snacks around and, similarly, don't buy things that you should not eat. Fruits and vegetables, crackers, and rice cakes are good snacks.

If snacking is a major problem for you, consider the psychological aspects. Boredom, anxiety, anger, and depression often trigger snacking. Food seems to be a way of trying to avoid or moderate these emotions. Some babies are given food whenever they cry or get restless and they often turn into people who snack when they are unhappy. If emotions play a large part for you, try to manage the emotion with something other than food. If you are bored or depressed, call a friend or find something to do. If you are angry or anxious, think it through, do what you can about it, and then try to let it go.

Undoubtedly, many more strategies exist that can help you manage your diet. You may even want to join a group or organization that offers you social support. Take some time now to develop a plan using the methods described previously.

Activity 6.2 Modifying Dietary Habits

List at least two concrete ideas that you are willing to carry out under each of the headings below. Be creative, get help from friends or family if necessary:

1. Get motivated.

a. _____

b. _____

2. Keep track of what you eat.

a. _____

b. _____

3. Gain support from family/roommates.

a. _____

b. _____

4. Control the foods that you buy.

a. _____

b. _____

5. Use prearranged menus.

a. _____

b. _____

6. Monitor and reinforce your progress.

a. _____

b. _____

7. Schedule time for regular meals.

a. _____

b. _____

8. Avoid non-nutritious snacks.

a. _____

b. _____

EFFECTS OF SPECIFIC FOODS ON STRESS AND EMOTIONS

Because of the different reactions that each person has to various foods, making many absolute generalizations in this area is difficult. Dr. Rudolph Ballantine (1978) described an Indian approach to the emotional effects of different foods. He also warned that foods affect different people in different ways and suggested that each person must determine experimentally his or her own optimum diet. In the approach he described foods that are categorized into what are called the three **Gunas**:

Tamas—These foods are spoiled partly or highly processed. Alcohol and meat (unless it is freshly slaughtered) are considered to be in this category.

Such foods create a feeling of heaviness, of lethargy; they nourish only the grossest aspects of the body. Behavior results can include:

- Feeling of restlessness and lack of ease.
- Tyrannical, oppressive kind of disposition.
- Makes one less alert
- One may vacillate between irascible restlessness and a tendency to fall asleep. (Ballantine, p. 547)

Rajasic—These foods are highly cooked to increase appeal. They speed up the nervous system and metabolism. These foods include coffee, tea, tobacco, and richly sauced, spicy meat.

Rajasic foods will energize, but not in the sense of lending a clear, balanced energy. Rather, they stimulate and push the organism to increase its speed and to indulge more in physical activity, sensual pleasure, and "creature comforts." (Ballantine, p. 548)

Satvic—This category includes grains and vegetables. By contrast to the above two categories, those foods which are fresh, whole, natural of good quality yet mild, neither over nor undercooked, are experienced as lending calm alertness and at the same time a state of quiet energy. Such foods are called Satvic. They are said to "nourish the consciousness." They not only provide nourishment for the body, but they do not adversely affect the overall energy state. They add vitality to the total system by bringing a perfect, harmonious balance of energy states in the food itself. They do not pull energy from the body, they do not weigh it down, they do not make it heavier; neither do they irritate it, nor push it beyond its capacity. (Ballantine, p. 550)

A rather different approach is presented by Dr. Judith J. Wurtman and M. Daubrot (1986), in their book, *Managing Your Mind and Mood Through Food*. Dr. Wurtman's research indicates that the amino acids created by proteins and carbohydrates affect the neurotransmitters in the brain which in turn affect mood. If you eat protein with or without carbohydrates, the amino acid tyrosine is produced and is available for the brain to produce the neurotransmitter dopamine and norepinephrine. This will occur if your body is using up these substances rapidly, and will make you more alert, mentally energetic, and motivated. If you eat carbohydrates without protein, and no proteins are still in your stomach, the amino acid tryptophan will be produced and made available for the brain to produce serotonin, a neurotransmitter that will decrease stress and anxiety and make one feel more focused and relaxed. The tryptophan will only make its way to the

brain if you eat carbohydrates alone because the amino acids produced by proteins block its entry into the brain.

The significant point here for stress management is the contention that small amounts of carbohydrate eaten without protein can produce feelings of relaxation. Wurtman and Daubrot suggested that three or four ounces of protein will produce the alertness effect and that one or one-and-one-half ounces of carbohydrates will produce the calming, focusing effect. This is somewhat dependent on weight and size of the person. They cautioned against eating proteins and carbohydrates with too much fat. Fish and chicken are the best sources of nonfat protein. There are two types of carbohydrates, simple (sugars) and complex (starches). Small amounts of glucose from any sweets (candy, cookies, pie, jam, soft drinks, etc.) will produce the desired serotonin, as will more complex carbohydrates from bread, rice, potatoes, and pasta. Fructose, sugar from fruit, will not produce the response in a reasonable amount of time.

The only way to decide if these ideas hold true for you is to test them out. If you want to explore the effects of large categories of foods, as those discussed in the three *Gunas*, you should try eliminating different groups of foods over the course of several days. Remember that the best and most widely researched advice calls for a balance of the four standard food groups mentioned at the beginning of the chapter. Dr. Wurtman and Dr. Daubrot's ideas are a bit easier to try out because you can experiment with eating an ounce or two of carbohydrates without proteins fairly easily. You might try this approach when you typically feel stressed, perhaps in mid-afternoon or before you go to bed.

CAFFEINE, ALCOHOL, AND OTHER DRUGS

Caffeine is a stimulant that increases your alertness and generally makes you feel alert and ready for action or activity. It stimulates the central nervous system and helps relieve fatigue and sleepiness. It can also create anxiety attacks and a kind of general anxiousness that tends to make it more difficult for a person who wants to cope with stress and/or to relax. The effects of caffeine can be quite different for different people. Some people can tolerate large amounts and some have trouble with any caffeine. Caffeine is most commonly known as an ingredient in coffee; however, several other foods and beverages contain fairly large amounts:

Instant Coffee, 6 oz cup	86-99 mg
Colas (Coke, Pepsi, Dr. Pepper) 12 oz	32-65 mg
Tea, 6 oz cup	60-75 mg
Chocolate Bar, 3 oz	15-30 mg

A number of prescription (e.g., Darvon) and non-prescription (e.g., Exedrin) drugs also have caffeine, so check labels or consult your pharmacist.

The best way to check out the effect of caffeine on your system is to stop using caffeine or drastically reduce it for several days. If you go "cold turkey," you may have some withdrawal symptoms like a headache. Take a minute to review your diet log (Activity 6.1) to ascertain just how much

caffeine you actually use. If it is more than 200 mg per day, you should experiment with decreasing your intake and determine how that effects your experience of stress. Caffeine stays in your system for several hours, so if you have a cup of coffee in the morning you need not drink several more cups during late morning or early afternoon. If you eat a reasonable lunch with some protein, you shouldn't feel the need for a pick-me-up until late afternoon. You might deal with this with a walk or short break, or if necessary, another cola or cup of tea or coffee.

In our culture we use a number of drugs to help decrease feelings of stress and anxiety. Tranquilizers continue to be widely prescribed remedies for stress, and alcohol and marijuana are often used to counter stress and feelings of anxiety. The use of alcohol for relaxation and as a social lubricant has a very long history. Wine, beer, and other spirits are often part of various cultural events and traditions. Other commonly used drugs like cocaine, LSD, Speed, and Quaaludes are generally used for stimulation and excitement, so they will not be discussed here. Poor stress and anxiety management can certainly, however, be a factor in the development of reliance on many different drugs.

Are alcohol and marijuana harmful, or do they offer an easy and harmless way to relax? They certainly can have harmful side effects if used too frequently or in high dosages. Alcoholism is a major health problem in this country and we are just beginning to realize the negative generational effects of family alcoholism. Large numbers of people have psychological problems because they grew up in dysfunctional homes as a result of alcoholic parents. Certain people have a strong propensity toward addiction to alcohol and often their use begins with a drink or two to relieve stress. If you are one of these people (there seems to be a greater risk if alcohol addiction is present in your nuclear family), then even a drink or two for relaxation is quite risky. Even if you are not prone to alcoholism, you should seriously consider the negative implications of using alcohol as your stress management approach. A good exercise workout, meditation, or deep muscle relaxation is far superior to two martinis after work.

Marijuana has been the drug of choice for many people for the last few decades. Considerable controversy as to the ill effects still exists. More recent research seems to show that it can have harmful side effects, particularly on adolescents who are not finished growing physically or psychologically. Heavy use of marijuana frequently produces what has been called the "amotivational syndrome." Some users become apathetic and unable to accept and meet life's challenges. In this case the drug has been so effective in dulling their feeling of stress and anxiety that they stop growing and developing, an interesting case of too much stress management.

Tranquilizers, when used judiciously, appear to have few negative side effects. They can effectively lower feeling of stress and anxiety and are often useful for situational problems. The major problem with them is the high potential for dependence. At one point, when these drugs were first introduced, physicians often prescribed easily and for long periods of time. This resulted in many patients, more often women, becoming dependent. After the potential abuses became more widely known, physicians became much more circumspect in their use, although we still have many tranquilizer-addicted people in our population.

If you consider the nature of stress, you easily can understand the great potential for abuse of any substance that offers quick relief. To pop a pill or take a drink is certainly much easier than to stay in good physical shape, eat correctly, develop a regular relaxation program, or modify basic thinking or life-style patterns. However, if you have an effective stress management program in your life, the potential for abuse of these drugs will decrease sharply, because you will not have the chronic need to have your stress and anxiety removed. If you use alcohol, tranquilizers, or marijuana as a relaxer, analyze the frequency and dynamics of this use by completing Activity 6.3.

Activity 6.3 **Analysis of Alcohol, Tranquilizer, and Marijuana Use**

This activity has two parts. First, record every use of caffeine, alcohol, or other drugs, for a several-day period. Record also the feelings that you were having prior to taking the drink or using the drug, your perception of the cause of any negative feelings like stress, anger, etc., the social context (whom you were with, what was the activity, if any) and then record your feelings and energy level two hours later. Do this recording as close to the actual occurrence as you can. You may need to carry a small pad or book. It may be cumbersome, but the information will be invaluable to you in analyzing your use patterns.

After you have a record of several days, go back and develop some alternatives to alcohol or drug use in each situation where alcohol or drugs were used to help you cope with stress or another negative emotion. If you had a glass of wine with dinner or drank a beer with a friend on a purely social basis, that should not count as a use for stress reduction. Be honest with yourself, however. A drink with a friend can still be used for reduction of stress. You may be reacting negatively to this activity because it sounds like a prohibitionist approach. This activity and the information on alcohol and drugs is not meant as a moral stricture against their use—it is a very focused attempt to help you analyze and consider the dynamics of your own use as it relates to stress. Following is a sample format to use:

Date, Time, Situation Social Context	Substance Amount	Feeling & Energy Level (a) Prior to ---- (b) Two hours later.
1.		
2.		
3.		

After you go back over the items and brainstorm alternative relaxation methods, pick one or two common situations or times when you use alcohol or other drugs to relax and experiment with using one of the relaxation techniques that you learned in Part II of this book. See a counselor or psychologist for help in assessing your situation if you are using alcohol or other drugs consistently to manage stress.

VITAMINS

Your body needs dozens of vitamins and minerals to function properly. These substances are essential for the processing of food; the operation of your heart, brain, and other organs; the growth of cells; production of hormones; and many other body functions. Small amounts of all these substances are contained in the foods that we eat. Many doctors and nutritionists advise that the best way to get the proper vitamins and minerals is to eat a well balanced diet. Others cite the many reasons why we don't get various vitamins and minerals and therefore need supplements. Some of these reasons include:

1. Processing takes nutrients out of many foods we eat.
2. Vegetables sold in supermarkets have lost vitamins and nutrients because they are grown with chemical fertilizers and pesticides.
3. Overcooking, draining, and other cooking processes eliminate vitamins and minerals.
4. Various prescription and over-the-counter drugs affect the body's ability to absorb vitamins and minerals.
5. Pollutants in our environment affect how our bodies use vitamins and minerals and how vegetables and animal food grow.
6. Chemicals used to raise beef, chicken, and other meats decrease the nutritional value.

To make matters more complicated, vitamins are of two types: **water soluble vitamins** and **fat soluble vitamins**. The fat soluble vitamins can be stored in your body so that you don't need to consume them every day, while the water soluble vitamins are passed out of your body with urine and sweat and, therefore, need to be consumed regularly. The federal government has developed standards that specify how much of each vitamin and mineral the average person needs per day. Many vitamins and foodstuffs list what percentage of the daily allowance of vitamins and minerals are provided by their product. The best advice for general health remains that of eating a balanced diet. Single-capsule multivitamins exist that provide supplementary amounts of vitamins and minerals that are commonly deficient in the American diet. You may want to consider taking one of these supplements as kind of an insurance policy. Consult with a physician, nutritionist, or pharmacist about this issue. Also, you could have your hair analyzed to determine vitamin deficiencies in your body. Don't expect any easy answers, however. You will get varying opinions.

When considering the effects of vitamins and minerals on stress and stress management, consider two important suggestions. First, remember that you maximize your ability to manage and cope with stress by staying healthy. This means that you need adequate vitamins and minerals, and perhaps you should consider a general multivitamin with mineral supplement. Second, there is substantial body of opinion that contends that stress depletes the body of some of the B-complex vitamins. Several "stress formulae" are on the market that contain extra vitamin B supplements. Unfortunately, no

really clear, unequivocal advice is available in this area, so you will have to make your own decision. Be careful with regard to vitamin supplements. Although most large (megadoses) of vitamins and minerals are not harmful, some have possible negative effects. Overuse of vitamins also can have a very negative effect on your wallet or checkbook, since literally dozens of different formulae and combinations exist.

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

In this chapter, you have been encouraged to take a close look at your diet. You can't really do anything about modifying unhealthy eating behavior unless you log what you eat and then develop a strategy for improvement. Modifying unhealthy dietary habits and the use of caffeine, alcohol, and drugs can have a very profound effect on your general functioning as well as on your ability to manage stress. This kind of stress management work is more difficult than just learning and practicing a particular relaxation approach, but it is just as important. Most of the information in this chapter hasn't been specifically related to a particular stress management technique, although some attention has been given to the emotional effects of foods and specific effects of caffeine and other drugs. Remember to seek help from a counselor or psychologist if you have serious problems with eating disorders, alcohol or drug abuse, or dependence on other drugs.

SUMMARY

1. Keeping yourself in good physical condition can help you more effectively cope with stress and minimize the unhealthy effects of excessive stress on your system.
2. The major requirement for a healthy diet is to eat a balanced diet with foods from the four basic food groups.
3. The first step in improving your nutritional habits is to keep a comprehensive diet log so that you can analyze what you currently eat.
4. Several other principles are very important in maintenance of a generally good healthy diet.
 - a. Maintain a reasonable weight for your size.
 - b. eat foods high in dietary fiber.
 - c. avoid high fat foods, and
 - d. avoid large amounts of processed sugar products.
5. In order to modify and improve your diet, you need to be motivated to change, keep track of what you eat, gain the support of family/roommates, control the foods that you buy, use pre-arranged menus, monitor and reinforce progress, schedule time for regular meals, and avoid non-nutritious snacks.

6. The empirical evidence regarding the effect of food on emotions is unclear at this point in time; however, one Indian approach identifies three food groups that have different effects.
7. The production of amino acids from proteins and carbohydrates produces dopamine, norepinephrine, and serotonin, which are neurotransmitters that can affect mood.
8. Caffeine is a central nervous stimulant that can produce stress and anxiety symptoms and decrease coping abilities if used in excess.
9. Alcohol and marijuana are often used in our culture for stress reduction; however, because of other negative effects, they are generally poor substitutes for other stress management techniques.
10. Tranquilizers can be effective stress and anxiety reducers for specific situations, but they have a great potential for addiction.
11. A large number of vitamins and minerals are essential for body functioning. These can generally be gotten from eating a balanced diet.
12. B-complex vitamins appear to be depleted during periods of stress. Stress capsules can be purchased to provide extra B-complex vitamins.

7

Chapter

EXERCISE



Regular exercise helps combat daily tensions and anxieties.

The message about the value of exercise has been widely discussed during the last two decades. The commercial interest in exercise clothing and equipment, with different shoes for every type of exercise, attests to the growing interest in exercise and fitness.

The evidence supporting the value of regular exercise, from both scientific research and personal experience, is overwhelming. You feel better, look better,

work better, love better, and manage your stress better. We evolved as active creatures with our survival dependent upon the ability to be both intelligent and active physically. Our bodies are designed to move and to be active; however, we have become so civilized that more and more labor is performed for us. In order to exercise now, we have to make a point of doing it as a special activity—for most of us it is no longer built into our work or other regular life activities.

TYPES OF EXERCISE

The term exercise is rather broad. What are the different kinds of exercise? Are all types of exercise equally valuable? In general, exercises are of two types—those that **build strength and improve muscle tone** and those that **build overall endurance**. Exercises like weight training, calisthenics, isometrics, and stretching are primarily used to maintain and improve muscle strength, tone, and appearance. These exercises also can build endurance if they increase your heart rate enough for a sustained period of time. Endurance exercises like running, biking, swimming, fast walking, and rowing are called **aerobic** because they elevate your heart rate and provide what is called the training effect. These endurance exercises can, of course, also improve muscle tone, strength, and appearance. Most of the beneficial effects, particularly the longer-term physical health benefits, accrue from aerobic exercise. The two general types of exercise are, of course, not mutually exclusive. Usually, if you are involved in aerobics, you do some stretching and muscle building as part of that process.

In a sense, the definition of what is aerobic is somewhat dependent upon each individual. For an exercise to be aerobic and therefore of maximum value to you, your heart rate must be high enough to provide a training effect. In order to achieve this you must sustain a heart rate for about twenty minutes in a target zone which is between 70 and 80 percent of your heart's maximum attainable rate. If you exercise at least three or four times a week with this elevated heart rate, you can expect an increase in the size and strength of your heart.

You can figure your own target zone by subtracting your age from 220. This will give you an approximate maximum heart rate. Then you can take about 75% of that rate and you will have your approximate target rate. This may vary depending upon your physical condition, size, and other factors. An example of figuring the approximate target rate is given below:

Example—43-year old man

$$220 - 43 = 177 \text{ (approximate maximum rate)}$$

$$177 \times 75\% = 133 \text{ (range 70\% to 80\% = 123 to 142)}$$

Your heart rate should be checked during exercise to ascertain whether you are attaining a heartbeat in the training range. For some exercises, like walking or cycling, it may take a period of time before you reach the training rate (depending upon how fast you are going). Medical cautions, warm-up, and many other aspects of developing an exercise plan will be covered later.

EXERCISE BENEFITS

The benefits of regular aerobic exercise are enormous. Physical health is greatly enhanced. The cardiovascular system is improved, with the heart and blood vessels able to carry more blood and to distribute it faster. Bone and muscle strength is enhanced, weight is controlled, and general coordination and alertness are improved. The brain works better and more creatively, energy level is improved, and general mood is elevated. Because you look better when you exercise you also accrue many social benefits. Self-concept is often improved, attractiveness increased, and sexual functioning is often enhanced.

Regular exercise is also an excellent way to help manage stress and anxiety. The improvement in your general health will improve your general coping abilities. By becoming stronger physically and psychologically you deal with all kinds of stressors more effectively. The improvement in your physical condition goes beyond strength and endurance. By improving your cardiovascular system, you decrease the long-term negative effects of stress on your entire system. Logically, you can assume that exercise probably also improves your immune system and helps you fend off the potentially negative effects of stress on that system.

CHOOSING AN EXERCISE PROGRAM

Many different opportunities are available. You can join a luxurious spa, do vigorous calisthenics on your bedroom rug, play tennis with a friend, or greet the sunset in the latest and fanciest running shoes. If you are not a regular exerciser, how do you choose? A number of important things need to be considered. When you are starting out, give yourself some time to pick something that works for you. Don't make any large expenditures on clothes, equipment, or memberships until you have done some experimentation and evaluation. Consider the following nine suggestions.

1. Choose Something You Like

Exercise is not supposed to be punishment. Try to find something to do that you like. If you passionately hate running, then don't try to run. Think about your past experience with sports and exercise and look for something that you have positive feelings about. Perhaps you were on a swim team as a kid and really enjoyed it, or maybe you always took wonderful long walks with your grandmother.

2. Consider Location and Logistics

Do you prefer to be indoors or outdoors? Would a cross-country or rowing machine in front of the morning news be just the thing for you, or would running before breakfast work better? Can you pick something that involves going to a particular location (i.e., track, spa, or gymnasium) or would something at home work better?

3. Assess How Much Time You Have for Exercise

Do you need something quick or can you afford to take long walks or bike rides that allow your heart rate to build slowly? Should you combine your exercise with doing something else—watching TV, listening to music, etc?

4. Consider Whether You Want to Exercise Alone or with Others

Are you gregarious and do you need to have others along to enjoy and sustain yourself? Would regular tennis matches, or running with a neighbor, work best for you? Or would you hate to be dependent on someone else being there?

5. Determine Whether or Not the Expense Is within Your Budget

Can you afford to invest in equipment or membership in a health club? Do you need to find something that doesn't cost anything?

6. Consider Your Physical Limitations and Prior Injuries

Jogging is hard on knees, and tennis can be hard on joints and ligaments. Running might just be too much for someone with arthritis. Although exercise is still beneficial at any age, consider your physical problems and powers. Consult with your physician if need be.

7. Choose an Exercise That Will Produce the Aerobic Effect

Some exercises like walking, golf, or tennis may not provide you with the necessary aerobic effect unless you pursue them with vigor. Will you do it, or do you need something that forces you to work up a sweat?

8. Decide if You Need a Structured Program

Can you exercise on your own schedule or do you need a class or structured program? Can you do aerobic dance four mornings a week on your own, or do you need to join a class that meets three times a week?

9. Pick Something for Which You Have the Skills

Don't pick an exercise program that involves a skill that you know is difficult. On the other hand, remember that the adventure and excitement of learning something new can be motivating.

If you plan to develop a regular exercise program as part of your stress management efforts, complete Activity 7.1. Choosing an Appropriate Exercise.

Activity 7.1

Choosing an Appropriate Exercise

Select two exercises or sports activities that you like and that seem to have potential for your exercise program.

1. List the two exercises or sports activities that you selected.

a. _____

b. _____

Answer the questions that follow for each activity (a and b).

2. Is it done indoors or outdoors?

a. _____

b. _____

3. Is it done at home or some other location (how far away)?

a. _____

b. _____

4. How much time does each activity take to achieve 20 minutes of an appropriately elevated heart rate?

a. _____

b. _____

5. Can you combine the exercise with something else (i.e., watching TV, listening to the radio)?

a. _____

b. _____

6. Does the exercise or sport require other people? How available are these other people to you (i.e., tennis partners, an aerobic dance class)?

a. _____

b. _____

7. Does it cost anything? Is the cost within your means?

a. _____

b. _____

8. Are any physical injuries/problems associated with your doing it?

a. _____

b. _____

9. Can you develop the aerobic (training) effect easily with the exercise?

a. _____

b. _____

10. Are you skilled enough to do it?

a. _____

b. _____

11. Are there structured programs or facilities around for this exercise?

a. _____

b. _____

12. How well do you like to do the activity?

a. _____

b. _____

Now go back and examine the pluses and minuses of each activity. If neither seems viable, evaluate two more possibilities. If most of the questions seem to support an activity, but you don't really feel very positive about doing it, work toward something that generates some interest and excitement, even if it isn't quite as practical. For example, if an aerobic class appeals to you, but would take an extra 30 minutes, consider taking the extra time. The extra time spent probably will be worth the investment if it allows you to choose an exercise that you will be able to sustain.. Don't subvert your own efforts by picking something that is unreasonable for you. If you have tried to jog five times previously and just hated it, you probably need to find something else.

MEDICAL CONSIDERATIONS

If you are not a regular exerciser, you should seek approval from your physician before you start a strenuous exercise program. Even if you plan to move into something gradually, discuss it with your physician. If you haven't had a complete physical recently, he or she will probably recommend one. Also, there are times during exercising when you should check with a physician before continuing. According to Pollack, Wilmore, and Fox, who wrote a book titled *Health and Fitness Through Physical Activity* (1978), some of these are as follows:

1. Abnormal heart activity, including irregular pulse (missed beats or extra beats), fluttering, jumping, or palpitations in the chest or throat, sudden burst of rapid heart beats, or a sudden slowing of a rapid pulse rate.
2. Pain or pressure in the center of the chest, or the arm or throat, during or immediately following exercise.
3. Dizziness, lightheadedness, sudden lack of coordination, confusion, cold sweating, glassy stare, pallor, blueness, or fainting.
4. Illness, particularly viral infections, can lead to myocarditis; that is, viral infection of the heart muscle. Avoid exercise during and immediately following an illness. (Pollack et al., 1978, p. 234)

DEVELOPING A PLAN

Now that you have picked an exercise to try, you can give more thought to developing your exercise plan. Consider the following nine suggestions.

1. Set a Definite Time Schedule

Look at your weekly time schedule and determine where you will put exercising. Find an actual time and plan on spending that time exercising. Don't plan on doing it "when you have time," or "after work." You have to be more specific than that. Remember to allocate time for warm-up and cool-down. Select the time of day carefully. Think of your natural rhythms and how the activity will fit into your life. If you choose the morning, can you really get up that early? If you choose lunch hour, will you really give up those hours? If you choose late afternoon, will you be too tired from work or school?

2. Plan Your Warm-up and Cool-down

A good general rule is to stretch for at least five to ten minutes for both warm-up and cool-down. You must prepare your muscles, ligaments, and joints for vigorous activity and you also need to allow them time to cool down slowly and recover. The type of stretches depends upon your activity, your physical condition, and the intensity of your exercise.

