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Just say NO... to stress

When you think about it, the 80's are a pretty strange and wonderful time to be alive. Right now, it's the only time to be alive. At any rate, human-beings are doing some awfully darn crazy things, these days. But you read the newspaper, so you know that already.

We live in a society in which stress is becoming more and more a part of daily living. As a culture we embrace stress. Stress gives our lives an illusion of meaning. The note pad next to the phone by my terminal has a box you can check if the message is urgent. I always make a large, heavy mark in it because it makes everything we do down here at the Daily Nebraskan seem more important.

Our schools send subtle messages to our children that if there isn't any stress, something's wrong. It's almost as if we're teaching them to stress for success.

But the main thing is, that in the age of 'just say no' stress has become one of the few highs that is acceptable anymore. People voluntarily place enormous pressures on themselves by accepting way more commitments and responsibilities than is healthy for them. I guess you just can't beat that adrenaline rush that goes along with racing around to meet deadline after deadline after deadline.

As far as I can tell, the idea is to make your life as hectic as possible. Spread yourself so thin that you don't have time to think about how meaningless your life really is. The belief is, that if your life is a blur, you will be less unhappy. Besides, that's what everyone expects you to do.

The effects of stress are narcotic. Breathing becomes shallow and fast. The pulse quickens. The eyes become vacant and glazed over, like a doll's eyes. Concentration becomes difficult as the mind reels back and forth from one obsessive and disturbing thought to another. Speech may be rapid and lack meaning relevant to the situation at hand. Body motions may be erratic and repetitive.

And it's addictive like dope. You don't usually see all that many people abusing stress on campus this early in the semester, but as the year wears on it will become a real problem. People will seem agitated, concerned that something isn't complete. It will be hard to get their attention. Tempers will flare and people will no longer be polite to one another waiting in the line at the Burger King in the Nebraska Union.

Some people are more prone than others to abuse stress. People who tend to abuse stress are driven by their own demons to over-achieve. They are perfectionists. They are souls in torment. Certain professions are attractive to stress-prone people. Journalism is an example of one such profession.

Stress junkies are easy to spot if you can recognize some fundamental symptoms. They try to systematize their stress in organizer books. They attend stress management workshops and listen to special tapes that help them control stress. They have telephones in their cars and beepers in their pockets so they are never far away from a quick fix. They know they're hooked and are trying to do something to regulate their habit. But it still takes its toll on their minds and bodies.

It doesn't have to be this way. It's a matter of choice.

In universal terms, we are insignificant creatures on a tiny planet in an average solar system and galaxy. With the exception of a few problems we have — like violating each others' human rights and ruining the planet for all the other creatures we share it with — most of the things we get all worked-up about are really pretty darn trivial.

And we are so lucky to be here now, together on this marvelous little world. That's the funny thing about it. There is so much to see, to feel, to experience.

There is so much to share.

Life is too short. Stress destroys the quality of it by causing us to miss-out on the really important things in life. Things like that weird blue-green bigger-than-color glow emitted by the trees and grass on a gray autumn afternoon. Things like the smell of coffee brewing in the morning or the taste of a peach after class. Things like the smile of a child looking at you over her mother's shoulder as you're waiting for the bus home.

Stress also causes us to lose our dignity as human beings, because it makes us selfish and closes our minds.

"I don't have time for that now," slips out of our mouths and reverberates within our skulls with alarming frequency, when we're messed up on stress. When we're strung-out on stress, our world becomes narrow and our lives become empty.

Stress breaks our bodies and consumes our souls. Stress wastes life.

But you have a choice. Just say no.

Dwyer

Students learn to 'interrupt' stress

Class relieves stress

By Micki Haller
Senior Editor

After nearly a month of school, the reality of education has hit. Two papers due, a major exam, 12 chapters to be read, and 40 pages of homework due, and that's just for Friday. It's time to run the midnight kilowatts, and prepare for major stress.

But at least one class is aimed at reducing stress instead of creating more of it. Stress, Tension and Reduction, offered through the School of Health, Physical Education and Recreation, can teach students skills to reduce stress for a lifetime.

According to Wes Sime, associate professor in HPER and director of the Stress and Physiology Lab, the class is a mini course offered for five weeks each semester.

The class has been full or overflowing during the 11 years that it has been offered, Sime said. The class has room for about 50 students to enroll.

Sime said popular appeal and the fact that it's a good class are the reasons behind the "Stress Reduction" success story.

The class is half content, and half experience, Sime said. The students receive information on the sources, signs, symptoms and disorders associated with stress. Then, they learn ways to cope with stress.

Progressive relaxation is a series of sessions which help an individual recognize the sensations of unnecessary muscle tensions. Students learn to "interrupt" or let go of stress, Sime said.

In autogenic training, students listen to a tape which has specific suggestions. The individual may feel his body getting heavier or warmer; things which help relieve unwanted tension, he said.

Time management is a method of organizing one's time so stress is avoided.

Cognitive restructuring is a rational way to combat stress. Everyday, people encounter little stress factors, like a red light at the wrong time, or finding out that a 10-page paper is due within a few hours.

"The typical response is to presume disaster and doom," Sime said.

The object of cognitive restructuring is to put the event into perspective with the rest of reality, Sime said. Is it life-threatening? Will it prevent a college education? Or is it just embarrassing?

By determining the worst possible outcome, people can put their stress response into proper perspective, instead of making mountains out of molehills, he said.

The finale of the course is learning how to put all the techniques together to quiet stress in day-to-day situations.

However, Sime said, not all stress is necessarily bad.

A high degree of stress is exciting, for instance, while skiing, or doing risky things.

"It is the spice of life," Sime said.

The most important part is to put the individual in charge of the stress, he added.


When doing challenging things, it is important to concentrate on several things in order to function.

"When one is really stressed out, all of that goes by the wayside," Sime said.

Each person's stress level is different, and everyone should be able to recognize an optimum point of stress. Without stress, life would be boring.

"Boredom can be a fairly stressful phenomenon as well," Sime said.

Although this semester's course, held during the last five weeks, is already full, the course will be offered again second semester.



John Bruce/Daily Nebraskan