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Stress management
for
massage therapists

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2007

Self Care, Body Mechanics, Nutrition and Stress Reduction

Description and objectives

Burnout is the number one reason forcing massage therapists out of business. It happens when therapists dedicate their time to caring for others while seldom taking the time to care for themselves. Too much stress compromises your ability to focus on your skills and flow in a performance. The main objective of this book is to help massage therapists prevent exhaustion. Moreover, the book aims to provide massage therapists with additional tools to educate their clients on a holistic approach that will help them take a better care of their multidimensional bodies.

If you have been in practice for at least a couple of years, you already know how physically demanding massage therapy can be and how high the injury rate is. Some authors assert that more than 75 percent of body-workers experience repetitive stress injuries at some point in their career. The average career in massage lasts from five to seven years. But burnout and injure are both preventable if you listen to your body.

A balanced body is healthy and functions optimally. However, in order to keep balance it is fundamental to follow a healthy lifestyle, one that includes a nutrition based on natural food, plenty of physical activity and a wise management of stress.

Underlying all the recommendations for a balanced diet, body mechanics, and stress management, this book encompasses an invitation to understand the inner capacity of the body to heal itself and visualize ourselves as multidimensional beings (physical, emotional, mental and spiritual) in need to focus on our wholeness, attending to all these different dimensions, in order to keep good health. The more we understand and apply these concepts on ourselves, the better we will be able to care for our patients.

The book has three main sections. The first section invites you to make an inventory of healthy habits as a starting point to introduce changes in your lifestyle. The second section examines the concepts of curing and healing and introduces new concepts to understand health and illness from a holistic perspective, including the concept of an intelligent body that provides suitable solutions in response to the adaptive challenges imposed by the environment. The third section is all about stress management. It explains what stress is, how it affects the body, the different sources of stress, and some of the strategies that we can adopt to keep stress to reasonable levels. The book ends with a subsection on body mechanics. As you know, correct posture and good body mechanics prevent not only injuries but also exhaustion.

The Self-Care class is approved for 8 CEUS in Florida. More information at www.ceusonlineflorida.com

Self care to prevent burnout

To take good care of ourselves, we need to get educated in health matters. Education will help us in:

- Creating a health plan, based on realistic goals
- Promoting the intelligence of the human body
- Recognizing stress and the ways we react to it
- Understanding the impact of stress on the body
- Identifying the sources of stress (physical, emotional, mental)
- Learning that relaxation is easy as 1-2-3
- Controlling how we react to stress by:
 - √ Changing how we look at things
 - √ Improving time management
 - √ Creating pleasure time

Inventory – recognizing our needs and priorities

Seven thousand people were followed during a 40-year study in Alameda County (CA). The research showed that those who lived longer had followed these key health practices: They ate regular meals (avoiding frequent snacking); ate breakfast regularly; got adequate sleep (seven - eight hours daily); maintained a healthy weight; didn't smoke; limited alcohol consumption and participated regularly in physical activity. The research, supported by many other studies in the nation, provides a good foundation for an individual health plan.

The first step in a personal wellness program is to assess where you stand in terms of wellbeing and healthy habits. Then, as you gain personal insight into your physical, emotional, mental and spiritual needs and accomplishments, you will be able to prioritize and set an agenda including the subsequent steps that will lead to lasting changes and improve your health and wellbeing.

Be aware that wellness involves other dimensions in addition to the physical. For a thorough multidimensional assessment, you might want to try the Wellness Inventory, to which you will find a link that I have added to my website home page (www.silviacasabianca.com). This inventory is a premier tool for self-assessment. Take a free tour and decide if you want to use it.

If you don't make up your mind to do the Wellness Inventory, the following quiz, although basic, will help you assess your lifestyle. It comes from a multidimensional perspective, to help you in evaluating different areas of your life: the use of alcohol and mood-altering substances; your nutritional habits; physical activity; how you express yourself; your support system; the way you establish your goals; the use of humor to dissipate stress; recreation time; self-esteem and self-care and your spiritual life.

What actions are you taking to manage the stress in your life?*					
Are you making positive lifestyle choices that will help you manage stress? Try this quiz.					
Lifestyle choice		Strongly disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly agree
Alcohol and mood-altering substances	I drink alcohol in moderation or not at all. I do not abuse mood-altering substances	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Diet/nutrition	I eat nutritional foods each day. I drink more than two or fewer caffeinated drinks a day. I avoid excess salt, fat, and sugar. I drink 8 glasses of water daily.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Exercise	I exercise at least three times each week for at least 30 minutes (total).	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Expression	I express my needs and assert myself.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Friendships	I have good social and family support, friends, and/or family. I can ask for assistance from others.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Goals	I have reasonable and clear goals for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Humor	I can laugh at myself each day.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Pleasure time	I make time for myself.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Reward	I pat myself on the back for a job well done or whenever I am pleased with my efforts.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Self-care	I honor myself and tell myself that I am a good and worthy person. I take responsibility for my actions.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3
Spirituality	I fulfill my spiritual needs through reading, reflection, ceremonies, etc.	<input type="checkbox"/> 0	<input type="checkbox"/> 1	<input type="checkbox"/> 2	<input type="checkbox"/> 3

*Unknown source

Scores

In the quiz above, your score can range from 0 to 33. The higher your score, the better the lifestyle choices you are making. These positive choices will act as a buffer against stress.

If you score between 0 and 10, you need to review your lifestyle and begin to make significant improvements. You are vulnerable to the unhealthy effects of stress.

If you score between 11 and 22, you are making lifestyle choices that will help buffer you against the negative effects of stress. However, there is room for improvement.

If you score between 23 and 33, you are making wise lifestyle choices. You are improving your chances that you will not experience the long-term negative effects of stress.

Symptoms of burnout:

Definition: Burnout is a condition caused by *unrelieved* long-term stress or dissipation, which results in exhaustion, lower resistance to illness, lost interest in work and relationships, and work inefficiency.

Note that the key word in the above definition is *unrelieved*. Stress is a normal part of life, but in order to deal with it, the body needs certain external and internal conditions and time for restoration.

For most massage therapists, burnout is the result of working back to back for more hours than reasonable, no rest during the weekends, and no time to take care of personal needs. It is also the result of poor body mechanics, bad posture, and performing the same action over and over until a repetitive stress injury starts to produce symptoms, limiting movement and compromising performance.

Physical signs of burnout include:

1. Fatigue
2. Aches and pains
3. Headaches
4. Sleep problems
5. Changes in appetite

Emotional signs of burnout include:

1. Frustration
2. Low self-esteem
3. Feeling unable to continue providing care to others
4. Lack of motivation for work
5. Feeling down
6. Irritability
7. Strain in personal relationships

Mental signs of burnout include:

1. Considering quitting practice
2. Not wanting to learn any more
3. Desiring that the client doesn't show up

Spiritual signs of burnout include:

1. Difficulty in finding meaning in what we do

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2. Isolation
3. Not finding joy in our activities

It is essential to listen to our bodies. Symptoms are a wake-up call from the body. If we recognize every single alarm the body rings, then we will be able to prevent illness or find the real cause for symptoms.

Pay attention to what you do, and how you do it.

Living in a work-hard paradigm, most people labor too many hours without pause and usually setting aside their needs. How could a therapist lead her clients to healthier lives if she is not consistent with the lifestyle she is recommending? How can you pass on relaxation if you're tense?

To prevent burnout, the therapist needs balanced nutrition, proper body mechanics, time for physical activity and wise stress management strategies.

Wellness plan

Based on the quiz above, take the time to make a personal wellness plan. Include short, middle and long-term goals. Start by listing your strong points.

Your higher scores are pointing to the areas in your life where you feel already motivated to make changes. See what you can improve in those areas first. Motivation is the key to success, as you have probably already informed your clients. After you decide what areas to focus on, set a time frame for your goals and start a journal. Make entries as often as you can and read back to assess your achievements and remind yourself of your goals.

