

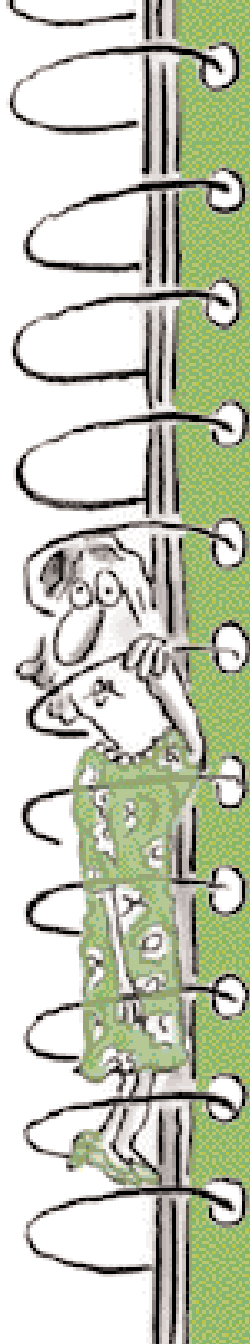
A cartoon illustration of a man with glasses and a green patterned shirt climbing a spiral binding. He is holding onto the wire with his hands and feet. The background is a dark, textured pattern.

MANAGING STRESS: A GUIDE FOR UFT MEMBERS

Third Edition

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The United Federation of Teachers

Illustrator: Debra Solomon

A GUIDE TO STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR UFT MEMBERS

Dear Colleagues,

The schools of New York City have never placed more demands upon their employees. And the pressures can be overwhelming.

Teaching is difficult, the bureaucracy is frustrating, and you're trying to do a good job while living under the strain everyone faces in New York City. The UFT understands how stressful your environment can be — and we want to help you cope with it.

This booklet is full of useful tips, exercises and information for dealing with stress effectively. For more extensive assistance, the UFT offers stress management courses. There, our experts provide a more comprehensive exploration of stress and ways of handling it. Look for announcements of the courses in the *New York Teacher*

Remember, you can't be your best if you're not taking care of yourself — so please do, for yourself and your students.

Sincerely,

Michael Mulgrew
UFT President

STRESS DEFINED

Q: What is stress?

A: Hans Selye, a pioneer in the study of stress, calls it “the rate of wear and tear within the body” — a series of bodily changes. Factors that cause stress are called stressors.

Q: Why do we have stress?

A: People, like other animals, have an inborn reaction to stressful situations called the “fight or flight” response. Just as when our ancestors had to decide whether to battle or flee from a rampaging carnivore, we still have the same physiologic reactions to stress: blood pressure rises, heart rate soars, breathing speeds and muscles get ready for action. That’s wear and tear.

These days, we’re more likely to respond to stressors by changing behavior than by grappling with a tiger. Unless we learn how to deal with stress, we risk illnesses, such as heart attack or stroke, from chronic fight or flight responses.

Q: What makes us feel stressed?

A: Some stress arises from problems in the school system. Some comes from our personal lives —

our homes, families and friends. Wherever its origins, stress negatively affects our ability to function daily. So stresses created by planning lessons, managing a classroom, typing reports, meeting deadlines and completing paperwork can become overwhelming. If we add to this the stress related to our personal lives, running households and taking care of finances, the result may be an overload of our functioning capacities.

Q: What can I do about stress?

A: No matter what you do, you will be under some amount of stress. The trick is to manage it through techniques including taking more control over your school, exercise, relaxation, diet and coping with drugs and alcohol. This booklet is filled with tips for doing these things.

Q: Is stress always bad for you?

A: We usually think of stress as a negative force since it can have a draining effect on us physically, mentally and emotionally. Yet not all stress is bad. Think of planning and taking a vacation. While that creates stress, it’s stress with a positive payoff.



STRESS AND SCHOOLS

Q: Is there much stress in school jobs?

A: Absolutely. Aside from the obvious tensions of working in often dilapidated buildings, in high crime areas and with a bureaucracy that can be unforgiving and unhelpful, some educators face the dangers of drugs, weapons and vandalism. On any given day stress may come from paperwork, disruptive youngsters, difficulties with a supervisor or violence in school. Worse, many educators feel that they have no

opportunity to make their ideas known to policy makers, and have no control over their professional lives.

But there are more subtle forces at work. You must give your maximum attention to your students. This can mean that so much of

your energy goes to dealing with their physical, mental and social ills that little time or energy remains for yourself. Brown University found more stress-related illnesses among people whose jobs involve significant responsibility for the well-being of others.

Q: Is the stress level in certain grade levels higher than others, and are some school jobs more stressful than others?

A: All educators experience some sort of stress and tension unique to their assignments, but they also share many stressors in common. No one is immune.

Q: What, then, is the best way for educators to keep their cool?

A: Research indicates a three-step approach: Verbalize your feelings, plan your week to allow for periodic relaxation and establish an exercise routine.



Q: To whom should I verbalize my feelings?

A: First figure out what is really causing your stress. If it's a person, make sure you know his or her nature. Ideally you should talk out a conflict with the person who is causing it, but this isn't always possible. So try talking to a colleague, writing a letter that you don't intend to mail, or (as a last resort if you're alone in your room), talk to an empty chair. Whatever you do, do something to release the tension.

Q: You say I should plan relaxation periods, but how can I do that in school?