3. Get the Proper Equipment and Clothing

For jogging you don't necessarily need hundred-dollar running shoes, but you do need shoes that provide a good cushion and solid arch support. If necessary, consult an expert in the particular sport or exercise. A physical

education teacher or a health club trainer might be helpful. If you are outside in either very hot or very cold weather, attend to the temperature. In cold weather, remember that your head can easily lose body heat and that extremities can get frostbitten in the wind. Wear a hat and gloves when necessary. Since exercise increases your body temperature, remember to wear layers of clothes so that you can unzip or remove excess clothing. In hot weather, the dangers are overheating and dehydration. In very hot and humid weather, your body's natural cooling system doesn't work as well. In hot weather, try to exercise in the cooler parts of the day, drink plenty of fluids, and reduce the intensity of your exercise.

4. Start Slowly

Set a major goal and develop several steps to reach the goal. If your goal is to swim for 30 minutes without stopping three times a week, start out with smaller goals. Perhaps swimming in blocks of five minutes and rest between. Move up a few minutes each week until you can swim the 30 minutes without resting. Be careful not to set up goals that doom you to failure. Too many exercise programs have failed because the participant didn't set up small increments toward a larger goal.

5. Chart Your Progress

Develop a system for keeping track of your progress. A chart or graph that is placed in a prominent place can be very helpful. Figure 7.1 is an illustration of a form that may be helpful in charting progress when exercising.

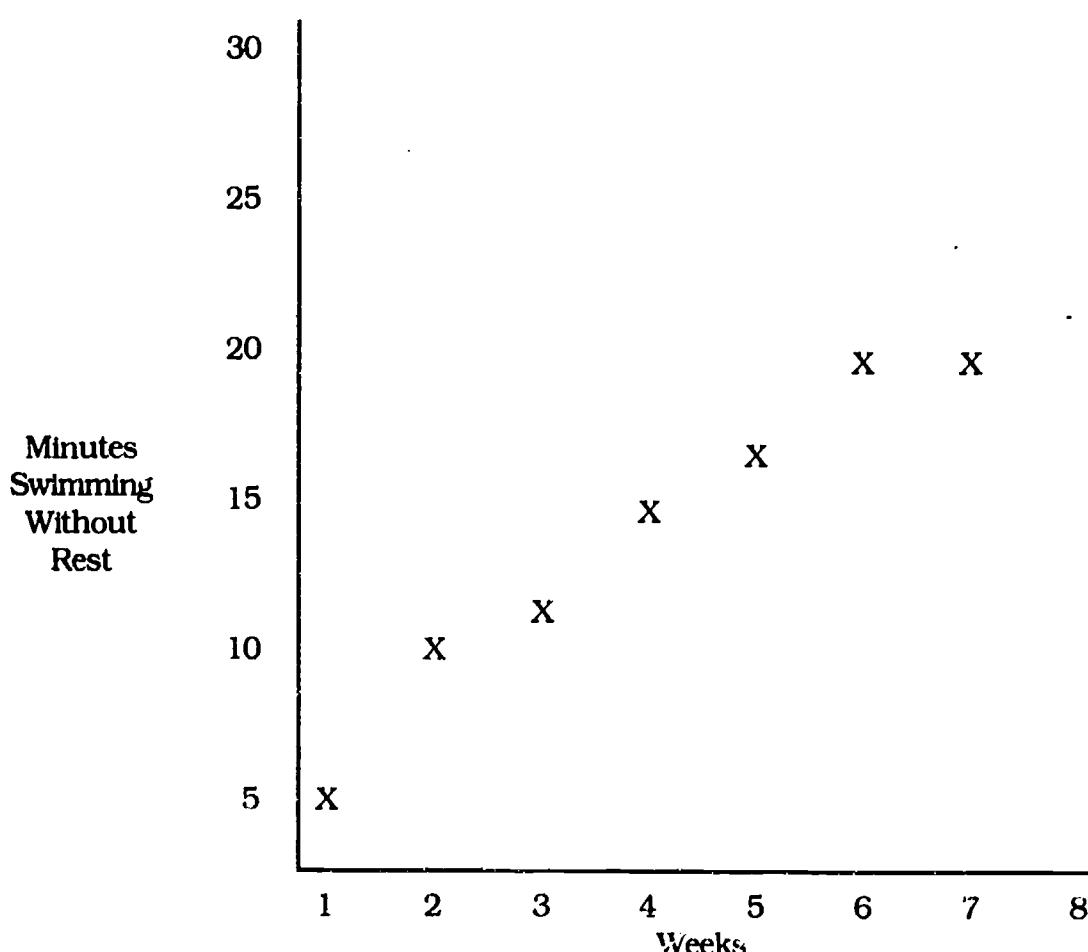


Figure 7.1. Illustration of a form for charting progress when exercising.

6. Keep Your Motivation Up

Flagging motivation is a great enemy of successful exercise programs. The resolve to begin a program with its attendant high motivation sometimes fades as times goes on. After a few weeks of regular exercises, your success and improved appearance and general improved health will provide a strong incentive to continue. However, before you reach that point, you may find your motivation lagging. When you begin your program, make up a list of all of the reasons why you want to exercise and all of the positive rewards and results that you anticipate. During the first few weeks, get out your list and reread it after every exercise program.

7. Reward Progress

No matter how internally motivated you are, provide yourself with some rewards for a job well done. Set up a schedule of rewards that coincides with your plan. Don't underestimate the reward value of the good feelings that you will have as a result of carrying out your plan.

8. Enlist the Help of Family and Friends

For most of us, the help of a spouse, lover, or close friend is essential for modifying exercise, nutrition, and other life-style behavior. You don't want to be dependent on another person to force you into anything, but you can profit greatly from their advice and observations of your behavior.

9. Anticipate Problems

Try to list the roadblocks that you will encounter in your exercise plan. What will make it difficult or get in your way? Here is a sample list of roadblocks for the example of someone starting a swimming exercise program. (The assumption is made here that swimming was a good choice as exercise—pools are available, the person likes to swim, etc.):

- a. Will have to work late and miss time for swimming.
- b. Will be too tired to swim.
- c. Going to be out of town a lot with no place to swim.
- d. The weather may get too cold.
- e. No one to watch children when husband is out of town.

Each of these roadblocks can be anticipated and managed. If you have to work late often, perhaps an alternative time can be set, or a later swimming time. Too tired probably means low motivation, decrease your goal for those days (swim less) rather than skipping entirely. Book hotels out of town that have pools, or check ahead for municipal pools, health clubs, or Y's. Find indoor pools if the weather is bad. Arrange for babysitters if children interfere with exercise time. You must give your exercise time high priority if you are to succeed.

In Activity 7.2, develop your plan for an exercise program. Use the exercise or sport that you identified in Activity 7.1.

Activity 7.2 **Developing An Exercise Plan**

1. Identify the time that you will allot to the exercise and to warm-up and cool-down. List the regular times during the week. If you don't have an organized time management plan and weekly schedule, you may want to complete Chapter 12, Time Management, before you decide on your time.

Time per exercise with warm-up, cool-down, preparation, and showering.

Example:

15 minutes—travel to track
10 minutes—warm-up
30 minutes—running
10 minutes—cool-down
15 minutes—travel home
20 minutes—shower and change clothes

Total—85 minutes (about 1 and one-half hours)

Time per exercise:

Time scheduled during the week.

Example:

Tuesday and Thursday—4:00 pm to 5:30 pm
Saturday—8:30 am to 10:00 am

Weekly times:

2. Indicate what you will do for warm-up and cool-down.

Example:

Warm-up—5 minutes—stretches
5 minutes—walk around the track

Cool down—5 minutes walk around the track
5 minutes stretches

Warm-up:

Cool-down:

3. Write out your plan for gradual increases in aerobic time and a charting system. Include a periodic check of your heart rate to verify that you are achieving your target range.

Example:

Mileage—Week 1— $\frac{1}{4}$ mile
Week 2— $\frac{1}{2}$ mile
Week 3—1 mile . . .

Chart/Graph posted on the bathroom door with 10 weeks listed horizontally and quarter mile increments listed vertically. Chart progress every week after Saturday run.

Gradual increase plan:

Chart/Graph:

4. List four rewards that you can use to reinforce your progress. Use internal and external rewards. Remember that these rewards must be something extra special that you wouldn't typically do or get and they must be contingent upon completion of your goal.

Example:

- a. Buy myself a new piece of clothing after 2 successful weeks.
(external)

- b. Go to a movie on a week night after one successful week. (external)
- c. Take five minutes to imagine how much better I will feel and look when I exercise regularly. (internal)
- d. Imagine how healthy I will be at age 60 if I keep up a good exercise program. (internal)

a.

b.

c.

d.

5. Indicate one or two people who can provide help and support for your efforts and describe how they can help.

Example:

- a. Husband—He can watch the kids and encourage me to take the time periods that I have specified for exercise.
- b. Friend—She can gently check up to see how I am doing and ask me if I need any help when I seem to be losing my motivation.

- a. _____

- b. _____

6. List three problems that you can anticipate. (See previous description for examples.)
- a. _____

- b. _____

- c. _____

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

At this point, you have developed a plan for an exercise program (if you didn't already have one). If you can carry out this plan along with improving your diet as suggested in the previous chapter, you will soon see dramatic results in your general health and in your ability to manage stress. You must, however, give improved nutrition and exercise a chance to work. If your exercise and dietary habits have not been very good, a few months may be needed before you really notice the positive effects. If you can't get yourself to develop good exercise and nutrition habits, you can still profit from other stress management techniques, but you will be operating with a kind of deficit to start. Think of it as something like the operation of an automobile. You can learn to drive very safely and to use the accelerator judiciously to save gas, but if your car isn't operating at full efficiency, your level of safety and gas efficiency is limited no matter what else you do.

SUMMARY

1. Generally two kinds of exercise are identified—those that build strength and improve muscle tone and those that build endurance. Calisthenics, isometrics, and stretching are examples of exercises that build strength and improve muscle tone. Running, cycling, swimming, and fast walking are examples of endurance exercises. These are also called aerobic exercises.
2. To have an aerobic or training effect, an exercise must produce a heart rate of about 75% of your maximum rate. (Figure by subtracting your age from 220.)
3. Regular aerobic exercise is of tremendous benefit to your general health and it improves your ability to withstand and manage stress.
4. In choosing an exercise you should
 - choose something you like,
 - consider location and logistics,
 - assess how much time you have for exercise,
 - consider whether you want to exercise alone or with others,
 - determine whether or not the expense is within your budget,
 - consider your physical limitations and prior injuries,
 - choose an exercise that will produce the aerobic effect,
 - decide if you need a structured program, and
 - pick something for which you have the skills.
5. See a physician before you start a new, strenuous exercise program.
6. Develop a plan for regular (at least 3 times a week exercise) and include these suggestions:
 - set a definite time schedule,
 - plan for warm-up and cool-down,
 - get appropriate equipment and clothing,
 - start slowly,
 - chart your progress,
 - keep your motivation up,
 - reward progress,
 - enlist the help of family and friends, and
 - anticipate problems.

PART IV

“MIND” APPROACHES

TO

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Part IV

"MIND" APPROACHES TO STRESS MANAGEMENT

Think back for a moment to the Stress Interaction Model (Chapter 2, Figure 2.1). Remember how the "mind" has a profound effect on how you interpret various stressful events and situations, and how your thoughts, beliefs, and personality influence your experience of stress. Review and reread the information on the model if necessary. Remember that by your interpretation of situations and events you have considerable control over how much stress you experience.

In this section, you will examine four different aspects of your cognitive (mental) processes as they relate to stress management. First, in Chapter 8 you will look at how your basic belief system affects how you interpret events, and how those beliefs can be modified to decrease negative emotions and stress. Next, in Chapter 9 you will examine your actual thinking process and how mistaken or inaccurate thinking can be modified to improve stress management. In Chapter 10, you will learn a coping skills method called stress inoculation. This method focuses on relaxation and coping self-statements. Finally, in Chapter 11 you will consider your personality and how it relates to your experience of stress and to your ability to manage stress.

This approach to stress management is quite different than the techniques discussed previously in Parts II and III. Improvements in stress management here involve very basic changes—how you think and what you believe. You may find that these chapters are more difficult; however, don't give up! You may be surprised at how profound a change you can make in your life by modifying your way of thinking about events or situations.

8

Chapter

IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

“ **M**en are disturbed not by things, but by the view they take of them.” This quotation by Epictetus, a Roman Stoic philosopher, often appears in Albert Ellis’ (1962) work describing his Rational Emotive Therapy. Ellis was the first psychologist to become well known for emphasizing the importance of thoughts and beliefs in diagnosing and treating emotional difficulties. He developed a list of common irrational beliefs that can cause emotional difficulties and a way of analyzing problems and identifying the underlying irrational beliefs. His system is still quite useful and has a particularly good application to stress management.

Many of our feelings of stress and anxiety are caused by underlying beliefs about how we or the world ought to be or behave. These beliefs cause us to interpret many situations and events negatively and to experience stress and other negative emotions and behaviors as a result of that interpretation. We learn these beliefs as part of our family and cultural heritage. Ellis (1962) believed that many of the beliefs that we have learned are irrational because they place too much emphasis on guilt, obligation, and achievement.

IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

Following is a list of Ellis’ (1962) original irrational beliefs, with a number of common variations for each one and a brief explanation of how that belief can cause stress and anxiety. As you read over these beliefs begin to think about the extent to which you have internalized that particular belief.

1. It is a dire necessity for an adult human being to be loved or approved by virtually every other significant person in his/her community. (Ellis, 1962, p. 61)

Variations

- a. I must be worthless if my mother/father/sister/brother doesn’t approve of me.
- b. I must have done something wrong if he/she doesn’t like me.
- c. I need to work really hard to get everyone to like me.
- d. I better not make anyone mad or they will dislike me.

- e. I better go along with him/her or our relationship won't work.
- f. He/she doesn't like me, I must not be likable.

This belief, with its corollaries, is very common. Many people feel that they must have other people's approval in order to be worthwhile. In the extreme, they are always on edge, worrying about how everything they do will affect other people's opinions of them. Most people who hold this belief learned as young children that pleasing others was a necessity. People who hold this belief are often not assertive and in the extreme they are so scared of others that they wind up avoiding relationships.

- 2. One should be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving in all possible respects if one is to consider oneself worthwhile. (Ellis, 1962, p. 63)

Variations

- a. I have to be outstanding in everything I do—a perfect student/mother/lawyer/etc.
- b. I am never good enough.
- c. I can never be satisfied with myself.
- d. I always make too many mistakes.
- e. If I let down and relax, I won't achieve enough.
- f. I am not as competent as others.
- g. I can't feel good about myself because I have not achieved enough.
- h. I can relax as soon as I achieve one more thing.

This belief is clearly in tune with our achievement-oriented culture. Many of us learn early that competence and achievement bring rewards in life. The problem comes when individuals set up an equation where very high achievement is necessary to be a worthwhile human being. People with this belief also can be very demanding of others and can easily communicate their faulty belief to their children. Stress is usually a major component in the lives of people with this belief because they can never settle back, relax, and enjoy life. They must always keep pushing and worrying about doing more and more.

- 3. Certain people are bad, wicked, villainous, and they should be severely blamed and punished for their villainy. (Ellis, 1962, p. 65)

Variations

- a. My husband/wife/mother/etc. is a bad person and deserves to be punished.
- b. I can't have any control in my relationship to that person because he or she is just a bad person.

- c. I am basically a bad/flawed/mean person and I deserve whatever I get.
- d. I deserve to be punished so I should feel depressed and unhappy most of the time.

This belief can be applied in two ways. People use it on themselves; that is, they believe that they are basically bad and deserve punishment. Or, the belief can apply to others. In both cases, it tends to produce fear, anxiety, and guilt.

- 4. It is awful and catastrophic when things are not the way one would very much like them to be. (Ellis, 1962, p. 69)

Variations

- a. I can't control what happens so I might as well give up.
- b. I can't cope with this unexpected situation.
- c. I can't handle surprises.
- d. The things happening to me are impossible to manage.
- e. This setback is going to do me in.
- f. With this latest event I might as well throw in the towel.
- g. I have no choice but to give up.

Everyone loses his or her perspective at times and believes that some event or situation is an absolute catastrophe. If this belief becomes a dominant one for an individual, he or she will go through life constantly upset by crisis situations. All of these crises occur, of course, because of the belief and expectation that things always should be orderly and predictable. Life just doesn't work that way. Often, people with this belief respond very emotionally to unexpected or unpredicted negative events and lose their ability to rationally evaluate and cope.

- 5. Human unhappiness is externally caused and individuals have little or no ability to control their sorrows and disturbances. (Ellis, 1962, p. 72)

Variations

- a. Others are responsible for my problems.
- b. I have no control over my life.
- c. He/she/it is responsible for my unhappiness.
- d. I am just unlucky and destined to be depressed.
- e. My job/husband/wife/etc. makes me stressed and anxious.
- f. I am just not strong enough to deal with all the negative things that happen to me.

Externalizing your problem is simple and seductive because it is easier to blame other people than to accept responsibility for what happens. Certainly uncontrollable events do impact your life at times, but a general belief that external events actually control your life robs you of your power and humanity. People who hold this belief are often very anxious because they don't know when the next threat will hit them. They are like balloons in the wind, never knowing in which direction they will go next.

6. If something is, or may be, dangerous or fearsome, one should be terribly concerned about it and should keep dwelling on the possibility of its occurring. (Ellis, 1962, p. 75)

Variations

- a. I must always worry and be super vigilant because something dangerous may happen.
- b. I must avoid flying/driving/tennis/swimming/etc. because I might have an accident.
- c. Life is very dangerous and I must always protect myself and take no risks.
- d. Something bad could happen at any time and I need to be alert and guarded all the time.
- e. If you worry about something, it will help you cope with it when it actually happens.

The over-vigilant parent is a good example of someone with this belief. He or she is constantly worrying that something bad will happen to a son or daughter. In the extreme, the son or daughter can be deprived of the opportunity to take risks and learn how to manage adversity and mistakes. This belief can severely limit someone's lifestyle and create a constant edge of anticipatory anxiety. Even if life carries considerable danger at times, being over-zealous in one's fear of danger is not helpful. For this belief, and for all the others, a more reasonable, rational alternative is available. For example, the more rational alternative might be, "The world can be dangerous, so be alert and don't take unnecessary risks." The reasonable alternative usually makes the irrational belief more difficult to identify, because it is often masked by what appears to be a reasonable belief. In this case, for example, "It does make sense to avoid walking in dangerous neighborhoods at night, but it doesn't make sense to worry all the time about being attacked wherever you go."

7. It is easier to avoid than to face certain difficulties and self-responsibilities. (Ellis, 1962, p. 78)

Variations

- a. If you ignore problems long enough, they will go away.
- b. The problem is just too difficult to tackle.

- c. It's too much of a problem. I'll just have to live with it.
- d. Let my mother/father/wife/etc. deal with it. I don't want all the hassle.
- e. It is not really a problem. All those friends are just overreacting.

It is true that sometimes when you ignore a problem, it will go away, but usually it will come back and often is more difficult to deal with as time goes on. Failing to deal with major issues or difficulties in one's life ultimately leads to anxiety and stress and to feelings of impotence and loss of control.

- 8. One should be dependent on others and need someone stronger than oneself on whom to rely. (Ellis, 1962, p. 80)

Variations

- a. I am not strong enough to take care of myself.
- b. He/She is so much stronger. Why not let them dominate the relationship?
- c. I just can't take steps to be on my own.
- d. I can't survive without my marriage.
- e. A woman must have a man.
- f. A man must have a woman.
- g. I always must have someone to call when I am down.
- h. I can't travel on my own, go to a movie on my own, etc.

In the past, women particularly have been prone to this irrational belief. This myth is not surprising because until recently, the idea that a woman needed a man was prevalent in our culture. However, many men also believe that they need someone to take care of them. Accompanying this belief is another irrational belief that the individual in need is weak and not capable of caring for himself or herself. The opposite of this belief, that one should be totally independent and never dependent on others, is equally irrational. Times occur frequently when it is appropriate for all of us to be dependent and to be taken care of. However, this need is healthy when it is within the context of a relationship that is reciprocal.

- 9. One's past history is an all-important determiner of one's present behavior, and because something once strongly affected one's life, it should have a similar effect indefinitely. (Ellis, 1962, p. 80)

Variations

- a. My father/mother was an alcoholic and I'll never feel good about myself.
- b. I grew up in an emotionally deprived family so I'll never be able to trust anyone.

- c. I was abused as a child so I'll never be able to trust others.
- d. I did poorly in school as a child so I can never do well in any learning situation.
- e. I have always been shy so I'll never be able to meet people.
- f. I have always been fat/skinny and I'll never be any different.

Sometimes people believe that they are scarred for life by childhood experiences or they believe that certain characteristics or situations can never change. Certainly one's background and past experiences influence development, but the past really does not determine what happens in the present or future. This belief is often part of a defensive system that protects a person from the risk of trying new behavior or a new way of living.

10. One should become quite upset over other people's problems and disturbances.
(Ellis, 1962, p. 85)

Variations

- a. When my friends are depressed, I have to be depressed too.
- b. I am responsible for the problems of my friends, husband, wife, children, etc.
- c. When someone in my family or one of my friends has a problem, I must spend all of my time trying to help them solve their problems.
- d. I am not a good person if I feel happy and okay when someone I know is having a problem.
- e. I shouldn't allow myself happiness and fulfillment when so much suffering is in the world.

Most people find it difficult not to become emotionally involved in the problems and difficulties facing people they love and care about. However, if you become over-involved in the problems and difficulties of others you are apt to spend every waking hour worrying about somebody or something. This irrational belief is particularly hazardous for members of the helping professions. If a counselor, teacher, or physician takes on the problems of those with whom he or she works, their effectiveness as a professional is soon diminished. In a sense, this is true about people in general. If you lose your sense of objectivity and perspective concerning other people's problems, you are less likely to be able to offer help and support.

11. A right, precise, and perfect solution to human problems is invariably possible, and it is catastrophic if this perfect solution to human problems is not found.
(Ellis, 1962, pp. 86-87)

Variations

- a. I have to be perfect.
- b. I can't make mistakes.

- c. I am not worthwhile unless I am a perfect student, worker, person, etc.
- d. I can't do it perfectly. Why try?
- e. If I make a mistake, I will be punished.
- f. Things are black and white. Nothing has a grey area.
- g. I cannot compromise—things have to be done right.

Everyone knows at least one perfectionist. Perhaps you are one yourself. Some people are even proud of needing perfection, to the point where they will sometimes boast about it. Unfortunately, the need to be perfect carries with it an incredible amount of pressure and anxiety. Many people confuse the desirability of working toward higher levels of competence with the necessity of things being exactly right. A dangerous side effect of this perfectionistic belief is the underlying assumption that one must achieve perfection in order to be a productive and worthwhile person. The person who needs perfection could be visualized as someone running on a treadmill that constantly increases its speed so that he or she never reaches their destination. After all, how many perfect people are in this world?

IDENTIFYING YOUR OWN IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

As you read over these general irrational beliefs, you probably identified some that you believe. At first reading, most of the beliefs seem to be rather obviously irrational. Most of us drift into this kind of irrationality at times, even though we recognize the belief as essentially irrational. Society's general acceptance and reinforcement of a more rational version of each belief also makes for difficulty in identifying just when you have moved from being rational to being irrational.

Later in this chapter you will learn a specific system for analyzing individual situations and identifying and modifying the irrational beliefs. At this point you should take a more global look at the eleven beliefs and try to identify how they generally create stress and anxiety for you. This example will illustrate how a particular belief can cause stress.

Example:

Jonathan is a 35-year-old insurance man. He is a very personable fellow and is a fair salesman. He knows how to interact with people and usually comes across as sincere and friendly. He is very sensitive and worries a lot about how people react to him. If someone doesn't seem to like him, he gets upset and feels depressed. He was promoted to the position of manager for his agency, but just wasn't able to cope with the demands, so he returned to just being an agent.

Jonathan was small for his age while he was growing up and he always worked very hard to get all the boys to like him. He was afraid of conflict and avoided it by doing whatever it took to have

a lot of friends. He received a lot of rewards for being friendly and well-liked and his parents encouraged him to avoid conflict. He has always felt a kind of underlying anxiety, and feels particularly stressed when he meets new people until he is sure that they like him. Although he is a fairly successful insurance agent, he hates to make the initial contact with people and avoids making contacts unless he has some kind of referral.

Much of Jonathan's stress is caused by his need to be liked. He failed at being a manager because he couldn't provide supervision when a risk might exist that others wouldn't like him. He is not comfortable with a more aggressive sales approach because he just can't take the rejection. Clearly, Jonathan's acceptance of the irrational belief that he needs to be liked by everyone has created considerable anxiety for him. If he were able to modify that belief (doing so would be difficult, given his development), he would be able to work as a manager and probably become a more effective salesperson. In addition to that, his personal relationships would be more comfortable.

By identifying which of the eleven irrational beliefs you tend to hold, and examining how that belief developed, you can take a good first step toward modifying the belief so that you will experience less anxiety.

CHANGING YOUR IRRATIONAL BELIEFS

Now that you have identified and thought about your own irrational beliefs, you are ready to work toward modifying these beliefs. This may not be easy. You will be trying to change some beliefs that you have held for a long time. Also, many of these beliefs have been highly rewarded by parents and peers. If you have always been a perfectionist and a straight-A student, modifying this belief and perhaps losing the rewards of straight A's will be pretty difficult. Chances are, however, that you can still do extremely well in school without needing to be perfect.

Activity 8.1 Personal Irrational Beliefs

Review the eleven irrational beliefs and pick out the two that you are most likely to use. In the space provided, list your two beliefs and write out two examples of how this belief causes stress and anxiety for you. Then, think about the development of that belief and try to explain how you learned each particular belief.