Add the answers to these important questions to your self-assessment.

What is your life about?

What gives you a sense of purpose?

What do you really want from life or what are your dreams?

Many things bring us joy but also leave us feeling a void. Are you happy with your professional achievements?

Include in your notes what your health goals are, and how you plan to improve your professional skills and develop your career.

Your wellness plan should also include strategies to improve your education on health and wellness matters. Have you ever subscribed to wellness magazines? Do you prefer to browse the web for information?

How would you describe your theoretical approach to health and illness? Is it medical? Is it alternative? Here are a few resources that you may want to utilize in your search:

- *Our site, www.silviacasabianca.com offers a wealth of information and links. Visit us.*
- *Dr. Andrew Weil has advocated for integrative medicine. His website is full of useful advice: www.drweil.com. I recommend his book "Healthy Aging."*
- *You can find a guide to holistic practices in www.healing.about.com.*
- *The site below provides a wealth of information on alternative care: www.alternativesforhealing.com*

After assessing yourself, define how you give away energy and then start observing your daily life behaviors. Are you really present in every moment? Are you connected to yourself?

Curing vs. healing

There is an important distinction to make between curing and healing.

Curing is getting rid of what appears wrong, attacking the symptom, fixing a part.

Healing is a transformation process that leads you to what brought the symptoms. Ailments could be understood as a message from the multidimensional body telling you to focus on an aspect of your life you need to learn about.

Curing tends to be a passive process where you depend on somebody's expertise to get well. It comes from something that is outside you.

Healing comprises a process by which instead of depending on external circumstances, you are in charge of your life, your body and your choices, and you work on yourself to produce the changes that your multidimensional body requires. Healing is a process by which we increase awareness and stop neglecting, ignoring and denying our body, which are defense mechanisms that prevent us from having a fulfilling life.

The body has an immense capacity to heal itself and will do so if we take care of it. Think that even when we imagine that the medicines we are taking are getting us better, it is actually the body and its capacity to heal itself that brings about change. However, in order to repair and regenerate tissues, the body needs all the support we can provide.

We are called self-centered and egotistical when we think of ourselves first. But in most occasions, if we dedicate our time solely to care for others, even when we think we are doing it just to make a living, this creates a situation where we become exhausted and resentful and unable to give. Our frustration and dissatisfaction is now passed on to others.

Healing ourselves to be able to care for others is actually the most selfless thing to do.

Mind and body are indivisible

Why is it that the same kinds of stressors make some people ill and not others? What determines individual responses to stress? What defines when, facing the same kind of stressor (say for example, a cold virus), sometimes we get sick, sometimes we don't?

Usually, when stress overcomes our resources, it causes illness. Many kinds of stressors: physical, biological, electromagnetic, chemical, emotional and mental, are part of our daily life. In health, the body is well equipped to adapt to stress and cope with it. From an environmental point of view, poor sanitary conditions, pollutants and virulent microorganisms explain disease. From the body's perspective, our immune response, our mood, genetic predisposition, biochemical changes and nutrition determine health. In the process of learning and adapting to environmental stressors throughout our life, our organism "programs" emotions, reactions, behaviors and even physical symptoms that help it deal with stress. We could say that we "learn" health and illness, and once learned it becomes a script the body intuitively follows.

When we are given a diagnosis labeling a chronic condition, we start revolving around the illness, we identify with it. We visit doctors once or twice a month, ask ourselves what to eat, what's the proper amount of rest we should have, what kind of supplements to take, what activities to avoid. We read and learn about illness. We talk about it. A diagnosis becomes a complement to our identity, and it may even provide us with what Sigmund Freud called "secondary gains," which would include people's compassion and understanding. At a conscious level, we're battling the disease; unconsciously, other

forces are at play. A cold might, for example, provide a perfect excuse for overly responsible people to slow down and isolate themselves.

Many authors believe that an illness might be an opportunity for personal growth if we don't let ourselves become its victims. How our thoughts, attitude and perception influence our well-being is demonstrated by the placebo effect. Placebo-controlled studies deem medication effective if the outcome is greater than the observed using placebo. Because the researcher's belief in the value of treatment may affect the outcome, the studies are usually "double-blind," where both the patient and the researcher are unaware of who's receiving medication and who's receiving a placebo.

Many studies show that at least a quarter of individuals receiving a placebo experience relief of symptoms and a measurable improvement in their condition. What caused relief?

A study on depression medication (Khan A, Warner HA, and Brown WA) argues that up to 75 percent of symptom and suicide risk reduction is due to the placebo effect rather than the treatment itself. Our faith in the benefits of a medication improves our body chemistry!

If it's objective or subjective is not the question. In a multidimensional approach to the body, there's no difference. Faith in the medication we are taking, even if it's a placebo, might increase brain blood flow and neural activity, while pain-relief brought by a placebo is explained by faith-induced release of sedating endorphins in the body.

Norman Cousins authored *Anatomy of an Illness*, a book based on his successful battle with a chronic and progressive disease. He said medication is not always necessary to cure the patient, but faith always is. The placebo effect, he said, has allowed medicine to evaluate and understand the relationship between mind and molecular changes in the body.

Research has shown that treatment success is not only the result of accurate diagnosis and treatment, but is related to the patient's perception of the situation, her support system and even the characteristics of the health care received.

Renowned authors like Louise Hay, Eckhard Tolle, Jeane Carper and Brough Joy became famous when they published their healing experiences. They passed the test of illness by transforming their lives.

After 40 years of a wellness movement focused not on illness but on health, alternative practices assure that the body can be cured through the mind and vice versa. Psychobiology, biological medicine and psychoneuroimmunology have demonstrated in tangible ways that mind and body are one. Let's welcome the new understanding of the relationship between health, environment, thoughts, perception, feelings, attitudes, nutritional habits, breathing patterns and lifestyle.

Our inner healer

Our body is a self-regulating organism that encloses an inner healer. This healer is not limited to instinctive responses, as it has been understood in the past few centuries, but it is in charge of surveillance and communication, storage of information, evaluation, organization and expression of the body as a whole.

This inner healer is also responsible for providing suitable solutions in response to adaptive challenges imposed by the environment. It draws on the information that the body has memorized and learned in order to perform its functions and therefore, we can call it an intelligent healer.

Let me give you some examples of the body functioning under this perspective.

The lungs inhale air and blood takes out the oxygen from it. In the lung's tiny alveoli, red blood cells (RBC) pick up the oxygen and transport it to the tissues. For that purpose, RBCs use a molecule known as hemoglobin, partly made of iron.

This iron comes from what we eat. The digestive system must remove this element from the food. The circulatory system takes iron to the liver for storage or directly to the bone marrow where the hemoglobin “factories” are located. Bone production rate is regulated by thyroid hormones (Calcitonin) and parathyroid hormones (PTH) and it is also stimulated by muscle contraction. Sugar produces the necessary energy to make the muscles contract. Sugar, coming from our food or from our body storage, requires insulin to enter the cells in order to be used. The pancreas produces insulin. Other hormones produced in the same organ regulate the amount of insulin the pancreas secretes.

The above is a good example of systems’ interaction and interrelation. In order to perform and coordinate their tasks, the different organs require an optimal communication system. The immune system, the endocrine system and the nervous system are in charge of great part of the communication in the body.

Each one of our skin cells lives for about 36 days. Once one cell dies, another cell replaces it. How else could you explain that our skin lasts during a whole lifetime? Our red blood cells live up to 119 days. However, the number of cells remains constant in our blood. It’s not necessary to push, direct or mediate these regenerative processes. We don’t have to pay for a medical consultation and get medication to guarantee that our skin or our red blood cells will continue to regenerate.

We completely renew our body tissues every seven years. It happens without our involvement. Although, of course, we need to guarantee the raw material: food, air, water. Our tissues are made up with supplies coming from the nutrients we eat, the water we drink and the air we breathe, and thus the quality of our tissues will depend on the quality of our food, air and water.

