

Got Stress?

Dealing with the stressors in your life

By Rebecca Wagner

As we take this voyage, also known as college, there are bound to be small bumps in the road. As if school weren't bad enough, these day-to-day hassles can build up over time and leave us feeling overwhelmed and exhausted. This is where I step in to provide you with some encouragement about handling stress. As a co-student and Peer Health Educator, if anyone knows stress, it's me!

The nature of stress isn't always an unhealthy one. What makes stress become unhealthy is when people do not cope or deal with stressful occurrences, which then continue to compile over time. Stress is an ingrained human reaction to different stressors that life throws at us. Some deal skillfully; others don't. Two people can experience the same stressors like a bad grade, an unexpected car repair, or money issues. Some react as if there is no problem, while others think their world is going to end. Dealing with stressors head on is the key ingredient to not letting stress get to you.

When people continue to let stress build up it can cause many adverse reactions in the body. These reactions can be mental, physical, or emotional, and after time can literally wear out the body's immune system. The relationship between stress and disease is not a new concept to the medical profession. When stress hormones are released they are responsible for many reactions in the body like, elevated blood pressure, which has been linked to coronary heart disease. Stress is also connected with the immune system and being able to fight off infection. In addition, stress can also affect school performance, sleeping habits, eating and digestion, daily energy, and overall mood. When it comes to the connection between health and stress, we would do well to pay close attention to the wear and tear we place on our bodies.

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There are four key strategies I can recommend.

1. *Identify and recognize the things that stress you out the most.*
2. *Understand what's most important in your life and keep them in perspective.*
3. *Make a behavior change. Write out a list of changes you're willing to make and take a step toward correcting one practice.*
4. *Use creative problem solving skills to stick to a final goal.*

You can focus privately on all 4 steps or talk them through with a close friend. Although these four steps might help to reduce stress, you may also want to also try a creative outlet. This can be anything from a personal hobby, running, yoga, meditation, or journal writing. The options are endless. Finding an outlet can drastically decrease your stress level and help to get you focused on other areas of life.

If you constantly find yourself stressed check out some of the UO resources available to enrolled students.

- **Student Recreation Center-** offers recreational sports, aerobic classes, and other special interest activities, (346-4183)
- **University Counseling Center-** located on the top floor of the Health Center, by appointment or walk in, offers free support and counseling programs (346-3227).
- **University Health Center-** offers medical examinations and treatments, Peer Health Education, Therapeutic Touch and massage (346-4441).

Stress happens. We simply need to determine our own unique strategy of how to manage it. Our stress can be helpful indicators of how we want to live our lives.

Breathing

By Sarah Parrish

"Breathing may be considered the most important of all the functions of the body, for, indeed, all the other functions depend upon it."

—Ramacharaka:
Hindu-Yogi Science of Breath

Ramacharaka certainly knew what he was talking about. Have you ever considered how important breathing is? Breathing affects everything from our mood, to thinking ability, to heart rate, down to even posture. Conditions that compromise breathing - pneumonia, emphysema, colds, allergies - have a tremendous impact on our quality of life. Those who meditate often use breathing exercises as a way of focusing their attention. Breathing plays a great role in Tai Chi, Yoga, singing and all manner of activity. Breath is considered by many to be our primary life force. We can all agree that it at least brings needed oxygen to the brain. The art of breathing properly is one of the most overlooked aspects of optimal health.

Dr. Andrew Weil, author of the books Spontaneous Healing, and Natural Health, Natural Medicine, stresses the importance of breathing clean air. He describes how breathing does more for a person than just expand lungs and add oxygen to the blood.

Try this simple exercise:

- *Stand in a well-ventilated area with your feet hip-width apart and parallel.*
- *Raise your arms in front of you in a circle stretching up as far as you can reach while triggering your yawning reflex.*
- *Repeat 5 times.*
- *Switch the direction of your arms and repeat again 5 times.*

This is a simple breathing exercise that is designed to leave you feeling more energetic.

Andrew Weil's books are available for free two week loan from the Peer Health Education Office in the University Health Center. Check them out for other ideas on improving this essential aspect of your daily living.

Discovering the World of Yoga



By Cass Skinner

As a single mother of three young children, going back to school full time and trying to juggle all of our crazy schedules, I realized that I needed an hour just for me or I would end up in a padded room. It also happened that I needed that one little credit hour to bump me up to full time status. So, I looked into Physical Education courses offered at the Student Recreation Center and nailed down two possibilities that fit within my class schedule: Step Aero-

bics or Hatha Yoga. Now, as you may imagine, my everyday life is not without its share of aerobic activity: just getting the kids woken up, fed, dressed and into the car is a two hour process every morning, so the idea of doing more running in place was not too appealing. Hatha Yoga became the default choice and I am ever grateful that it did.

Little did I realize at the time, however, that I would end up in a padded room anyway. The Mat Room used for this class had padded walls and a padded floor to make Yoga, meditating, or stretching much more comfortable. As I

walked into the room for the first time, with soft music playing and the lights out, I felt as though I had entered my personal stress-free haven. Donna O'Neil, the instructor for my class, indicated that quiet introspection and a darkened room were ideal to appreciate the benefits of Yoga fully. One of the few dictates she had for the class was that all superficial chatter be left at the door (along with your shoes and socks) so that you could rely on peacefulness and serenity in the room. I listened, paid attention, and learned how to breathe.

Even after just one class, I could really tell the difference between how flexible I was, how I handled stress, and how I felt about myself in general. The overall sense of peace and tranquility that I got by just slowing down and breathing was amazing. Consider that it is done without drug consumption, without exercising like mad, and with virtually no equipment. I knew then and there that Yoga would be a lifetime practice of mine.

I asked Donna about long-term benefits she has experienced from her practice of Yoga. She began the discipline in the 1970's and has been teaching Hatha Yoga since 1995. Along with an overall sense of peace, she has found Yoga to help with "pain management, balance, posture, [and] strengthening" and it has also given her "general vitality to face the day".

If you are among the many whose schedules are already packed to the breaking point and are not able to take a Yoga class, Donna suggested checking out beginning Yoga videos or other forms of media from the library. The Peer Health Education Office in the Health Center also has Yoga books available to you for check out. I strongly urge you to consider signing up for a class, even if you think you don't have time for it. Depending on the school term, there are between ten and thirty-six Mind and Body (PEMB) classes offered by Physical Activity & Recreation Services, so you should be able to find one that would fit within your schedule. When it comes time to register, do so quickly, as they are among the most popular of PE classes and fill up quickly. You will only have yourself (and me) to thank later on. Now, if you don't mind, I need to get to my padded room and BREATHE.