

Published January 5th, 2011

## Stress Without Strain in 2011

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all right" message to the brain and body. Note: breathing deeply will also improve libido and mood, as it activates the part of the nervous system that controls pleasure centers.

3. Eat well and Exercise - When eating healthily, brain blood sugar stabilizes, which is critically important for clear and stress-free thoughts and emotions. Exercise improves circulation to the body, resulting in improved brain function. Good nutrition and regular exercise can correct many imbalances, lead to reduction of distress and illness, restore vitality, and consequently add more joy to everyday events. And a great by-product of this is losing weight. How to fit it into a busy life? Put it on your schedule, then as George Carlin said, "Always do whatever's next" and begin to integrate it into your life gradually until you find the right levels for you.

4. Connect with Others - For some it seems that friends and family should not be "burdened" with stories about one's stress, especially at this time of year when one is expected to be cheerful and happy. Yet these connections and sources of support are essential to living life in a positive and balanced way. It is a truly beautiful gift, unique to each of us, to both receive and lend support, a personal declaration of love and faith in the human spirit. "In the progress of personality, first comes the declaration of independence, then a recognition of interdependence," wrote Henry Van Dyke. The wonder of connection with others is that just a little attentiveness and honesty can open the heart and reduce the stress that would otherwise intensify with isolation and oneliness.

I hope during this new year that stress eases up for everyone. In the meantime, let these suggestions help you to experience "stress without strain!"

### REFERENCES

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FEELING vigorous at work protects workers from higher

At this time of year many people are experiencing significant levels of stress. Situations such as the loss of a job, illness, relationship difficulties and other significant disappointments present themselves all year long and must be dealt with but seem even more challenging during the holidays. The purpose of this article is to explore options for diminishing or relieving the very real stresses we face and to experience more peace in our lives. Below are four simple and effective coping skills:

1. Put it in Perspective - It's my opinion that high stress levels result from both the reality of and the perception of the stressful events. As Coach Charlie Widemeyer (who suffered with ALS) once said, "Pain and suffering are inevitable - but misery is optional." Emotions stemming from stressful events are part of human experience and shouldn't be denied or ignored, however a chronic negative outlook intensifies and increases the stress response. The phrase "Thoughts are things" applies here. Negative inner dialogue triggers a physiological change, activating the brain and nervous system via a "Fright, flight and fight" mechanism. The stress hormones produced raise blood pressure and heart rate, decrease digestion, imbalance blood sugar, and damage brain cells. Conversely, positive, calm thoughts and coping mechanisms diminish the physical experience of stressors in the environment. Therefore, as stressful events unfold it's advisable to pause briefly to reflect on positive things in your life and remind yourself that the current situation is a passing event not tied to your entire existence.

2. Deep Breathing - This is perhaps the most effective measure that can be undertaken in any moment of the day to reduce stress. During a commute, a challenging meeting, in the heat of one's daily grind and in its aftermath, a routine of focused breathing is a restorative and centering exercise. Breathing is something we do anyway, so why not do it in a way that makes life easier and the body healthier? Deep, slow abdominal breathing is free, unnoticeable to others, and slows down the stress-cortisol system, sending an "It's

mortality and metabolic syndrome (diabetes) markers.

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