Who instructs our body to do the regeneration and repair job? How does it know that it has to build skin cells in the skin and red blood cells in the blood? A blueprint within our cells mediates the communication system in the body and guarantees regeneration, reparation and survival.

And, how do we explain growth and development of a child? We have to assume that there is intelligence imprinted in our organism. There is some sort of software in our energetic bodies and in our genes as well, to maintain our life. And communication between organs is essential to keep this intelligence at work.

What defeats this inner healer, which resides in our subtle bodies as well as in the depths of our entrails; what breaks the balance and generates dis-ease, is stress. A certain amount of stress in life is unavoidable and even stimulating and healthy, and the body is fully equipped to deal with it. However, continuous or excessive stress ends up compromising our body balance, and hindering the body’s capacity to respond to stressors.

Stress management

Have you wondered if technology has made your life easier? More enjoyable? If you have now more time available for yourself? For your children? Do we have a healthier society?

U.S. workers put in more hours on the job than the labor force of any other industrial nation, where the trend has been just the opposite.

According to an international labor organization study, Americans put in the equivalent of an extra 40-hour work week in 2000 compared to 10 years previously.

Japan had the record until 1995 but Americans now work almost a month more than the Japanese and three months more than Germans.

In a 2001 survey, nearly 40 percent of workers described their office environment as “most like a real life survivor program.” (<http://www.stress.org/job.htm>)

Massage therapists are not the exception and if sometimes stress cannot be avoided, its effects can certainly be compensated by a healthy lifestyle.

What is stress and how does it affect us?

Stress is the result of environmental changes that either the body or the mind perceive as a threat, a challenge or a conflict that could compromise balance. From birth on, the body is well prepared to take stress because it is a normal component in our interaction with the environment; it is part of life. What is new is chronic stress, which is characteristic of modern living. Never before has the human being been subject to as many, intense and varied stressors, with little restoring pauses and sparse compensatory elements. All stimuli posing demands on the body generate stress. If intense, stress becomes the cause of injuries, pain and disease. Even when not excessive, if it is repetitive, stress leads to imbalance and becomes responsible for what we call illness.

A hundred years ago, Hans Selye, a professor at McGill University in Montreal, described the body's response to stress. He observed that lab rats responded to different stressors (hormones or toxic substances injection, or extreme cold) in the same way. He found the adrenal glands greatly swollen, the lymph nodes degenerated, and ulcers in the stomach and intestines. The whole body had been affected. He also found that the effects of stress were mediated by the pituitary. Further experiments showed that when an animal was put under stress, its body responded immediately to it by making certain changes in its activities. When the stress was continued, these changes became a regular feature. And if the animal remained under stress for a prolonged time, these changes exhausted the body and ultimately caused its death.

Selye gave the name of *Alarm Reaction* to the initial response where the body is gathering all its resources to respond to a challenge. He named the second phase, *Stage of Resistance*, when the body is in the process of adapting to perceived stressors. The third phase, he called *Stage of Exhaustion*, when the body has made use of its resources and suffered irreparable damage.

When we are stressed, we produce an extra amount of adrenaline and cortisol. These substances are necessary for the body to respond to challenges; however, when the stress becomes chronic or cumulative, these substances damage the tissues.

On the other hand, when we are resting, receiving a massage or having a good time, the body has the chance to gather up its resources to repair tissues and regenerate cells.

Individual responses to stress depend on many different factors such as heredity, nutrition, resilience, our support system and even the way we perceive the stressor.

Deepak Chopra has told in his lectures the story of an experiment with rabbits fed with a diet high in fat and cholesterol to study arteriosclerosis induced by food. The levels of cholesterol and triglycerides went up in blood tests, except for one group of rabbits who only developed mild changes in the arteries. Once the experimenters ruled out most variables, they decided to watch the actual feeding, to discover that the feeder of this particular batch of rabbits, held the animals, petted and talked to them. These animals were healthier because the person who was taking care of them loved rabbits and was providing them special attention. New further experiments proved that this indeed was true, although of course, the scientific report didn't list the variable as love.

Candace Pert, who was nominated for a Nobel Prize after her work with what she called "the molecules of emotion," studied how meditation counteracted the effects of stress over the immune system. She found that stress obstructs the free flow of the molecules that carry information through the body, hampering the basic autonomic functions such as breathing, circulation and digestion. The result is the body can't perform the necessary regeneration and reparation processes. If the stress continues, the immune system loses its capacity to recognize foreign molecules and cancerous cells.

Meditation, she found, relaxes the mind, and attenuates emotions. At the physical level, the use of relaxation, meditation, massage or reiki, stimulate the communication among organs, which is necessary to maintain balance and prevent illness.

The relationship between immune system functioning and infections, autoimmune diseases and allergies is not a new concept. But only recently, science has understood that immunity is at the root of other conditions such as diabetes, cancer, and coronary disease.

Free radicals

The body responds to stress resulting from the increasing contamination of the environment and the food we eat by producing free radicals. Free radicals are highly reactive chemicals that attack molecules crucial for cell function by capturing electrons and thus modifying chemical structures. They affect metabolism, hormonal activity, synthesis of genetic material and cell behavior.

Although free radicals are a normal by-product of cellular metabolism, an excess of such ions in response to electromagnetic fields or toxic chemicals might render the normal antioxidant defense system of the body insufficient and incapable of preventing the occurrence of disease.

Oxidation processes including transfer of a couple of electrons from one atom to another are common in the body. On occasion, a molecule's weak bond breaks leaving it with an incomplete number of electrons. It is now called a free radical. The immune system, as part of its normal functioning, produces some free radicals to neutralize virus and bacteria.

Free radicals are also produced when food is processed, boiled, fried, frozen-dried or irradiated. Free radicals are quite unstable and are always on the look to steal nearby electrons so that they can become complete again. By doing so, they generate a cascade of chemical reactions in which new free radicals are created. Normally, the body can manage free radicals, but if existing in excess, they will eventually produce cell damage, which is cumulative through time.

Free radicals disrupt patterns of electromagnetic energy in muscles and destroy the protective fats in the cell membrane, leading to fluid retention and accelerating the aging process. Many degenerative diseases, like Alzheimer's, are now linked to an excess of free radicals, as well as the effects of free radicals over the immune system. The body readies to repair the damage caused by free radicals, but it cannot efficiently accomplish its task if its restoring and regenerating capacity was compromised by these substances.

The oxidative process partially explains aging. When free radicals attack the molecules that participate in the reproduction of cells, these can become cancerous. Free radicals might also be responsible for damaging the cells that are in charge of removing cholesterol from the blood, which

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explains the accumulation of plaque in arteries and coronary disease in people under accumulative stress.

Type of stressors

Stressors can be of different types and their impact can manifest in any of the body dimensions: physical, emotional, mental, and spiritual. Please see table below.

In this section, we examine in detail some of the main sources of stress, offering valuable tips to relieve tension.

Stressors	Description
Physical, mechanical, biological	Traumatisms, starvation or heat-stroke. Lack of sleep, exhaustion, exercising in excess. Too much darkness or excessive exposure to light. A prolonged time under artificial light (especially if fluorescent light), work overload. Parasitism and infections.
Chemical	Pollution of water, air, soil and food with chemical products.
Electromagnetic	Radio waves that cross the air carrying signals for radios, TVs and cell phones. Low frequency electromagnetic fields, computers, electro domestic appliances and airplanes, are all sources of electromagnetic stress.
Emotional	A broad range of conflicts cause stress (relationships, work, study, health, socioeconomic situation, bereavement). Other sources of emotional stress can be TV and radio news, nation's economic setbacks, war, immigration, safety concerns.
Mental	Conflicting thoughts that cause anxiety, fear and distress or convey emotions that prompt release of certain molecules (hormones) which accumulate causing damage.
Spiritual	Loss of connection with the whole, feeling isolated, finding no meaning in life, loss of interest in the job, incapacity to relate to others in a loving way.