A: Relaxation means doing anything that will let you take your mind off your problems. At the beginning of a prep period or during lunch you might want to listen to music, walk around the block, stretch or read a book. There are tapes you can play that are

designed to help you relax. You can utilize commuting time to give yourself a break.

Q: What about exercise? I'm no athlete.

A: This booklet provides a series of easy stretches that will do the trick. Read on.

Q: What if working conditions are creating my stress?

A: *Work with your UFT chapter.* Together, you and your colleagues have the power to bring substantial changes to your situation in school. Much can be done just by increasing communication within your building, particularly with the administration. Also, by using the School-Based Option provision that the UFT negotiated into your contract, your chapter can make changes in class size; teacher schedules; and rotation of assignments, classes and paid coverages.



STRESS AND STUDENTS

Learning to manage your stress is only half the battle in schools, because often your students are under equal pressure. There are things you can do to help.

Q: What are some of the causes of stress in youngsters?

A: Keeping in mind that stress is idiosyncratic, for children as well as for adults, some common causes include: family problems (like separation, divorce, death, sibling rivalry, being a latchkey child); peer group pressure (am I as tall/smart/tough as Johnny? Do I really want to go along with them?); development (like

puberty, self-esteem, losing in a game); academic requirements and achievements (including test anxiety); health; moving to a new school; and being held back a grade.

Q: How can I identify students under stress?

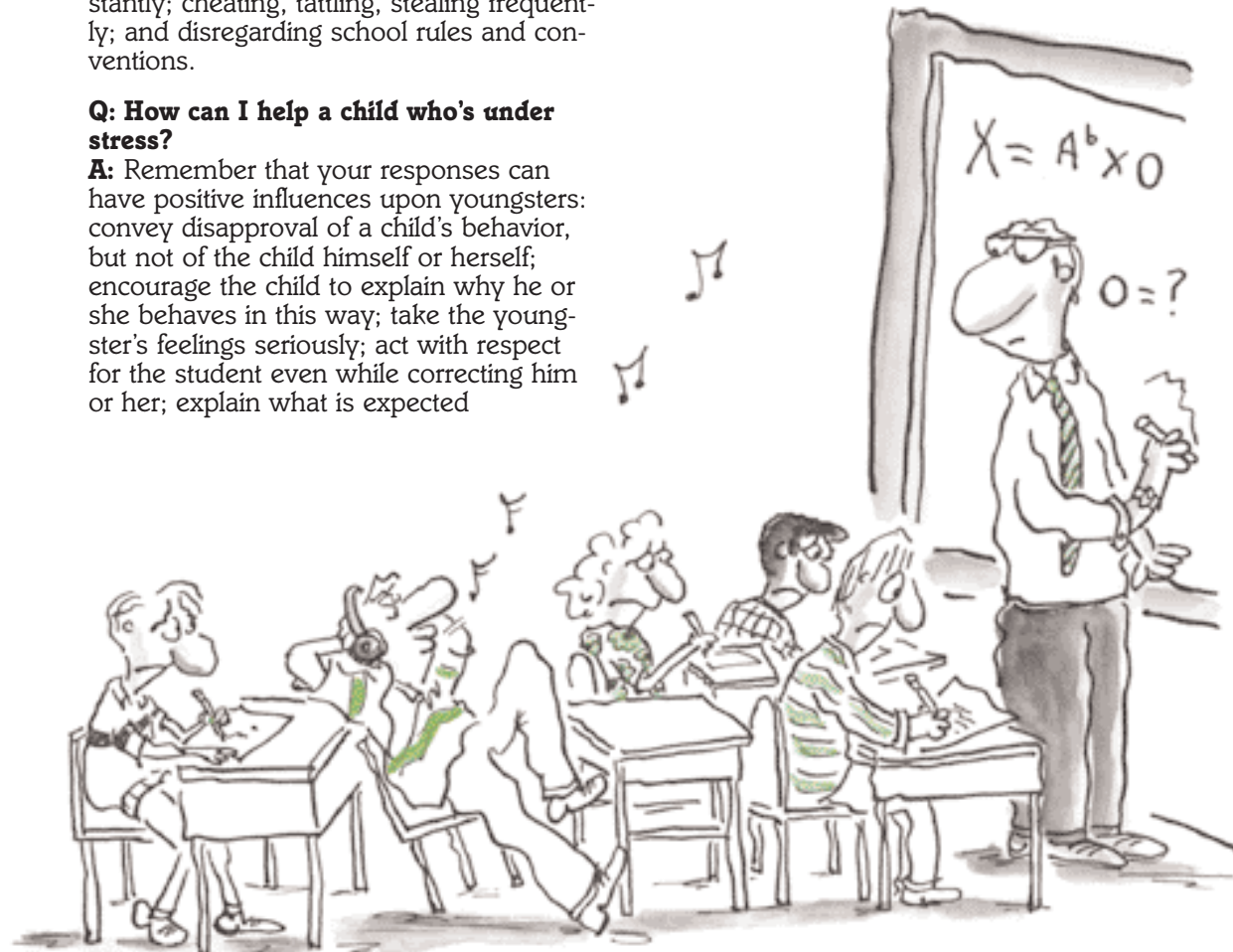
A: Look for common warning signs, including: truancy; change in academic performance; limited participation in group activities; daydreaming/withdrawal during classroom activities; hyperactivity, noisiness, fidgeting all the time; inappropriate behavior (laughing when something isn't funny); giv-

ing up on assignments or saying, "I'm too dumb"; doodling, drawing or otherwise playing instead of doing work; arguing, disobeying, being rude to adults or students; seeking praise and attention constantly; cheating, tattling, stealing frequently; and disregarding school rules and conventions.

