

Do yourself a favor, take control of stress

NEWARK, Del. — Why is it that one person can break a leg and remain calm, while another gets hysterical over a broken teacup?

There's a word to describe why we come apart at the seams. It's called "stress". We're hearing a lot about stress these days, perhaps because more people are under greater stress in this topsy-turvy world — or perhaps because we're beginning to realize how destructive prolonged stress can be to our bodies and emotions.

Whatever the reason, stress is a fashionable word, and Lynn Hershey, Delaware home economist, is convinced that the more each of us knows about it the better off we'll be.

Stress refers to the

physical and emotional responses of the body when demands are made of it. These responses are not always bad. Short-term or limited stress can be invigorating and extremely productive. An onrushing deadline can ignite a good writer and make him even better. The pressure of Olympic competition can cause new records to be set.

An actress who turns pea green before going onstage may wind up with a Tony Award for her performance. A camper who's approached by an unfriendly bear may suddenly be able to run twice as fast as he ever did before. However, if these people were to function at a high stress level all the time, they could become ill.

Two things are certain:

there is no way we can avoid stress altogether until rigor mortis sets in; and as we attempt to cope with stress, our bodies react physically. Stress can often be worked off or channeled in positive ways. But prolonged stress can be a killer.

Heart and circulatory diseases, ulcers, suicide, alcoholism, child abuse, emotional disorders and teenage drug addiction are just a few of the problems linked to stress.

Use of Valium and other tranquilizing drugs has reached epidemic proportions as people strive to cope with stress.

What healthful alternatives are there when we're faced with stressful situations? Sometimes it's possible to change these

situations and remove the stressors. If you have an apartment next to a bongo drummer and can't stand the din, move.

More often, however, we just have to cope with stress. The trick is to cope in ways that reduce body strain, not aggravate it. For example, drinking coffee all night while cramming for an exam aggravates it.

On the other hand, vigorous exercise is considered one of the best stress-reducers. Go for a hike or swim. Scrub the kitchen floor (unless that happens to be the cause of your stress!). Play touch football with your kids. Do 20 sit-ups.

If you spend your days in an office, that's no excuse. Climb up and down several flights of stairs every morning and afternoon. Go for a brisk walk during your lunch hour. Bend down and touch your toes when no one is looking — or even if someone is.

Learning to relax is vital. It's a skill that can be

developed with practice. Get some books on yoga, meditation, or relaxation techniques, then give yourself some quiet time every day to practice unwinding. You're worth it. And your health may depend on it.

Watch your daily diet. When your body is under stress, good nutrition is even more important. In particular, stress can deplete your reserves of the B vitamins and vitamin C,

which are not stored in the body and should be replenished daily.

Talk out your worries with someone you trust and respect. It helps to get a problem off your chest, and you may also benefit from a fresh view point.

Finally, if you feel you cannot handle your stress, get professional help. This is not a sign of weakness, but a positive step that indicates courage as well as common sense.

Sign of the times



This license plate, belonging to Len Zematis, director of the Pennsylvania Farmers Union, states his position clearly.

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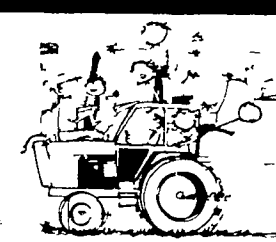
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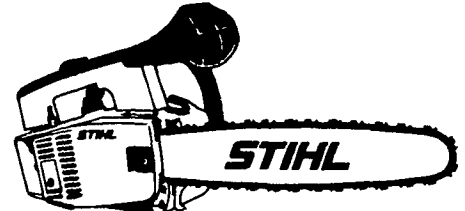
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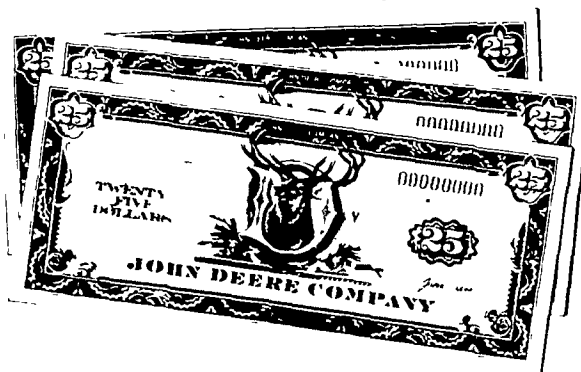
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