Emotional stress and relationships

When talking about stress the first thing that usually comes to mind is emotional stress, to the point that we frequently dismiss other important sources of strain. Conflicting relationships within our family or at work are major sources of emotional tension. Time constraints and traffic are also wearing elements that contribute to stress. The thoughts and limiting beliefs that we hold about the world, others, and ourselves, feed emotional stress. “I can’t deal with this anymore”; “All against me”; “I’m a failure” and “Nobody values/understands me” are among the many limiting beliefs that stem from our self-concept and distort our perception of reality deepening emotional stress without contributing solutions.

Relationships or the lack of them, are many times the main emotional stressor in our lives. There are many things that we can do to improve relationships starting by improving our communication skills (see below) but there’s very little that we can do to change an abusive relationship. That is why this class brings focus to abusive relationships, explaining how to recognize them and why we need to avoid them.

Vignette

After a year of marriage, a young woman felt confused, trying to remember who she was before the wedding.

“I want my old self back,” she said. “It seems that I can’t do anything right. He’s always upset with me. I don’t have my own opinions anymore and we quarrel over insignificant issues to the point that I just agree with anything in order to avoid an argument.” But even her compliance is insufficient to calm him down and has seldom brought emotional rewards.

It is not unusual to be in a situation where a discussion with a partner turns into an argument, or where you feel the other person is cornering you or making you feel guilty, afraid, uncomfortable or inadequate.

But be alert! If these aren’t isolated incidents but something happening again and again, you’re being emotionally abused. Many people use emotional blackmail in their relationships, but there are a few who won’t stop it even when you set clear boundaries.

If you observe that the described behaviors are consistent, you might be in an unhealthy relationship.

Take a moment to stop and examine your relationship. Violence has many facets. Battering is easily recognized as violence but emotional abuse is perfidious. If you are in a relationship where you don’t have your own voice; cannot have a contradictory opinion; need to do things your partner’s way; find yourself engaged in his hobbies with no time for yours; visit with his friends but have no time for your own family, you’re being controlled and manipulated.

Abusive people are easily recognizable for one main feature: they progressively debilitate their partners. Abuse is about control. It is about exerting one’s own identity and mastering the environment in a way that is detrimental for others.

Ask yourself, does my partner listen to me? Does he respect my opinions and ideas? How do I feel after a disagreement? If you’re in a healthy relationship you will feel safe with him and will know that you can disagree without fearing loss or reprimands. (Statistics show that 90 percent of abusers are male).

Another woman has a husband who is always “reminding” her of how much she owes him. When he is not ignoring her, he calls her names and makes derogatory remarks about her especially when they are with friends, like: “She stays home watching TV while I sweat her dinner.” Or “It surprises me that she ever got a diploma.”

She is a person with a college education, and she has become a reluctant housewife. He has demanded that she stay at home, for the sake of their 6-year-old son. She isn’t happy and feels trapped. He also has financial control over her.

A third case is a woman who is dating a person who gives her the silent treatment either every time they disagree or finds every excuse to express that the relationship is not going anywhere.

Intimidation, demeaning, silence and threats are behaviors aimed at controlling another person by creating discomfort and apprehension.

Very often, people do not realize that they are in an abusive relationship; they just think they have done something wrong and try to correct it. It is very important to recognize the signs of abuse.

Watch your own reactions. Are you feeling afraid, guilty, insecure, or that you’re not appreciated? Are you doing things that you don’t want to do? Scrutinize your relationship. You may need help from a counselor to dissolve the strong consequences of emotional abuse. There is no reason to stay in a relationship where you cannot grow as a person and you cannot feel happy.

A healthy person will acknowledge and apologize for his or her behavior, making sure that it doesn’t happen again. Instead, an abusive person will continue to display the same behaviors over and over and these will escalate in intensity as the need for control increases.

How assertive are you?

You know that you are assertive enough when you usually stand up for your own rights and don't let anybody take advantage of you. It requires that you clearly communicate what you want, what you feel and what you think, and that you respect the rights and feelings of others.

An assertive person is in midway between the aggressive and the submissive. The aggressive person is insensitive to others and may violate their rights. The submissive person is always placing herself in a second place.

Many people avoid being assertive because they want to please all and be liked. However, your relationships will hardly bloom if you do not assert yourself.

Ask yourself the following questions to find how assertive you are.

- ✓ ***What do you do if you need help?***
- ✓ ***How do you express annoyance?***
- ✓ ***Do you reflect confidence when you communicate?***
- ✓ ***Do you make eye contact when you talk to people?***
- ✓ ***Do you ask for clarification when you're confused?***
- ✓ ***Are you okay with expressing your opinions even when you disagree?***
- ✓ ***When in groups, do you actively participate in conversations?***
- ✓ ***Is it easy for you to say No when you want to say no?***

If you find it easy to ask for help when you need it, instead of waiting for somebody to guess what your needs are; if you can set limits and express your feelings and if your answered yes to most of the above questions, then you are most likely an assertive person.

Recommendations to improve interpersonal communication skills

Improving your communication skills can help you cut down a significant source of stress from your interpersonal relationships and can also make you more efficient in your work. Most relationship problems are due to poor communication. It is, therefore, important to develop these skills.

When we talk about interpersonal communication, we are referring not only to how we speak but also to our body language, and gestures.

Here are some tips to develop good interpersonal communication skills.

- ✓ Respond to the communication style of others. The only way to do that is being very present and observing. Try to feel where they are coming from, their head ("thinkers") or their heart ("feelers"). Get in sync with them.
- ✓ Be very attentive to what the other person is saying and make sure that you understand it in the context into which it is meant. This will avoid misunderstandings.
- ✓ Try to speak slowly and clearly so that your listener fully understand what you are trying to say.
- ✓ Do not give unsolicited advice and opinions to clients. But be daring enough to give your opinion or advice when you think you can prevent somebody from getting hurt or hurting others.
- ✓ If preparing for a special meeting or discussion, decide what you want to say in advance. Rehearsing what you will say will help you develop self-confidence.
- ✓ State your needs clearly in the first person. It has a completely different effect to say: "You never listen to me," which sounds like an accusation, than to say, "I need you to listen to me."

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- ✓ Be assertive. As said before, assertiveness is the art of stating your needs and ideas without being submissive or aggressive. An assertive person projects herself as positive and confident. Defend yourself or stand up for what is right. If you have trouble doing this, you need help from a professional counselor.
- ✓ Validate others as often as you can, but come from your heart. If you truly appreciate others you don't have to repeat empty (even if kind) sentences. This helps build rapport with those people who share time or space with you.
- ✓ Stop criticizing others or sharing a negative view of the world. Work towards acceptance.
- ✓ Keep an eye on your body movements and body language. Make sure that your body and your mouth are saying the same. If they are not, maybe you're not feeling what you're saying.
- ✓ Be polite and open to receive feedback. If someone praises you, say thank you, and if they point out something negative about you, accept it gracefully. Life is about experiencing ourselves and relationships provide us with an extraordinary mirror to know us better.

Mental stress - Stop the mental chatter

How do we manage our negative thoughts and achieve a sense of reconnection to our inner perfection in order to achieve peace and joy? It seems that those thoughts that totally affect our mood and ruin our day are for some strange reason more persistent than joyful ones, so it pays to bash them away. But, what is the best way to get rid of them?

What kind of thoughts are in your mind? Toxic thoughts are the main source of mental stress: criticism, judgment, blaming and doubt. Start observing your thoughts. Can you separate healthy thoughts from garbage?

What happens when you are going through an emergency? Ah, that's when your clearest thoughts come to mind because you are present in the moment, considering solutions and requiring you to act immediately.

In regular situations, we are more likely to ruminate over negative thoughts. Our inner dialogue might be stuck on a conflict or a negative episode that happened at work. Maybe we would feel better if we hit the forward button but we usually hit the rewind one and hurt ourselves over and over. These toxic thoughts modulate our emotions and have an impact in our body. We produce adrenaline and cortisol, the hormones of stress, not only when we are facing a challenge, but also when we remember the experience. We become upset just by mulling over what happened, even though we are okay in the present moment.