1. First Irrational Belief: _____

a. Examples of how this belief causes stress:

(1) _____

(2) _____

b. Description of how you learned this belief (family, school, church, friends, ethnic background, etc.):

2. Second Irrational Belief: _____

a. Examples of how this belief causes stress:

(1) _____

(2) _____

b. Description of how you learned this belief (family, school, church, friends, ethnic background, etc.):

The A B C Method

The first step to take in changing irrational beliefs is to be able to identify when an irrational belief is causing you stress or anxiety. Since you have already examined your beliefs in general, you should have a good idea for which of the irrational beliefs to look. The A B C method, which was developed by Albert Ellis (1962), involves analyzing individual situations, beliefs, and emotions/behavior:

A = Event or Situation that Precipitates Stress or Anxiety

B = Beliefs Relevant to the Situation or Event

C = Negative Emotions and Behavior

Practice is important in order to learn how to accurately analyze your own situations. Discuss them with a friend to check the accuracy of your own analysis. Following are some examples of how the A B C system is used:

Example 1: Tom is going to attend a party where he doesn't know anyone (A = Situation/Event). On the way to the party, he feels anxious and when he gets to the party he goes directly to the bar, has too much to drink, and stumbles out without really talking with anyone (C = Negative Feelings/Behavior).

Example 2: Sharon is becoming less productive on her job. The quality and quantity of her work has been decreasing slowly for several weeks (A = Situation/Event in this case evolves over a period of time). She has a vague sense of anxiety, she is dissatisfied with her job, and her absences from work are increasing (C = Negative Feelings / Behavior).

In both of these examples you might be tempted to say that the situation, A, caused the negative feelings and behaviors, C. Not so! You have to add Step B, which identifies the beliefs about the situation. These beliefs give meaning and interpretation to the events.

Review Example 1. Put yourself in this situation and try to decide what you might be saying to yourself if you were Tom going to the party. Several possibilities exist. You might be telling yourself that you have to appear perfectly competent and "cool" when you meet new people or that you have to make a good impression. Or, you might be saying to yourself that everyone at the party must like you and therefore you must be a sparkling conversationalist. Or, you might be thinking that you are never very good at parties and therefore this one will be the same.

You can identify several irrational beliefs (B) that may have put enough pressure on Tom to create extreme stress to the point where he drank too much and avoided meeting anyone. Note that each of his irrational beliefs is directly related to one of the original eleven irrational beliefs.

In Example 2, if you imagine that you are Sharon, you can also identify several beliefs that may relate to the situation at work. Perhaps you would tell yourself that you have to be extremely productive all of the time in order to be a worthwhile person, or maybe you would tell yourself that this period of low productivity is an absolute disaster. You might even be telling yourself that this period of low productivity is part of a repeating pattern of failures that will always continue. The irrational beliefs here increase Sharon's anxiety, and prevent her from confronting and solving the problem. The important point to note is that C includes both negative feelings and behaviors.

Before you begin to analyze your own situations, take a few minutes to practice using the A B C system and identifying possible irrational beliefs.

Activity 8.2 A B C Practice

List two or three possible irrational beliefs in the blank space following B for each situation. After you have completed your lists, check the possible answers and explanations after the three situations.

Situation 1

A = Ed has to tell a very close friend that he doesn't want to lend him \$200.

B = _____

C = He feels very nervous and avoids seeing his friend.

Situation 2

A = Polly had sex last night with a guy she really likes.

B = _____

C = She feels guilty and wants to break up with him.

Situation 3

A = Ed's boss just told him that someone who has been with the firm a shorter time is going to get promoted, while Ed is to keep the same job.

B = _____

C = Ed is very upset, angry, and feels extremely stressed.

Answers

Situation 1 (Possible Irrational Beliefs)

- I can't survive if my friend doesn't like me.
- I have to have the love and affection of my friend.
- I can't handle the catastrophe if my friend gets angry.
- I have to be a perfect friend and lend him the money.
- I'll just avoid seeing him and not deal with his request.

Note: You may be tempted to say that the irrational belief is that the friend will get angry if you say no—this is not the irrational belief. In fact, the friend may get angry!

Situation 2 (Possible Irrational Beliefs)

- I have to be perfect and not have sex or lose control.
- He is an awful person for taking me to bed.
- I am an awful person for going to bed with him.
- This is a catastrophe from which our relationship can never recover.
- Having sex was his fault. I never want to see him again.
- I always have sex with my boyfriends. I guess I will never have any self-control.

Situation 3 (Possible Irrational Beliefs)

I am not a worthwhile person since I didn't get the promotion.
This is a catastrophe. I will never be able to succeed in my career.
My boss is a wicked, evil man and it is all his fault.
This is my wife's fault. She always makes me nervous.
I've never been successful and I never will be.

Activity 8.3 **Analyzing Irrational Beliefs**

Now that you have some practice with identifying irrational beliefs, you are ready to examine some of your own stress reactions and the underlying beliefs.

Identify three situations when you feel stress and anxiety and analyze them according to the A B C method. Write out the irrational ideas in your own language, then go back to the original list and identify which one(s) are related. Going all the way back to the basic irrational idea is sometimes difficult. You may need to check out your assessment with a friend or someone who can help check your response.

Situation 1

A = _____

B = _____

C = _____

Situation 2A = _____

_____B = _____

_____C = _____

_____**Situation 3**A = _____

_____B = _____

_____C = _____

_____**STEPS FOR CHANGING
YOUR IRRATIONAL BELIEFS**

You have already taken a major first step in modifying your irrational beliefs by identifying them, learning more about how you developed them, and analyzing some of your stress situations with the A B C method. Now that you have these beliefs identified, there are several steps you can take to change them and make them more rational.

1. Argue Against the Irrational Belief

Take the time to rationally argue against the irrational beliefs that cause you problems. Write out the arguments and review them often. For example, the following are two irrational beliefs with arguments against each:

Irrational belief number 1—It is a dire necessity for an adult human being to be loved or approved by virtually everyone in his/her community.

Arguments against:

1. You can't expect everyone to like you.
2. Having conflicts with some people is normal.
3. It's nice to be liked, but you don't need approval from everyone.
4. Sometimes you have to look out for yourself and do things that others don't like.
5. You can't spend your life pleasing others.

Irrational belief number 2—One should be thoroughly competent, adequate, and achieving in all possible respects if one is to consider oneself worthwhile.

Arguments against:

1. No one can do everything well.
2. Making mistakes is human.
3. You can be a capable and worthwhile person and not be competent in some areas.
4. People love you for things other than your achievements.
5. Everyone has to let down and relax sometimes.
6. You will miss a lot of life if you spend all your time working.

2. Restate Your Irrational Beliefs in More Rational Terms

Since most of the irrational beliefs contain principles that are important and valuable, work at sorting out the rational from the irrational parts. Restating the irrational beliefs that are troublesome to you in rational terms can help. For example:

Irrational belief number 3—One should be dependent on others and needs someone stronger than oneself on whom to rely.

Rational restatement—To have people upon whom you can depend and rely is desirable, but at times you have to depend only upon yourself.

Activity 8.4 **Rational Statements and Arguments**

Pick two of the irrational beliefs that are most troublesome for you, write out several arguments against them, and then restate the belief in rational terms.

1. Irrational Belief

a. Arguments against

- (1) _____
- (2) _____
- (3) _____
- (4) _____

b. Rational restatement

2. Irrational Belief

a. Arguments against

- (1) _____
- (2) _____
- (3) _____
- (4) _____

b. Rational restatement

3. Visualize the Situation and Change Your Emotions

One way to learn that you can control your thoughts is to practice changing your thoughts and emotions when you are fantasizing a particular situation. Imagine a stressful situation, then imagine yourself making irrational statements to yourself and feeling the stress and other uncomfortable emotions related to that belief. Then, change the belief, while you are still visualizing the situation, to a more rational one and change the feelings to more appropriate and less stressful ones. Here is an example:

Martin is very nervous about meeting new people. He has to go on a job interview soon, and is afraid and nervous. In using this technique Martin first imagines the job interview situation. He visualizes himself, in an office, talking to an interviewer. He sees himself dressed up and talking about his qualifications. He then imagines that he is repeating irrational statements to himself (i.e., "I am not a worthwhile person if I don't behave perfectly and get this job. I must get this interviewer to like me."). He then imagines feeling very nervous and stressed during the situation. Next he modifies the irrational beliefs in his fantasy to more rational ones (i.e., "I would like to do well in this interview, but if I don't, it won't be the end of the world. I would like to make a good impression on this interviewer, but I can only be myself."). He then imagines that these beliefs allow him to feel less stressed and more confident, with just enough anxiety to give a really good interview.

This technique may be difficult at first. You have to be able to visualize pretty well. You will be amazed, however, at how much you can control your feelings in the fantasy by modifying the statements that you make which are based on your beliefs.

4. Disprove Your Irrational Beliefs Through Action

In this method you change your behavior as a way of disputing an irrational belief. The idea is to prove that your belief about the possibility or consequence of some event or activity is irrational. For example, if you believe that because you have never been good at sports you can't learn to play golf, go ahead and take some golf lessons. You may not become a professional golfer, but

chances are that with instruction you can learn to play. This will help you challenge your irrational belief and ultimately discard it. This particular method takes a good bit of faith and you need to pick out a behavior for which you can get some help, particularly if you haven't developed any skills. If you are shy and non-assertive and you believe that you can never become assertive because you are just too afraid of conflict (need to have everyone like you), don't just decide to be assertive. Get some instruction in how to be assertive, take a course, read a book, talk to a friend or counselor. Make certain that you try out a behavior change that can succeed.

Activity 8.5 **Disputing Irrational Beliefs**

Pick one of the A B C situations that you have analyzed previously and use the visualization technique to change the belief and emotions. Try this daily for one week and record your reactions in your stress journal. Select a behavior that you have been unable to accomplish because of an irrational belief and plan and carry out a behavior change. Try this several times and record your reactions in your stress journal.

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

In this chapter you have learned about the importance of beliefs in the stress management interaction. You have identified your own irrational beliefs and you have practiced applying the A B C identification method. You also have acquired several ways to dispute your irrational beliefs. If they seem to be so strongly ingrained that you can't change them, you should consider seeing a counselor or a psychologist. Participation in either individual or group counseling can help you modify irrational beliefs that appear to be too stubborn to handle by yourself.

SUMMARY

1. Many feelings of stress and anxiety are caused by our underlying beliefs about how we or the world ought to be or behave.
2. Albert Ellis has identified eleven common irrational beliefs that cause negative feelings and behavior. He argued that many of the beliefs that we have learned are irrational because they place too much emphasis on guilt, obligation, and achievement.

3. Nearly everyone holds some irrational beliefs and it is helpful to identify and understand the origins of the ones that are likely to create stress for you.
4. The A B C method of analyzing stress interactions can help you identify the irrational beliefs. A = Event or Situation, B = Beliefs relevant to the situation or event, and C = Negative feelings or behavior.
5. In order to manage stress you need to change your irrational beliefs to rational ones.
6. One method of change is to logically argue against the irrational beliefs.
7. Another method is to practice restating the irrational belief in a rational manner.
8. Visualizing yourself in a stressful situation with the irrational belief, and then changing the irrational belief to a rational one with an attendant change in negative feelings, can help you learn to control the irrational belief and feelings.
9. Behaving as if the irrational belief was not true and experiencing this fact can help you dispute irrational beliefs.

9

Chapter

THINKING MISTAKES

In addition to irrational and faulty beliefs, mistakes in your thinking process can have very negative effects on how you interpret situations and events. Much of our thinking about events is automatic so that we tend to repeat the same mistakes without even being conscious of them. Dr. Aaron Beck has written extensively about the role of thinking mistakes and distortion. This chapter will include a discussion of these mistakes and how to correct them. This emphasis on the **process** rather than the **content** of thinking is somewhat different than the previous chapter on irrational beliefs, but you will find a number of similarities.

In order to review the general role of thinking and thoughts in the stress interaction process, consider the example of Brad.

Example:

Brad is a student in high school. He is about average in appearance and seems to get along well with people. His older sister was a very popular student in school and a member of the "in" group. Brad has never been quite as popular as his sister, but he desperately wants to be among the most popular group in school. He recently ran for student council and was narrowly defeated by a very popular football player. He was devastated and became depressed and very nervous whenever he interacted with anyone he considered to be popular. He interpreted his loss in the election as a terrible defeat and concluded that he clearly had been rejected from the "in" group at school.

Brad's interpretation of his election loss is an excellent example of thinking mistakes and distortion. His generalization was inaccurate and he set up black and white categories so that he was either "in" or "out" of the popular group. He also had tunnel vision and focused on the negative situation, his election loss. You will learn more about the different kinds of mistakes and distortions later.

If Brad could be taught to think more clearly he would be able to see that he actually made a very good showing in the election and that he is probably quite popular. He might not be as popular as the football player, but that doesn't necessarily relegate him to an unpopular group. His basic mistake is in imagining that this election clearly would put him in one group or the other. You also can analyze this situation in terms of irrational beliefs.

Perhaps his irrational belief is that he has to be as competent and popular as his sister in order to be a worthwhile person. Also note that he may have this irrational belief and be using distorted thinking. Both of these would tend to color his interpretation of the election loss and create depression and anxiety.

THINKING MISTAKES— TUNNEL VISION

One of the most difficult thinking distortions with which to deal is tunnel vision or loss of perspective. Many of us easily focus only on the negative aspects of certain situations and events. We often screen out facts and observations that don't support a particular negative interpretation. This kind of tunnel vision can occur in a variety of ways:

1. When you become so involved in a particular situation that most of your time and energy is focused in that arena. For example, if you spend several days working on a particular problem at work and are unable to find a solution, you can easily begin to think only about that failure and to feel stress and anxiety. In reality, this problem may be only a minor part of your work and an even smaller part of your life.
2. When a fear or anxiety seems to overtake you and you spend a great deal of time worrying about that situation and the possible negative consequences. For example, if you have some kind of medical problem and you can't get an appointment with your doctor for several days, you might become so obsessed with the negative possibilities of a serious illness that all of your time and attention goes toward worrying about that rather remote possibility.
3. A somewhat different form of tunnel vision occurs when you systematically ignore the positive and rewarding aspects of your life. This can occur when you begin to take these positive aspects for granted and only think about all of your problems and difficulties. In a sense, you get out of balance and lose your general sense of perspective.

THINKING MISTAKES— BLACK AND WHITE THINKING

In this kind of thinking, things become only good or bad. No in-between exists. Stress is most often created by this distortion because too many situations and events are interpreted as bad or negative. A kind of dichotomy is set up where something has to be nearly perfect before it is interpreted as positive. Artificial divisions, such as the popular/unpopular division in the previous example, are created. You become either a good worker or a bad worker, an excellent student or a terrible student, a likeable person or an unlikeable person. By ignoring the many different levels of meaning, this kind of thinking makes it quite difficult to ever achieve or fall into the absolute good category.

Consider the example of June.

Example:

June is in her mid-twenties, has a good job, and a number of friends. She tends to see herself, however, as either successful or unsuccessful at dating. She hasn't had a date for several weeks and is quick to label herself as a loser, saying that men are just not attracted to her.

In reality, she has many friends, and has dated regularly and successfully, but because of her black and white thinking she categorizes herself as a loser and therefore feels considerable stress whenever she meets a man who is attractive to her. This, of course, becomes self-defeating because her stress and nervousness make her a less attractive person to date.

THINKING MISTAKES— OVER-GENERALIZATION

Most of us, at some time or other, take a logic or scientific methods course in school where we learn the dangers of over-generalization. Over-generalization occurs when you decide that a particular general principle is true based on your observations of specific evidence. In a scientific experiment, a researcher must demonstrate that the events or facts supporting his or her generalization could not have happened by mere chance. The process of generalization is a purely logical one, but in our personal lives many of us tend to form beliefs without sufficient evidence. We are sometimes prone to make negative conclusions about ourselves based on very scanty evidence.

For example, if someone is not friendly to us on one occasion we may conclude that he or she doesn't really like us, when, in fact, the person had a splitting headache and just couldn't respond. Or, if we fail a chemistry test, we may conclude from that one failure that we just can't do chemistry. Part of the problem with over-generalization is that it is extremely difficult to be objective with oneself. Emotions, preconceptions, and other distortions tend to make for difficulty when sorting out reality.

THINKING MISTAKES— FAULTY ASSUMPTIONS

Because relationships are so complex and confusing, faulty assumptions can easily be made about other people and their thoughts and feelings. Faulty assumptions are also frequently made about behavior and its consequences.

Example:

Sandra is a middle-aged woman who has raised three children. They are all out on their own at this point, and live in different parts of the country. She communicates regularly with her two youngest children, but has very infrequent contact with her oldest son. She worries a lot about him and is afraid to call him because he accused

her of being overprotective when he was growing up. She assumes that because they had a stormy relationship during his teen years that he doesn't really care for her that much. This hurts her a lot and makes her quite nervous when she does have contact with him, particularly with his new wife.

Sandra's faulty assumption here is that her son doesn't care for her and doesn't want to contact her. In reality, her son also worries about their relationship and wishes that they could be more comfortable with each other. He always assumes that too much communication would signal that he wants financial help from his mother and he doesn't want to give her this message. He also senses her nervousness when they talk and interprets it as shortness and impatience. This kind of web of faulty assumptions and interpretations is not all that uncommon in human relationships.

People frequently make faulty assumptions about the potential consequences of some action on their part. You probably have had the experience of not telling someone something negative because of your assumption about what they would say and feel, and what the consequences would be. You also probably have had occasion to be surprised and learn the negative assumptions that you made were not necessarily true.

Although there are other kinds of distorted thinking, these four seem to contribute most to stress and anxiety. Practice identifying the different thinking distortions in Activity 9.1.

Activity 9.1 **Identifying Thinking Mistakes**

Examine the following statements and indicate which thinking mistake they represent.

- Tunnel Vision (TV)**
- Black and White Thinking (BW)**
- Over-generalization (O)**
- Faulty Assumptions (FA)**

- ____ 1. He seems to be friendly, but I know he doesn't like me.
- ____ 2. I have been turned down twice, so I know I will never make it.
- ____ 3. Those military men are all alike. I'll never trust another one.
- ____ 4. I could have enjoyed the party, but all I could think of was the fact that Tom didn't speak to me.
- ____ 5. It's no use, I know he won't listen to what I say.
- ____ 6. If she doesn't like me, she must hate my guts.
- ____ 7. I know I have been successful several times, but all I can think about is my one failure.
- ____ 8. Since I didn't get an A, I am a lousy student.

Answers: 1—FA, 2—O, 3—O, 4—TV, 5—FA, 6—BW, 7—TV, 8—BW

CORRECTING THINKING MISTAKES

The first step in correcting thinking mistakes is to recognize the mistakes. In Activity 9.2, practice analyzing some of your own thinking.

Activity 9.2 Identifying Personal Thinking Mistakes

Use a slightly modified version of the A B C method that you learned in the last chapter to analyze two personal stress situations in which you can identify one of the following mistakes.

A = Situation or Event

B = Type of Faulty Thinking

C = Emotion and Behavior

Example

A = It was my first day on a new job. Everything went well except that one of the employees who has the office right next to me wasn't very friendly.

B = I concluded that the workers are not going to be friendly. (Tunnel Vision and Over-generalization)

C = At home that night I felt anxious, highly stressed, and discouraged about the new job.

Situation 1

A = _____

B = _____

C = _____

Situation 2

A = _____

B = _____

C = _____

Now that you have identified some thinking mistakes, consider the following ways of correcting them.

List Your Evidence for Generalizations

When you have discovered what appears to be a faulty generalization, write it out and then list all of the evidence that you have to support and refute it. If the evidence is scanty, write out an alternative generalization that makes more sense.

Example: Workers on the new job are not going to be friendly.

Support—The guy in the next office wasn't friendly and he only spoke to me in a very cursory manner.

Refutation—Several other people were friendly. The boss seems warm. One day is not enough time to decide about how friendly anyone will be. I was nervous and perhaps not very approachable.

Better Generalization: Things seemed to go fairly well the first day. Most people were friendly.

Challenge Faulty Assumptions

Identify your faulty assumption and indicate why it may be faulty. List alternative assumptions that may be true. Modify your beliefs that are based upon that assumption.

Example: Because I am so young, he won't listen to what I have to say.

Support—Sometimes older people have a problem listening to those much younger than themselves.

Refutation—I have no idea how he will react to what I say. I have heard that he is a fair person. I know what I am talking about and can present it in a logical manner. I may be young, but I can be articulate. I have studied the subject about which I am going to talk.

Better Assumption—The chances are quite good that he will give me a fair hearing, even though I am young and inexperienced.

Expand Tunnel Vision

List the statements that appear to result from tunnel vision, then list other facts, events, that you also could focus upon. Include positive events and facts.

Example: I just know that she thinks I am a real loser and doesn't like me, even though my date with her went very well, except when I spilled my coffee.

Support—I spilled my coffee and was embarrassed.

Refutation—We had some great conversation and she seemed to enjoy herself. She liked the place I took her for dinner. She said to call her again. We held hands part of the time.

Better Focus—Although I felt stupid when I spilled my coffee, all in all the date went well and I think that I will ask her out again.

Expand Thinking Dichotomies

Draw a line across a piece of paper and list the two poles of an example of black and white thinking on each end. Then fill in several other possibilities between the black and white poles.

Example: I just don't have the gift of gab. I had a hard time talking to the new person at school and it just goes to show that I am a real jerk when it comes to conversation.

Figure 9.1 on the next page is an illustration.

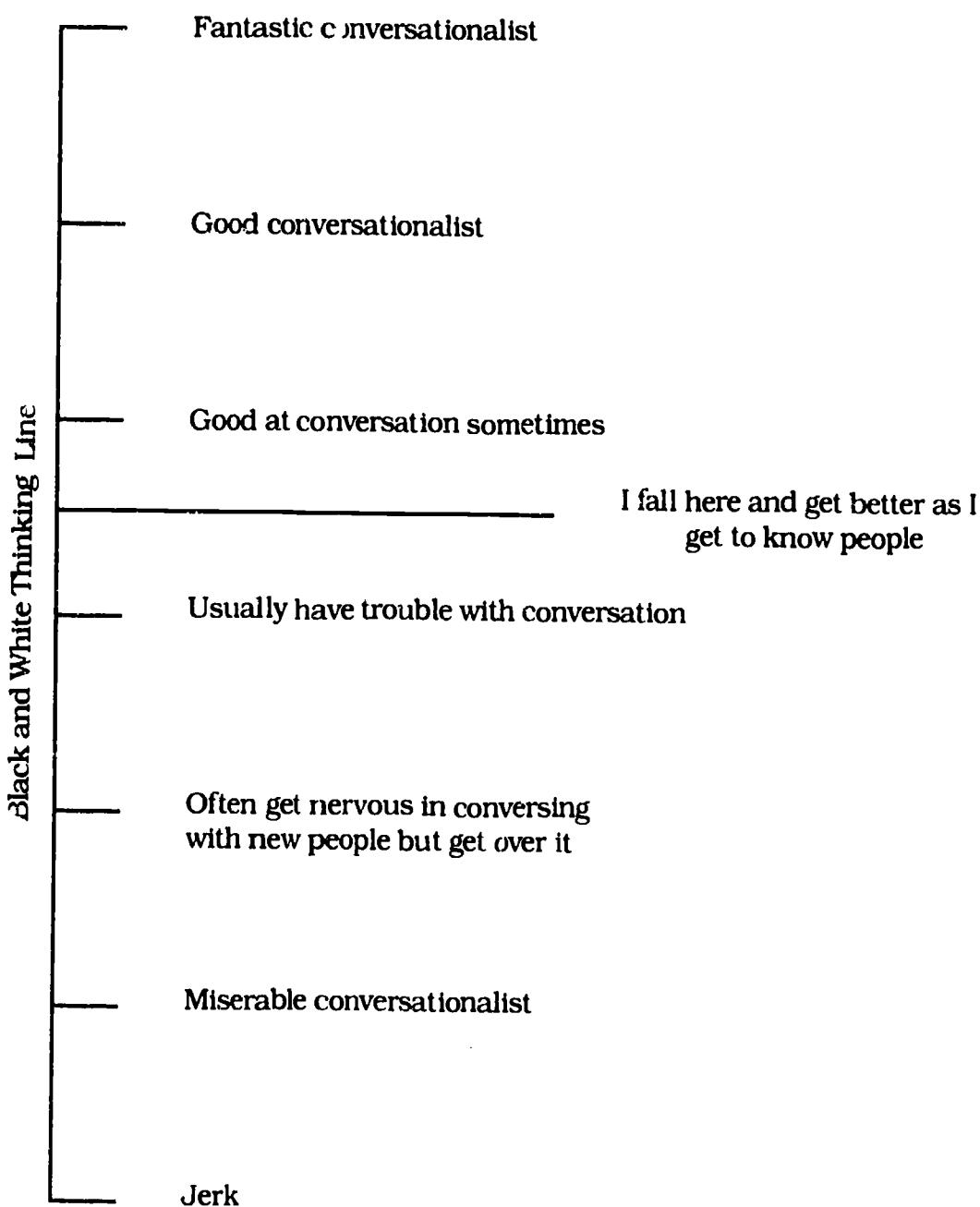


Figure 9.1. Example of a black and white thinking line with illustrations of possibilities between the two poles.

Activity 9.3

Challenging Thinking Mistakes

List one thinking mistake that you found of your own and follow the method used in the previous example to correct it.

Thinking Mistake _____

Support _____

Refute _____

More Logical Statement, Premise _____

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

At this point, you have learned how to recognize and challenge irrational beliefs and you also have learned how to recognize and modify four basic types of irrational thinking. These methods may be more difficult for you if you tend to be emotional. Some people who experience strong feelings have trouble analyzing their related thoughts and focusing on thoughts when their feelings are so strong. If you have this difficulty, analyze your thinking processes when you are not feeling so strongly. Do some "after the fact" analysis when you are more able to be logical and cognitive.

SUMMARY

1. The **process** of thinking, in addition to the **content**, can be a significant factor in stress reactions.
2. **Tunnel Vision** occurs when someone focuses on only one or two events (usually negative) without keeping other facts and experiences in mind.
3. **Black and White Thinking** happens when a person sets up two dichotomous categories (usually good or bad) and doesn't consider all of the in-between possibilities.
4. **Over-generalization** is when a conclusion is reached without enough evidence, often as part of an emotional response.
5. **Faulty Assumptions** cause individuals to draw conclusions based on inaccurate premises.
6. Correction of these different thinking mistakes can lead to more accurate interpretations of situations and less stress and anxiety.