Q: How can I help a child who's under stress?

A: Remember that your responses can have positive influences upon youngsters: convey disapproval of a child's behavior, but not of the child himself or herself; encourage the child to explain why he or she behaves in this way; take the youngster's feelings seriously; act with respect for the student even while correcting him or her; explain what is expected

and why; encourage development of self-respect and respect for others; and realize that you as an educator may be the child's only positive adult role model.



RECOGNIZING STRESS

Q: What are the warning signs of stress?

A: Many symptoms are often associated with stress, coming either in response to a long-term stressful lifestyle or to short-term stressful events. See how many symptoms you've seen in colleagues, students and yourself:

Unusual voice volume ; nervous tics or habits (tapping, etc.); vibration feeling (like a motor running); laryngitis; frequent headaches; migraine headaches and symptoms; numbness in extremities; use of combative gestures (punching or chopping the air); use of sarcasm; use of exaggeration in speech; hostile language; blowing up/loss of temper; losing perspective (making a mountain out of a molehill); unusual amount of blinking or yawning; repeated lateness; repeated forgetfulness; unusual heart feelings like tachycardia (rapid heartbeat); rigid thinking, dogmatism; sudden weight change; loss of normal bowel regularity; excessive illness/frequency of colds; allergies or rashes; breathing problems (shortness of

breath, out of breath, asthma); misperceptions (failing to hear or see accurately); sudden change in diet (going on a food binge or suddenly focusing on one "favorite" food); accident prone-ness (dropping things, bumping into things); inattentiveness or distractibility (daydreaming, inability to focus on what's happening); high or low irritability (either everything or nothing bothers the person); and regression (returning to old behavior habits).

INTERPRETING THIS LIST

Anybody may have several of these "symptoms" at a given moment without having a problem. Each of these items can have many causes other than stress. But a combination of several signs can suggest overload. If in doubt, see a physician or mental health practitioner.

If you experience a clear pattern of stress symptoms, your inner self is sending you a vital message. Re-evaluate your lifestyle and make changes.



WAYS TO RESOLVE STRESS

Q. Does exercise help?

A. Stress causes the muscles of the body to tense. This can lead to muscle knots, tension, headaches, cramps, stomach disorders, stiff necks, backaches, poor circulation, etc.

In order to pull your muscles out of this state of partial tension, neither completely flexed nor completely relaxed, you have to exercise. In addition, tranquilizing chemicals (endorphins) are released in the brain during

exercise. Exercising does not necessarily mean running a marathon or doing 100 pushups. Rather, just stretching for a few minutes when you're alone in your room can provide immediate relief.

Q. What are the benefits of regular exercise?

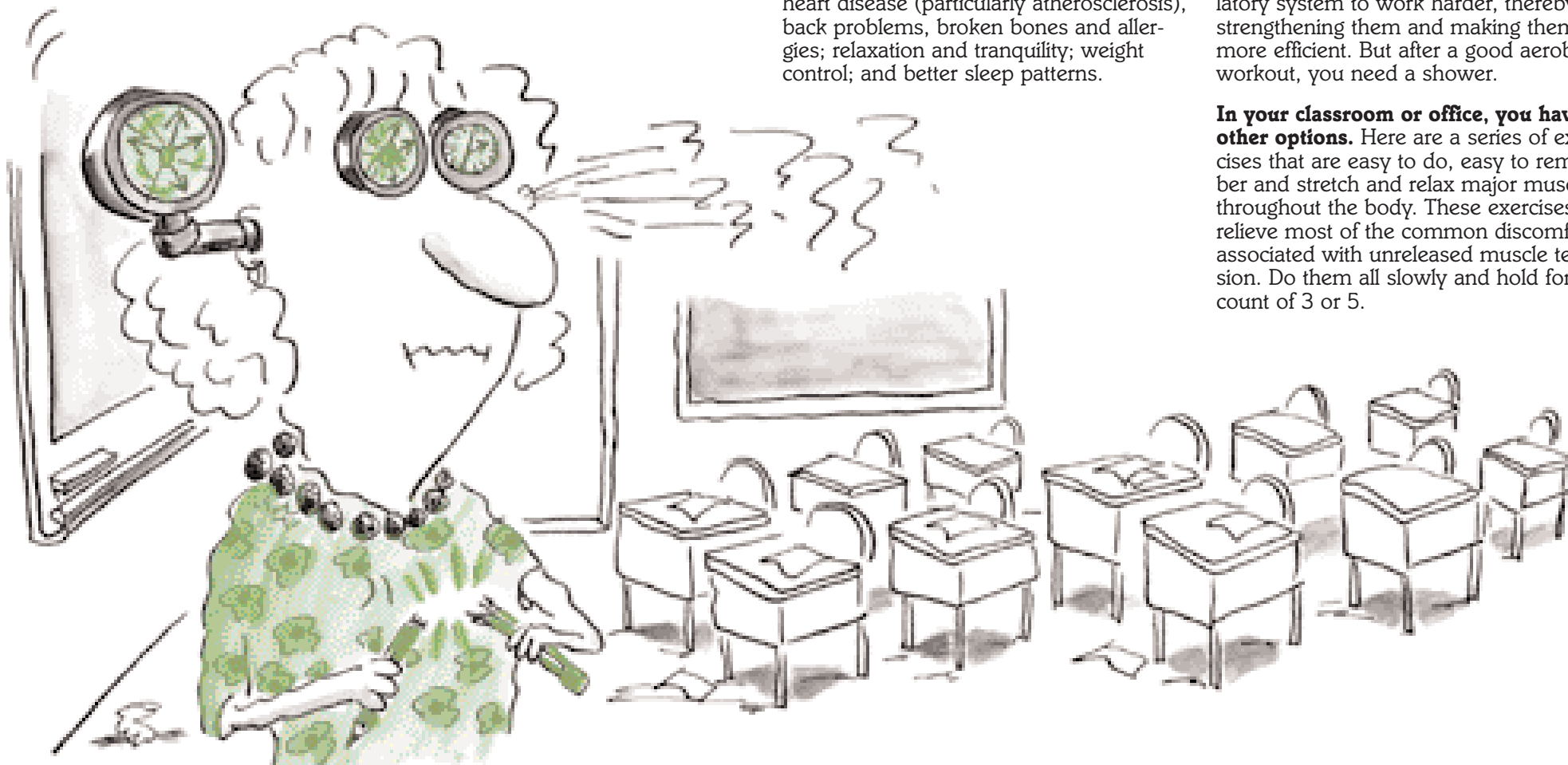
A. Resistance to many ailments, including heart disease (particularly atherosclerosis), back problems, broken bones and allergies; relaxation and tranquility; weight control; and better sleep patterns.