Observe your thoughts and the emotions elicited by them. Do they have the power to disturb you? Try to classify thoughts among several categories of limiting beliefs. Are they about something that is wrong with you? About something you feel is wrong with your life? With your world? Are you wondering who loves you? Are you telling yourself that something is missing; you blew it; you're not good enough, or you're perfect and the others cannot appreciate it? These are among the many limiting beliefs found behind our negative thoughts.

Masters have found that meditation and breathing are good tools to keep these negative thoughts at bay. Meditation gives us the opportunity to observe and monitor our thoughts and let them pass by. Build up affirmations that you can repeat while you meditate. You will find that repeating a sentence over and over relaxed the mind and once the mind is relaxed, your body will release tensions. Breathing deeply also relaxes our body and changes our mood.

When we deliberately place in our minds affirmations that are the opposite of our negative thoughts these tend to dissipate. When the mind relaxes, we feel happier and calmer.

Remember that we were all princesses and princes when we were born. We loved our world and ourselves, before we became frogs! And how did that happen?

A baby knows no other option but to accept life as it is. However, from the minute we're born (and even before that) we're told stories that we end up believing (you can't do that, this is bad, that's wrong, you're good), and thus we see ourselves as either perfect or flawed; we perceive the world as supporting us or failing us and we act accordingly. We add our own part to the script as ambiguous experiences are misinterpreted and we end up scripting lines that we follow as absolute truth. Limiting beliefs may taint our whole life experience, and it's up to us to become aware of them and find a way out of the limitations that prevent us from developing our full soul potential.

Relaxation

Well, massage therapists are supposed to be the masters of relaxation. That's what massage clients come for. But are massage therapists receiving massage at least once a week? Are they practicing any relaxation technique at home?

Let me ask you this, how do you feel after providing massage? Drained or calmed? Massage therapists who learn to be truly present with the client, feel the tissues under their hands, and use good body mechanics, feel almost as relaxed as the client at the end of a session.

You can find a number of relaxation methods to compensate stress. It is worth taking the time to learn a technique and practice it consistently. Research has shown that relaxation attenuates anxiety, headaches, insomnia, pain and occupational stress. It has positive effects on the course of several medical conditions such as arthritis, hypertension and asthma.

Techniques that combine guided imagery and relaxation seem to have an even better outcome. You can try guided meditation CDs and use them before you go to sleep. They promote a really restorative sleep.

No pain, please

People come to us for relaxation and we can provide an avenue for healing.

When a massage therapist asks a client what kind of massage they prefer, she will most often receive one of two answers, "I don't know," or "deep massage please," which actually means "I don't really know the difference, but I think deep is what I've received before."

However, what is deep massage, really? The one that is performed with thumbs, elbows and knees? Is it deep massage that makes the client either scream or bite his knuckles to refrain from screaming? The "painful but feels good" modality? I don't think so.

Pain brings more pain, eventually. Deep massage is not supposed to cause bruises, but to help clients enter a deep state of relaxation that promotes healing, not addiction to endorphins.

When massage therapists learn to truly feel a body, they can provide a real deep massage. These therapists aren't looking to provide immediate relief or trying to please a client that asks for deeper poking into his tissues. They aim at promoting healing processes that usually take time, so they are patient. They sense, evaluate and know well how to break restrictive patterns that cause pain and their massage promotes positive changes in the tissues.

Different from medical massage that addresses a specific condition, the aim of wellness massage is helping in "rebooting" the system by promoting a restorative relaxation.

Touch is therapeutic in itself. People look for touch. Only very few people don't like to be hugged or caressed. Every time that a person is touched, her body responds by producing a number of substances. At first contact, touch from a stranger elicits an alarm and the organism rushes to determine what kind of touch it is. That is why people don't experience relaxation during the first few minutes of a massage. The sympathetic branch of the Autonomic Nervous System (ANS) rules at first and some adrenaline is released. When the body finally decides that touch is safe, the ANS switches to the

parasympathetic mode and the body surrenders to relaxation. The tissues ‘remember’ a positive experience; the mind remembers the positive experience, and we call it trust. It is this trust that explains why we easily let our loved ones touch us. When the body is comfortable with contact, it starts producing endorphins, the body opiates that sedate us and kill pain.

Endorphins are hormones produced by the nervous system. They modify the way nerve cells respond to neurotransmitters. Endorphins are released when we experience pleasure, we exercise, or eat chocolate (hence, a comfort food, in case you didn’t already know), but the body also produces endorphins under conditions of stress or great pain.

In receiving any kind of massage, a client benefits from a generalized physiological effect that includes the release of endorphins, and also from an influx of nutrients and increased oxygen delivered to the specific areas that have been treated. The pain produced by rubbing the “painful knots,” also elicits the release of endorphins. That’s why pain can eventually become addictive, although the addiction is not really to pain but to the natural pain-killers released by the body.

A massage therapist can count on the fact that a person addicted to pain is a faithful client. They will come for more pain, because they are looking for endorphins... until they get tired of seeing that their health has not improved.

We are so used to strain, effort and “doing” that we hardly recognize presence, being and sensing. ‘Deep’ needs to refer to the depth of an experience; to the depth of the effect, not to the inches of finger penetration into the tissues.

An educated client will prefer to come back because of the deep restorative effect of a relaxing massage than because he needed an extra flush of endorphins. For that, you can use laughter rather than pain.

Time management

An essential part of stress management is time.

Are you one of those people who repeat once and again that you “don’t have time for anything”? Then, maybe you should ask yourself how you are managing your time. Maybe you’re taking too much at once or maybe you don’t rationalize the use of your time.

In order to reduce stress it is necessary to develop time management skills. It will allow you to save time and greatly reduce anxiety.

Once you become aware of your goals, you will be able to prioritize your tasks. First, clarify your long-term objectives and then, set your short term and mid term objectives according to your long-term goals. Many people don’t find time for their big dreams because they let themselves get caught in their daily haste.

Give yourself deadlines that are always ahead of the deadlines set by others. Say, for example, that you have an appointment at 3 p.m. and you have a 30-minute drive to get there. If you organize your time to be at your appointment at 2:45, you are covering any unforeseen circumstances. Besides, your client will appreciate your punctuality and seeing you arrive relaxed. This will help you build your practice.

Use an agenda and mark your calendar for every activity and appointment that you set. Always have an alternative plan (plan B). Remember to leave enough time between appointments and when calculating time, don’t try to squeeze too many activities into an hour. Take into account that unexpected events happen. Be flexible with your schedule. It is okay to skip one or two of the things that you had planned for the day. That is what plans B are for.

Try to save time by organizing your activities in a time-saving mode. For example, plan to pick up your laundry and buy groceries on your way home.

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It's important to include pauses in your work. You need time for yourself. Don't book your clients back to back. Give yourself at least 20 minutes between clients in a busy day and 30 minutes in a not so busy one. You can relax for a few minutes, take notes for the records, arrange the room and even take a few calls during the intervals. Then when your next client comes, you're refreshed and ready to listen to his body. Think what you will spend in medication to counteract the effects of stress. A lot more than what you make in a work hour.

And pamper you as often as you can. Feel that you deserve to take time for yourself, but don't leave it for when you find the time, so schedule it in your agenda.

Avoid electromagnetic fields

For most of us, food is available in stores, kept in the fridge, or can be ordered over the phone. We don't have to go hunting or fishing to get it as our fore fathers had to. We live in comfortable houses, and we can travel long distances quickly. We have defeated cold and heat by developing technology that keeps us in ideal artificial environments; we have comforts unimaginable to our ancestors. However, modern life has also brought a myriad of electromagnetic stressors to our lives.

Few people are aware that exposure to radio waves, weak electromagnetic fields (ELF) could cause serious damage to our organism. Unnatural frequencies increase the presence of free radicals in our systems affecting our highly sensitive cells and interfering with the communication among organs.

