

Image Awareness Healthletter

Dealing With Stress

Emotional Components of the Stress Problem

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Notice

This newsletter is designed for educational purposes only. Any individual suffering from health problems which are mentioned or discussed should consult a physician for proper diagnosis and treatment.

Sound and Stress

Sound interacts with the chemistry of the body in very complex and significant ways. Loud abrasive sounds can be quite stressful and arouse strong emotions. Delicate stringed instruments can have a soothing, stress reducing effect on body chemistry.

Strong Emotions

Music has been used to stir up violent emotions for centuries. The Romans charged their foes with the blast of trumpets and horns. A general once said that music was one of the most vital weapons of the Russian army under the Czars. Without music a Russian soldier would be cowardly, brutal and inefficient. From music he obtained a magic power of endurance, and ignored suffering and mortality. Music was described as a divine dynamite. Napoleon claimed that the strange tunes of the Russian Cossack regiments so infuriated them that they destroyed the cream of his army.

Soothing Music

While loud music of drums and brass instruments can stress the body and arouse strong emotions, the music of stringed instruments can be quite relaxing. The Bible records that David calmed King Saul by playing a stringed instrument when he was vexed with a distressing spirit. (I Samuel 19:9)

Noise Pollution

An article in a leading medical journal noted that the "Effects of intrusive sound may be deleterious to health, particularly for individuals with emotional disturbances and so-called tension diseases."¹ The noise of such household appliances as a vacuum cleaner, garbage disposal, ventilating fan, blender, television or stereo system can be surprisingly loud and disturbing. The noise can result in "outbursts of fury or threats."



Noise may cause "neurosis, loss of sleep, excessive fatigue, emotional disturbances" and the like.²

It is important to realize that it is not usually the person that is making the noise that is most bothered by it. The annoyance value of sound is related to six characteristics:

(1) **Unexpectedness:** Lack of preparation for noise causes a stronger stress response to the sound. Thus saying "boo" to someone might create no stress at all unless it were said loudly in a dark hallway in the middle of the night.

(2) **Interference:** Noise which interrupts an activity in which a person is engaged is more stressful than other noise. Thus a husband will find the vacuum cleaner running during a football game more irritating than it would be if he were working on fixing a window.

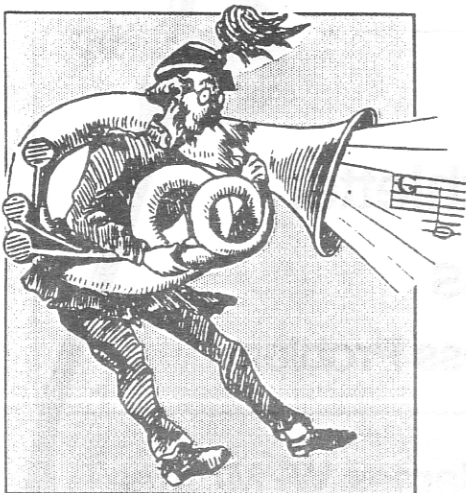
(3) **Inappropriateness:** The roar of a jet engine is more stressful on a quiet beach than it is in an airport.

(4) **Intermittency:** The intermittent scream of a fire alarm or air raid warning is designed to evoke a maximum stress response.

Table of Contents

Dealing with Stress

Sound.....	1
Overcrowding.....	2
Humor.....	2
Rest.....	2
Suffering.....	3
Responding to Stress.....	4



(5) **Reverberation:** The echo effect of sound can be quite stressful. This technique has been used in movies and sound recordings to create a sense of discomfort.

(6) **Origin of the sound:** We have a high tolerance for noise we generate, but a low tolerance for noise other people generate.³

Loud noise can also damage hearing. There is little doubt that hard rock music destroys the hearing of those who listen to it. Reddell writes that "the levels encountered in typical live amplified rock and roll music concerts exceed those considered safe for prolonged exposure." He found permanent damage to hearing of hard rock musicians and temporary damage to the hearing of some listeners at concerts.³

Action: To reduce stress try to listen to relaxing and soothing music and to avoid excessively loud or disturbing noise.

References:

1. Farr, Lee E., "Medical Consequences of Environmental Home Noises," *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Vol. 202, No. 3, October 16, 1967, p. 171.