Q. What type of exercise is best?

A. This depends on the time you have, where you are and what your goals are. Aerobic exercise, which increases your rate of breathing, involves constant movement for 20 to 45 minutes.

Aerobics force your heart, lungs and circulatory system to work harder, thereby strengthening them and making them more efficient. But after a good aerobic workout, you need a shower.

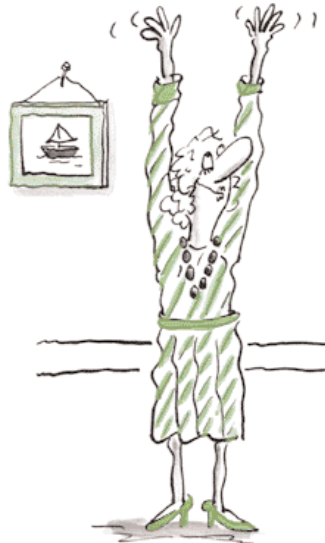
In your classroom or office, you have other options. Here are a series of exercises that are easy to do, easy to remember and stretch and relax major muscles throughout the body. These exercises will relieve most of the common discomforts associated with unreleased muscle tension. Do them all slowly and hold for the count of 3 or 5.



SHOULDER ROTATION

Stand, with the arms hanging loosely at the sides. Rotate the right shoulder in a complete circle, first moving it forward and up toward the ear, then backward. Repeat with the left shoulder and then again with both shoulders simultaneously pressing the shoulder blades together and down. Rotate three times in one direction and then reverse three times.

This releases tension in the shoulders and upper back.



OVERHEAD STRETCH

Stand erect, arms at your sides. Inhaling, stretch the arms up, from sides to shoulder level to overhead. Stretch toward the ceiling as high as you can, first one arm, then the other, then both together. Each time, hold the highest position. Exhaling, relax the arms and let them slowly drop to the sides.

Take a deep breath. Repeat, and exhale into a forward bend.

This stretches the spine, neck, shoulders and arms.

FORWARD BEND

Begin with an overhead stretch while inhaling. Then, exhaling, bend forward from the hips, keeping the back straight and the arms next to and high above the ears. Continue bending; place your palms next to your feet, or drop them down as far as possible. Hold the stretch. It's OK to bend your knees a little until your hamstrings become more flexible. Don't strain them. Roll up slowly.

This encourages a flexible spine, massages intervertebral discs, stretches hamstrings.



NECK ROLLS

Lower the chin to the chest and slowly begin to rotate the head to the left. Inhale while lifting the head up (left ear to left shoulder) and back. Exhale when bringing head down (right ear to right shoulder). Rotate three times, with head, neck and body relaxed. Reverse, and rotate the same number of times to the right.

This releases tension in the neck and shoulder muscles.

SIDE STRETCH

Stand with your feet shoulder width apart and legs straight. Inhale, raise the arms to shoulder level with palms down. Turn left palm up and continue raising left arm until it presses against the left ear. Exhale, and bend at the waist to the right, sliding the right hand down the right leg. Hold the position. Inhale as you raise your arms back to shoulder level. Then exhale and lower arms. Repeat on opposite side.

This stretches the arms, spine, waist.



BALANCING POSTURE

Stand straight, feet about six inches apart. Inhaling, raise right arm up overhead. Stretch left arm back to grasp left foot. Hold this position. To keep your balance, try to focus on a spot directly in front of you. Exhale, lower the left foot, and then the right arm. Repeat on opposite side.

As you get used to balancing, you can tilt forward from the waist, until your arm is parallel to the ground.

This stretches pelvic ligaments, arms, shoulders and muscles around knee.