These are a few recommendations to avoid electromagnetic fields:

- ✓ Choose to live at least 50 yards away from high power lines.
- ✓ Sleep away from overhead wires and radio beams.
- ✓ Use a wind-up watch.
- ✓ Don't use electric blankets.
- ✓ Have your TV or computer away from your bed. At least, unplug them while not in use.
- ✓ Sit at least nine feet away from the TV.
- ✓ Avoid equipment that relies on radio waves or emits radiation of any kind.
- ✓ Use copper coils or semi-precious stones on top of fax, computer, TV, VHS and microwave.
- ✓ Build the body defenses through proper nutrition. Antioxidant, reduced fat diet is the ideal.
- ✓ If possible, have an LCD monitor or an anti-radiation screen on your computer.

To know more: <http://www.medsci.uu.se/occmcd/webkurs/trends/emf.htm>.

Chemical stress should also be reduced

We have already referred to how long commutes, getting stuck in traffic, the sheer number of things that need to be done on time, the increasing cost of gas and health, complex family and job relationships, all add up to make our heart rate and blood pressure rise.

We have also mentioned electromagnetic stressors. Now, let's briefly bring focus to chemical stressors in our lives.

Chemical pollution from industrial production has deteriorated water and air quality. As individuals, there is not much that we could do to avoid these chemical substances. But we can be aware of and avoid the chemicals added to the food we eat, because these can also cause serious damage to our organism. Food industry claims that there is not enough evidence to stop adding substances such as high fructose corn syrup or monosodic glutamate (which have been said to cause obesity) to their products. However, in the past fifty years the food industry has been forced to stop using substances that they

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defended as nontoxic and later were proved harmful. The best recommendation is to avoid processed food, especially if it contains preservatives and dyes.

Research has shown evidence that many chemicals that we breathe or ingest increase the presence of free radicals in our systems affecting our body.

Some people think that what they should be doing it to detoxify the body by using a number of products, by fasting, going to sweat lodges or using colonics. Still, the best you can do is eat natural products, avoid inhaling toxins like those present in cleaning products, stay away from traffic in rush hours or go to the country side to breathe clean air. Drinking a fair amount of mineral water will also help the body get rid of toxins.

Nutrition

What follows are the American Cancer Society's guidelines devised for cancer prevention and treatment. They include nutritional as well as physical activity recommendations. These are endorsed by other organizations such as the American Heart Association and the American Diabetes Association. Their independent research has come to similar conclusions: that optimal functioning of the body largely depends on a proper nutrition.

Grains, vegetables and fruits provide the body with the most antioxidants, needed to counteract the damaging and ageing effect of free radicals.

In www.mypyramid.gov you can view the most recent guidelines published by the U.S. Department of Agriculture. Clicking on "My Pyramid Plan" you can get a personalized recommendation on the amount of each food group you need daily. Just enter your age and sex (unfortunately it doesn't take into account your size, which would provide a more accurate guide).

Recommendations for Individual Choices

1. Eat a variety of healthful foods, with an emphasis on plant sources.
2. Eat five or more servings of a variety of vegetables and fruits each day.
 - ✓ Include vegetables and fruits at every meal and for snacks.
 - ✓ Eat a variety of vegetables and fruits.
 - ✓ Limit French fries, snack chips, and other fried vegetable products.
 - ✓ Choose 100 percent juice if you drink fruit or vegetable juices.
3. Choose whole grains in preference to processed (refined) grains and sugars.
 - ✓ Choose whole grain rice, bread, pasta, and cereals.
 - ✓ Limit consumption of refined carbohydrates, including pastries, sweetened cereals, soft drinks, and sugars.
4. Limit consumption of red meats, especially those high in fat and processed.
 - ✓ Choose fish, poultry, or beans as an alternative to beef, pork, or lamb.
 - ✓ When you eat meat, select lean cuts and have smaller portions.
 - ✓ Prepare meat by baking, broiling, or poaching rather than by frying or charbroiling.
5. Choose foods that help maintain a healthful weight.
 - ✓ When you eat away from home, choose foods that are low in fat, calories, and sugar, and avoid large portion sizes.
 - ✓ Eat smaller portions of high-calorie foods. Be aware that "low-fat" or "nonfat" does not mean "low-calorie," and that low-fat cakes, cookies, and similar foods are often high in calories.
 - ✓ Substitute vegetables, fruits, and other low-calorie foods for calorie-dense foods such as French fries, cheeseburgers, pizza, ice cream, doughnuts, and other sweets.
6. Adopt a physically active lifestyle.

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- ✓ Adults: engage in at least moderate activity for 30 minutes or more on five or more days of the week; 45 minutes or more of moderate-to-vigorous activity on five or more days per week may further enhance reductions in the risk of breast and colon cancer.
 - ✓ Children and adolescents: engage in at least 60 minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity for at least five days per week.
7. Maintain a healthful weight throughout life.
 - ✓ Balance caloric intake with physical activity.
 - ✓ Lose weight if currently overweight or obese.
 8. If you drink alcoholic beverages, limit consumption. Men, no more than two drinks per day and women, no more than one drink per day.

Good nutrition should provide plenty of antioxidants to counteract the deleterious effect of free radicals in the body. Veggies and fruits are the main source of antioxidants.

Anti-inflammatory and pro-inflammatory foods

Twenty years ago, a doctor developed rheumatoid arthritis, which limited his performance as a surgeon. In search of a cure, and after several months of taking anti-inflammatory medication that badly upset his stomach, he opted for alternative treatments.

His new diet excluded meat and dairy, even though his former primary doctor recommended against it. He also tried meditation, massage, acupuncture and homeopathy. And when after a few months his condition started to really improve, instead of going back to work as a surgeon, he decided to train in the same treatments that helped him. Illness also gave him the opportunity to learn that he needed to change his levels of stress in order to maintain health.

For many years, part of popular wisdom is that meat and dairy have a negative effect on arthritic conditions. But recently, mainstream medicine is corroborating the relationship between certain foods and the exaggerated inflammatory response seen in conditions such as arthritis.

We tend to see inflammation as an unwanted reaction from the body. Notwithstanding, inflammation is the normal body response to harmful stimuli. Without inflammation, the body would not be able to repair damaged tissues or respond to an invader.

The physical process generated by the inflammatory response grants the destruction, dilution and sequester of noxious agents, be it a thorn in the skin or a bacteria in our blood stream. Inflammation manifests through redness, swelling and pain (rubor, tumor, calor, dolor), signs that alert us that something in our body needs prompt attention.

When the body has been under stress for a long time, it loses its capacity to regulate the inflammatory response, which may become exaggerated or long lasting (chronic). Then, we develop symptoms that may be limiting and painful. The body always tends to go back to normal when the danger is gone, but in some cases, stimuli that caused the inflammation persist, or we are not properly supporting the body's inner healer with the elements that it needs to go back to balance. Some of these elements are repose, a good supply of vitamins and minerals and proper nutrition.

Scientists are excited about recent discoveries on what we could call inflammatory and anti-inflammatory foods. In its February 2004 edition, for example, the Tufts University Health & Nutrition Letter published the article *Anti-Inflammatory Eating* reporting on studies that correlate three medical conditions, high blood pressure, coronary disease and arthritis with nutritional habits.

The fats and oils that we use in our food are precursors of prostaglandins. Some of these substances hold back the inflammatory response (the ones coming from omega-3 fatty acids, present in olive and flax oil and salmon) while others exacerbate the inflammatory response (like those that come from omega-6 fatty acids, present in animal fat, corn, sunflower and cotton oils). Most processed foods are prepared with fats rich in omega-6 fatty acids.

White rice, white bread, refined sugar and other foods that tend to produce acid in the body, such as meat and dairies, also elicit an inflammatory response. On the other hand, most fruits and vegetables, legumes, tofu and seeds help to keep it at bay. Fruits like papaya and pineapple rich in certain enzymes (papain, bromelain) contribute to curb inflammation. Ginger and red tart cherries are in this category as well.