2. Farr, p. 100.

3. Reddell, Rayford C., "Oto-traumatic Effects of Hard Rock Music," *California Medicine*, 116:1-4, Jan. 1972.

Overcrowding and Stress

The more people are crowded together the more stress they seem to experience. Psychologist F. G. Zimbardo conducted an experiment to demonstrate this in which he parked two automobiles near major universities. One was near New York University and the other near Stan-

ford University with a lower population density.

It took just seven minutes for vandalism to occur in New York and within 64 hours the car was a "battered, useless hunk of metal, the result of twenty-three incidents of destructive contact." Most of the culprits were well-dressed, white, middle class adults. The only event near Stanford was the passage of a kindly pedestrian who lowered the hood of the car to keep the motor dry.

Action: To reduce stress spend time away from people during your vacation or for part of the day.

Reference:

Macquade, Walter and Aikman, Ann, *Stress*, Bantam Books, 1975, p. 12.

Humor and Stress

One of the best natural stress and pain relievers is humor. Norman Cousins, former editor of *Saturday Evening Post*, developed a serious collagen illness in 1964. He was given one chance in five hundred of recovering from the disease.

The illness had been induced by stress. He had stayed in Moscow in a room exposed to the noise and fumes of diesel trucks plying the streets all night. Sleep had been difficult and he probably suffered from adrenal exhaustion.

To deal with the tremendous pain he experienced, Cousins supplemented his diet with vitamin C which is a key nutrient for the functioning of the adrenal gland, the key stress responder in the body.

He also obtained *Candid Camera* films and some old Marx brothers films. He found that "ten minutes of genuine belly laughter had an anesthetic effect and would give me at least two hours of pain-free sleep." Cousins discovered that reading from "E.B. and Katharine White's *Subtreasury of American Humor* and Max Eastman's *The Enjoyment of Laughter*" was quite helpful.¹

Over a period of several years Cousins completely recovered from his illness. He literally laughed himself back to health.

Action: To reduce stress read humorous stories or watch humorous videos. Supplement with vitamin C.

References:

1. Cousins, Norman, *Anatomy of An Illness*, New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1979, pp. 39-40.

Also Cousins, Norman, "Anatomy of an Illness," *Reader's Digest*, June, 1977, p. 130.

Rest a Stress Reducer

Modern man lives in a society bombarded with stimuli which make it difficult to obtain adequate rest and sleep at night. Probably the two greatest sleep reducers are television and artificial lighting.

Our pioneer forefathers had no artificial light. When the sun set, it was about time to go to bed. When the sun rose, it was time to get up.

With artificial light, it is possible to work all night as if it were day. The very light itself tends to keep a person awake.

Late night movies or video recordings can so capture the attention that it becomes very difficult to turn the equipment off and go to sleep.

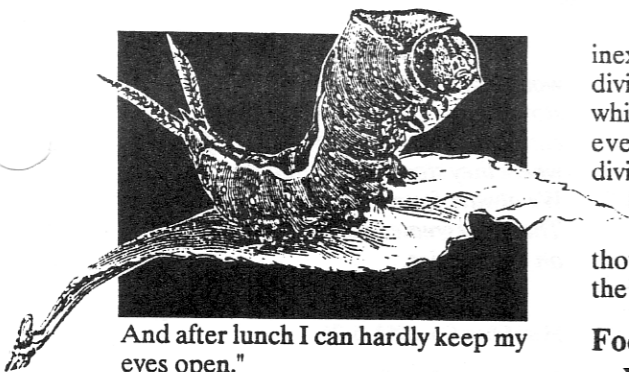
George Watson shares a wonderful story of the consequences of lack of sleep and its effects upon personality.

A wife came to Watson and asked if he could do anything for her husband. The man was "...sort of aimless, like he didn't have a rudder. He's always changing direction, and he just can't stay onto anything very long."

Within six months, he had started to become a stock broker, sold books, hunted for uranium, and negotiated for a doughnut shop franchise.

Jack proved to be a healthy young man twenty-four years of age. He had only one complaint, "...why can't I seem to wake up in the morning? I've lost more jobs by being late to work."





And after lunch I can hardly keep my eyes open."

It turned out Jack was only sleeping five or six hours a night. Jack was certain that this was enough sleep for him since his neighbor survived on even less sleep.