DEEP MUSCLE RELAXATION

Q: What is the best way to relax quickly?

A: At school, find a quiet place with a chair (or sit in your car); take five to ten minutes to calm down and refresh yourself with these relaxation exercises. At home, choose a quiet comfortable place where you won't be disturbed for half an hour. Go through relaxation while lying on the floor, a bed or a reclining chair.



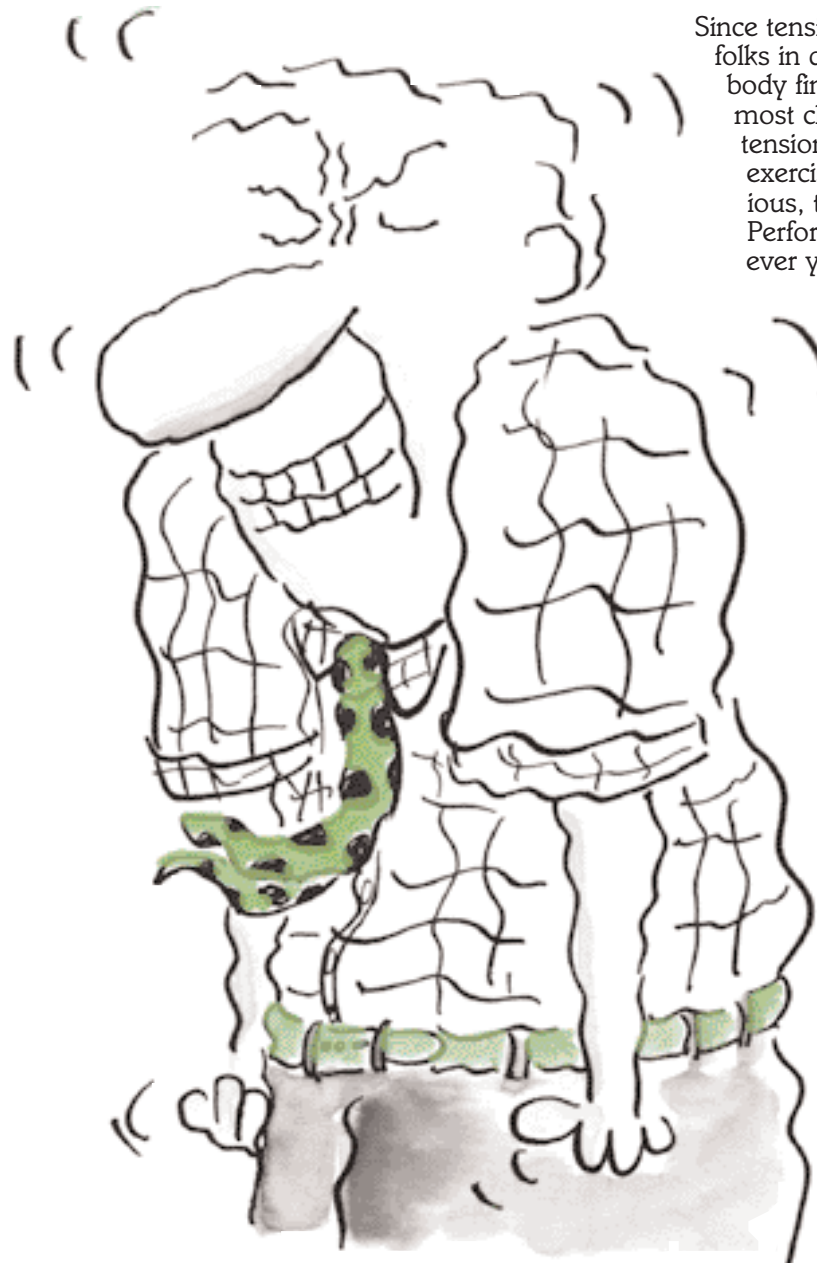
Concentrate on each muscle group, one at a time in the order presented. For each muscle group, a method is described for creating tension and achieving relaxation. Create tension in the muscles by tightening them for five seconds and then relaxing them. The first time you try it, go through the procedure for each muscle group twice.

Since it is difficult to read the instructions while attempting to relax, you may want to make a tape recording of the exercises so you can give yourself instructions. Be sure to speak softly and gently.



MUSCLE TENSING METHOD

Forehead	Wrinkle forehead Try to make your eyebrows touch your hairline for five seconds. RELAX.
Eyes and nose	Close your eyes as tightly as you can for five seconds. RELAX.
Lips, Cheeks and Jaw	Draw the corners of your mouth back and and grimace for five seconds. RELAX. Feel the calmness and warmth in the face.
Hands	Extend arms in front of you, clench fists tightly for five seconds. RELAX, and feel the warmth and calmness in your hands.
Forearms	Extend arms out against an invisible wall and push forward with hands for five seconds. RELAX.
Upper arms	Bend elbows. Tense biceps for five seconds. RELAX, and feel the tension leave your arms.
Shoulders	Shrug shoulders up to your ears for five seconds.
Back	Arch your back off the floor or bed or away from your chair for five seconds. RELAX. Feel the anxiety and tension disappearing.
Stomach	Tighten your stomach muscles for five seconds. RELAX.
Hips, buttocks	Tighten buttocks for five seconds. RELAX.
Thighs	Tighten thigh muscles by pressing legs together as tightly as you can for five seconds. RELAX.
Calves, feet	With your heels planted firmly on the floor; raise your toes as high as they will go for five seconds. Feel the stretch down the back of your calves. RELAX.
Toes	Curl toes under as tightly as you can for five seconds. RELAX.