Bottom line is science is arriving to the conclusion that a balanced diet, rich in anti-inflammatory foods, and limited in inflammatory foods, could contribute to the improvement of conditions such as arthritis and cardiovascular disease.

We should not eat ourselves to death

With the introduction of computers, videogames, remote controls and 24 hours TV programming, we are moving less and less. Lack of physical activity is a major cause of weight gain.

In 2003, the federal government's Center for Disease Control (CDC) rang the alarm bell about America's obesity epidemic. Headlines such as "How to drop 40 pounds in a week," "Shave off waist inches easily" or "Walk your way to a better burn" inviting people to lose weight effortlessly have proliferated in magazines and health newsletters. Others such as "Studies link obesity with prostate cancer" or "Abundant evidence links overweight and obesity with impaired health" warn about the danger of being overweight or obese.

In 2000, individuals who were overweight or obese spent more than \$35 billion a year on weight loss products and services. That figure - and the nation's collective waistline - have expanded since then. Americans are trying to lose weight or prevent weight gain by buying videos, books, dietary supplements or any other product promising miraculous results.

According to the CDC, physical inactivity and nutritional deficiencies are the cause of the obesity epidemic, and only lifestyle changes can guarantee healthier lives and leaner bodies.

Lifestyle changes required to keep a desirable weight and prevent the diseases linked to obesity - such as heart ailments and diabetes - include eating fewer calories, consuming less processed food, being more physically active and reducing stress levels. But individuals alone cannot shoulder all the responsibility.

There are chemicals in food, such as monosodic glutamate, that have been related to weight gain. Another problematic product is fructose. German researchers found a relationship between consuming high fructose corn syrup and weight gain. Fructose does not need insulin to enter cells and is easily stored as fat. Many processed foods and most sugary drinks contain corn syrup.

In the past five years, the food industry has used advertising to sell products based on their claimed potential to contribute to weight control or weight loss. For example, the National Dairy Council spent \$200 million promoting the idea that milk helped to reduce weight. In June 2005, the Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine filed suit, contending the industry's advertisement was deceptive. The weight-loss campaign was based on studies conducted by Michael B. Zemel, a professor at the University of Tennessee. Who funded his research? The dairy industry.

In a 2002 report on the current trends in weight-loss advertising, a Federal Trade Commission staff group, with the assistance of the Partnership for Healthy Weight Management (consisting of experts from the scientific community, academia, health care, government, commercial enterprises and other organizations) examined false and misleading claims in the advertising of weight loss products and

services. They found that nearly 40 percent of the ads in their sample “made at least one representation that almost certainly is false.” We have built a society that looks for easy, effortless solutions to difficult and complicated matters. But in our search for comfort we have paradoxically increased the risks to our health.

Lite might not be the best for your health

Sodas, beers, precooked meals and even genetically engineered avocados: all of them have gone light in the past few years. And, what does lite really mean? By definition, when we talk about lite we’re referring to a product that contains at least 50 percent less fat or 50 percent less calories furnished by the fat. Lite is also a word used for drinks with lower levels of alcohol, or for meals with lower levels of salt.

But, is lite necessarily healthier?

We can avoid some mistakes when we’re trying to follow healthy recommendations.

Take for example “lite” salad dressings. When trying to stay away from the 120 calories and 11 grams of fat per spoon in mayonnaise, or the 90 calories and 18 grams of fat in a serving of blue cheese dressing, people switch to light versions of the products, although seldom reading the nutrition facts on the label. Should they read the label, they would realize that most of these lite dressings are lower in calories indeed, but heavy on sugar and salt and actually only light on nutritional value.

A better choice would be a simple oil-and-vinegar dressing, which although high in calories, contains lots of heart-healthy mono-unsaturated fatty acids and no saturated fat. My own recipe, sour cream and ketchup with a few drops of olive oil has less than 50 calories per spoon, contains a nice balance of omega-3 and omega-6 fatty acids and tastes good.

Another example is found in meals labeled “less-sodium.” Processed food is the main source of excess salt in our diet, which has been associated with cardiovascular disease. The law requires that the manufacturer cut only 25 percent of the sodium from the original product. Solely the products marketed as “low-in-sodium” have the recommended less than 140 milligrams of sodium per serving.

People on low-calorie diets who love sodas have turned to diet sodas containing aspartame instead of sugar, but there are 92 documented symptoms related to aspartame, from headaches to death. Birth defects, lupus and multiple sclerosis-like symptoms have been linked to aspartame poisoning, although studies offer contradictory results.

Sharon Fowler and colleagues at the University of Texas in San Antonio reported earlier this year that people who drink diet soft drinks not only don’t lose, but gain weight. The team reviewed eight years of data on 1,550 Mexican-American and non-Hispanic white Americans aged 25 to 64. Of the 622 study participants who were of normal weight at the beginning of the study, about a third became overweight or obese.

“What didn’t surprise us was that total soft drink use was linked to overweight and obesity,” Fowler told WebMD. “What was surprising was when we looked at people only drinking diet soft drinks, their risk of obesity was even higher.”

Interestingly enough, when the researchers analyzed their data, they found that nearly all the obesity risk from soft drinks came from diet sodas.

“There was a 41 percent increase in risk of being overweight for every can or bottle of diet soft drink a person consumes each day,” said Fowler.

The problem is you can’t fool the body. Food with low nutritional value, compared to fresh food, won’t keep you satisfied for long. Researchers hypothesized that diet sodas stimulate appetite.

It is important to become wise buyers, not only making intelligent choices at the supermarket, but also not believing (buying) everything that you hear or read. Develop your own criteria, do some

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research to inform yourself and then create healthy habits including buying reliable, fresh or low-processed products.

Why keep changing brands and improvising meals with differing calorie and fat values because of the commercials you saw on TV? Every so often, people trying to shed just a few pounds became so self-conscious of their appearance and obsessed over food calories and fat content that they ended up battling eating disorders and obesity. The best path to health is to find what works for you and stick to your own healthy choices.

Body mechanics

We have reserved this special section to talk about the way we manage our bodies. Massage therapists get injured often because they perform repetitive movements that will stress your joints causing inflammation. In many cases this happens because we stop paying attention to what we are doing and are not aware to signs from our bodies. So, ask yourself a few questions:

What do you look for when you set the table height?

The patient's comfort?

Your comfort?

Do you change the table height according to the technique you use or the patient's size?

Or you just follow the indications that were taught at school?

Have you experienced different heights and postures to see how you feel more comfortable?

Do you find yourself squatting in order to adjust to the table height?

Or raising your shoulders because maybe the table is too high?

Do you pay attention at the angle formed between your forearm and wrist when you're doing effleurage or compressions?

If you realize that your answers point toward bad habits and mechanical repetition of what you've been doing for months, then it's time to reconsider what you have been doing in order to work comfortably and prevent injuries.

Positioning your body to work will not only increase your comfort, but also will give you balance, leverage¹ and control of the body, while allowing energy to flow during the session. This will reduce stress and make your job more enjoyable.

Because all actions that involve movement and muscle effort depend on forces exerted on the body, your massage will be more effective if you use proper body mechanics. Take into account that posture has been identified as the source of spinal and joint problems, and even osteoporosis.

Biomechanics studies the human body workings and the postures and movements that prevent injury, reduce stress and allow you to make a more efficient use of the body.

Good body mechanics refers to the optimal alignment of bones while our body moves. We are using good body mechanics when we are working and feel no strain on our spine or our shoulders; when we are not "fighting" against gravity. To have good body mechanics we need to be aware of how our posture is affected by gravity and how our skeletal system works like a system composed by different types of levers.

"The human body is organic by nature. It cannot be reduced to separate parts in an overly mechanical orientation, which, when imposed on the body, can lead to rigidity of body and mind. Still, an understanding of the mechanical components of skeletal architecture can provide us with insights that will help us practice massage with an ease and efficiency of movement that protects us from unnecessary stress and pain," says Mary Ann Foster in *Visualizing Bones in Body Mechanics*, published in *Massage & Body Work*, December/January 2007.