Watson explained, "...if a person can hardly drag himself out of bed, and at the moment would give a thousand dollars if he could just go back to sleep, you can be certain that this person's body and brain have not been restored sufficiently through nutrition and rest to be able to function normally."

Watson told Jack to sleep until he could wake up rested in the morning. Within a short period of time Jack was sleeping twelve hours a night. During this time his wife called and complained of being neglected (he was sleeping from 7 p.m. until 7 a.m.).

Fortunately, Jack was eventually able to reduce his sleep to nine hours a night and still wake up refreshed and energetic. He became a new person.

Watson warns against overcommitment or trying to "carry out a daily life plan that is clearly beyond one's mental, emotional, and physical resources."

"This particular kind of overcommitment is the sick life pattern of large cities, where one's transportation to and from work, the job itself, plus those things to do at home, far exceed one's ability to daily absorb stress and recover fully within a twenty-four hour period."

Action: Get enough sleep at night so you are rested the next day. Limit your activities to your physical endurance.

Reference:
Watson, George, *Nutrition and Your Mind*. New York: Bantam, 1974, pp. 63-69.

Stress and Suffering

One of the greatest stresses an individual can suffer from is seemingly

inexplicable suffering. Sometimes individuals cause their own suffering, while at other times it appears that events just overtake certain individuals. Regardless of the cause or form of pain and suffering an individual experiences, a few thoughts might be helpful in bearing the burden.

Focus is Important

When undergoing suffering, an individual can focus on the cruelty and pain of the experience or look beyond it. Focusing on the suffering only serves to create misery and a negative attitude. We begin to feel sorry for ourselves and start to take out negative feelings on other people who then respond by drawing away from us.

Even excruciating pain can be surmounted. Renoir, the famous French painter developed a terrible case of arthritis in his later years. His hands became so twisted and deformed that even holding a brush was extremely painful.

The famous artist Matisse, a friend, once visited the suffering painter. He asked how he could bear to hold a brush in his fingers at the expense of such torture and pain. Renoir replied, "The pain passes but the beauty remains." Renoir found a focus outside of himself in his pain to which he directed his thoughts in his suffering. His focus was so fixed on his objective that the pain shrank to insignificance.

Reference:
Anderson, Lee, "Suffering Has a Purpose," *Scoocaster*, Scofield Memorial Church, Vol. 16 No. 13, March 30, 1975, p. 1.

Suffering and Feeling

Suffering increases the ability of an individual to feel the emotions of those who are going through difficulty. It improves the ability to communicate and to understand. It can also spur an individual to growth and maturity.

Jenny Lind once came to America on a singing tour. In Boston a famous music critic named Goldsmidt heard her and commented, "She is wonderful, but she needs one thing. She needs to have her heart broken. Then she would be the greatest singer in the world."

Goldsmidt later married Lind and his words became a self-fulfilling

Pain is the megaphone God uses to speak to a deaf world.

— C. S. Lewis

prophecy. He was so cruel to her that her heart was broken. Afterwards she sang with such depth of feeling and understanding that the world was touched. She became known as the Swedish nightingale.

It is difficulties that people wrestle with that often make them unique and different. Pain and suffering can give a voice like that of Lind a depth of compassion which might not otherwise be there.

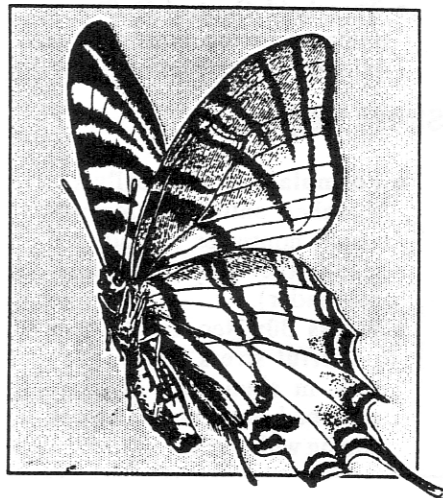
The story is told of two mothers who had carried on a close friendship for years. One of the women lost a child and the other woman shared in her sorrow. Later the child of the second woman died and again the two women met at the side of a grave. The second woman said, "Once I knew what you suffered, now I feel it."