Since tension strikes different folks in different areas of the body find the exercise that most closely relates to your tension area. Memorize the exercise. When you feel anxious, take a deep breath. Perform the exercise(s) wherever you are and feel the tension dissolve.

DIET

Q: What part does nutrition play in stress reduction?

A: Food influences how you react to stimuli. Some nutrients have a positive effect (such as vitamins B and C) while others can play havoc (like sugar). Taking responsibility for your nutrition and health is vital.

Q: What can I do to improve my nutrition behavior and habits?

A: What works best for one individual may not be good for another. We are all biochemically unique and our dietary requirements differ. Allow enough flexibility in your dietary plans to

accommodate change and exploration. Also: **Consider new theories and information**, but make your own choices. Experiment and observe.

Remember that nutrition is a function of lifestyle. Ailments cannot be attributed totally to poor nutrition. Nutrition is part of the whole health picture.

How you eat is important. One of the best things you can do for your body is to eat food that is most easily digested and assimilated—boiled, baked or broiled, prepared in the simplest form,

with no sauces, creams, wine, etc. Avoid stuffing yourself, the “eat and run” syndrome, gulping your food (chewing food well eases digestion), and unrestrained eating (the “binge”).

Where and when you eat should also be a consideration. A relaxing atmosphere contributes to better digestion and an overall sense of well-being. Avoid eating late at night and when you are anxious or unable to eat slowly. Eating while moving, driving, standing or doing something else is hard on your body’s digestive process.

Be aware of why you eat. How often do you eat because you are bored, anxious, tired, need oral gratification or feel social

pressure? Try to distinguish those feelings from real hunger.

Be concerned with what you eat, but don’t let worry about food take up too much of your energy. Try to consume more whole grains, cereals, fresh fruit and vegetables, fish, poultry and legumes (investigate alternative protein sources). Avoid too much sugar, salt, red meat, fat and cholesterol, food dyes and preservatives, alcohol and caffeine.



EASY DIET CHANGES

Q: So what should I be eating?

A: Avoid junk food snacks. Don't buy them. Ignore that aisle in the market. Mix raisins, nuts and seeds and have them on hand to nibble.

Limit the amount of red meat and foods high in cholesterol.



Stick with polyunsaturated oils instead of palm or coconut oil.

Switch to skim milk. If you don't like the taste, try 1% fat milk to make the transition easier.

Try tofu, a high protein soy bean curd product offering good nutrition and reduced calories. It tastes bland, but absorbs the flavors of the food around it. Try it in stir-fry meals or instead of ricotta cheese in Italian specialities.

Choose fresh fruits or, if they are not available, canned fruits packed in natural juices rather than in sweetened juices. This cuts down on sugar consumption.



Buy brick cheese and slice your own pieces for sandwiches. Processed cheese that is individually wrapped is convenient but less nutritious than unsliced brick cheese.

Buy long-cooking rice and oats and add 20 minutes to your routine or schedule. Cereals can be prepared the night before and reheated in the morning. Nutrients are refined out of minute oats and rice.



Avoid large quantities of the four whites: sugar, salt, refined flour and hydrogenated oils.

Try unbleached flour instead of refined flour. More nutrients are left in.

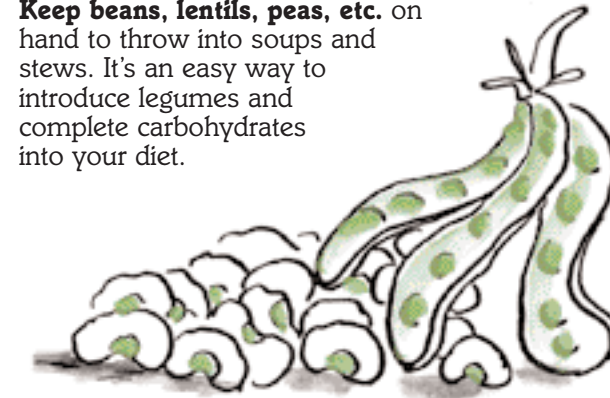
Make your own bread. Experiment with different flours. Slice the bread and freeze it in small quantities if you feel you can't eat a whole loaf.



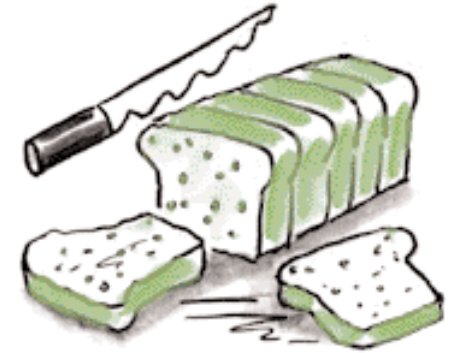
Sea salt is concentrated. You use less, plus it doesn't contain sugar or silicon.

Instant carob tastes like instant hot chocolate mix but contains no sugar. You can then control the amount of sugar you wish to add.