Chapter 10

STRESS INOCULATION



Positive self-statements can help you cope with performance anxiety.

Thus far, you have worked on the "thinking" aspect of stress management by learning about irrational beliefs and how they create anxiety, and about the negative effects of distorted thinking. In this chapter, you will learn how to manage stress by improving your coping skills. Since psychologists began to realize how important one's self-talk or self-statements are in coping with stressful and other difficult situations, several methods have been developed to help improve these "coping skills." The approach called **stress inoculation** will be described in this chapter.

Remember when you were a child and you had your first vaccination? Your mother or father explained to you that the vaccination would give you a small case of the disease, which would force your body to develop the antibodies to fight the disease. Those antibodies would then be useful as

a defense in fighting off the real disease. Donald Meichenbaum's (1985) stress inoculation is somewhat comparable to this kind of medical inoculation. His method encourages a defense against stress by promoting a problem solving, preventive approach. He suggested a rehearsal of positive coping mechanisms, somewhat comparable to the development of antibodies.

The method involves three main components: (1) problem solving; (2) self-instructional, positive coping statements; and (3) cue-controlled relaxation. The aim of this "inoculation" is not to prevent stress, but to manage it. The emphasis on a **coping** model rather than a **mastery** model is very helpful, and is actually the hallmark of any effective stress management procedure.

PROBLEM SOLVING

Before you can develop an active strategy for dealing with excessive stress or anxiety, you need to define and confront whatever problem is causing the anxiety. Of course, as you have learned, one must be careful not to externalize and believe that stress problems are outside of one's self. A number of problem-solving strategies have been developed to help people systematically approach problems they are having with stress. These are all quite similar and resemble, in many ways, the basic steps of the scientific method. Meichenbaum summarized these steps:

1. Define the stressor or stress reactions as a problem-to-be-solved.
2. Set realistic goals as concretely as possible by stating the problem in behavioral terms and by delineating steps necessary to reach each goal.
3. Generate a wide range of possible alternative courses of action.
4. Imagine and consider how others might respond if asked to deal with a similar stress problem.
5. Evaluate the pros and cons of each proposed solution and rank order the solutions from least to most practical and desirable.
6. Rehearse strategies and behaviors by means of imagery, behavioral rehearsal, and graduated practice.
7. Try out the most acceptable and feasible solution.
8. Expect some failures, but reward self for having tried.
9. Reconsider the original problem in light of the attempt at problem solving. (Meichenbaum, 1985, p. 67.)

The real heart of the stress-inoculation method (to be described later in the chapter) comes with Step 6, rehearsal and practice of coping skills. The following example illustrates how the problem-solving method can be applied.

Example:

Edward is 27 years old, has a good job as a manager at Sears, and has been married for 3 years. He and his wife are happy and are saving money to buy a house and have children. Edward's parents have recently moved to town and are living in a retirement village

about 20-minutes away. Edward always has gotten along well with his mother, but he frequently has had conflicts with his father. As he was growing up, his father was often very critical of him and would not let him make many of his own decisions. Edward suffers from a great deal of tension and anxiety since his parents moved to town, because he hates to spend any time with his father. Whenever they get together, his father treats him like a teenager and tries to give him too much advice. His father also criticizes him constantly and Edward always feels very tense and anxious during and after a visit.

Problem-solving Model Application

Problem: Dealing with his feelings and reactions to contact with his father.

Realistic Goals

1. To be able to visit father without extreme stress and anxiety.
2. To be consistently assertive with father about father's behavior without starting arguments.
3. To arrange for contact with father that minimizes his advice-giving and criticism.

Unrealistic Goals

1. To eliminate anxiety about father.
2. To change father's behavior.

Possible Alternatives

1. See father only when absolutely necessary.
2. Move out of town.
3. Tranquillize self before visits.
4. Increase skills to cope with father and related feelings.
5. Seek psychoanalysis to cope with feelings about father.

Evaluate Alternatives—Alternatives 2, 3, and 5 are rejected as impractical. Alternative 4 is ranked as most desirable, followed by number 1.

Rehearse—Stress inoculation to be used. (See description in next section.)

Solutions/Failures/Rewards—After considerable effort with newly developed coping skills Edward was able to deal with his father more effectively and to cope with periodic visits. He has accepted the fact that his father will probably not change very much and that he, therefore, must learn to improve his own ability to cope and manage his reactions to his father.

SELF-INSTRUCTIONAL POSITIVE COPING STATEMENTS AND RELAXATION

The preparation and rehearsal for stressful situations are divided into four different phases:

- Preparing for a Stressor**
- Confronting and Handling a Stressor**
- Coping with Feelings of Being Overwhelmed**
- Evaluation of Coping Efforts and Self-Rewards**

Meichenbaum discussed purposes and gave examples of statements for each of the four phases.

Phase One—Preparing for a Stressor

Purposes:

- Focus on specific preparation for task
- Combat negative thinking
- Emphasize planning and preparation

Examples:

- What do I have to do?
- I can develop a plan to deal with it....Just think about what I can do about it.
- This could be a rough situation.
- I can work out a plan to handle this.
- Remember, stick to the issues and don't take it personally.
- Stop worrying. Worrying won't help anything.
- What are some of the helpful things I can do instead?
- I'm feeling uptight—that's natural.
- Maybe I'm just eager to confront the situation. (Meichenbaum, 1985, p. 72)

NOTE: These statements are aimed at helping you do two things: first, to focus on specific preparation for the task; and second, to combat negative thinking and expectation. By emphasizing planning and preparation, you redirect the energy it takes to worry and fret into specific action that helps you better prepare for a stressful situation. This action focus also stops you from building the negative expectations that come from negative statements like, "It is going to be awful," or "I just can't do it."

Phase Two—Confronting and Handling a Stressor

Purpose:

- Control stress reaction
- Reassure that one can handle situation

Reinterpret stress as something that can be used constructively

Reminder to use coping responses such as relaxation

Remain focused on task or situation

Examples:

Just "psych" yourself up—I can meet this challenge.

I can convince myself to do it.

One step at a time.

Just chunk the stress into manageable units.

Don't think about my stress, just about what I have to do.

This stress is what the trainer said I might feel.

It is a reminder to use my coping exercises.

The tenseness can be an ally, a cue to cope.

Relax, I'm in control. Take a slow deep breath. Ah, good.

As long as I keep my cool, I'm in control of the situation.

Don't make more out of this than I have to.

Look for positives, don't jump to conclusions.

I have a lot of different coping techniques I can call upon.

Things are not as serious as I make them out to be.

I can just sit back and take it easy. (Meichenbaum 1985, p. 72)

NOTE: In this stage the self-statements are designed to help you cue your relaxation response, reassure yourself that you can cope, and reinterpret the anxiety as normal and expected. These statements also help you stay focused on the task instead of becoming obsessed with your anxiety.

Phase Three—Coping with Feelings of Being Overwhelmed

Purpose:

(This stage does not always occur)

Set up contingency plans, prepare for possibility of becoming extremely stressed

Prepare to deal with worst situation when feeling out of control and overwhelmed

Encourage to remain in situation

Stay focused on present

Accept feelings and wait for them to decrease

Learn to have some control even if worst happens

Examples:

- When stress comes, just pause.
- Keep my focus on the present; what is it I have to do?
- Label my stress on a 0 to 10 scale and watch it change.
- I should expect my stress to rise sometimes.
- Don't try to eliminate stress totally; just keep it manageable.
- My muscles are getting tight.
- Relax and slow things down.
- Time to take a slow deep breath.
- Let's take the issue point by point.
- My stress is a signal.

Time for problem solving, (Meichenbaum, 1985, p. 73)

NOTE: Statements in this stage help you cope with your worst nightmare. They help reassure you that intense anxiety will decrease and they help you deal realistically with your worst fears.

Phase Four—Evaluation of Efforts and Self-Rewards

Purpose:

- Evaluate attempt, what helped and what didn't
- Look back over experience to see what has been learned
- Recognize small gains, don't belittle gradual progress
- Praise self for trying
- Keep trying, don't expect perfection
- Recognize what would you have done differently or better

Examples:

- It wasn't as bad as I expected.
- I made more out of stress than it was worth.
- It didn't work. That's okay.
- What can I learn from my try.
- I can be pleased with the progress I'm making.
- Wait until I tell the others how it went.
- I handled it pretty well.
- Good. I did it. Next time I'll do even better. (Meichenbaum, 1985, p. 73)

As you review this list, several things should be obvious. First, several cues reminded you to physically relax. In effect, you will use the **cue-controlled relaxation** that you learned in the first part of this book in combination

with the positive self statements. This relaxation becomes an important part of the self-coping mechanism. You also will note that many of the statements guide you toward focusing on effective coping and reinterpreting your anxiety. In a sense, you learn to accept the stress and not let it escalate. You will note a strong underlying theme of self-acceptance and instructions not to punish yourself for being imperfect in your coping skills. Small steps are encouraged and progress is strongly reinforced.

APPLYING THE METHOD

Now that you understand the method, you are ready to apply it and learn to develop positive self-statements for a variety of situations.

Activity 10.1 Developing Positive Self-statements

Write out three possible statements for each of the stages in the following stressful situations. Examples are included for each stage.

If you have trouble coming up with three positive coping statements for each situation, go back to Meichenbaum's examples and adapt some of them for these situations. Actually, many of the positive self-statements are generic, in that they can be used in just about any situation. Try to use some general statements and some specific to the situation for each stress situation.

Situation 1—Stress about phoning someone for a date.

Preparation

Examples:

- a. What am I going to say first?
- b. I'll be okay once I start talking.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Confronting and Handling

Examples:

- a. Focus or what I want to say.
- b. Take a deep breath if I get anxious.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Coping With Being Overwhelmed

Examples:

- a. Being scared is okay. I can still talk.
- b. Just pause and relax.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Evaluation and Reward

Examples:

- a. Great, I talked to her.
- b. She said no, but I carried on a conversation.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Situation 2—Anxiety about starting a new job.

Preparation

Examples:

- a. What can I do to prepare?
- b. I don't have to do everything right the first day.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Confronting and Handling

Examples:

- a. Take a deep breath and I will be okay.
- b. It is okay to be nervous your first day.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Coping With Being Overwhelmed

Examples:

- a. The intense anxiety will pass.
- b. Just pause and feel your stress decrease.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Evaluating and Rewarding

Examples:

- a. It was tough, but I did okay.
- b. It will be better tomorrow.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Situation 3—Fear of driving in heavy rush-hour traffic.

Preparation

Examples:

- a. I've planned my route. I'll be okay.
- b. I know I can take deep breaths and relax.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Confronting and Handling

Examples:

- a. Relax, I am in control.
- b. Focus on driving and my anxiety will decrease.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Coping With Being Overwhelmed

Examples:

- a. Just pause, the strong anxiety will pass.
- b. Just relax, I can always pull over if necessary.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

Evaluating and Rewarding

Examples:

- a. I coped with the situation! Congratulations!
- b. The stress will be a bit less next time.

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

PERSONAL APPLICATION

Now that you have learned the method, you are ready to try it out on some of your own stress situations. If necessary, go back and review cue-controlled relaxation and practice your relaxation response. The regular practice of the relaxation response will greatly improve your ability to use cue-controlled relaxation. Use Activity 10.2 to practice with one of your own stress situations.

Activity 10.2 **Personal Application**

Pick a personal stress situation with which you want to be better able to cope. Apply the problem-solving method first, and insure that part of your proposed solution is to improve your coping skills and better manage anxiety. Develop four positive self-statements for each of the coping phases and insure that at least one statement in Phases One, Two, and Three is designed to remind you to cue the relaxation response.

Remember that these statements should be short and in your own words. After you have written out your statements you need to memorize them. They must be memorized well so that you can automatically produce them during the stressful situation.

Situation 1—(Describe the situation.)

Phase One—Preparation

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Phase Two—Confronting and Handling

1. _____
2. _____

3. _____
4. _____

Phase Three—Coping with Being Overwhelmed

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Phase Four—Evaluating and Rewarding

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____
4. _____

Another way to use stress inoculation is to rehearse coping with a situation through visualization.

Activity 10.3 **Rehearsing Stress Situations**

In order to rehearse, you need to visualize the four phases of your stress situation. Take some time to think about what to visualize for each phase of the situation that you picked in the last activity. Use visual, auditory, or any other clues that help you imagine the situation. Close your eyes and try to imagine the situation so realistically that you can actually feel the stress that comes with that situation. After you can visualize each phase and feel the stress, the next step is to practice coping with the stress by imagining yourself relaxing and saying your positive self-statements. This rehearsal will give you a great head start in using the statements, because you will have already begun to condition yourself to relax and cope during the anxiety-producing situation. Following are two situations with examples of scenes picked for each phase.

Situation 1—Anxiety about starting a conversation with a stranger.

Imaginary Scene	Coping Phase*
1. I am approaching someone I want to get to know.	1. Preparation phase.
2. I sit next to the person.	2. Confronting and handling phase.
3. I begin a conversation, but anxiety begins to overwhelm me.	3. Coping with the feeling of being overwhelmed phase.
4. After the conversation is over.	4. Evaluating and reinforcing self-statements phase.

*You will use the coping self-statements that you have developed for each phase during your visualization and rehearsal.

Situation 2—Taking a difficult exam.

Imaginary Scene	Coping Phase
1. Two days before the exam I start to worry.	1. Preparation phase.
2. I begin the exam.	2. Confronting and handling phase.
3. I panic at three questions I can't answer.	3. Coping with the feeling of being overwhelmed phase.
4. After . walk out of the testing room.	4. Evaluating and reinforcing phase.

Rehearse your stress scene as described above at least once each day for a week. Remember to include relaxation and coping self-statements. After you have completed these rehearsals, you are ready to use the method during the actual situation. Expect the stress to decrease gradually each time you use the method.

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

You now have three different approaches to managing stress by modifying your thinking and thinking processes. After studying each of these methods, the importance of your cognitive processes in the stress interaction model should be clearer to you. Pick out the approach or approaches that seem to work for you and incorporate them into your stress management plan. Note that the stress inoculation method actually combines a cognitive and a relaxation approach. Take this as an example for the entire book. Incorporate methods or parts of methods into an integrated stress management plan that works for you.

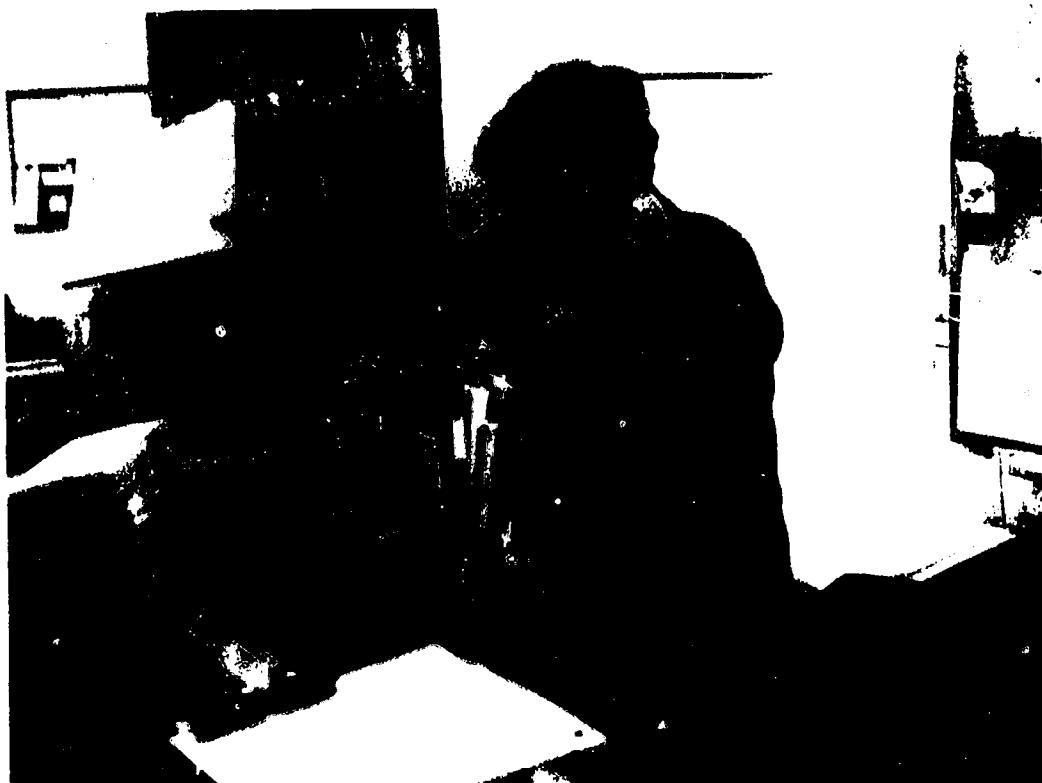
SUMMARY

1. Stress inoculation has three major components: (1) problem solving; (2) self-instructional, positive coping statements; and (3) cue-controlled relaxation.
2. Meichenbaum's problem-solving steps for stress management are (1) define problem; (2) set realistic goals; (3) generate alternatives; (4) imagine other people's alternatives; (5) evaluate and rank alternatives; (6) rehearse using imagery, behavioral rehearsal, and graduated practice; (7) try out most feasible solution; (8) expect failure, reward effort; and (9) reconsider in light of problem-solving attempt.
3. The four phases of a stress reaction for which self-instructional coping statements are developed are (1) preparing for a stressor, (2) confronting and handling a stressor, (3) coping with feelings of being overwhelmed, and (4) evaluation of coping efforts and self-reward.
4. By developing and learning positive coping self-statements for each phase, you can help yourself manage stress because you can better assess the reality of the situation, control negative thoughts and images, use anxiety positively as a cue to relax, increase your motivation to manage and cope, prepare for your worst nightmare of being overwhelmed, and reward yourself for your coping efforts.
5. Rehearse your memorized positive statements by imagining your stressful situation at each phase and using the coping statements and relaxation to cope with the imagined situation.
6. The stress-inoculation model depends upon a **coping** rather than a **mastery** model.

11

Chapter

STRESS AND PERSONALITY



Your personality may affect the way you deal with stress on the job.

Your experience of stress and your reaction to it are strongly affected by your personality. The term personality has been defined in many different ways. It is most easily and commonly understood as a kind of structure that helps determine how you view the world and how you interact with your environment. Your personality affects the way you interact with people, the way you think and feel about the world, the beliefs that you have about how things are and should be, the way you perceive events, and the way that you behave. Words like character, disposition, temperament, nature, and even soul are sometimes used to describe the structures or qualities that are known as one's personality. Not much agreement exists among psychologists as to how personality is formed, other than the realization that it seems to be a combination of some genetic component and life experience.

If you think back to the stress-interaction model, you can readily understand that one's personality is certainly an important factor in determining how one interprets and perceives information. Personality plays an important role in how you interpret situations and therefore in your experience of stress. In the previous three chapters, the focus was on thinking or cognitive processes and how they affected this interpretation. Personality is a broader concept that can include cognitive or thinking processes, but that also includes a number of other components.

The primary goal of this chapter is to help you better understand your personality and how it influences your perception and management of stress. Unlike the previous three chapters, no definitive suggestions will be provided for modifying or improving your personality in order to better manage stress. The emphasis will be on understanding your personality and in using this understanding to better manage stress. A specific theory of personality that embraces all types of personality as equally useful and worthwhile will be used. Remember that we are using only one particular theory out of dozens that attempt to describe this complicated domain.

JUNG'S THEORY OF TYPE

Jung's theory of personality, which has been operationalized in the *Myers-Briggs Type Inventory* (MBTI) (Myers, 1985), uses a typology to describe personality. According to this theory, four main attitudes and functions govern how we interact with the world and with each other, and each of us has a *preference* for how we operate within each attitude or function. Preference means the preferred way of operating and does not mean that one does not or cannot use abilities and behaviors in the opposite preference. Thus, by determining your preference within each of the four areas you have one kind of description of your personality, and by putting the four preferences together you have your personality "type." If you have access to the MBTI, you may want to take the inventory to help you assess your preferences. In order to do this you will need to talk with a counselor or psychologist and receive a professional interpretation. The inventory is not necessary for you to use this chapter, however. The theory is described here in some detail, and by directly assessing your own preferences you can gain valuable information about your personality and implications for stress management.

BASIC DESCRIPTION OF ATTITUDES AND FUNCTIONS

Read through the following description carefully. As you learn about the preferences within each attitude and function, think about where you stand for each preference. Later you will be asked to decide about your own preference in each area.

1. General Attitude Toward the World

Extroversion—————Introversion

Extroverts are outer-directed. They get their primary stimulation from the environment. **Introverts** are inner-directed. They are more concerned

with their own inner world of thoughts and ideas. Extroverts like conversation, and are friendly, easy to know, and expressive. They are action-oriented and seldom spend time in reflection. Introverts are private, reserved, and hard to know. They usually have only a few close friends and spend considerable time thinking and processing their experiences internally. **Remember that no one is all extrovert or all introvert**, but, according to the theory, we do all prefer one attitude over the other.

Example: Sharon, an introvert, has a free Friday evening. She has been asked to go to a large party at a friend of a friend's. She also has received a call from an old friend who wants to get together and catch up. She chooses dinner with the old friend because she likes the idea of a small intimate interaction. An extrovert has the same options. He invites the old friend to come to the party with him because he doesn't want to miss the stimulation of all the people at the party.

2. Way of Perceiving and Taking Information In

Sensing—————Intuition

People with a preference for the sensing function take information in directly through the five senses. People who prefer intuition take information in more indirectly and tend to filter their perception through past experiences and expectations. **Sensors** are practical, observant, and tend to see things in smaller parts. They usually don't like theory and abstraction and are usually literal minded. They like facts and details, and are often happy with the status quo. **Intuitors** are often dreamers and theorizers. They like change, variety, and can be impractical. They like fitting things together and often don't notice individual parts. They are imaginative, innovative, and often focus on the future.

Example: Two people, one a strong sensor and one a strong perceiver, go to an art gallery and view a particularly famous painting. They discuss it afterwards. The sensor remembers the colors, the texture, the frame, and the details of the content. The intuiter hardly remembers the actual painting but goes on to describe in great detail the fantasy and reactions that the painting caused in him.

3. Ways of Judging and Making Decisions

Thinking—————Feeling

People who prefer **thinking** are logical and analytical. They decide things by thinking and they can be objective and impersonal, but may have trouble empathizing with other people's feelings. Those who prefer **feeling** are emotional, understanding, warm, and spontaneous. They can be overly sensitive and easily have their feelings hurt. They see things from personal, value perspectives, and they have trouble being analytic and objective.

Example: Two people are arguing about an important issue. One is a feeler and one a thinker. The thinker has a number of facts to back up her position and quotes statistics to show that she is correct. The feeler argues passionately that she disagrees, but she doesn't have many facts or arguments to back up her position. She tends to be overwhelmed in arguments and gets carried away by her emotions.

4. Preferred Life-style and Way of Interacting with the World

Judgement————Perception

Those who prefer **judging** like an organized, orderly approach to life. They like clear limits and parameters and they like to have their life under their own control. They don't like changes. People who prefer **perceiving** like to be spontaneous and to take life as it comes. They emphasize the perception or interaction with the world, rather than judging or controlling it. They prefer to be able to be flexible and tend to be disorganized and do things at the last minute.

Example: Two people, one a strong judger and one a strong perceiver, get up on a free Saturday morning. The judger prefers to have the day planned out, to know what he is going to do when, and doesn't want to have to change his plans. The perceiver doesn't want to make plans. She wants to wake up and see what she feels like doing, to be spontaneous.

Activity 11.1 Assessing Personality

Now it is time to decide upon your own preferences. According to the theory you must place yourself in either one or the other category. However, you can indicate the strength of the preference. Remember that you are rating your preference for one dimension over the other. That doesn't mean that you don't also have abilities and behaviors from the opposite preference. For example, if you rate yourself as more feeling than thinking, that doesn't mean that you never use thinking in your judgments. It does mean that you prefer to use feeling rather than thinking. Rating yourself on these dimensions may be difficult. Make a strong effort to be honest and not to rate yourself as you would like to be, rather than as how you really are. If you have a close friend who will take a few minutes to read the dimensions and then discuss your preferences with you, that would be a good way to cross check your own perceptions of yourself.

(Rate your preference and the strength of the preference. You may only check one place.)

Extroversion/Introversion

Example: Janice is pretty good at interacting with people. She can talk with strangers at parties and has a number of friends. However, she is a private person in many ways and doesn't confide in people easily. She also likes to spend time alone, and prefers to socialize with a few close friends, even though she enjoys a large and wild party occasionally.

Janice has some extroverted characteristics, but her basic preference seems to be toward introversion. She might be rated as a "moderate" introvert. (Be careful not to be fooled by behavior and abilities in the area. They don't necessarily reflect your preference.)

Now check one to rate yourself.

Introvert	Extrovert
Very strong _____	Very strong _____
Strong _____	Strong _____
Moderate _____	Moderate _____

Sensing/Intuition

Example: Ted has always been a great athlete. He loves the outdoors and the feel of playing sports. He is also an outdoorsman and enjoys hiking, camping, and swimming. He is a very keen observer and can remember many details of what he sees. He is also very realistic and is very impatient with dreamers and people who want to discuss things too long. He is known as a doer. In school he hated anything that was too theoretical and abstract.

Ted would appear to be a very strong sensor. He seems to perceive things directly through his senses and he dislikes anything that is not realistic and down-to-earth. He would probably be rated as a very strong sensor.

Now, check one to rate yourself.

Sensing	Intuition
Very strong _____	Very strong _____
Strong _____	Strong _____
Moderate _____	Moderate _____

Thinking/Feeling

Example: Marjorie works as a physical therapist. She loves her work, although she often gets very emotionally involved with her patients. She is very sensitive and is also very good at counseling them and helping them deal with the psychological aspects of their recovery. Although she is sensitive and good at understanding the feeling of her patients, she doesn't lose control of her emotions and she can be objective and thoughtful at times.

