

Tips help students breathe easy

Health experts say body awareness, exercise and visualization are key to stress management.

By JOY LUDWIG
Staff Reporter

Breathe in. Breathe out. Relax. Repeat. That could be instructions for a Lamaze class, but it's actually one of the simplest ways students can relieve stress whether they are in class or alone, said Ann Hauder, a stress management instructor at Bryan Memorial Hospital.

Students encounter head-on some form of stress almost every day, but instead of having anxiety attacks every time a test date approaches, students can learn to confront the battle and win.

She said she suggests that people could deal with a stressful situation in one of three ways:

- Avoid it.
- Alter it.
- Adapt to it.

To avoid stress, Hauder said students needed to be assertive with others and learn to say no more often. They also should plan ahead, manage their time and get extra help if need-

ed. When stress is unavoidable, she said, students could alter the threat of a stressful situation by taking time out to relax and handle the situation more effectively.

For example, Hauder said they could lean on a support system, such as talking to friends and family.

"Take a break with them and have fun," she said. "Your support system is supposed to be there and help you fight these things emotionally."

However, she said students also should take time out for themselves by exercising or going for a walk. She said research showed that people should try to take 20 minutes twice a day to relax, get their heart rate down and muscles relaxed.

Hauder said students also could relax by scanning their bodies for tension — starting with the neck and releasing tension, then their shoulders and so on.

"Scan your entire body and let go of everything," she said. "If your muscles get more relaxed, your mind will too."

Using imagery helps as well, Hauder said.

"Close your eyes," she said. "Picture yourself in Hawaii on the beach. Feel the sand. Hear the waves. It's just like a mini-vacation that you can do in class, at the library or during a study break and it will help you."

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ANN HAUDER

stress management instructor, Bryan Memorial Hospital

As another method, students could learn to adapt to stress with positive affirmations, Hauder said.

"Instead of thinking to yourself 'I'm going to flunk,' think positively. 'I'm smart. I studied, so I'm ready.' This can help you go into the class and do better," she said.

Psychologists also emphasize that students recognize the wrong ways to deal with stress.

Vernon Williams, coordinator for career counseling at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln's Career Services Center, said students could cause more problems for themselves when they try to escape stress that won't go away.

"Procrastination is the big one that students do to avoid stress," he said. "They have so many commitments that they don't know which way is up. It's inevitable that they put some things off."

Sometimes, psychologists say, students will turn to any distraction

they find to forget the stress before them. Television, movies or drinking commonly take students from their responsibilities, but only temporarily.

Another way some students try to handle stress, Williams said, is by sleeping.

"There are all kinds of ways to blot out stress. Some people sleep. They get more rest than some people get and more than they'll ever need."

"You try to keep going by pushing yourself and then your body reacts and you might get a cold," he said.

Most importantly, Susan Bukacek, counseling psychologist at UNL's Counseling and Psychological Services, said although there is no miracle cure for stress, students need to learn to balance their lives.

"Just because somebody looks like they're running the clock 24 hours, seven days a week, taking 18 hours and involved in every activity on campus, that's only what it looks like on the outside," she said.

Class can offer ways to manage anxieties

Recognizing signs of stress is part of the coursework of Health Education 255.

By ANN MARY LANDIS
Staff Reporter

It may be the only class at the University of Nebraska-Lincoln in which students are graded on the temperature and moistness of their hands.

After students in Stress and Tension Reduction take their written final exams, they hold out their hands for one last test. The professor, Wesley Sime, checks their hands to see if they have been able to apply Health Education 255 to their life. Stressed students with cold, wet hands can try again later to improve their grades.

About 100 students took the five-week class this semester. Sime said they learned to recognize symptoms of stress. Commons signs include high blood pressure, headaches and anxiety, but stress can promote more serious diseases. Sime taught a student who was diagnosed with multiple sclerosis.

"Her doctor told her MS had been an indictment of stress," Sime said.

Luis Diaz-Perdomo, a counselor at the University Health Center, said he felt students benefit from the class.

"They get a better understanding of what stress is and what it does to them," Diaz-Perdomo said.

The class also introduces students to different stress-coping strategies. Sime teaches students to use humor, time and money management, and self-esteem building, among other techniques, to help control stress. Diaz-Perdomo, who has attended some of the classes, thought the class was valuable.

"It gives an opportunity for students to learn skills for life," Diaz-Perdomo said. He wanted more students to understand they could learn ways to manage stress. He said the skills can help students in public speaking, test-taking and social situations.

Sime, who has doctorates in counseling psychology and physiology, founded the class about 20 years ago.

Former students told Sime they appreciated the class. He said recommendations from University Health Center counselors, academic advisors and friends draw many students to the class.

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