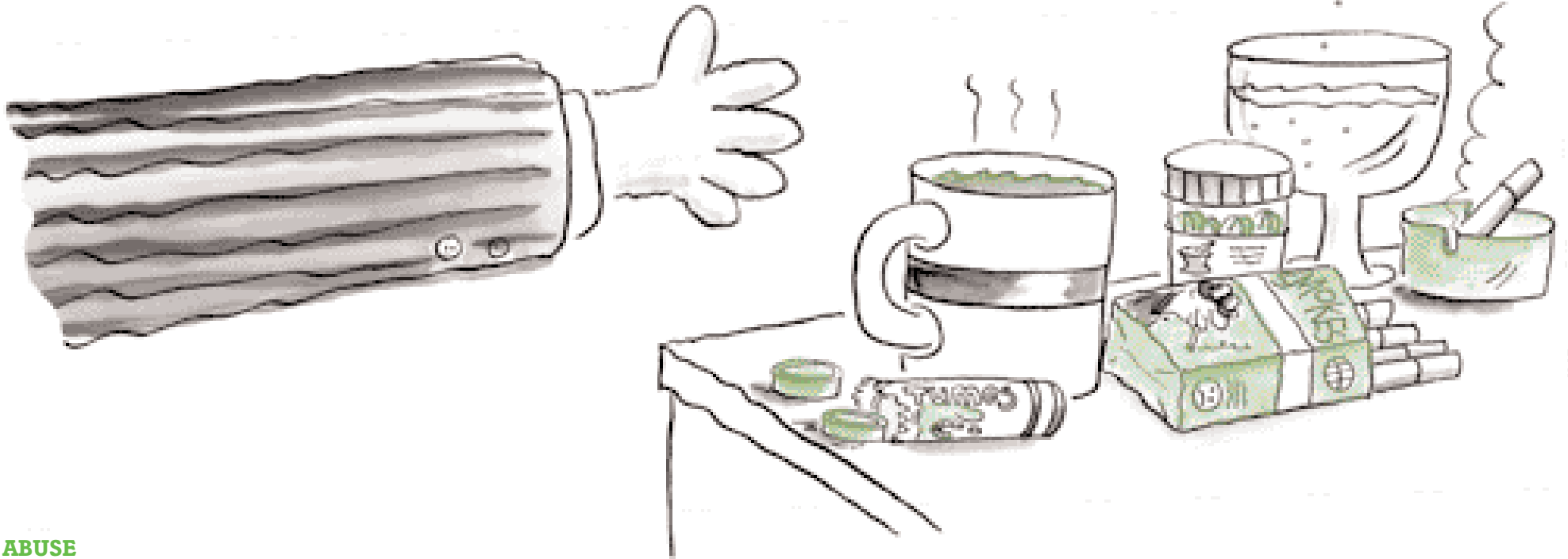
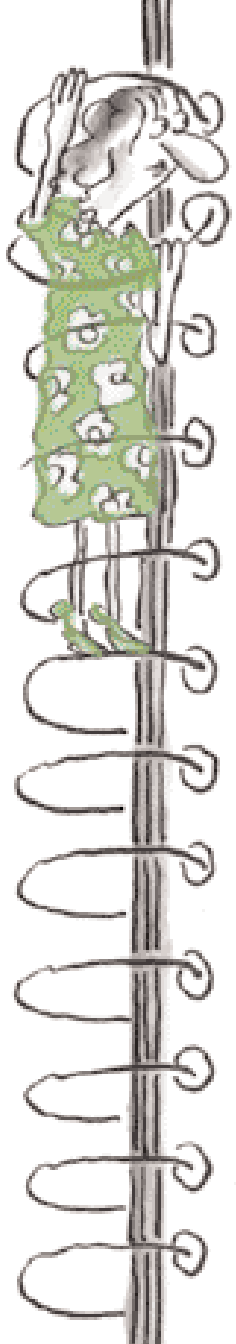
Keep beans, lentils, peas, etc. on hand to throw into soups and stews. It's an easy way to introduce legumes and complete carbohydrates into your diet.



Avoid foods with food dyes and preservatives.



Read can and bottle labels. Ingredients are listed in descending order. Sugar can appear as several different components: sucrose, fructose, corn syrup, etc.



SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Do you:

- take pills to go to sleep?
- take pills to wake up?
- take a drink (wine, beer, liquor) to relax?
- use stomach aids (Tums, Di-Gel, etc.) frequently?
- rely on mood elevators (Elavil)?
- rely on mood depressors (Valium)?
- use any substance to sustain a mood?
- smoke a cigarette to soothe your nerves or prevent weight gain?

If you use any chemicals to help ease the tensions or discomforts you associate with stress, you may be falling into a Catch-22 pattern. You try to manage your stress by escaping into a synthetic shelter. Once the chemicals wear off, you are only facing the stressors again, and perhaps you've compounded the problem and feel worse. Hence you take something else to help you feel better and soon you're caught in a web you've spun out of stressors.

You can't live like an ostrich with your head in the sand. Sooner or later you have to face the stressors. Stress management techniques should replace the substances you are using.

Q: How bad is caffeine?

A: Did you know that caffeine can increase the heartbeat and basal metabolic rate, promote secretion of stomach acids and increase the rate of urine production? In some cases it constricts the blood vessels, while in others it dilates them.

Caffeine can produce anxiety, restlessness, diarrhea, delayed or interrupted sleep, heart palpitations and headaches. In addition, many people suffer irregular breathing, irritability, heartburn and depression.