Marjorie prefers feeling in her interactions, but because she also uses thinking and objectivity at times, she is probably a "strong" and not a "very strong" feeler.

Now, check one to rate yourself.

Thinking

Very strong _____

Strong _____

Moderate _____

Feeling

Very strong _____

Strong _____

Moderate _____

Judging/Perceiving

Example: Juan is a very good student. He is well organized and has a very tight time-management plan. His desk is always very orderly and there is a place for everything. His friends see him as a very organized person. However, they don't like the fact that he can never seem to change his plan or act spontaneously.

It is fairly obvious that Juan is a "very strong" judger. Everything in his life is orderly and he has trouble when he cannot control all aspects of his life.

Now, rate yourself.

Judging

Very strong _____

Strong _____

Moderate _____

Perceiving

Very strong _____

Strong _____

Moderate _____

Now that you have decided upon your preference in each area, summarize your preferences by circling your preference for each attitude and function below.

Introversion _____ Extroversion

Sensing _____ Intuition

Thinking _____ Feeling

Judging _____ Perceiving

In addition to just looking at preferences in each area, you can also examine the relationship between different preferences. In fact, if you take the MBTI, you will get a specific description that is unique to your combination of the four preferences. This chapter, however, is limited to examining the implications of the individual preferences for stress management.

PREFERENCES AND STRESS

Consider the following implications for the different preferences.

Extroversion

Extroverts need people and will experience stress if they are not in fairly regular contact with others. An extrovert needs to express himself or herself and be able to share thoughts and feelings. If a person who prefers extroversion is isolated or doesn't have people with whom he or she can talk, the person will feel very anxious and unsettled. For example, if an extrovert is given an assignment that requires individual research in the library for several days, she will quickly feel stressed and isolated unless she can take frequent breaks and talk with people. Or, if an extrovert moves to a new community and has difficulty making friends (unlikely for an extrovert), he will have great trouble tolerating the isolation and the forced focus inward. Extroverts often talk to others to manage their stress. It is the natural thing for them to do. They are transparent and usually express what they are feeling. If you are an extrovert, it is very important for you to have an opportunity to talk with others frequently about stress-producing situations. Some extroverts have trouble with anxiety management techniques like meditation or muscle relaxation, because they are solitary activities that force a focus inward.

Introversion

Introverts need time alone. They experience stress if they have to be around people for long periods of time without breaks. They also need the alone time to think and recharge their batteries. They have trouble coping with situations without time for thought and contemplation. They are sometimes not comfortable in social situations and may experience stress from these interactions (depending upon how sensitive they are to what other people think of them). Introverts also need others for support. However, because they usually only have a few close friends, at times they may not have anyone to seek out for support. Usually introverts have to make a more conscious effort to maintain friendships. Stress management for introverts will most likely be an activity that gives them time alone. They also might be more able to take the time to think about and analyze their thoughts and thinking process. (Extroverts will probably have a harder time with these self-analytic activities.)

Intuition

People who use intuition as their dominant mode of perception tend to see and perceive things indirectly. Because they are less literal in their perception they may have a tendency to color events and situations with their past experiences or misconceptions. Consequently, they are more likely to experience stress from distorted or preconceived thinking. For example, if persons who prefer intuition as their perceiving function interact with persons with whom they have had considerable difficulty, they will be likely to perceive those persons' behavior in light of their past experience. On the other hand a person who prefers sensing would be more likely to perceive the actual behavior of that person at that time. People who prefer intuition also are more likely to imagine and visualize potentially stressful upcoming events. They may have a tendency to daydream, and that fantasizing can involve worry and obsessing about potential problems.

This tendency to daydream and fantasize can be a stress management tool by allowing escape to the future. That is, a person can minimize the reality of current painful situations by imagining how it might be, or how it is going to be. This ability to abstract and imagine is clearly a double-edged sword.

Sensing

Sensors are usually able to realistically assess stressful situations. This means that they will experience stress when they encounter the situation, but may be more likely to let it go when the situation is over. Because they are sensory-oriented, their experience of stress may be directly felt in their body. Sensors tend to compartmentalize and see things in parts rather than as a whole. They may feel considerable stress and frustration if they can't see the parts or if they can't see clear goals. Sensors may experience anxiety when they are involved in abstract or theoretical pursuits. For example, a sensor can have great difficulty studying philosophy unless he or she can see the common sense of it. Sensors also may experience conflict and stress if they interact with others who prefer intuition and therefore are satisfied to deal with things in the abstract. Having a boss at work who prefers intuition and who always gives very broad, not detailed assignments can be a great source of frustration for a sensor.

Sensors are probably most likely to manage stress through physical activity, problem solving, stress inoculation, or some method that allows them to gain some control over their stress by breaking it down into manageable parts or one that focuses on a physical way to manage stress.

Thinking

People who prefer to use thinking as a way of making judgments tend to be able to approach situations rationally and logically. They may experience stress when they encounter situations that are not amenable to a logical solution or when their own feelings are triggered and cannot be controlled by logic. For example, a person who is a strong thinker who has always been able to logically deal with problems suddenly falls in love and is then rejected for no apparent reason. Strong feelings and an irrational situation make it impossible to logically deal with this situation. Thinkers also may experience stress in relationships with people who prefer feeling as a method of judgement because they cannot impose a logical approach on their companion.

Thinkers have a powerful stress management tool in their ability to be logical. They are often able to avoid undue stress by logically evaluating situations. They are often quite good at monitoring irrational beliefs (if they realize that they are irrational) and at finding illogical thinking distortions. Thinkers also can be good problem-solvers and can mobilize energy to solve a problem rather than feeling stress and anxiety for a long period of time.

Feeling

Feeling-preference people will experience stress when they cannot use their time according to their own values and feelings. When they feel strongly about something, it is hard for them to put it aside. They can experience considerable stress when they are frustrated. They don't have the thinker's natural ability to reason through situations. Feelers are very sensitive to others and they often get their feelings hurt. They can experience hurt and

be stressed and upset for minor slights that are really not intended. Feelers who are not independent can make strong emotional demands on others and feel great stress if others are not available to them. Feelers also can take on other people's pain, and become upset when a close friend is having problems.

Feelers can manage stress by directly confronting their emotional responses. If they can express their feelings, they usually feel better. If they are overly sensitive, they can decrease their stress by confronting the person they believe they have offended. Feelers need to avoid simmering anger and stress. Feelers can manage anxiety well by talking with others. Frequently a discussion with someone will help them gain objectivity and decrease their feelings of stress. They also get great comfort from feeling that they are understood, even if there is no problem solution or advice given.

Judging

People who prefer judging feel anxious when they lose control over their life or their time. If they can't get organized or if they are so overwhelmed that organization seems impossible, they feel great stress. If they are forced to continually change their plans, they also become stressed. Judgers need to be able to control their days and probably feel stress when they are under someone else's control. They would probably prefer some kind of structure, however, to none.

Judgers manage their stress best by controlling their lives. Time management is a great help to them. They have great abilities to get things done so that exercise, meditation, or some other form of relaxation can be very helpful if they fit it into their schedule. If a judger is committed to one of these activities, he or she will do it on a regular and persistent basis.

Perceiving

A person who prefers perceiving doesn't really like to be organized. In the extreme, any imposition of organization or structure will create stress in this person. Since we all need to learn organizational and structural skills, the perceiver must find a way of structuring things that works for him or her. He or she will feel great stress if any system that he or she uses or that is imposed on him or her doesn't allow some flexibility. Strong perceivers often do poorly in school and feel great stress because they just can't figure out a way to organize their studying.

To manage anxiety, a perceiver needs to understand his or her need for spontaneity and flexibility. The person must have some time when he or she can be unstructured and flexible. A career that emphasizes independence and change will help this kind of person decrease stress. In a sort of paradoxical way, an effective self-organization scheme can help decrease stress for a perceiver. If he or she can work out a compromise that allows the person to be successful and productive, yet still has flexibility and allows for spontaneity, the stress of being nonproductive will be eliminated.

IMPLICATIONS OF PERSONALITY ON YOUR STRESS PROCESS

In Activity 11.2, you will explore the implications of personality on your stress process. If you had difficulty deciding on your preferences, it will be

difficult for you to explore implications of personality to stress. Before you can examine these implications you have to have a picture of your own preferences. If this picture is very unclear to you, spend more time on self-understanding before you attempt to look at stress implications. You may want to see a counselor or psychologist and take the MBTI or some other personality instrument.

Activity 11.2 **Personal Implications**

List at least three implications regarding your experience of stress that you have learned from identifying your preferences. After you list each implication, discuss some stress management strategies that take your personality into account.

Examples:

Implication 1—I am a strong introvert and I get really stressed at work when I have to talk with so many different people all day long. I now know that this stress is probably because, as an introvert, I don't have enough time by myself during the day.

Stress Management Strategies—Take frequent breaks, perhaps a walk by myself. Close the office door and meditate when I feel overwhelmed. Try to screen out some of the contacts by having someone else in the office handle them. Find a job requiring less contact with others.

Implication 2—My girlfriend is always telling me that I don't understand her. I now realize that, as someone who prefers thinking, I have trouble being sensitive to her feelings and I often expect her to explain them logically to me. Some of the stress that comes from conflict in our relationship is because of this.

Stress Management Strategies—Talk to her about our different preferences for thinking and feeling. Stop trying to make her explain her feelings logically. Work hard at understanding her feelings. Ask her to work hard at understanding my need for logic and explanations.

Now, write out your own implications and strategies.

1. Implication _____

Strategies _____

2. Implication _____

Strategies _____

3. Implication _____

Strategies _____

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

Understanding oneself is not all that easy. This chapter has been an attempt to teach you a fairly simple personality system as a way of helping you better understand yourself and your experience of stress and anxiety. Use this opportunity to reflect and talk with others about your personality. Don't despair if you want or need to change some things about yourself. We are all in the process of growing and becoming. Perhaps an insight or two here will help you better manage stress and at the same time set a personal goal to develop a part of your personality that you want to improve.

SUMMARY

1. The term personality generally describes a kind of structure or series of traits that makes each of us unique. Many theories of personality exist that attempt to describe the structures of personality and how we acquire our personality.
2. Terms like character, disposition, temperament, nature, and even soul are sometimes said to have a meaning similar to the term personality.
3. Understanding your personality can help you better understand your stress reactions and also help you develop stress management strategies that will work for you.
4. Carl Jung's theory of personality types and preferences is one useful way to view personality.
5. In Jung's personality theory, which was operationalized and popularized by the *Myers Briggs Type Inventory* (MBTI), there are four basic functions and attitudes, with each person having one of two preferences within each attitude and function:

 Introversion—Extroversion (General attitude toward the world)

 Sensing—Intuition (Way of perceiving and taking information in)

 Thinking—Feeling (Ways of judging and making decisions)

 Judgement—Perception (Preferred life-style and way of interaction with the world)

6. You can learn a great deal about your own stress reactions by understanding what your preferences are in each area. This understanding can lead to greater self-acceptance and to the selection of stress management approaches that complement your personality.

PART V

ENVIRONMENT

AND

LIFE-STYLE ISSUES

Part V

ENVIRONMENT AND LIFE-STYLE ISSUES

So far, the emphasis in this book has been on how you can improve your management of stress by attending to your own interpretation of events, to personal health, and to improving relaxation and coping skills. You have learned about relaxation approaches, ways to modify irrational and flawed thinking processes, positive coping skills, personality considerations, and the importance of your general health in managing stress. In this section, you will examine some of the broader life-style issues. The focus will change to a more general treatment of how you make the choices about important life issues, and how these choices influence your own personal environment. For example, if you choose not to manage your time well and to live an unbalanced life-style, this has strong implications for your personal environment and your experience of stress. Or, if you face a major life transition, like the death of a spouse or parent, the way that you respond and reorganize your life has a profound effect on your personal environment. The assumption that you always have some control over your personal environment, through your choices, is an important one.

Although a comprehensive discussion of all of the important life-style areas is not possible here, some of the areas most relevant to stress management are covered. The first, included in Chapter 12, relates to your use of **time**. No stressor is more debilitating than the feeling that you must rush everywhere with no time to spare, or that you are wasting your time on activities that have no personal value or meaning. **Relationships**, discussed in Chapter 13, are also crucial. We need people to give us support and help us manage stress, yet many of us have great difficulty maintaining and cultivating the kind of trust and intimacy that makes this support possible. In Chapter 14, the importance of dealing with **life transitions** and the related stressors is considered. Job changes, divorces, marriages, deaths, and a myriad of other beginnings and endings in our lives all produce stress, yet great opportunity exists for growth and personal development. In Chapter 15, the role of **value**, **meaning**, and **spirituality** in stress management is explored.

12

Chapter

TIME MANAGEMENT



Managing time sometimes means taking time for new kinds of relaxation.

Futurists twenty years ago predicted that leisure time in America would increase dramatically. They foresaw a four-day week, with fewer work hours and more time for family and personal activities. Instead, figures show an increase in the time we spend working and many people report a feeling of just not having enough hours in the day. We seem to want to do everything and have everything. Stress is a frequent by-product of this need to constantly achieve and race the clock. Sometimes this sense of time urgency and over-commitment also leads to the feeling that our lives are driven and out of control. Some philosophers and commentators contend that this approach to time is largely a product of our technological society.

If this is true, then one obvious way to deal with the problem would be to drop out of the mainstream culture that seems to encourage this rather

frantic use of time. In recent history, some people did attempt to "drop out" of society. In the 1960s and early 1970s, a number of communes were formed where participants strove to live simpler lives and abandon, among other things, the highly structured and hurried life-style prevalent in our culture. In the long run, this turned out not to be a viable solution for most of them.

Short of dropping out of western civilization, then, what can you do to feel less stress about time? One effective method is to manage and balance time so that it doesn't feel as scarce. Another is to confront the personal characteristics that seem to cause the need to hurry. These approaches won't prevent you from having to operate within a culture that often encourages a sense of time scarcity, but they will help you increase your personal ability to manage time with a sense of perspective and balance. In this Chapter, you will have an opportunity to explore your attitudes about, and use of, time from both of these perspectives. First, you will examine the notion of Type A Behavior and the exaggerated sense of time urgency and other factors that go with that complex of behaviors. Second, you will learn more about effective time-management procedures and how you might improve your own use of time and create a harmonious balance between the different demands upon your time.

TYPE A BEHAVIOR

In the early 1970s two cardiologists, Meyer Friedman and Ray Rosenman, began to notice that patients who had heart disease had many personal characteristics in common. They were **competitive, impatient, hostile, perfectionistic**, and had a great sense of **time urgency**. Doctors Friedman and Rosenman labeled this "action emotion" complex Type A Behavior, and in subsequent research found that men who were Type A had more heart disease than those who were not Type A (they were called Type B). Since their initial book, literally thousands of studies of Type A Behavior have been conducted. In general, the concept has held up over time. Recent attempts have tried to isolate the specific part of Type A Behavior that is dangerous and to examine the validity of the concept for women. Some evidence is available to support the concept that aggression and hostility are the most important factors in heart disease; and the application of the concept to women, who generally have less heart disease, has not been strongly supported. In their original book, Friedman and Rosenman reported that over 50% of the urban Americans that they evaluated had Type A characteristics.

Type A Behavior is not a personality construct. It is rather a tendency to react to situations in various ways. Recent research has suggested that it may be related to one's general cognitive view of the world. One hypothesis is that people with poorly developed identities and low self-concepts see the world around them as threatening, and that they need to be hostile, competitive, and rushed in order to defend against it.

What does seem clear is that the Type A characteristics are related to excessive stress and to heart disease, certainly in men, and possibly in women. Since much of the competitiveness and time urgency for men seems to relate to their careers, the large increase of women in the workplace may lead to more women with Type A Behavior.

Complete Activity 12.1, Type A Behavior Inventory, to assess whether or not you have Type A characteristics. The inventory is based on the description of Type A Behavior in R.M. Friedman and R.H. Rosenman, *Type A Behavior and Your Heart*, New York: Knopf, 1974.

Activity 12.1 **Type A Behavior Inventory**

Rating Scale: For each behavior listed, assign the value to indicate the frequency with which the behavior occurs.

2 = Frequently
1 = Sometimes
0 = Almost Never

1. Verbally aggressive/impatient.

- Explosively accentuate key words.
- Increase the speed of the last few words of sentence.

2. Generally hurried.

- Move, walk, and eat rapidly.

3. Impatient with the rate of most things.

- Try to hurry speech of others.
- Finish sentences for others.
- Get unduly irritated in slow traffic.
- Become unnerved by having to wait in line.
- Get impatient when watching others work too slowly.
- Become impatient with routine tasks.
- Hurry reading (skip to summaries).

4. Try to do several things simultaneously.

- Think about or do two things simultaneously.
- Think about one thing while doing another.

5. Self-preoccupation.

- Steer conversations around to your own interests.
- Pretend to listen, but remain preoccupied.

6. Relaxation difficulties.

Feel guilt when relaxing.

7. Miss interesting and beautiful things in life.

Move too quickly to see/enjoy flowers, rainbows, etc.

Can't remember seeing trees, flowers, etc.

8. Preoccupied with getting rather than being.

Strive for material possessions.

Go about daily activities without reflection.

9. Chronic time urgency.

Feel constant need for more time in schedule.

Rush from place to place.

10. Aggressive/hostile.

Argue frequently.

Seldom feel compassion for others.

Try to dominate conversation, activities, etc.

11. Characteristic gestures or tics.

Clench fist or bang your head during conversation.

Clench jaw, grind teeth, or have tic.

12. Success is related to speed.

Must always compete and do things faster.

Unable to slow down, must always be first.

13. Emphasis on numbers.

Translate everything into how many, how much.

Emphasize quantity rather than quality.

Scoring: This inventory is not scientifically validated. However, you can obtain a rough idea of the extent of your own Type A Behavior by adding your scores and comparing them to the following scale:

50 - 60 = Probably a Type A

30 - 49 = Numerous Type A characteristics

10 - 29 = Some Type A characteristics

0 - 9 = Likely a Type B

If you surprised yourself with a large number of Type A Behaviors when you determined your score in Activity 12.1, give some thought to whether or not you really have these characteristics. Solicit feedback from people who have observed your behavior. Type A characteristics can be changed. In fact, many of the stress management methods that you have already learned will help. For example, if you realized that you have the high achievement or perfectionistic irrational belief, you may have already slowed down and become less competitive. Or, if you are practicing meditation regularly, you probably don't feel the hostility or sense of time urgency as much. In many ways the Type A Behavior describes someone who desperately needs good stress management skills and attitudes.

If you came out with many Type A characteristics, use this information to motivate yourself and reaffirm your commitment to using the stress management approaches that you are learning in this book. Because high blood pressure and heart disease are associated with Type A Behavior, you also may want to consult your physician. You may have to make some major changes in your values and overcome previous learning and socialization. Many of the Type A characteristics are taught to males in our culture. Boys often learn to be very competitive, high achieving, and aggressive. They learn to keep things inside and to be completely self-reliant, a prescription for stress and Type A behavior.

Activity 12.2 **Changing Type A Characteristics**

If you scored in the upper ranges on the Type A Behavior Inventory, use this activity to plan ways to decrease the different Type A Behaviors. Assess yourself on the following dimensions and list possible strategies for improvement. Try to list both attitudes and behaviors under each heading and include behavioral and attitude change improvement strategies.

1. Competitiveness

Example:

I am very competitive. It upsets me when I don't win at everything. I often compare myself to others and feel bad if I am not more competent. I even feel competitive with my girlfriend and other friends.

(Write your self-assessment here.)

Improvement Strategies

Examples:

1. I will work hard at refuting the irrational beliefs that I have about always needing to be supercompetent and always needing to be number one.
2. I will talk with some close friends about my competitiveness and try to understand why I can't feel happy with myself without always being on top.
3. I will deliberately participate in a sport or activity that I am not very good at and work toward just enjoying it and not trying to win.

(List your improvement strategies here.)

2. Rushing/Hurrying Everywhere

Improvement Strategies:

3. Impatience

Improvement Strategies:

4. General Hostility

Improvement Strategies:

5. Perfectionistic

Improvement Strategies:

PLANNING AND MANAGING YOUR TIME

If you can learn to manage your time, make progress toward accomplishing your goals, and lead a balanced life-style, you will eliminate a great deal of stress related to the use of time. First, you need to set your goals and priorities. This usually involves some hard decision-making and a willingness to be honest about what you can and can't do. Second, you need to find a time-management system that works for you. Your system should take into account your personality as well as the goals that you have set out for yourself. Third, you also must keep an effective balance in your schedule. No matter how goal-directed you are, if you don't attend to your general needs for good health and a healthy psyche, your accomplishments will be tarnished by stress and probably dissatisfaction and unhappiness. Fourth, to maintain a good time-management system you also must have to be able to combat procrastination and remain motivated when it is necessary to give up short-term gratification for long-term satisfaction.

SETTING GOALS AND PRIORITIES

The first step in effectively managing time is to develop an explicit statement of your long-range goals. This statement of goals will allow you to set shorter-range goals and to prioritize specific activities according to how much they contribute to your goals. Setting these long-range goals may be more difficult than you imagine. The process can force you to confront decisions that you have been putting off, or value issues that you don't want to handle. The notion of long-term goals often scares people because they consider the choices involved as unchangeable. In fact, many people avoid any goal setting because of the feeling that a choice will lock them out of other possibilities. This is both true and false. Certainly, at times a decision to pursue a goal rules out other possibilities. However, often goals can be changed and modified when new or additional information becomes available. Following is an example of one method for setting goals.

Example: Ben is a 19-year-old sophomore in college. He has tentatively decided that he would like to enter a people-helping profession like counseling or psychology. He also has done work on his personal goals. He is not satisfied with his relationships with women and would like to develop better interpersonal skills in this area. His long-term personal goal is to have an intimate relationship with a woman and to eventually marry and have a family.

Here is a chart of his career goal with intermediate and short-term career goals.

Long-Term Career Goal: Career as a Counselor/Psychologist (6 to 8 years)

Intermediate Career Goals:

1. Enter a Ph.D. or Master's program in Counseling or Clinical Psychology (3 to 5 years).
2. Graduate Assistantship or Counseling job at the Bachelor's level (2 to 4 years).

Short-Term Personal Goals: (Present)

1. Major in psychology.
2. Courses in education, biology, and statistics.
3. At least a 3.5 average for Masters.
4. Volunteer work as a hot-line counselor.
5. Volunteer or paid work as a research assistant (to generate reference letters from faculty).
6. Study-skills course to improve grades and study habits.
7. Find a quieter living environment at the end of the term to improve study time.

Looking at Ben's personal goal we see the following plan:

Long-Term Personal Goal: Develop an intimate relationship, marry and have a family (5 to 10 years).

Intermediate Personal Goals: (1 to 2 years)

1. Develop relationship skills so that meeting new women is not so threatening.
2. Learn to manage stress and anxiety about asking women for dates.

Short-Term Personal Goals: (Present)

1. Join two campus organizations to improve interpersonal contacts and self-confidence.
2. Attend an assertiveness-training workshop to help with anxiety and fear about initiating conversation.
3. Initiate conversation with women in classes.
4. Stay current with campus events to be a better conversationalist.
5. Take a listening-skills course to become a better conversationalist. (This will help with the career goal, also.)

This may seem like a rather involved set of goals, but you can see how helpful these goals will be to Ben in setting his priorities and in deciding how to spend his time. Keep in mind that goals are not set in concrete. Ben may change his mind, but for the present he has some rather specific guidelines. He has a head start on many college students, because he will not experience the stress of having no direction and he will be able to set up a time schedule and prioritize.

In Activity 12.3, establish two long-term goals (and related intermediate and short-term goals) for yourself, one in your career area and one in a personal area.

Activity 12.3

Goal Setting

- A. List the long-range goal. (Decide on a career and a personal goal, even if you are not certain, just so that you can practice the goal-setting process.)

Long-term Career Goal:

Long-term Personal Goal:

- B. List two immediate goals for each long-range goal. (These should be things that you can accomplish in the next few years.)

Intermediate Career Goals:

1. _____

2. _____

Intermediate Personal Goals:

1. _____

2. _____

- C. List at least three short-term goals for one intermediate goal in the career area and one in the personal area. The short-term goals should be things that you need to accomplish during the present to move you toward your intermediate goals.

Short-term Career Goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

Short-term Personal Goals:

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

DAILY AND WEEKLY SCHEDULING

The heart of effective time management is in day-to-day time organization. Scheduling and prioritizing can be done in a number of ways. If you don't have clearly defined goals, this section on time scheduling will be difficult for you for two reasons. First, you won't have any guidelines to use for prioritizing your activities; and second, you will have trouble motivating yourself to complete the tasks in your schedule that are not immediately gratifying. You will, for example, be tempted to go to a movie instead of studying calculus (which may be necessary for the long-term goal of becoming an engineer).

Two general approaches to scheduling can work well. The first is fairly simple and involves a **daily list** of things you want to accomplish that day. In order to use this method you need to know what your activities and obligations are for several weeks. This will allow you to make a daily list and modify and prioritize with a clear understanding of your very-short-term goals. This kind of approach appeals most to people who don't like too much structure and don't want to be locked into an hour-by-hour schedule. It allows for daily flexibility, yet helps you keep track of what needs to be done and allows you to prioritize and change priorities as deadlines approach. Of course, you must keep your need for balance in mind. Over the course of the week you should find time for relaxation, exercise, and socializing. (The question of balance will be covered in more depth later.)

Following is an example of a three-day period using the daily list type of schedule with a simple A-B-C priority system. (A = Highest Priority, B = Moderate Priority, and C = Lowest Priority.) This is a schedule for Ed, a man who works during the day and attends law school at night. (* = activities that he was not able to complete that day.)

Thursday (Home from Work at 5:30 P.M.)

1. Review notes for legal ethics class. (A)
2. Study for contracts class. (C)*
3. Work out at the gym. (B)*
4. Talk after dinner with Susan (wife). (A)
5. Prepare sales brief for tomorrow. (A)
6. Attend legal ethics class. (A)
7. Write a letter to brother. (C)*

Friday (Off Work at 2:00 P.M.)

