

Stressed-out students' health may deteriorate

BY KARL ANDERSON
Staff Reporter

A sickness is in the air. Some students are experiencing sweaty palms, rapid breathing and sleepless nights. A few may even lose their hair.

Midterm exams have started and many students are finding themselves stricken with the stress bug.

Luis F. Diaz-Perdomo, a counselor who works in the Counseling and Psychological Services Office in the University Health Center, defines stress as the body's response to a perceived threat. Anything that requires adjustment can cause stress, Diaz-Perdomo said.

For students, stress often revolves more around psychological factors — such as worrying about performance on a test — than around physical factors, such as being chased by a wild animal.

What many students probably do not realize is that if stress is left untreated, it can cause long-term health problems.

Wesley Sime, professor of health and human performance, said people can develop health problems if they do not learn to cope with their stress. Common ailments include heart disease, high blood pressure, ulcers and gastro-intestinal disorders such as Crohn's disease, which is the chronic inflammation of the digestive tract; and ulcerative colitis, or inflammation of the colon. Other ailments include chronic back pain, migraine headaches, arthritis and outbreaks of acne.

Some less common ailments can include:

■ Alopecia, an ailment causing hair loss in individuals. This hair may grow back, but in some cases, the hair loss may be permanent.

■ Raynaud's Syndrome, the restriction of blood vessels in the hands and feet that causes rapid heat loss in those areas. It is natural for vessels to constrict when a person is under stress, but in most individuals, the vessels quickly return to normal after the cause of the stress has passed. The vessels of individu-

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LUIS F. DIAZ-PERDOMO
counselor

als suffering from Raynaud's Syndrome take much longer to return to normal, Sime said.

■ Bruxism, commonly known as teeth grinding. If left untreated, bruxism can cause teeth to become loose and painful. Patients can grind away parts of their own teeth and leave them with worn surfaces or fractured enamel. Bruxism can also lead to migraine headaches if left untreated.

Stress also weakens the immune system, leaving individuals more vulnerable to more common ailments such as colds and flu. Stress may even be a contributing factor in the development of some types of cancer, Sime said.

Sime and Diaz-Perdomo both stressed the importance of learning how to handle stress before it becomes a problem.

Exercise, eating right and maintaining strong relationships with family and friends is important, Diaz-Perdomo said. Having a religious grounding also may help some people deal with stress, he said.

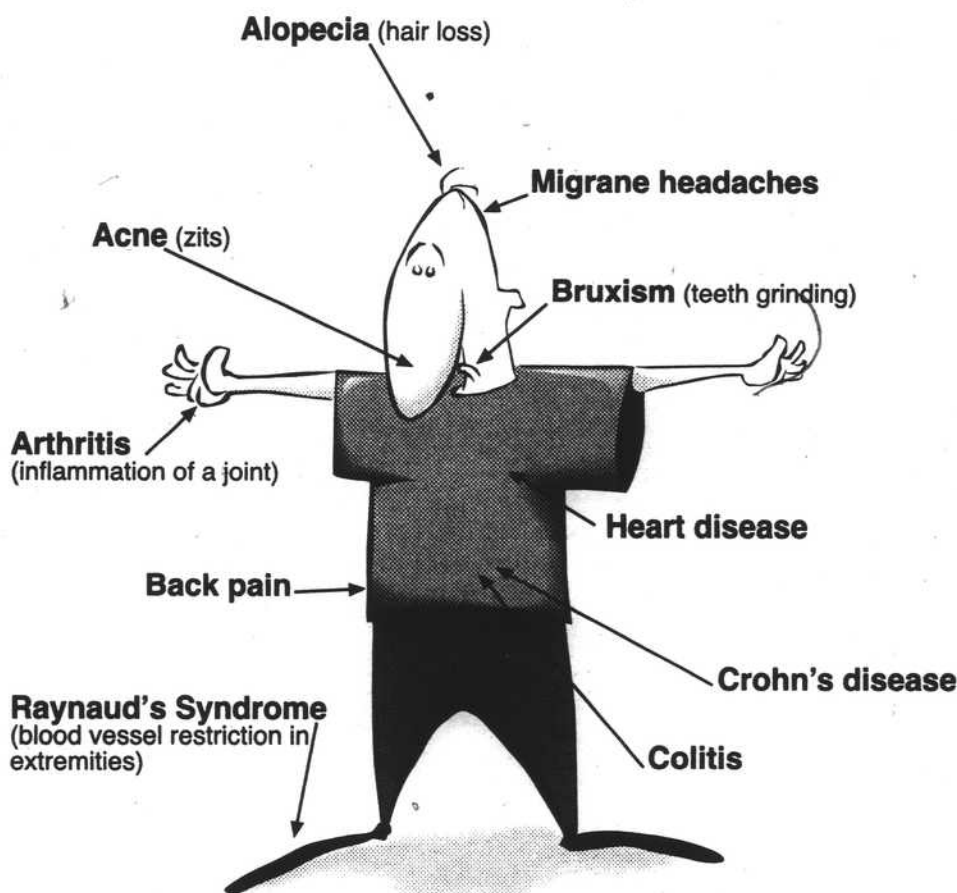
Diaz-Perdomo said better organization, improved study habits and the ability to say no when asked to take on extra responsibilities can also help students to relieve stress.

Rather than relying on just one form of relief, it is important to maintain a balance of stress relievers.

“Have a repertoire of techniques so you don't depend on just one thing,” Diaz-Perdomo said. Overuse of any one relief will decrease its effectiveness, he said.

The pains of stress strains

Stress does more than make people unhappy. Doctors say continued stress can cause serious physical effects, literally from head to toe. The worst of such effects can include long-term illnesses. Proper stress management is an important part of healthy living.



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Stress on the Web

People suffering from stress can find helpful information on the World Wide Web:

☛ How to survive unbearable stress
<http://www.bighorn1.com/success/>

☛ Noodle's Panic/Anxiety Page
<http://www.algy.com/anxiety/index.html>

☛ Stress
<http://www.uiuc.edu/departments/mckinley/health-info/stress/stress.html>

☛ Stress Management
<http://www.health-net.com/stress.htm>

☛ Stress release through natural healing
<http://www.best.com/%7E>

morgana/stress_release.html

☛ The Herb Connection
<http://members.aol.com/deanmcel.index.html>

☛ Uncomfortable with College Stress
<http://kwazwai.cc.columbia.edu/cu/health-wise/0113.html>

☛ Problems of Life: Exams
<http://www.soon.org.uk/problems/exams.html>

☛ Dealing with Stress in College
http://www2.ncse.edu/ncsu/stud_pubs/nubian_message/Archives/Fall1996/120596/Health.stress.html

☛ Stress on Campus
<http://www.collegeedge.com/college/articles/ready/stress.stm>