Caffeine is found in cocoa, tea, coffee, some aspirin-containing medications, cola drinks and some other sodas, No Doz tablets, cold remedies, weight control aids and some prescription drugs.

Read the labels of all foods and drugs before you buy or use them.

TAKE A DEEP BREATH

Q: What effect does breathing have on stress reduction?

A: Experts say proper abdominal breathing gently massages the internal organs, makes your cardiopulmonary system more efficient and regulates the actual flow of breath in and out of the body. It helps maintain a calm, relaxed physical state of well being.

Q: What is proper abdominal breathing?

A: Sit or stand comfortably with your head, neck and trunk erect. Try to keep the body motionless except for the muscles involved in breathing. You breathe with your abdomen, not with your chest. The abdominal muscles control the diaphragm, a muscle that acts like a bellows to squeeze and release the lungs.

Place your hands on your abdomen, between the rib cage and the navel, in order to feel the movement as the muscles contract and relax. Do not try to force the breath. A quick method for deep abdominal breathing is:

1. Relax your arms and shoulders.
2. Rotate your head in a circle, first to the right, then to the left.
3. Close your eyes. Take a deep breath through your nose and exhale. Repeat.
4. Concentrate on your breathing. Put aside all stressful thoughts.



YOU'RE NOT ALONE

Q: Sometimes I can't cope or figure out how to solve problems. Any suggestions?

A: Support groups can help you find a way to cope and solve problems creatively. When things build up, it helps to discuss your feelings. No one can hear what you're thinking.

In your professional life, your support system can include your colleagues and peers; in your personal life, it can involve your family and close friends. A strong support system will help you practice your stress management skills. The UFT's stress management courses will show you how to develop and use your own support network.

Q: It sounds like stress management involves change and practice.

A: You've got it. After deciding what changes you would like to see take place in your life, you will have to decide on the amount of time you are willing to invest in making them happen. You either opt to change your thinking on a stressful situation or you change the situation itself. This change will allow you to think more clearly about the stress management techniques you want to employ. It takes time and practice to master any skill, and stress management skills are no exception.



CLOSING THOUGHTS

This UFT guide to positive stress management was designed to help you learn some effective ways to deal with the stressors in your personal and professional lives.

There is no doubt that stress is part of school life. Assuming the responsibility for the well-being and growth of students is a complex task. Schools may be daunting and education itself is changing toward greater professionalism. Those changes, though for the good, will bring

new stresses. Wanting to work with students and being frustrated by a straining environment can cause a lot of tension.

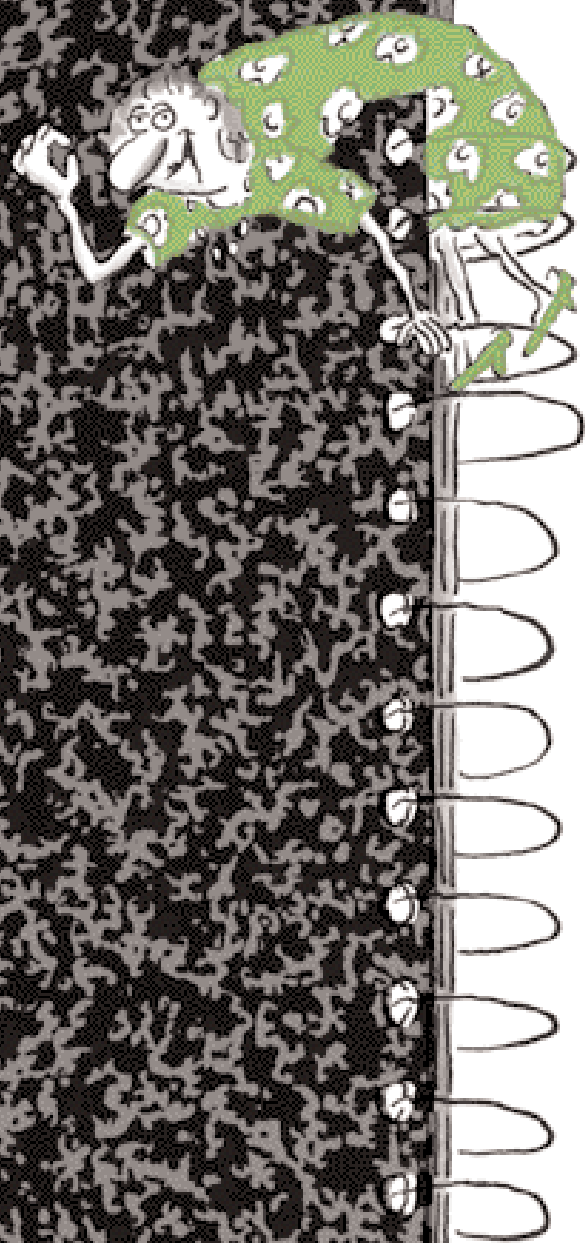
The complexity of multiple stressors in your personal and professional lives makes it absolutely necessary for you to approach stress management with the broadest of perspectives. You must set personal goals to use stress reduction techniques and to make reinforcing behavioral, psychological and physical changes. To do any less is to be applying Band-Aids when tourniquets are needed.

There is both positive and negative stress. The difference between the two lies in the way you perceive and handle each situation. Shakespeare wrote, "Things are neither good nor bad, but thinking makes it so."

Before you lose control, take a deep breath, let it out slowly and feel your composure return.

Good luck and good health.





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