1. Do contracts assignment. (B)
2. Library research. (B)
3. Lion's Club meeting. (C)*
4. Work out at the gym. (A)
5. Review notes for test next week. (C)*
6. Play catch with son. (A)
7. Read material for sales meeting at work next week. (B)*

Saturday

1. Church group project. (B)*
2. Softball game. (A)
3. Contracts assignment. (A)
4. Shopping. (C)*
5. Movie with Susan. (A)
6. Write letter to brother. (A)
7. Take son to little league. (A)
8. Read sales meeting material. (B)
9. Review notes for next week. (B)

In this schedule, you should be able to determine some of Ed's long-term goals and also see how he uses flexibility in his schedule. One of his goals is obviously to finish law school. From the way he prioritizes activities, it would also appear that another goal is to be a good father and husband. He also appears to be committed to a balanced schedule because he includes time for exercise, contact with his brother, and a softball game. By reevaluating his priorities every day, he is able to handle activities that don't get done in a particular day. Too much of this juggling can be difficult, but it also allows for the kind of flexibility that Ed needs. Consider also the fact that Ed may from time to time totally drop an activity out of his schedule. Sometimes one cannot just juggle from one day to another and when that occurs a particular activity may need to be given up. In his case, for example, he may decide to give up the Lions Club or perhaps the Church group project. These choices will be difficult and will depend upon what obligations he has coming up and upon how well he is dealing with his current schedule.

The method you use to record this kind of **daily list** schedule deserves some thought. A written list is essential. The list should be somewhere available to you throughout the day. You may want to carry a notebook or card with the items on it. You also will find it helpful to post the list somewhere as a reminder. Using this system will require a few minutes time at the end of the day or the beginning of the next to make a new list with the new day's priorities.

A more detailed kind of schedule will be necessary for people who need more structure than the flexible list method offers. The most common method is to use an hour-by-hour **weekly schedule**. This allows you to allocate time specifically and gives you a very clear guideline of what to do when. Although some people find this confining, others welcome the order and find it extremely helpful.

In Figure 12.1 is an example of this type of schedule for Ann, vice president of a branch bank. (The schedule is for only three days. Normally you would complete one on a weekly basis.)

Note that although her schedule is very full, Ann has taken her needs for a balanced life-style into account. She has even scheduled in free time where she can relax and have no demands upon her time. Although this type of schedule is highly structured, there is still room for change. You will always encounter unplanned needs for time. Therefore, there should be some room for flexibility. On the other hand, the value of this kind of schedule is in following it, so too much flexibility won't work. The key is not to be overcommitted. If you use this kind of schedule and every block is filled with an activity, you are clearly overcommitted and probably need to take a hard look at your priorities and give something up. You may have to go back to your original goals and see what is most crucial to them and to maintaining a balanced life-style.

Certainly other weekly schedule possibilities do exist. The **list schedule** and the **hourly weekly schedule** represent the two main types. You should experiment to find out which one works best for you. You may need to develop your own modifications. Perhaps you will devise a schedule that divides the day up into morning, afternoon, and evening, or maybe you will use a card system with items listed for different parts of the day. Be creative!

Time	Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday
(am) 7:00-8:00	Breakfast, Exercise		→
8:00-9:00	Dress, Commute		→
9:00-10:00	Work		→
10:00-11:00		→	
11:00-12:00		→	
(pm) 12:00-1:00	Lunch Relax		→
1:00-2:00	Work	Work	Work
2:00-3:00			
3:00-4:00		↓	
4:00-5:00		Health Club	↓
5:00-6:00	Commute	Commute	Commute
6:00-7:00	Dinner		→
7:00-8:00	School Conference	wash Clothes	Church meeting
8:00-9:00	Play with Daughter		→
9:00-10:00	Prepare Briefing	Read TV, Relax	Wash Clothes)
10:00-11:00	Read TV, Relax	↓	Read TV, Relax

BALANCE

The most common mistake that people make when they are trying to develop good time-management systems is not to allow for a balanced life-style. In recent years, a number of "wellness" systems have been devised to help remind us of the important dimensions of our lives. Proponents of these approaches believe that one's overall health and wellness require attention to all life areas. One common wellness model has six general areas:

- Physical** (exercise, nutrition, sleep)
- Intellectual** (cultural, aesthetic)
- Social** (intimate and social relationship)
- Career** (school and career-goal-directed work)
- Emotional** (expression of feelings, desires)
- Spiritual** (quest for meanings)

Certainly you don't have to have a designated set of activities in each of these areas; but if you notice one area that you don't attend to at all, you may be ignoring an important part of yourself. For example, if you set aside time for exercise, you will improve your overall functioning and also better manage your stress. If you take time to foster your intellectual growth, you can gain new perspectives on life, experience some different kinds of pleasure, and perhaps be better able to focus on your goals. If you allow yourself to think about and seek out your own feelings about the meaning of life, you may achieve a better sense of self, and a better perspective on what you really want to accomplish. If you take the time to form close relationships with others, you will have a support system and be able to share your emotional life with others. All of these require time and should be included in your time-management plan. You, of course, have to be the judge as to what is really important to you, but beware of the time-consuming activities that really don't gain you anything and in fact prevent you from following a balanced schedule.

Now is the time to decide on the kind of time-management system that makes the most sense for you. You may want to review the chapter on stress and personality. If you are structured and like organization and control, you will probably like some type of hourly schedule. If you don't like structure and prefer flexibility, your time-management task will be more difficult. You will need to experiment with the list system to see if you can find a way to get your time organized and still retain some flexibility.

Activity 12.4 Developing a Time Schedule

Write out either a list or an hourly time schedule for yourself. Use the models given in the descriptions of each method. Before you try out your schedule, review it and answer the following questions:

1. How did you set priorities?

2. Is your schedule realistic in terms of how many activities and tasks you are trying to accomplish? _____

3. Are your long-term goals reflected in your priorities? _____

4. Which parts of your schedule account for your needs in each of the following areas:

Physical (exercise, nutrition, sleep). _____

Intellectual (cultural, aesthetic). _____

Social (intimate and social relationships). _____

Career (school and career goal directed work). _____

Emotional (expression of feelings, desires). _____

and Spiritual (quest for meaning)? _____

After you have tried out your schedule for a week, analyze your success and make the necessary modifications. Don't give up if it doesn't work. Several tries may be needed before you find something that will have the proper balance between structure and flexibility for you.

PROCRASTINATION, DISTRACTION, AND OTHER PROBLEMS

Time management seems like a very sensible approach, yet many people never really learn to manage their time. They cannot quite get what they want done, or they just can't seem to prioritize, or somebody else distracts

them, . . . or . . . or . . . or . . . The reasons go on and on. If you are having a problem with time management, consider the following suggestions:

1. Review your long-term and intermediate goals often. Keep a list where you will see it often.
2. Continually try to eliminate unnecessary tasks that are not related to your goals or to maintaining a balanced life-style.
3. Take advantage of your natural cycles, schedule the most difficult activities when you are sharpest.
4. Learn how to say "No" to people, including spouses, friends, children, and parents.
5. Reward yourself for effective time management.
6. Solicit cooperation from those around you. Let your spouse, family members, roommate, and others know about your efforts to manage time.
7. Attend to your needs for spontaneity.
8. Do not set yourself up to fail. Be realistic and work toward an individualized approach that makes sense for you.
9. Record things—the process of putting schedules, priorities, and plans on paper is helpful in itself.

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

Developing a workable time management plan takes patience and perseverance. As you can see from this chapter, how you spend your time is related to your goals and values, and it can also make a considerable difference in managing the stress in your life. If your goals are unclear, you will have difficulty deciding how you want to use your time. If you don't attend to your needs for balance, you may accomplish some specific goals, but at what price?

When viewing time management, view it as a process rather than a specific task to master. No one manages time perfectly. We all need to reevaluate and reexamine our priorities periodically. Make three resolutions. One, to keep trying and experimenting with scheduling methods. Two, to write out your schedule even if you don't think it is necessary. And three, to strive to have balance in your schedule even if you are pressed to eliminate time for anything except your primary goals. Remember that, in the long run, a balanced schedule is the best way to achieve your goals and effectively manage stress.

SUMMARY

1. Time is at a premium in our culture, and our race with the clock often results in stress and anxiety.

2. Two basic approaches to time and anxiety are discussed in this chapter:
(a) confronting personal characteristics that increase the sense of time urgency and stress; and (b) learning to manage time effectively so that you have a balance of activities in your life, can work toward well-defined goals, and minimize the feeling that time is scarce and uncontrollable.
3. Type A Behavior has been identified as an "action emotion" complex that is characterized by behavior that is competitive, impatient, hostile/aggressive, perfectionistic, and time urgent. Studies show that men with this complex of behaviors are more likely to have stress-related heart disease.
4. Recent research has suggested that the aggression/hostility complex of behaviors may be the most significantly related to heart disease and that Type A Behavior is the result of one's general view of the world. One suggestion is that people with poorly developed identities see the world as hostile and threatening and that they use Type A Behavior as an attempt to cope.
5. Many of the relaxation and cognitive strategies already covered in this book can help you reduce Type A Behaviors.
6. Two general ways exist to develop a time-management schedule. A **daily list** which allows considerable flexibility and requires you to set your priorities daily and a **weekly schedule** that requires a weekly, hour-by-hour plan of activities.
7. In order to use either of these methods, you have to have developed some long- and short-term goals so that you can set priorities and decide how to spend your time.
8. Your personality, in particular your attitude toward structure, will determine which kind of time-management system works best for you. People who prefer flexibility and limited structure (Perceivers on the MBTI) have a more difficult time with time management and need to develop systems that allow them considerable flexibility.
9. Balance is an important concept in time management. You must consider your needs in all areas of your life when planning your schedule. One "wellness" system includes the following life dimensions: Physical, Intellectual, Social, Career, Emotional, and Spiritual. If you ignore any of these important areas, you are less likely to be able to develop a time schedule that helps you manage stress and anxiety.

Chapter 13

RELATIONSHIPS



Supportive relationships can help you deal with stress.

We all need people. Relationships with others are a great source of satisfaction and perhaps the richest part of the human experience. Yet relationships are also the source of some of our greatest fears and anxieties. We worry about what others think, about meeting people, about being liked, about finding a mate, about losing a mate, and so on. Stress is indeed a normal part of relationships, yet in the extreme too much stress and anxiety can be crippling, and block a person from rewarding relationships with others and from accomplishing many life goals.

Think about your own attitudes and feelings toward others. Are you frequently nervous about what others say or about what you say? Do you have people around who love you and to whom you can turn for support and comfort? Can you handle conflict in relationships? Can you say no, and express your other feelings? Do you understand how your own personality affects your

relationships with people? Are you lonely? These are not easy questions. In fact many of us spend a lifetime working and improving upon how we relate to others. Entire books have been written and theories developed about human relationships, so don't expect to have all of these questions answered in this chapter.

The approach here will be to focus on two aspects of relationships that are critical to stress management: having close friends, and being able to express feelings and opinions. Close friends provide a support system to help provide a buffer against a sometimes difficult and anxiety-producing world. This kind of personal support is a very important way to manage stress. These relationships require trust, however. You must have a certain level of closeness and intimacy to share your thoughts and feelings. These kinds of relationships have to develop and are usually reciprocal (you depend upon each other). Expressing your feelings and opinions (being assertive—the other relationship area crucial to stress management) allows you to avoid the stress that comes with bottling up emotions and feelings. In addition to the immediate stress that comes from not being assertive, a longer-range sense of powerlessness and impotence can develop from consistently failing to express yourself and your opinions and feelings.

SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIPS

By the time you read this book you have already learned a great deal about forming relationships. If you are lucky, you learned from your family and parents how to trust, how to reach out to others, and how to feel confident in your own attractiveness as a person. If you are unlucky, you may have learned to distrust or to question your own attractiveness as a friend, and perhaps you weren't able to learn some of the basic relationship skills. Few of us learned everything that we want or need to know about relating to others. Room exists for growth and positive change in all of us. Use the following review of relationship basics to help evaluate your own developmental progress. If you need to improve in certain ways, you can focus some of your attention on that area. In order to develop the close friends necessary to form a support system, you must . . .

1. feel that you are worthwhile and will make a good friend or partner.
2. have the ability to listen effectively.
3. have the ability to carry on small talk and begin and sustain conversation.
4. have the ability to disclose things about yourself and to trust others.
5. be willing to devote time to developing relationships and participate in activities that bring you into contact with others, and
6. foster intimate, supportive relationships.

These six points are discussed in the pages that follow.

Feeling Good about Yourself

Feeling worthwhile and having confidence that you have something to offer others is the underpinning for close relationships. You can't expect others to like you if you don't like yourself. You can use the material presented earlier in this book to help improve negative thoughts and feelings about yourself. If you have irrational beliefs about what you ought to be or how you ought to behave, confront them and try to become more rational about yourself. If you feel inadequate because you are too anxious to meet and converse with others, relaxation and stress inoculation can help you manage your anxiety and therefore feel better about yourself. If you hesitate to form relationships because you lack confidence in yourself, another solution may be to forge ahead and behave as if you do have confidence and something to offer others. You will soon find people react positively and that you no longer have to behave as if you were confident. Of course, forming friendships

means finding people with whom you are compatible. Doing so may take a while. If a particular relationship doesn't work out, it doesn't necessarily mean failure.

If, over the long haul, you can't help yourself improve negative feelings about yourself, you need to get professional help. In counseling you can discover how you learned to be negative about yourself, and you can get help with the process of developing a more positive self-concept.

Effective Listening

The ability to listen effectively and actively is a key to general success in relationships. Frequently, individuals are so intent upon getting their own point across that they just do not pay attention to what someone else is saying. When someone does really listen, it is meaningful. People who are good listeners have many friends because they are able to offer a commodity that is rather rare. To listen actively, you must focus your attention on the other person. If you try to understand what the other person is saying and feeling, you will take an important first step in active listening.

To achieve this kind of understanding you must perceive the situation from the other person's frame of reference, put yourself in the other person's shoes, so to speak. This process is called **empathy**. To listen actively you must be able to empathize (understand from the other person's point of view) and to communicate that empathic understanding. Your nonverbal behavior is as important as what you say. Your facial expressions, head nods, eye contact, body position, and body movements all tell the other person how actively you are listening.

Researchers have determined that increasing one's ability to listen actively and to communicate empathy is possible. The simplest and most direct way to improve these skills is to practice and then ask others if they feel that you were understanding them. Formal opportunities to improve listening skills are available. Communication skills and empathy training are often available at local colleges, churches, clubs, and personal growth centers. You also can try Activity 13.1 to assess and improve your listening skills.

Conversations and Small Talk

Often people say, "I hate small talk, it is so meaningless." But it is not meaningless! Small talk is the ritual that people use to make contact with each other. Yes, it is superficial, but it is also an important stage in maintaining and establishing relationships—it is often the basis of initial conversations with new friends. The content, or words exchanged, are not as important as the general interaction that occurs. In a sense, words allow the interpersonal process to begin. Are you one of the people who avoids contact with new people because you hate small talk? Why not overcome your negative opinion and open yourself up for more new relationships?

Using small talk in conversations isn't difficult once you accept the basic premise that the content is not important. A helpful procedure is to have a number of questions and topics ready to help begin conversations. If necessary, make a list and consult friends who are good at beginning conversations to see what they say. Creating an inclusive list, of course, isn't possible. What you would say to someone you are sitting next to on a bus is different from what you would say to someone you meet at a party. People will not always reciprocate your small talk. If the person next to you on an airplane hastily returns to his magazine after you try to start a conversation, that is perfectly all right. Not everyone wants to converse. You have the same right not to return conversation if you so desire.

Self-disclosure

On all levels of relationships you have to be willing to share part of yourself. When you practice active listening, your communication of empathy

Activity 13.1

Active Listening

Find a partner who is willing to let you practice listening and to give you honest feedback. Have your partner tell you about a problem or situation that has some meaning for him or her. Your job is to *listen* and to let the other person know that you understand what he or she is saying and feeling (not to give advice or to provide solutions). If possible, audio tape or video tape the interaction. After about five minutes, stop the interaction, rewind, and replay it. Ask your friend to listen to the interaction and to stop the tape periodically to give you feedback. Before your partner gives feedback, discuss the concept of feedback. Helpful feedback has to be specific, direct, constructive (not personally threatening), and balanced. Most people can only handle a certain amount of negative feedback. Ask your friend to look for both positive and negative aspects of your listening. Have your partner answer the following questions about your listening.

1. At what part of the interaction did you (the partner) feel that you were best understood?

2. What did the listener say or do to communicate understanding and empathy?

3. How were you affected by the listener's voice?

4. What specific verbal and nonverbal behaviors were helpful and not helpful?

5. How could the listener have expressed greater empathy and understanding?

requires you to risk telling the other person your perception of his or her feelings. At times you may even share your feelings or experiences in similar situations. When you are making small talk, you have to eventually contribute something about yourself. The level of your self-disclosure will have a great effect on how well the conversation develops and moves beyond small talk. Self-disclosure is a significant part of close and intimate relationships. Sometimes disclosure in these situations is risky and difficult. In general, your ability to self-disclose, to be honest about yourself and your feelings and experiences, is more important as relationships progress. If you are someone who is introverted and shy, you may have trouble talking about yourself, especially if you are not directly asked. You may need to work on being more open, particularly if you want to develop intimate relationships. This may require extra effort and a kind of forcing yourself to share your feelings, ideas, and experiences. By doing Activity 13.2, you can examine aspects of your self-disclosure.

Activity 13.2 **Self-disclosure**

Review the following scale and evaluate yourself on how often you use different levels of self-disclosure and on how easily you disclose at each level. If you have trouble with appropriate self-disclosure, list two situations where you would feel safe being more self-disclosing (write out your self-evaluation after each level):

Level 1—Superficial. No real self-disclosure. Usually involves perfunctory social responses; e.g., How are you? Fine, you?

Level 2—Some Self-disclosure. Some self-disclosure, but at a fairly "safe" level; e.g., How are you? Not so good, work is getting me down. (Note that this self-disclosure would likely lead to more conversation and perhaps more self-disclosure.)

Level 3—Significant Self-disclosure. Usually occurs within private conversation where additional time together is possible; e.g., "Tom, you look terrific. Come on in and have some coffee." "Thanks, Al. I am feeling really good. The most fantastic thing happened to me yesterday."

Level 4—Intimate Self-disclosure. Sharing of something very personal that makes you feel vulnerable. Usually occurs with a very close friend or family member; e.g., "Carol, I am really worried that my husband is having an affair. We just don't seem to communicate anymore."

List two situations in which you would like to be more self-disclosing.

1. _____

2. _____

Devote Time and Participate in Activities

To develop and maintain relationships, you have to make an effort. This means that you have to spend time with friends and, if necessary, put yourself in places where you can meet new people. You may have always thought that friendships just develop naturally. In a sense this is true in that we tend to be attracted to people with whom we can be friends; however, these people don't always automatically show up in our lives. If you have always lived in the same town, you may still have the friends that you made as a child and you may be around many family

members. If you have moved away, like so many others, you have had to establish new friendships and new support systems. Don't be afraid to go about it systematically. Sometimes you can very easily get involved in work or other activities that put you into contact with people you might want to meet.

Evaluate the time you spend on relationships by completing Activity 13.3.

Activity 13.3 **Relationship Time**

Answer the following true-false quiz about the time you devote to relationships.

- T F 1. I spend at least some time every day relaxing and talking with my spouse or lover. (Answer this one only if you are living with a partner.)
- T F 2. I reserve time in my schedule for time with my close friends at least weekly or every other week.
- T F 3. If a friend calls me and needs to talk with me, I can almost always find the time for him or her.
- T F 4. When I feel the need to meet new people, I participate in organizations or activities where I am likely to meet people with whom I will be compatible.
- T F 5. When I know that I want to get to know someone better, I take the lead and arrange to spend time with them.
- T F 6. When I notice that my schedule is getting so busy that I don't have time to spend with close friends, I rearrange my schedule so that I don't lose touch with my friends.

If you answered true to all of the above items, then you are doing an excellent job at putting the time and energy into maintaining close relationships. If you answered one or more of the items as false, you have some room for improvement. Take the time to make the necessary adjustments in your schedule and life-style.

Foster Intimate, Supportive Relationships

To develop a support system of people upon whom you can depend and who can depend upon you, you need to go beyond casual friendship. You need to develop some level of intimacy in order to get this kind of support. Intimacy, in this sense, doesn't necessarily mean a sexual relationship, although a sexual partner is a logical person from whom to get support and understanding. Men sometimes have a much more difficult time forming intimate relationships

with other men. Because of socialization, many men in our culture grow up learning that they should be strong, independent, and able to rely only upon themselves. They also don't learn very well how to share their feelings and their vulnerabilities. Many men, even in intimate sexual and marriage relationships, are unable to get the support they need to deal with their stress and anxiety. Think about just how your support system currently works. Can you get support when you need it? Examine your support system by doing Activity 13.4.

Activity 13.4 **Support Systems**

Examine the following situations and see if you can list at least two friends upon whom you could call for personal support if you encountered each of the situations below (list two people for each situation if you can):

1. Not getting along well with your boss—feeling a lot of stress at work.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
2. Afraid that your marriage or love relationship is going sour.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
3. Worried about flunking out of school.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
4. Feeling very tense and having frequent headaches.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
5. Losing sexual interest in your husband or wife.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
6. Just found out that you have cancer.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____
7. Your 16-year-old son or daughter has just ran away from home.
 - a. _____
 - b. _____

Some situations on this list are very anxiety-producing; yet, if you have a good support system, you will have people to lean on and to get help from. If you couldn't come up with two people for each of these situations, you need to put some effort into developing a better support system. These kinds of relationships take time and sustained effort. Now is the time to put the effort in, not when you reach a crisis like one of those listed previously.

ASSERTIVENESS

When you are overly cautious and elect not to express wishes and feelings, you pay a price—anxiety. Even though you consciously may decide not to express yourself (and sometimes this decision is appropriate), you still feel anxiety. Most of the time, when you feel the need to express yourself, that expression, if done without devaluing the other person, is quite appropriate. All too frequently, however, people choose not to express themselves and being nonassertive becomes a pattern. A negative cycle develops and the individual starts to believe that he or she doesn't have the ability to be assertive or that he or she doesn't have the right to express an opinion or feeling. People also can be too expressive and develop the habit of aggressively expressing feelings and opinions. Their attitudes violate the rights of others and they become the kind of aggressive person that no one likes.

Joseph Wolpe, a psychotherapist and researcher, began to advocate the use of assertion training to combat anxiety in the early 1970s. The idea of learning to be more assertive was popularized by a number of self-help books including the widely popular, *Your Perfect Right*, by Alberti and Emmons. The concept was particularly appealing to many women who, through the feminist movement, were learning that they, as women, had been socialized to be too passive, and that becoming more assertive would help them express their independence. This popularization was generally a healthy development, except that some assertion proponents have gone overboard and tend to overemphasize the "me first" aspects of assertion, leaving out the importance of respecting other people's rights as well as standing up for your own.

Most of the models of assertion training suggest three possible ways of expressing feelings and desires.

Nonassertive—being passive and not expressing feelings or standing up for yourself.

Assertive—expressing feelings and opinions clearly without violating other people's rights.

Aggressive—expressing feelings and opinions in an overbearing and hostile manner so as to violate the rights of others.

Stress and anxiety most often come with being passive and nonassertive, and not expressing yourself. The sense of holding in feelings and the related stress is the basis for the anxiety that is created. Most assertion training programs begin with some discussion of attitudes. You have to believe in

your right to be assertive and be willing to accept the corresponding responsibilities and consequences before you can change your behavior. Changing attitudes can be particularly difficult if you have developed a kind of passive, "I will sacrifice" social role. Assertion training is often done in groups so that members can help each other change their passive attitudes. If you need this kind of help, seek out a training program to help modify this attitude.

After you come to believe that you are entitled to be assertive, and able to cope with the consequences, all that remains is to learn the behaviors involved. This includes learning appropriate kinds of responses (ways to express yourself); practicing them, first in controlled and safe settings; and trying them out with real life situations. Examine your assertiveness by doing Activity 13.5.

Activity 13.5

Assertiveness Assessment

List three interpersonal situations in which you felt stress or anxiety. Rate your reaction as either passive (P), assertive (As), or aggressive (Ag). If you weren't assertive, indicate why. Do you have any patterns of being nonassertive or aggressive?

P As Ag 1. Situation

P As Ag 2

Page 10 of 10

P As Ag 3:

8 _____

Pattern _____

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In order to learn to be more assertive, you can follow a seven-step learning process. These seven steps are summarized in the pages that follow.

1. Learn the Differences among Assertive, Nonassertive (Passive), and Aggressive Responses

An understanding of how each kind of response affects the person giving the response and the person or persons to whom the response is directed will help you realize that an **assertive response** is usually best. Generally an assertive response allows you to express your own feelings without violating the rights of others. By expressing your feelings directly, you avoid the anxiety that comes from holding back your feelings and you also have the satisfaction of knowing that you have expressed yourself. Assertive responses, although they may express disagreement with someone else, are generally best in the long run because they tend to keep relationships honest.

Passive behavior, not expressing your feelings or thoughts, is harmful to everyone concerned. If you don't express yourself, you will feel the accompanying anxiety, and perhaps develop feelings of resentment and incompetence because you don't respond when you want to. Relationships also will suffer because frequently your feelings will come out anyway in some passive or aggressive way that will confuse and anger others. A pattern of passive behavior may lead to overt aggressive responses which carry very strong emotion stored up from many instances of being passive. In other words, if you attempt to control your feelings and stifle them frequently, they may come out in very strong and destructive ways at times when you can't control them. Here are some examples of passive, assertive, and aggressive behavior:

Example 1: A man is angry with his wife because she scheduled a weekend social engagement with friends without telling him beforehand.

Passive response—decides not to say anything because it will only lead to an argument.

Assertive response—tells his wife that he is hurt and angry because she didn't consult with him before making plans.

Aggressive response—screams, calls his wife an inconsiderate bitch, and storms out of the house.

