

Stress: How Does it Affect Your Family?

BY KIMBERLY HERR

LANCASTER — The word stress, now commonly used to describe a human condition, was initially an engineering word.

"It describes how much pressure a building can take before it breaks," explained James E. Van Horn, Penn State Extension family specialist. "If it goes too far, the building will collapse. When we talk about it in human terms, it is the same thing."

Van Horn spoke on personal and family stress during last week's

critical times, disease outbreak, such as the Avian influenza, high debt load, government regulations and, of course, the weather

"The mere fact that the farmer has no control over the weather causes stress," Van Horn said

"Farming produces a lot of stress in general," he continued "People in poultry farming who have not been hit with the Avian influenza are living under a tremendous amount of stress."

And the symptoms produced by

problems are using eating to cope with stress."

Some of the symptoms deal with emotions Stress may result in feelings of anger, guilt, fear or irritability Or nervous habits, such as tapping feet, twisting hair or biting nails, may develop.

A dangerous side effect, according to Van Horn, is the abuse of a substance, whether it is drugs, alcohol, food or over-the-counter drugs. Van Horn said some people believe that drug companies' stock would go down and some would even go bankrupt, if Americans could find a way to better deal with stress.

And, as Van Horn explained, when an individual is under stress, the family is usually under stress, since most everyone is part of some family unit.

"The family is like a mobile and when stress affects the family that mobile gets out of line and if it gets bad enough, it will collapse," Van Horn told his audience.

Van Horn referred to actions produced by stress as indicators. He put those indicators into two groups, Level I and Level II.

Level I indicators are parental conflicts and sibling conflicts, "the day in and day out, with no let up kind of thing," Van Horn explained.

Parent-child conflicts that lead to a break down in communication are another indicator. Van Horn explained it this way: "the kid who won't talk - the parent who badgers the kid."

Increased anger and increased rules and regulations are also results of family stress, as are child and adolescent behavior problems.

"Kids do not runaway from home," Van Horn said. "Parents propel kids out of the home."

If children come from a family with a lot of stress pile up, Van Horn explained, they are "pretty likely to become dependent on some substance or some kind of relationship outside of the family."

"Kids are tremendous



James Van Horn, left, stands with Jay Irwin, Lancaster Co. Extension agent, during Lancaster Co. Poultry Day. Van Horn spoke on the effects of stress.

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Lancaster County Poultry Day, held at the Farm and Home Center.

According to Van Horn, the causes of stress are as varied as the symptoms it produces. Some of those causes are machine breakdown, illness during a

these stressors include: dizziness, headaches, tight shoulders and neck, ulcer, upset stomach, fatigue and appetite loss or increase.

"More people are suffering weight problems today than ever before," Van Horn said. "A great number of people with weight

barometers on how well a family is doing," he said.

Van Horn, who is the father of five, explained that Level I problems can become Level II problems, including physical and verbal hostility, spouse or child abuse.

"Family stress and child abuse are intimately linked," Van Horn said.

Other Level II indicators are divorce, separation, the inability to work or the termination of work.

"If we had just one stress to deal with, we would do very well, but stress, like pancakes, will pile up," Van Horn said.

However, there are ways of relieving the stress, according to Van Horn. He recommended physical exercise or physical activity, "the kind of exercise that we might do to relax our bodies."

For example, Van Horn said, try squeezing your eyes tightly shut for five seconds and then opening them as wide as you can. This exercise, according to Van Horn, will help if you have been working with figures or using your eyes for other tedious work.

Or try pushing your hands against an imaginary wall for five seconds or just shrug your shoulders as hard as you can a couple of times.

"Talk about what it is that bothers you," Van Horn recommended. "The less we talk about what is bugging us the more it will show up in ulcers and physical problems."

In conclusion, Van Horn urged those present to recognize stress and to do something about it.

"You can be the master of your own ship," he concluded.

BACK HOME



By Michelle S. Rodgers

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HOW DO YOU FIND RELIEF?

It's March...almost time to put the potatoes into the ground except that it is still covered with snow! The sneak preview we got of spring fades into winter doldrums with the snow and sleet returning to the scene. I'm finding it difficult to get up and get going — particularly outside.

This seems to be the nightmare season for parents too. The recurring nightmare is one of fear of waking up to another day of snow, sleet, or rain and the kids crying, "What can we do?"

I learned early in my life back home on the farm that "What can I do now?" was not always a good question to ask if you were going to be selective about the options given. My mother is a great list maker and in three seconds flat she could quote a list of possibilities. The list always included an array of chores that needed to be done as the work really is never finished on the farm. But I don't have to think long to come up with fond memories of rainy/snowy day activities. If you can relate to this scenario, read on for a few suggestions to keep the kids occupied until the storm blows over.

PLAN A TRIP - This can have many variations. A blanket over a cardtable could transport my sisters and I to a camping trip almost anywhere. Or, have your children choose a place to travel as pictured in an old magazine. Then cut and paste pictures of places they'd like to stay, meals they

want to eat, things they want to do and see. The key is to make it a long trip!

RADIO - Haul out the portable tape recorder, put on a blank cassette and have the kids make up their own radio show. To incorporate the "sharing" concept have one be the news reporter, another be the announcer, and one or two give the commercials

TAKE OVER THE TOWN - Try a new "make believe" - a city government. Take over the town by electing a mayor. Run a campaign complete with signs, elections and speeches. After all, it is a campaign year!

PUT ON A PUPPET SHOW - Find those forgotten puppets or make some from paper bags, old socks, or plates and popsicle sticks. Have the children plan the script, sound effects and practice. You might need to give a short presentation of your own to get them into the spirit of things. Be prepared to attend the show once it is ready and offer your applause.

Other ideas which you can expand on and adapt to your children or household include:

Baking together.

Cleaning out the toy boxes and shelves together and rediscover long forgotten toys.

Work together on a household chore, and then spend time together at a board game or puzzle.

Finally, if you try all these ideas and still can't keep the little ones out of trouble, then put on their boots and coats and send them out to play!

Good Diet Helps Your Baby's Growth

YORK — Only 17 days after conception, a baby will begin to develop blood vessels and blood pools. Even at this early stage of development, the food you eat will affect the health of your child, says A Joan Lamberson, Extension home economist.

As early as two weeks after conception, a developing fetus needs protein, iron, and vitamin C. The source of these nutrients is the milk, meat, fruits and vegetables that the mother eats.

In the third week of development, the heart and brain begin to develop, and the child needs even more protein. The eyes also begin

to develop around this time, so vitamin A is needed from the fruit and vegetable group.

During the fourth week of pregnancy, the baby's ears and nose begin to develop. The baby then needs protein, riboflavin, niacin. Good sources of these nutrients are the meat and milk groups and the bread group.

The nervous system also begins to form in the fourth week, making thiamine, niacin and calcium essential for the child's growth. At this time, the expectant mother should be eating plenty of foods from the bread group.

The eight week marks the

beginning of the skeleton and the need for protein, calcium, vitamin D and phosphorus. The meat and milk groups will supply these

From the fifth month of pregnancy up to full term, the general features and characteristics remain the same. The structure of the baby is patterned in the first four months of pregnancy.

But it is still important for the mother to eat well. A good, healthy diet may mean fewer complications during the pregnancy, less chance of having a premature baby, a healthier baby and less chance of birth defects.