Reference:
Harrison, Everett, *The Ministry of Suffering*, His International Service, 1515 E. 66th St., Minneapolis, Minn. 55423.

Suffering and Potential

Suffering may be necessary for us to reach our full potential. It can mobilize resources that otherwise might never be called forth in our lives. It can transform us into something we might not otherwise have become.

One of the finest illustrations of the value of difficulty is the story of a young boy who discovered the cocoon of an emperor moth. The boy happened to be nearby when the moth began its struggle to leave the cocoon through a tiny aperture. The hole seemed far too small for the moth and it soon became obvious it



Lincoln's Road to Success

1831	.....	Failed in business
1832	.....	Defeated for legislature
1833	.....	Second business failure
1836	.....	Nervous breakdown
1838	.....	Defeated for speaker
1840	.....	Defeated for elector
1843	.....	Defeated for Congress
1848	.....	Defeated for Congress
1855	.....	Defeated for Senate
1856		Defeated for Vice President
1858	.....	Defeated for Senate
1860	.....	Elected President

The Treasure Chest, ed. Charles L. Wallis, N.Y.: Harper and Row, 1965, p. 3.

would be a Herculean struggle to exit the cocoon.

The boy watched for what seemed like an endless period of time as the creature struggled. Finally, compassion melted his heart and he determined to help the moth. Taking a pair of scissors he ever so slightly enlarged the exit of the cocoon. The moth quickly pulled itself forth into the world.

Unfortunately, the moth had been permanently damaged by the attempt to reduce its struggles. The moth needs the pressure of forcing itself through that tiny aperture in order to

force body fluids into its wings. That moth could never fly. Ever afterward it remained a miserable earthbound creature. Many of the greatest men who have lived have been made great by the struggles they endured and overcame.¹

Reference:

1. Cowan, Mrs. Charles E., *Streams in the Desert*, Vol. I, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, January 9 reading.

Responding to Stress

Oftentimes the most crucial factor in our lives is not the experiences we encounter, but how we respond to them. The choices we make are all important. Many people try to run from problems which is not always appropriate.

A story shared by a cowboy of the old west illustrates the importance of dealing with stress and resolving it:

The Herefords taught me one of life's most important lessons. We used to breed cattle for a living, but the severe winter storms used to take an awful toll. Again and again after a severe winter storm we would find most of them piled up against fences dead. They would turn their backs to the icy blasts and slowly drift down wind twenty miles until the fence stopped them. There they piled up and died.

The Herefords were different. They would head straight into the wind and slowly work up the other way until they came to our upper boundary fence where they stood facing into the storm. We always found them alive and well. That's the greatest lesson I ever learned on the prairies.

Reference:

Dunnington, Lewis, *Keys to Richer Living*, MacMillan Co., 1952, p. 76.

Look to the Fruit

Stress, pain or difficulty in our lives can be likened to a storm. If the sun shines all the time it inevitably produces a desert. A storm stirs up life.

The life that springs from a storm in our lives has a varied potential. When a plot of ground is fertilized and watered it can grow thorns and thistles or fruits and flowers. The fruit which grows is dependent upon the seed which is planted. We can not choose whether pain enters our lives, but we do have a great deal to do with choosing how we shall respond to difficulties. We choose our attitudes.

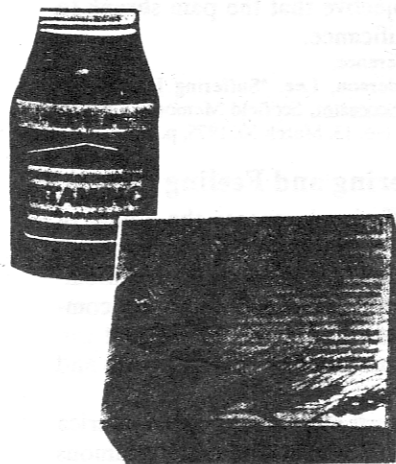
Sometimes stress and difficulty will not benefit us directly, but others. The Bible records a story of a woman named Rachel who died in childbirth. She called her child "son of my sorrows," but his father Jacob chose to call him Benjamin which means "son of my right hand." Sometimes our sorrow will leave a legacy to the lives of others of which we can hardly dream. Benjamin was the ancestor of the Apostle Paul!

Advertisement

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