Example 2: A daughter is talking with her mother on the phone. Mother wants to visit her next weekend, but the daughter has other plans. She tries to tell her mother this, but mother insists and says that she (daughter) won't have many more years to visit her dear old mother.

Passive response—decides to see her mother and change her other plans, but feels angry and resentful.

Assertive response—firmly tells her mother that she has other plans and that she will arrange another visit very soon.

Aggressive response—yells at her mother to stop giving her guilt trips and hangs up on her.

2. Assess Your Assertive, Aggressive, and Nonassertive (Passive) Behavior

We all make different kinds of responses at different times. The key to assessing your behavior is to identify patterns. Are you usually passive with certain people, or types of people, in certain situations? Are you often aggressive in some situations? Do you feel stress and anxiety after certain interactions? This may be a sign of passivity. Using anxiety as a kind of key, examine your interactions for several days. Do you see any patterns?

3. Develop New Assertive Responses for Specific Situations

After you have identified some of the patterns in your interactions, you will be able to decide in which situation and with which people you need to develop assertive behavior. For example, if you find that you are usually passive (and tense) around authority figures (like your boss, professors, etc.), you probably need to concentrate on those situations. Start out with one or two situations. Write out some assertive responses that you might make in specific situations.

4. Think Through and Discuss the Risks of Your Being Assertive

This step is very important because, indeed, risks are involved in being assertive. Usually, assertive behavior is effective and useful; however, at times it may have negative consequences. For example, if you feel that your boss is totally ignorant and unqualified for her job, you may not want to risk telling her your true feelings. That doesn't mean that if you disagree with her on a particular item that you can't be assertive and make that opinion known. Choosing to be assertive can be tricky. You may wind up with a trade-off between dealing with the stress of not expressing yourself, and dealing with the stressful consequences of expressing yourself. To be assertive without thinking about the consequences is certainly not appropriate. Be careful, however, that you differentiate real risks from your irrational fears of being assertive. Take some time to think through the risks associated with being assertive in the two situations that you picked in the previous paragraph.

5. Rehearse Your Assertive Behavior

Begin by visualizing yourself being assertive in the two situations that you picked earlier. Do this while you are calm and relaxed so that you can begin to learn the response without experiencing undue anxiety. After you have rehearsed internally, set up a situation where you can role-play the assertive responses and get feedback. Remember that how you say it is as important as what you say. An assertive statement said with great anger can become an aggressive statement. Ask two friends to help, one as an observer and one as the person with whom you are being assertive. Have both friends give you feedback and suggestions after the role-plays.

6. Try Out Assertive Responses in a Real Situation

The ultimate goal of developing assertive behavior as a way to manage stress is using it in real life. If you are attempting to change a major behavior

pattern, you may find that people are surprised and taken aback by your new assertive behavior. You may want to tell people who are close to you that you are making an effort to be more assertive and help them understand what this may mean in terms of your relationship with them. Giving them a kind of warning may help them adjust to your new behavior.

Try to remember also that you may initially need to provide support and reinforcement for yourself. Eventually you will find that most people respond well to your being assertive, and the decrease in stress and increase in the quality of your interactions will serve as a potent reinforcer. If you have had a pattern of being aggressive or passive, becoming assertive will make a very significant difference in your general stress level, and it will also increase your sense of self-worth.

7. Maintain Your Assertive Behavior by Constant Reevaluation and Reinforcement

You can easily fall into bad habits. Even if your general pattern of responses is assertive, you may slip into nonassertive responses in certain situations or periods. After you become aware of the importance of assertiveness and the stressful consequences of not being assertive, you will be able to fairly easily recognize when you are not assertive. Keep in mind also that being assertive is not only about negative feelings and emotions. Expressing positive and affectionate feeling is also assertiveness.

Remember that being assertive doesn't mean imposing your will on someone else. It does involve expressing your feelings and opinions, paying attention to your own rights, and being responsible for dealing with the consequences of being assertive. Your rights may come into conflict with the rights of others and to satisfy both parties may be impossible. Although this conflict can create stress, if you are assertive and reasonable, the chances are good that the conflict can be resolved without either party walking away with that tense, anxious feeling that results from not expressing a feeling or strong opinion.

PERS^{NAL} CHECKPOINT

Since the topic of relationships is so complex, this short chapter may have been frustrating. Two main points were developed. First the importance of forming and developing close friendships that will afford you support when you need it was emphasized. This social support is one of your greatest assets in dealing with stress-related problems and situations. Second, the importance of being assertive as a way of eliminating stress was addressed. A brief presentation of how to become more assertive and also how to form supportive relationships was included. If you are unable to put the suggestions into practice, you will need to do additional reading and perhaps get additional help with these areas. You also may want to expand your reading and experience with all aspects of relationships. Although, as discussed, some aspects of relationships are crucial to stress management, the topic is a broad one that is of crucial importance to most of our health and life satisfaction.

SUMMARY

1. Two major aspects of relationships are particularly important in stress management:
 - a. Having close friends as a support system.
 - b. Being assertive.
2. Effective supportive relationships often don't just happen automatically, they have to be developed.
3. Your feelings about yourself largely depend upon your experiences and what you learned about yourself as you were growing up. If you have negative feelings about yourself, you will have difficulty forming relationships with others. You will need, through counseling or some other work, to learn more positive feelings about yourself.
4. To be an effective listener, you have to learn to be empathic and to communicate your understanding to others. This involves learning to put yourself into the other person's shoes so that you can really understand what they are saying.
5. Many times in life you will have to make small talk and meet new people in order to develop friendships. Making small talk is a ritual that we use to begin the process of getting to know someone.
6. You have to be willing to disclose information and feelings to others if relationships are to develop.
7. Good friendships often don't just happen. You have to make an effort to spend time with people and to meet people with whom you are compatible.
8. In order to get the support you need to manage stress, you have to foster a degree of intimacy in some relationships.
9. If you don't assert yourself and express your feelings and opinions, you will feel anxiety from holding in these feelings and opinions.
10. Interactions where you desire to express a feeling or an opinion will be classified into one of three categories: assertive, nonassertive, or aggressive.
11. In order to learn to be more assertive, you can follow a seven-step learning process:
 - a. Learn the differences among assertive, passive, and aggressive responses.
 - b. Assess your assertive, aggressive, and nonassertive (passive) behavior.
 - c. Develop new assertive responses for specific situations.
 - d. Think through and discuss the risks of your being assertive.
 - e. Rehearse your new assertive behavior.
 - f. Try out assertive responses in a real situation.
 - g. Maintain your assertive behavior by constant reevaluation and reinforcement.

14

Chapter

LIFE TRANSITIONS



We all struggle with life transitions. The circumstances of our lives are always changing. We get older, we leave our parents, we have children, our parents die, we change careers, and we retire. These changes inevitably create anxiety. We are challenged to deal with new insights and new circumstances. Our search for meaning and fulfillment continues, but in different ways. The stress we feel with these changes is normal and sometimes stimulating, but it can still be painful and in the extreme it can create significant problems.

Life changes are often part of the normal developmental sequence, when we are called upon to make transitions as we move to new life stages. For example, the young woman who leaves home for college experiences a new kind of independence and self-sufficiency. She also may experience considerable stress as she goes through this transition to independence. Other important changes which require transitions and are not developmental also occur, often without warning. Examples of these kind of changes are death of a spouse, loss of a job, or an unexpected divorce.

Most of us get through life transitions related to developmental and unpredictable changes and move on to the next part of our lives. We manage the pain and the stress, we accept the need for transition, we rise to the challenge, and we carry on. Sometimes, however, stress and anxiety can interfere with transitions and can block growth and development. Although no easy way exists to minimize the pain and anxiety that can occur, the following five strategies can help:

1. Understand and accept the process of developmental change throughout life.
2. Recognize and accept emotions related to unexpected life events and crises.
3. Identify new developmental tasks and needs, and actively confront them.
4. Maintain your independence and self-reliance.
5. Practice good health and effective stress management, particularly in times of difficult transition.

UNDERSTAND AND ACCEPT THE PROCESS OF DEVELOPMENTAL CHANGE THROUGHOUT LIFE

In recent years, as a society, we have discovered the fact that people don't stop growing and developing when they become adults. Theories about life stages and adult development have been popularized and use of the term "mid-life" and "identity" crisis is commonplace. This is generally a positive awareness. It helps us all understand more about how we develop and about some of the things that we can generally expect to experience at certain points in life. If you take time to learn about life-span development you will be better able to accept and understand some of the changes and transitions that you may experience. Consider the following example:

Example:

Joyce is a 29-year-old woman. She grew up in a midwestern city in a family that stressed traditional values. She learned that one should work hard and follow the ten commandments. She also learned that the basic role for women was to marry, have children, and make a good home. In high school she was exposed to other value systems, but chose to follow her early teachings. She fell in love at 16 with the boy down the street and they married the week after high school graduation. He found a fairly good job as an auto mechanic.

At this point, her husband owns a small car repair garage. They have three children and Joyce has primary responsibility for their care. Although Joyce has all of the things that she always dreamed of, a house, a beautiful family, and a loving husband, she is not happy. Her life seems to lack something and she resents her husband's success. Lately she has felt guilty and depressed.

Joyce is experiencing something not uncommon for women who marry early before they develop their own identity. By marrying so early and focusing almost totally on her family and her husband, Joyce didn't have a chance to develop many of her own interests and abilities. At this point, she needs something else in her life. Fortunately, she and her husband are both avid readers and have learned something about adult development. After talking about the situation, they recognize that Joyce's problems are related to a developmental need. She is in a transition period and needs to figure out some of her own interests. Since she was good in math and has always been interested in computers, she decided to go back to school and study computer science. In this case, knowledge and acceptance of the fact that Joyce needed to make some developmental changes helped both her and her husband deal with the stress related to their situation and plan some appropriate action.

Erik Erikson, a famous psychoanalyst, developed the first major theory of development that covered the entire life span. Although a number of theories have been developed since Erikson's, his work still serves as a useful guide for viewing the stages of adulthood. Since his theory was developed, considerable work has been done to more closely examine development for women. A major criticism of his work was that it was developed primarily from studying males. Carol Gilligan, a well-known author, has pointed out some of the developmental differences between men and women. Men's development tends to be more related to careers, achievement, and autonomy while women are more oriented toward relationships, attachments, and nurturing throughout the life cycle.

Erikson's Stages

Erikson identified eight stages of man, with each stage characterized by a central conflict. The struggle and conflict is necessary for development to occur. The notion of stages comes from the fact that at predictable times in our lives biological growth and social expectations dictate certain kinds of development. For example, during adolescence we mature physically, and society expects us to become young adults and take on the obligations of adulthood. Be careful, however, not to view stages as rigid periods that apply to everyone. People are often not in the predicted stage, and they frequently fall back into conflicts that were part of earlier stages.

The last four of Erikson's stages provide a rough outline for adult development.

1. **Adolescence** (puberty to late teens, early twenties). The conflict is between **identity vs. role diffusion**. In this stage, the period of childhood ends and the struggle for adulthood becomes the central focus. The conflict is a pull between forming an identity and the role diffusion that comes from exploring the many roles that are possible. Feelings related to the onset of puberty with changing social expectations also are significant influences. In the sometimes desperate search for identity, young people often over-identify with specific heroes, causes, or ideologies. At times, as a way of fighting confusion, groups and cliques that adolescents form can be quite exclusive and cruel. The formation of

identity must occur in several different spheres—career, sexual, moral, and social.

2. **Young Adulthood** (late teens to mid-twenties). The conflict is **intimacy vs. isolation**. In this stage, according to Erikson, the young adult moves from an inward focus and identity consolidation to a search for intimacy and sharing. For many, this is the search for a spouse or lover because this period, the late teens and early twenties, is when the young person in our culture is usually expected to pick a mate. Some theorists contend that the development of identity for women involves the accomplishment of the intimacy vs. isolation stage before identity is formulated. The conflict between intimacy and isolation is concerned with the question of whether the young person can move beyond his or her self-involvement to involvement with others.
3. **Middle Adulthood** (mid-twenties to late sixties). The conflict is **generativity vs. stagnation**. In this stage, according to Erikson, the adult needs to develop ways to create and contribute something to the next generation. Whether the rearing of a child or the production of a work of art, this process is essential to prevent stagnation. This stage is another step away from involvement with self toward involvement with others. This is perhaps the least descriptive of Erikson's stages, and one in which work by other theorists has helped better define the middle years. The so-called mid-life crisis, which occurs in this stage, is in some ways a recapitulation of the identity stage where an individual reassesses self and his or her place in the world. The most significant stimulus for this crisis, which often occurs in the early forties, appears to be the realization that life is more than one-half over, and that many of the earlier hopes and dreams that one had will probably not be fulfilled. Considerable stress can occur in this period and sometimes new careers, major life-style changes, and divorces result.
4. **Old Age** (sixties and up). The conflict is **integrity vs. despair**. Since the life span has increased steadily in recent years, this period has become longer and more complex. Fortunately researchers are examining the older years to identify developmental patterns. Some have suggested dividing up the period into segments in order to recognize the difference between early old age (sixties) and late old age (eighties and beyond). Erikson saw old age as a kind of culmination of the earlier stages and his integrity vs. despair related to the person's perception of his or her past life. The absence of integrity results in the despairing of one's life. The difference between an aged person who is at ease with self and his or her life contrasts sharply with the individual who is bitter and constantly bemoaning life's mistakes and misfortunes. More recent considerations concerning this stage have to do with health and financial resources. For many, the early part of this period is one of relative health and freedom to travel, relax, and generally enjoy freedoms that are new and exciting. In many ways this stage is not just backward looking as Erikson described it, although the perspective and obvious mortality certainly require some measure of looking backward.

Activity 14.1 **Developmental Assessment**

Review the information given about Erikson's four stages and identify in Item 1 the central conflict or conflicts that you see in your own life. After you have identified one or two developmental conflicts, answer the questions in Item 2 about the conflict.

1. My developmental conflicts: _____

2. Questions

a. Do the conflict(s) match the developmental stages as given by Erikson?

b. How are these conflicts affecting your life?

c. Do they create anxiety?

d. Are you involved in something that will help resolve the conflict?

e. Has the conflict resurfaced from an early time in your life?

Stress in Life Span Development

The preceding is only the briefest outline of life-span development, but hopefully it will allow you to explore your own development and think about the role of stress in your life-span development. Perhaps more important than the details of the different life periods and stages is the notion that development does occur, and that major changes can and do happen throughout life. As has been suggested more than once in this book, self-understanding and insight can have a positive effect in helping you to cope with stress and anxiety.

RECOGNIZE AND ACCEPT EMOTIONS RELATED TO UNEXPECTED LIFE EVENTS

Unexpected life events like death or loss of a spouse, loss of a job, or serious injury or disability can be even more stressful than developmental changes. Two physicians, Doctors Holmes and Rahe, were the first to demonstrate that the stress of many different life events can be related to physical illness. Clearly, traumatic events that happen unexpectedly can have a major negative impact in many ways. No easy ways exist to deal with something like the loss of a spouse or an unexpected job loss; however, some strategies can help.

1. Expect strong and different emotional reactions.
2. Seek out support when you need it.
3. Be patient with yourself.
4. Accept the need for transition and change.

Many of the feelings related to unexpected life events come from the sense of loss. Elizabeth Kubler-Ross, a psychiatrist famous for her study of reactions to death, suggested several stages that people often go through when they are dying. These stages can be modified to cover any kind of loss, including death. Imagine the following stages as they might pertain to loss of a spouse, loss of a job, or physical disability:

1. **Denial**—This can't be happening to me.
2. **Rage and Anger**—Why is this happening to me?
3. **Depression**—What's the use of anything?
4. **Acceptance**—This awful thing has really happened. I must now go on.

You must allow yourself to feel and react. Most of us try to find ways to shelter ourselves from the pain. This is natural, but if it goes on too long, the failure to deeply feel the terrible pain will interfere with the healing process. One way to deal with a strong emotion is to talk with those who are dear to you. Often within the supportive arms of a friend or family member you can feel free to really face what has happened to you. The time may not be right immediately, but soon after the unexpected event you need to talk to others about what happened and about your feelings.

In addition to helping you express and experience your feelings, talking with others can help you feel that someone else is there for you; that you are not alone in your crisis. If you don't have a friend or family member, don't hesitate to find a counselor or clergyman to help you. Many peer support groups also exist to help members deal with common crises. Support groups are now available in many communities for people who have lost spouses, children, jobs; for people who are seriously ill or disabled; and for people who have suffered trauma like physical or sexual abuse.

Many times after a traumatic life event friends and relatives are quick to tell you that you have to go on with your life, and that you can't sit around and mourn or mope forever. This is true, but you must be patient with yourself and give yourself enough time to deal with your feelings before you are ready to go on. Somewhere in the process of mourning or dealing with your emotions you should begin to accept the need for transition. That is not to say that you need to jump right into life changes or transitions, but you ought to imagine and accept that things will never be the same. Don't be hurried in this process—take the time you need, but don't get stuck in the no-man's land of apathy and depression.

IDENTIFY NEW DEVELOPMENTAL TASKS AND NEEDS AND CONFRONT THEM

Whether you are in the midst of a developmental conflict or trying to move on after a traumatic life event, you can help yourself by directly confronting your needs. Take the following two examples, one representing the developmental tasks related to normal life-span development and one representing new tasks necessitated by unexpected life events.

Example 1: Noreen is 21-years-old. She has always been very close to her parents and attended a community college while she lived at home. She and her mother are best friends, and although she has dated, she has never had an ongoing serious relationship. She has completed her two years at community college and is planning to attend a state college in another town. She is very nervous about leaving home and has confided in her mother that she just doesn't think that she can make it on her own. Her mother is worried and doesn't know what to tell her.

It is clear that Noreen is involved in a conflict between the need to move on and become more independent, and her fear of leaving her parents. She needs to confront the developmental tasks that she will have to accomplish as part of her move away from home. She will need to do several things: (1) develop friendships to provide for the intimacy that she has had with her mother; (2) learn to manage her own life and live independently (which may require learning to manage money, cook, run a car, etc., depending upon what she has experienced while living at home); and (3) manage her time and develop academic and career goals relative to her school work. In addition to these immediate tasks related to leaving home and going to school, she probably will have to confront tasks required for relationships. These will involve interpersonal skills and perhaps learning about sexual and romantic relationships. She can help herself a great deal if she will think about and plan out how she will approach these tasks. If she doesn't confront them, she will probably be depressed and lonely at school.

Example 2: Tom is 42-years-old. He recently lost his job after being with the same company for 20 years. He was a mid-level executive and his termination came as a complete surprise. Tom was married for a few years, but he has been single for the last ten years. He never really liked his job, but nonetheless he put in long hours and seemed to use up most of his time working. He is feeling quite depressed about losing his job, and feels apathetic and tired most of the time.

Tom is certainly still reacting to the shock of losing his job. He is having difficulty moving on to the next stage of his life. In his case, the loss of a job that he didn't really like, but at which he spent most of his time, is really an opportunity to make some changes in his life. Perhaps he would like to find a career that he enjoys and that would allow him time to develop other aspects of his life. Maybe he would like to be more available for an intimate or marriage relationship. His immediate developmental task is to deal with the career question. He needs to develop some goals relative to finding a new job and perhaps a new career. He can best confront this directly by getting himself some career counseling with a counselor or psychologist who also can help him evaluate what other developmental tasks he might want to confront.

You can see that these two examples have similarities and differences. Noreen's need for change and development is really part of the normal developmental process, although she may be finding her independence a bit later than most people. No real crisis or unexpected event happened to propel her into change, although her completion of community college was a kind of marker that meant she needed to consider her next step. Tom, on the other hand, was thrown into an entirely new ball game when he lost his job. As is sometimes the case, the loss of his job seemed also to lead to a consideration of some of the other aspects of his life with which he wasn't happy. Tom might have been put into the same kind of predicament, realizing the need for change as a result of some other life events—death of a parent, friend, or sibling; increasing dissatisfaction with his job; or even meeting an attractive woman with whom he wanted to spend time.

The message here, with regard to stress management, is to actively confront what needs to be done in order to move on in your life. You can always expect a period of adjustment or anxiety, either from the developmental conflict or from an unexpected life event, but the stress and negative effects of having this anxiety and indecision prolonged can be confronted by defining and planning for necessary developmental tasks.

Activity 14.2 **Confronting Developmental Tasks**

Most of us are involved in confronting some kind of developmental task. They may not be the major tasks suggested by Erikson, and they may not be necessitated by a major life trauma; but we are all growing and changing, and we often experience a kind of prolonged stress if we fail to move on.

Try to think of one developmental task that you have been approaching and avoiding, and make some plans for how to move on with it. Three examples are provided. Review these before writing yours.

Example 1: Mathew is 58. His children are grown and he and his wife both have demanding careers that take much of their time. They both feel the need to slow down and perhaps ease into retirement, but neither of them seem to have the time. Their developmental tasks are to develop more recreational and hobby activities and figure out how to slow down at work.

Example 2: Diane is 26. She has had several jobs since college and has dated many different men. Her main objective has been to have a good time and travel. She feels like it is time to "settle down," and perhaps develop a relationship and get married. Her developmental tasks are related to becoming more career-oriented and developing a serious relationship. She may have to change the way she relates to men; perhaps meet some more serious-minded men, and figure out how to pursue a career and stay on a job for a period of time.

Example 3: Harrison is 42 and has experienced what he calls his mid-life crisis. He is about 30 pounds overweight, and isn't happy with his marriage or his relationships with his children. His developmental tasks are to lose weight, to develop a healthier life-style, and to improve his most important relationships.

Now list one of your developmental tasks and some ideas you have about how to confront the task.

1. One of My Developmental Tasks:

2. My Ideas About How to Confront the Task:

MAINTAIN YOUR INDEPENDENCE AND SELF-RELIANCE

Although you have been urged in several parts of this book to develop and maintain a good support system, you must also maintain a sense of self-reliance. Sometimes, particularly in marriages or long-term relationships, we grow to depend upon the other person too much and lose our ability to be self-reliant. This sometimes becomes evident when a husband or wife dies and the other partner just can't manage.

One painful, but useful, way to think about your self-reliance is to imagine what you would do if your spouse, partner, or parent died. Actually, we all entertain fantasies about losing those near and dear to us. We usually turn our attention to something else quickly because the pain of the emotions we feel is too horrible. These somewhat macabre fantasies are actually important ways of rehearsing how we might act and what we might do. The next time that you have one of these, allow it to linger a bit longer and see if you can examine your own self-reliance and ability to cope. Of course, actually planning is very important. For example, one needs to plan for the loss of a spouse or parent with appropriate estate planning and even discussing plans for funerals and life-support contingencies.

Another kind of important fantasy has to do with career and family. What would it be like to leave your career or what would happen if your spouse suddenly decided to divorce you? You may feel it can't happen to you, but it does happen to millions of others every year. Again, the object is not to involve yourself in morbid fantasies or worries about what might happen. Instead, you should allow yourself to think about, and even plan for, some of these painful and difficult contingencies. If you see yourself as a survivor, you are likely to be able to cope when some difficult life event does occur.

PRACTICE GOOD HEALTH AND STRESS MANAGEMENT DURING TIMES OF TRANSITION

Maintaining good nutrition and exercise habits when you are in the midst of a difficult life change or transition is very difficult. Your daily jog surely doesn't seem important if you have just lost your job or fiance, and eating three balanced meals is a difficult priority when you have just been widowed. Remembering to meditate or to fight against irrational self-statements is difficult if you have just suffered a severe financial loss. Ironically, you most need to keep yourself in good physical and mental shape during these times. Whatever you do during a developmental struggle or in coping with an unexpected life event, give a priority to the simple health and stress management rules. You will find that the transition is easier and that the anxiety of change or the pain of loss will control you less.

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

In this chapter, you have learned about two kinds of life transitions, those caused by normal developmental events and those caused by abrupt life changes that are unexpected. The main goal with regard to the developmental

transitions has been to increase your awareness of how life-span development works and how to best cope with conflicts related to developmental change. You have been asked to identify your own developmental transitions and to explore how to manage the stress and conflict that can come from these transitions. You also have been asked to consider how you might react to some different tragic life events and how to be as ready as you can be to manage the extreme stress and anxiety related to those situations. Managing stress connected to life transitions can best be done by understanding and managing your reactions to the transitions themselves.

SUMMARY

1. Life transitions occur when we move on to different developmental stages in life. Transitions also are necessitated by unexpected change, often tragic, that occurs as a result of death, catastrophic illness, or other life events.
2. Understanding and acceptance can help you manage the stress related to developmental change.
3. Recognizing and accepting the strong emotions related to unexpected change can help you deal with these changes.
4. Identifying and confronting the new developmental tasks that are necessitated by transitions can help you move through the transitions and manage the stress.
5. Self-reliance and independence are important attributes in negotiating stressful life transitions.
6. Good health practices and stress management procedures are particularly important during stressful life transitions.

15

Chapter

VALUES AND SPIRITUALITY



Some people find that natural beauty helps them clarify their values.

Are your values clear and prominent in the way that you live your life? Do you have a spiritual side that helps you find meaning and transcend some of the everyday hassles and disappointments in life? These are difficult questions and ones that we all face throughout life. You might think it strange to find them included in a stress management

book, but both subjects are indeed important to good stress management. Well defined values and the willingness to live by them can give you a sense of purpose and stability, even during times when life becomes difficult. A spiritual life can help you find meaning and calmness in what sometimes seems like a hostile and topsy-turvy world.

In this chapter, you will be encouraged to think about your values and your spiritual life. No right or wrong values or types of spirituality lead to good stress management. You will have to be the one to decide how your values relate to your experience of stress and how your sense of spirituality affects the way that you think and feel about yourself and your place in the world. The term spirituality is used in a very broad sense here and is not necessarily defined as part of a formal religion.

VALUES

Before discussing values and examining how your own values relate to anxiety and stress management, we need to define the term "values." Milton Rokeach, a noted researcher and theorist in the study of values, provides this definition:

A value is an *enduring belief* that a specific mode of conduct or end-state of existence is personally or socially preferable to an opposite or converse mode of conduct or end-state of existence. A *value system* is an enduring organization of beliefs concerning preferable modes of conduct or end-states of existence along a continuum of relative importance. (Rokeach, 1973, p. 5)

Several aspects of this definition deserve emphasis:

1. **A value is enduring.** Generally speaking, a value has stability over time. However, values also must be viewed within a relativistic framework because they can change over time.
2. **A value is a belief.** A value is a belief that specifies a desirable or an appropriate way to behave, or an end-state to work toward. Usually an emotional component exists, in that you have feelings about the belief.
3. **A value refers to a specific behavior or set of behaviors, or to an end-state or goal.** A value can help you make a specific decision. You might decide, for example, not to attend an X-rated movie because of a value against sexual exploitation of women. Values also are related to long-term goals or states of existence. For instance, you might believe that women and men should be equal in a marriage relationship and, therefore, see a certain kind of marriage as an ideal end-state.

Four general aspects of the valuing process can be related to stress and anxiety problems. Consequently, understanding and growth in these areas can help you manage your stress and anxiety. These areas include (1) value clarity, (2) value confrontation and change, (3) conflicts between values and behavior, and (4) lack of commitment and involvement.

Value Clarity

Poorly defined values cause anxiety in several ways. If you cannot identify your values, making many life choices is difficult. For example, the decision of what career to pursue cannot be made unless you know something about what is important and satisfying to you. Selecting a marriage partner is problematic unless you know what kind of relationship you want. Of course, many of us are not certain about career and marriage choices, but if some basis for our choices doesn't exist, the chances for success are limited.

Ambiguous values also make achieving an adequate sense of identity difficult. If you do not know how you feel about important life issues, gaining any sense of self is difficult. In a social sense, lack of clear personal values also makes it difficult for others to know you. Like the color-changing chameleon, people with confused values blend in with the background and never really project an individual identity. Developing values and a value system takes time, energy, and reflection. A number of ways exist to examine your value system and improve the level of clarity.

One way to clarify your values is to work toward becoming conscious of what values you learned as you were growing up. People often do not realize the extent that their past influences their current values. As a part of the natural process of maturing, the values that we learned as children must be integrated with those we hold as adults. Sometimes this integration is difficult and anxiety-producing because of the strong emotions related to values and because of the difficulty in identifying and separating childhood values from adult values. As a way of thinking about the influence of your past on your current values, take a few minutes to complete Activity 15.1

Another approach to values is called **values clarification**. This approach is often used in small groups where participants talk about their responses to various value clarification exercises and thereby gain more understanding of their values. Activity 15.2 is one such exercise.

Another way to examine your values and perhaps improve your understanding of them is to take a look at your valuing process. Kirschenbaum (1977) suggested a method that emphasized the following aspects of the process in a book entitled, *Advanced Value Clarification*.

1. Thinking

Do you think critically and clearly about value questions?

Do you identify alternatives in problem/decision situations?

Are you able to think rationally even when you are emotionally involved in an issue?

2. Feeling

Can you identify your feelings about value questions?

Activity 15.1

Value Influence

1. Think about three or four of the most significant people in your childhood. What are two or three of the values that you remember were most important to each of them?

2. What values resulted from your religious training?

3. What were the two or three values in your family as you grew up?

4. What values underlay behavior that was strongly forbidden in your family?

5. What values did you rebel against as an adolescent?

6. What values represent your cultural/racial/ethnic heritage?

Activity 15.2 **Choosing Opposites**

Circle the word that you like better.

Country—City
Quiet—Talkative
Past—Present
Order—Flexibility
Car—Bicycle
Candy—Vegetable
Dirt—Cement
Play—Work

Red—Blue
Aggressive—Passive
Feeling—Thinking
Knowledge—Power
Leader—Follower
Football—Track
English—Math
Walk—Run

As you have probably guessed, this is a bit of a projective test. Look over your choices and see if the choice represents a value choice for you. For example, if you chose *Power* over *Knowledge*, what value does that reflect? Does it mean that you value action and importance over understanding?

Do you consider your feelings about issues as well as your thoughts?

Are you able to "prize and cherish" your values?

3. Choosing

Are you able to make decisions freely even when you feel strong pressures?

Are you aware of your choice points?

Can you make decisions?

4. Communicating

Do you express your values to others?

Can you be empathic and express understanding of someone else's point of view?

5. Acting

Are you consistent in acting on your values?

Do you have the skills it takes for achievement in your value areas?

Do you often avoid doing what you think is right?

Value Confrontation and Change

As we move through life, our values are often challenged and sometimes changed. This process of challenge and change can produce considerable stress. For example, if you have always believed that one should never have sex before marriage and you fall in love with someone who believes in sex before marriage, you are probably going to feel stress. If you have always believed that women should be the primary care providers for children and you develop a peer group in which people strongly reject this belief, you are clearly on the horns of a dilemma.

Dealing with challenges to your values is not easy. One effective way of responding to challenges is to honestly examine what you believe and why. To do this you need to be open enough to consider new ideas and at the same time have a strong sense of which values are central and perhaps not changeable for you. Too much rigidity will interfere with an honest appraisal and too much flexibility will cause you to avoid commitment.

Sometimes maintaining your own values and at the same time allowing someone else to hold opposite or different values is important. You will feel less stress about different or conflicting values if you are able to take a kind of pluralistic approach and realize that in most cases no absolutes exist and that people who have different beliefs don't necessarily threaten your beliefs. This becomes more difficult, of course, if you are strongly affected by the other person's behavior or beliefs. In the example about premarital sex, for the two people to respect their individual beliefs and values and remain together would be difficult. In this case one person probably would have to suspend his or her belief for the other.

In addition to being honest with yourself about value questions, talk about your value concerns and confusions with others. A good friend who can help reflect back to you what you are saying and also make observations about your behavior can be invaluable. You also must give yourself ample time to deal with these difficult value questions.

In order to examine some of your own value conflicts think about two of these conflicts by completing Activity 15.3.

Activity 15.3 Conflicting Values

After reading the two examples provided with this activity, describe two value conflicts that you are currently experiencing and discuss briefly the kind of stress that you experience from this conflict. After you describe each conflict try to isolate two words that represent the conflict. (See the following examples.)

Example 1: Conflict between wanting free time to spend with family or friends and wanting to excel in my career by working weekends. Feel guilty about not spending time, tired if I work weekends with no recreation. Worried when I spend free time that I should be at the office. **Pleasure vs. Achievement.**

Example 2: Conflict between wanting to settle down and have a serious relationship and wanting to go out with a lot of people. Feel lonely at times, tired of meeting so many different people. Afraid to settle down, worry about never finding someone. **Commitment/Intimacy vs. Excitement/Stimulation.**

1

2.

Conflicts Between Values and Behavior

Carl Rogers, a famous counselor and psychologist, popularized the term congruence to describe the state at which a person is behaving in concert with his or her own feelings and desires. He believed that most emotional problems occurred because people were not being authentic and were living their lives according to what they thought they **ought** to do rather than what they truly wanted to do. The term and the concept fit nicely into a discussion of values and behavior. When you are not behaving in accordance with your values you are not **congruent** or **authentic**. This can cause unhappiness and anxiety.

Example: Sharon is a secretary in a large law firm. She makes good money, has a nice apartment, and a loving boyfriend, yet she is anxious and unhappy. When she was in school, she always loved art and she wanted to be an art teacher. She highly prizes creativity and artistic endeavors and her job at the law firm does not at all match her values. She went to legal secretary school because her parents persuaded her that she ought to do something practical that paid well. She didn't really agree, but she went along with them. Now she is not happy and feels stress and depression because her behavior doesn't match her values and interests.

The quest for congruence and authenticity is often challenging. It is a struggle for everyone to sort out and identify their basic values and beliefs. It seems clear, however, that the closer one comes to really living his or her values, the more inner peace he or she can experience. Paradoxically, though, the process of working toward authenticity can generate considerable anxiety. Consider Sharon's situation. If she decides to quit her job as a legal secretary and go back to art school to pursue art, she runs the risk of alienating her parents, maybe her boyfriend, and she may have problems financially. She has to decide whether the anxiety and stress over the short term is worth the possibility of greater satisfaction and happiness later. You can probably think of numerous examples where acting on a particular value is risky and anxiety-producing in the short run.

Sometimes people are not really aware of the difference between their behavior and their values. They get stuck in a routine and don't really feel content, but they don't know why. Activity 15.4, Values and Behavior, will help you examine your own values and behavior.

As you look over the results of this activity, you should be able to get some sense of how your values relate to how you spend your time. If you see yourself as basically non-materialistic, yet all of your activities require money, then some incongruence exists. If you really value friendships and relationships and few of your activities involve time with close friends, then your value of friendship is not getting played out in your behavior. If you find some major discrepancies, you may want to think about how this affects your level of stress and how you can make your behavior more closely match your values.

Lack of Commitment and Involvement

Sometimes committing oneself to an idea, a cause, or another person is difficult. This is understandable because commitment brings demands and obligations. The act of commitment and involvement, however, is very important, and is really a requirement for us to have a strong sense of self. Avoiding involvement because of fears about demands and obligations may decrease anxiety initially, but the discontent and lack of engagement will eventually lead to dissatisfaction. We all need to be involved in something, whether it be work, a political cause, or a hobby.

Activity 15.4 **Values and Behavior**

On the following form, list ten activities that you really enjoy. The list might include going to a play, visiting friends, reading a good book, etc. After you have finished the list, go back and complete the information requested in the directions following the list. Don't look ahead to see what these directions are until you have made your list.

	Column			
	1	2	3	4
1.	—	—	—	—
2.	—	—	—	—
3.	—	—	—	—
4.	—	—	—	—
5.	—	—	—	—
6.	—	—	—	—
7.	—	—	—	—
8.	—	—	—	—
9.	—	—	—	—
10.	—	—	—	—

Further Instructions: After you have listed your ten activities, go back and complete the following information on the four columns indicated.

Column 1—Put "M" next to each activity that costs money.

Column 2—Put the number of times that you have done the activity in the last two weeks.

Column 3—Put "S" next to activities that can be done spontaneously and "P" next to activities that need to be planned.

Column 4—Indicate whether the activity is "I," intellectual; "P," physical; "S," social; or "SP," spiritual.

Think about your own sense of commitment and involvement. In what do you really invest your energy? Are you able to become really involved with others? Do some activities in your life bring you great joy and satisfaction? If you see a kind of avoidance mechanism in yourself that seems to block you from being committed, you need to put some time and energy into trying to figure out why. Is it a time management problem? Do you need to find something new to excite you? If you can't make some progress in this area, you may want to talk with a counselor or someone who will help you learn more about why you shy away from involvement and how you can overcome your fears and avoidance.

SPIRITUALITY AND STRESS

The term spirituality is not easy to define. You might view it as a kind of nonrational way of believing and understanding. Spirituality often includes an acceptance of the general goodness of life, and an ability to find inner strength and understanding when life events seem irrational and unfair. It is not a passive acceptance of what happens, although at times you can use a spiritual understanding to accept painful life events that cannot be changed. Spirituality is often associated with religion, from both eastern and western religious traditions. Christianity, Judaism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and many other religions offer a path to spirituality. The path is also available through nonreligious means. Some people find it in a kind of communication with nature and appreciation of natural beauty that transcends their rational existence. Others find it in the laughter of children they teach or the lifting of pain from patients with whom they work.

Spirituality can help you manage stress in many indirect ways. If you have a spiritual side, you will probably be better able to cope with general life problems. You will somehow be able to have faith that certain order and positive forces do exist in the universe. You will probably feel calmer and more at peace with yourself.

No rules are available for developing spirituality. Consider your own spirituality for a moment. Do you have a spiritual side? If you don't, have you given up on a part of yourself that can help you find meaning and joy, and transcend some of your everyday worries and anxieties? If you are not religious or if your current religion doesn't seem to offer a sense of spirituality, search for a path that leads you in the direction you want to go. Talk with a clergyman, attend a weekend retreat, take a course in Eastern religions, study yoga, do volunteer work, or just take a long walk in the woods. Don't neglect this important part of your life.

Activity 15.5

Spirituality

Take some time to assess your own spirituality. What does the term mean for you? How and when do you feel spiritual?

List two times when you feel spiritual.

1. _____

2. _____

List two ways that you might work toward adding more of a spiritual side to your life.

1. _____

2. _____

PERSONAL CHECKPOINT

You now have come to the end of your journey toward better stress management. Hopefully, you have been able to incorporate this chapter on values and spirituality into your stress management plans. These last three chapters on relationships, life transitions, and values and spirituality, have taken a somewhat different tack than the previous ones. They didn't really provide as much in the way of specific suggestions for techniques, but were

more oriented toward more difficult and larger life-style issues. You may want to do further reading in these areas and perhaps explore other ways of learning more.

Now that you have completed the work in all of the chapters, you are ready to decide what to include in your personal stress management plan. Take some time to write out your plans. Set several goals for yourself and monitor them on a regular basis. Save your work on the activities in this book and review them often.

Good luck, and may you learn to manage your stress so that life is calm and peaceful for you without losing its excitement and surprise.

SUMMARY

1. A value is an enduring belief that a particular way of behaving or end state of existence is personally preferable over other behaviors and end states.
2. Four aspects of the valuing process are related to stress and anxiety management. These are value clarity, value confrontation and change, conflicts between values and behavior, and lack of commitment and involvement.
3. Unclear or poorly defined values make it difficult to make life decisions and also interfere with the formation of a positive sense of identity.
4. Many ways are available to clarify your values, including examining past influences, comparing values, and thinking about your own valuing process.
5. Value confrontation and change can be painful and anxiety producing; however, identifying and honestly confronting value conflicts and change is important.
6. Stress and anxiety can be caused by differences between your values and how you actually live your life. Examine your behavior and see how it matches your values and beliefs.
7. A lack of commitment and involvement may avoid anxiety in the short run, but a kind of underlying apathy and dissatisfaction are likely to result.
8. Developing a spiritual side to your life will help you transcend some of life's everyday hassles and can help you find the meaning and sense of peace that enriches life and adds meaning.

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INDEX

A

- ABC method 98-102, 113-4
- Acceptance 186
- Achievement 199
- Acting 197
- Addiction
 - positive 42
- Adolescence 183
- Adulthood
 - middle adulthood 184
 - young 184
- Aggressive 175
 - responses 176
- Al Ghazali 38
- Alberti, R. 175, 205
- Alcohol 58, 66-9
- Amino acids 65, 72
- Anger 186
- Anxiety
 - definition 4
 - stress 3-14
- Approach
 - general 23
 - mind 23-4, 87-146
 - relaxation 23, 27-54
- Assertive 175
 - responses 177-8
 - risks 178
- Assertive behavior
 - reevaluation 179
 - rehearse 178
 - reinforcement 179
- Assertive response 177-9
- Assertiveness 175-9
 - assessment 176
 - learning process steps 176-9, 180
- Assumptions
 - faulty 111, 118
- Attitude
 - basic 136-40
 - toward the world 136-7
- Authentic 200
- Awareness 1-25
 - stress 1-25

B

- Balance 163-4, 166
- Ballentine, R. 65, 205
- Barnett, R. 205
- Baruch, G.K. 205
- Bechtel, L. 205
- Beck, A.T. 109, 205
- Behavior
 - values 200
- Beliefs
 - changing your irrational 96-102
 - identifying your own 95-6
 - irrational 89-107
 - steps for changing 102-6

Benefits

- exercises 74-5
- Benson, H. 23, 38, 39, 44, 205
- Biner, L. 205
- Black and white thinking 110-1, 118
- Body 23, 25, *Figure 17*
 - response to stress 4-6
- Breathing
 - deep 31-2, 46
 - regular deep 31-2, 36
 - stress releasing 31
- Brody, J. 205
- Brown, B. 205
- Buddhism 202

C

- Caffeine 66-9, 72
- Carbohydrates 65, 72
- Change
 - developmental 182-6, 191
 - value 198
- Chocolate bar 66
- Choosing 197
- Christianity 202
- Colas 66
- Commitment 199, 200, 202, 204
- Communicating 197
- Confrontation 198
 - value 198
- Congruent 200
- Conner, S.L. 205
- Conner, W.E. 205
- Considerations
 - medical 79
- Content 109
- Conversations 169
- Cooper K.H. 205
- Coping
 - evaluating efforts 122, 124
 - model 120
 - phase 132
 - self-statements 133
 - skills 119
 - with feelings of being overwhelmed 122, 123-4
- Coping statements
 - self-instructional 122-9
- Cue-controlled 124, 129
 - relaxation 51-2

D

- Darvon 66
- Daubrot, M. 65-6
- Davis, M. 205
- Daydreaming 33-6
- Denial 186
- Depression 186
- Desensitization
 - systematic 45

Despair 184
Diet
 balanced 58-61
 habits 63-4
 healthy 58-61
 improving 61-4
 modifying 61-4
Disclosure 169-73
 feelings 180
 information 180
Distraction 164-5
Domash, L. 205
Drugs 66-9
Dryden, W. 205
Dying
 stages 186

E

Egan G. 205
Ellis, A. 89-94, 98, 106, 205
Emmons, M. 175, 205
Emotions 186-7, 191
 effects of specific foods 65-6
Environment 16-8, 23, 25, 147-204
 stressors, *Figure 17*
Erikson, E. 183-5, 205
 stages 183-5
Evaluation
 efforts 124
 self-rewards 124
Excedrin 66
Excitement 199
Exercise 55-86, 73-86
 aerobic 74, 86
 benefits 74-5
 build overall endurance 74, 86
 build strength 74, 86
 improve muscle tone 74, 86
 regular 75
Exercise program
 choosing 75-8
 types of 74, 86
Experiences
 subjective 42
Extroversion 141, 146
Extroverts 136-7, 139

F

Farrow, J. 205
Fats 58
Faulty assumptions 111, 118
Feedback
 loop 19
Feeling 137, 139-40, 142, 146, 195-7
Feeling good about yourself 169
Fight and flight mechanism 5-7, 9, 13-4, 22, 39
Folkman, S. 206
Fox, S.M. 79, 206
Friedman, M. 150-1, 205
Functions
 description 136-40

G

Generalization 111, 118
 better generalization 114-6
 refutation 114-6
 support 114-6
Generativity 184
Gillespie, P.R. 205
Goals
 career 156
 intermediate 156-7
 long-term 156
 personal 157
 priorities 156
 setting 156, 158
 short-term 157
Goldfried, A. 205
Goldfried, M. 205
Golf 76
Greiger, R. 205
Gunas 65, 66

H

Habits
 diet 63-4
Hinduism 202
Holmes, T.H. 186, 206
Howe, L.W. 206
Hypermetabolic state 39
Hypometabolic state 39

I

Identity 183
Imaginary scene 132
Independence 190, 191
Indicators
 behavioral 8
 emotional 8
 physical 8
 stress 7-8
Information
 way of perceiving 137
 way of taking 137
Inoculation
 stress 119-33
Integrity 184
Interaction model
 stress 15-6
Interpretation 16
Intimacy 184, 199
Introversion 141, 146
Introverts 136-7, 139
Intuiters 137, 139
Intuition 141, 146
Involvement 200, 202, 204
Isolation 184

J

- Jacobsen, E. 45, 206
 Jogging 76, 79
 Judaism 202
 Judging 138, 140, 143, 146
 making decisions 137
 ways of 137
 Jung, C. 136, 146, 206
 theory 136, 146

K

- Karp, D.A. 206
 Kerschner, V. 206
 Kirschenbaum, H. 195, 206
 Kubler-Ross, E. 186, 206

L

- Lazarus, R. 206
 Lehrer, P.M. 207
 Life
 transitions 181-91
 Life events
 unexpected 186-7
 Life-span development 186
 Life transitions 148
 strategies 182
 Life-style 24-5
 Issues 147-204
 way of interacting 138
 Listener
 effective 180
 Loevinger, J. 206
 LSD 67

M

- Management
 stress 27-54, 87-146
 time 149-65
 Marijuana 67, 68-9, 72
 Maslow, A. 206
 Mason, L.J. 206
 Mastery model 120
 McGovern, G. 205
 McKay, M. 205
 Meaning, 148
 Meditate
 learning 39-41
 initial 41
 plan 40, 41-3
 regular 39
 Meditation 37-44
 plan 43
 relaxation technique 37
 stress 38-9
 Meichenbaum, D. 120, 122-24, 133, 206
 Methods
 relaxation 29-36

Mind 23, 25, Figure 17

approaches 23-4

Mistakes

 thinking 109-118

Model

 coping 120, 133
 mastery 120, 133
 problem-solving 120-1
 stress-interaction 15-6
 wellness 163

Myers, I.B. 136, 206

Myers-Briggs Type Inventory (MBTI) 136,
 144, 146

N

- Naranjo, C. 38, 206
 Nonassertive 175
 Nutrition 55-86

O

- Old age 184
 Orme-Johnson, D. 205
 Ornstein, R.E. 38, 206
 Over-generalization 111, 118

P

- Passive 176-7
 behavior 177
 Pelletier, K. 206
 Pelletier, K.R. 206
 Perceiving 138, 140, 143, 146
 Performance
 level 9
 Personality
 implications on your stress process 143-5
 stress 135-46
 Phobias 22, 25
 Plan
 developing a deep muscle relaxation 50-1
 developing a meditation relaxation 41-3
 developing an exercise 79-85
 meditation 41-3
 Pleasure 199
 Pollack, M.L. 79, 206
 Preferences
 stress 141-3
 Price, V.A. 206
 Priorities
 setting 156
 Problem solving 120-1
 Process 109
 thinking 109
 Procrastination 164-5
 Proteins 65, 72

Q

Quaaludes 67

R

- Rage and anger 186
- Rahe, R. H. 186, 206
- Rajasic 65
- Reactions
 - emotional 16
 - physiological 16
- Rehearse 133
- Relationships 148, 167-80
 - supportive 167, 168-75, 180
- Relaxation
 - approaches 23, 27-54
 - conditioned response 41
 - coping statements 122-9
 - cue-controlled 46, 51-2
 - deep muscle 45-54
 - learning 47
 - meditation 7
 - method 36
 - muscle 7
 - progressive 45-54
 - progressive deep muscle 46
 - response 39
 - scene 33-4
 - survey 30
- Relaxation response 37-44
- Reshelman, E.R. 205
- Responses
 - aggressive 177
 - assertive 177-8
 - conditioned relaxation 41
 - nonassertive 177
 - passive 177
 - relaxation 39
- Rogers, C. 206
- Rokeach, M. 194, 206
- Role
 - diffusion 183
- Roseman, R.H. 150-1, 205

S

- Sartre, J.P. 4
- Satvic 65
- Scene
 - relaxation 33-4
- Scheduling
 - daily 159-62
 - weekly 159-62
- Scott, D. 206
- Self-disclosure 169-73
- Self-reliance 190-191
- Selye, H. 3, 13, 206
- Sensing 142, 146
- Sensors 137, 139
- Sheehy, G. 206
- Sherman, E. 206
- Sigh
 - cue-generated relaxing 32
 - stress-reducing 36

- Simon, S.B. 206
- Small talk 169
- Sobel, D. 206
- Speed 67
- Spirituality 148, 193-4, 202-3
 - stress 202-3
- Stages
 - developmental 183-5
 - dying 186
 - Erik Erikson 183-5
- Stagnation 184
- Steps
 - learning assertiveness 177-9, 180
- Stimulants 22, 25, 199
- Stress 1-25
 - accumulated 12
 - anxiety 3-14
 - awareness 1-25
 - body response 4-6
 - definition 3
 - effects of specific foods 65-6
 - excessive 7
 - indicators, activity 7-8
 - inoculation 119-33
 - interaction 22
 - interaction model 15-6
 - journal 21
 - level 12
 - management 7, 27-54, 87-146, 190, 191
 - managing 15-25
 - meditation 38-9
 - performance 9-11
 - personality 135-46
 - preferences 141-3
 - reaction 16, 18, 25
 - reaction components 15
 - rehearsing situations 132
 - spirituality 202-3
- Stress inoculation
 - major components 133
- Stress-interaction model 20, 22, 23, 24
- Stress management
 - problem solving steps 133
- Stress reaction
 - four stages 133
- Stressors 16, 25
 - confronting 122
 - handling 122-3
 - Identifying 19-20
 - major 19
 - minor 19
 - preparing for 122
- Suggestion 46
- Support system 180
- Surroundings 36
 - enjoying 35
 - natural 35
- Survey
 - relaxation 30
- Sweets 58
- System
 - support 180

T

- Tasks
 - developmental 187-9, 191
- Tasmas 65
- Tea 66
- Tennis 76
- Theory
 - Jung's 136, 146
- Thinking 137, 139-40, 142, 146, 195
 - black and white, 110-1, 118
 - content 118
 - mistakes 109-118
 - process 109, 118
- Thinking mistakes
 - black and white 110-1
 - correcting 113-7
 - tunnel vision 110
- Time 148
 - devote 172-3
 - management 149-65
 - relationship 173
- Tranquillizers 67, 68-9
- Transitions
 - life 181-91
- Tubelsing, D. 206, 207
- Tubelsing, N.L. 207
- Tunnel vision 110, 118
 - faulty assumptions 111-2
 - over-generalization 111
- Type A Behavior 150-5
 - changing 153-5
 - characteristics 150
 - description 150, 166
 - inventory 151

V

- Values 148, 193-202
 - behavior 194, 200
 - belief 194
 - change 198
 - conflicting 198-9, 204
 - clarification 195, 204
 - clarity 195
 - confrontation 198
 - end-state 194
 - enduring 194
 - goal 194
 - influence 196
- Vision
 - tunnel 111, 118
- Visualizations 33-6
 - relaxing 46
- Vitamins 70-1
 - B complex 70-1, 72
 - fat soluble 70
 - water soluble 70

W

- Walking 76
- Williams, R. 207
- Wilmore, J.H. 79, 206
- Witkin-Lanoil, G. 207
- Wolpe, J. 45, 175, 207
- Woolfolk, R.L. 207
- Worries, *Figure 17*
- Worrying 18
- Wurtman, J. 65-6, 207

Y

- Yoels, W.C. 206
- Yoga 202



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