Yogis and people who practice yoga on a regular basis, use exercise to stabilize the pelvis, and straighten the spine in different postures. This helps them stay healthy. Osteopaths and chiropractors work to correct spinal alignment and stress the importance of spinal curvature and posture as a foundation to good health. Pay attention at your spine when you're working. Extend your elbows, relax

¹ Leverage is the mechanical advantage gained by being in a position to use a lever. From a mechanical perspective, the body can be understood as a series of levers.

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your shoulders, make sure that your spine is straight, and your knees are unlocked. These few things will make a big difference in your body.

Presently, researchers are using computerized software to register what happens to joints and muscles when we stand, walk or run and now we have a wealth of knowledge about how to better use our bodies. But even if we are not using sophisticated technology, we can still know how our body is working by taking a look at some concepts from physics that explain the mechanics of our muscular and skeletal systems.

Here are some important basic concepts:

Forces:

A force is a push or pull exerted by object A on object B.

Gravity:

Is the pull of the Earth on the body or its segments (and that we experience as weight). Gravity is the most consistent force encountered by the human body and behaves in a predictable and describable manner.

Classes of Forces affecting the human body:

External	Internal
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Gravity• Objects we carry, pull or push• Air• Water	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pull of a muscle on a bone• Pull of a ligament on a bone• Bone on another bone

All forces can be defined by:

1. A point of application on the object being acted upon
2. An action line or direction
3. A magnitude

When we talk about gravity, the point of application is the center of gravity (COG), a hypothetical point at which all mass would appear to be concentrated, and it is the point at which the force of gravity appears to act. The COG is the point in any object about which it is in perfect balance no matter how it is turned or rotated around that point. In a symmetric object, the COG is located in its center. In an asymmetric object, such as the human body, it is located towards the heavier end at a point at which the mass is evenly distributed. It is a balance point. When standing in anatomical position (standing erect, with feet and palms facing forward), the COG would be around the second sacral segment (S2). When we move, our COG shifts. Carrying objects changes the COG. The stability achieved depends on where the COG is located.

The direction is always vertically downward, towards the center of the Earth.

The magnitude equals the mass of the object.

Levers

Now, let's talk about levers and how these concepts relate to the body.

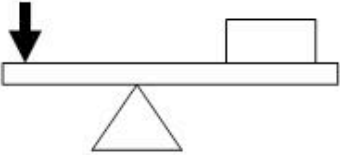
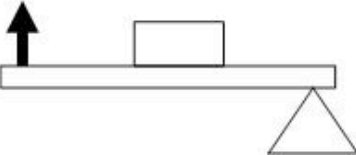
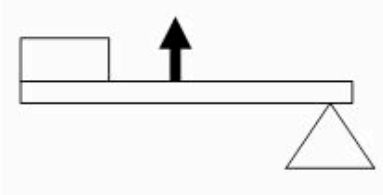
Definition of levers:

Levers are mechanical devices that make the work of moving a weight or other load, easier.

A lever has three points of interest:

1. The fulcrum or pivot location,
2. The load or weight (what we wish to manipulate with the lever, described as a magnitude), and
3. The effort (the force you are applying to do the lifting or pull).

The following chart that illustrates the different kinds of levers:

<u>First Class Lever</u>	
Fulcrum in the middle	
Eg: a playground seesaw, scissors, pliers, ; catapult.	
There are few 1st class levers in the body.	
Eg: Extending your head, the fulcrum is an intervertebral joint, the effort is made by the muscles that extend the head and the resistance is the weight of the head.	
<u>Second Class Lever</u>	Eg: A wheelbarrow, a nutcracker
	In the body, a good example is tiptoeing. The fulcrum is at the metatarsophalangeal joints, the resistance is the body weight and the pull is done by the muscles plantar flexion
<u>Third Class Lever</u>	
Eg: A baseball bat. If you're right handed your left arm is the fulcrum, your right hand is the force doing the effort, the ball is the weight. Most levers in the body are third class.	

Mechanical advantage:

Mechanical advantage is also called efficiency and it refers to the use of a lever in such a way that only a small effort or force is needed to overcome a large resistance.

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FA: force arm (from effort to fulcrum)

RA: resistance arm (from resistance to fulcrum)

Although the second class levers are the most efficient, most levers in the body are third class levers, where the magnitude of the effort is higher than resistance, but these levers allow for speed and broader range of motion. The type and extent of movement depends on the magnitude of the load, the muscle attachments and the joints involved.

While doing massage take into account that the leverage that works best is not a lot different from the leverage that you use while performing daily activities such as pulling a stroller or pushing a piece of furniture. Humans instinctively use the whole body, as you can see when observing little kids making any kind of effort with their limbs.

Do you remember how many times your massage instructors insisted that “you should come from your feet”? Pay attention to that recommendation and you will spare your shoulders, elbows, wrists and spine quite a bit of stress. When you lean from your feet, you’re using your ankles as a fulcrum and your whole body is working as a force arm.

Use your full body by consciously maintaining your spine in alignment while you are leaning, pushing or pulling from your feet. While doing compressions, make sure that you align your joints in such a way that the force passes through the center of each joint, from the part of the body you’re using to apply massage (thumb, hand, elbow) to your feet. This will prevent wear and tear of your joints, because it distributes the effort along a chain of joints.

When you visualize the body as a series of levers, you will understand that its efficiency depends on how you use your body. For example, compression is not about pushing the patient’s tissues. It actually shouldn’t require much effort on the part of the massage therapist. Effective compression will be the result of knowing how to lean your body over the person receiving treatment. Using good body mechanics, the massage therapist leans a controlled amount of her weight into the client. The therapist uses the force of gravity and her knowledge about levers to her advantage, instead of straining her muscles.

There are two main requirements to do this right. First, the massage therapist needs to learn to feel the client’s tissues. This way when she leans in, she will match the resistance found under her hands. And second, to lean without falling over the client or straining her body, the massage therapist needs to align her body properly as mentioned before.

There are different techniques to aligning the body. I suggest that you go to John Latz’s excellent article on Connective Tissue Massage to learn about his body mechanics concepts (www.johnlatz.com/keyelements_article.html). His theory is based on Rolf’s structural integration model that looks for alignment of the body along an imaginary vertical line that runs from the sole of the foot to the top of the head. Movement, according to Rolf, is “elongation along the alignment,” as Latz describes it.

“I lengthen in a vertical dimension through the bottom of my feet and out the top of my head, extending through my arms. I make my body bigger and longer, and my fascia expands in all directions simultaneously. This “spanning” of my tissue continues into the fascial body of my client, whose fascia lengthens and expands as though it is a continuation of mine,” Latz says in an article published by *Massage Magazine*.

You can also explore Yoga, QiGong and Tai Chi. These ancient Hindu and Chinese practices focus on the energy of the body, and work from the belief that we can boost our energy with proper breathing techniques and correct posture. In Tai Chi, for example, central equilibrium is fundamental. They focus on the sacrum, its position in space, its relation to the hip joints and the back of our head.

Also, take into account the following recommendations to prevent injuries and exhaustion:

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1. Stay aware of your posture. Your body is your tool, use it efficiently and carefully.
2. Avoid creating habits, they become restrictive patterns. Don't repeat actions just because they are part of a technique that you learned. Feel the client's body, perform only the actions that you feel the tissues need.
3. Remember to do stretches as often as possible and take special care of your hands. Stretches will keep your body flexible and will help take care of unnecessary tensions created by your job.
4. Observe the postures you adopt, not only during a massage, but also while you drive the car, sit in front of a screen or sleep. A good rest is essential to "reboot" your system after a strainful day.
5. Body mechanics need to be complemented with ergonomics. Make sure that your massage table is set at a height that allows proper alignment of your body and limbs.
6. Develop an exercise program that strengthens your limbs.

My last recommendation is that if your body is ringing alarms, you need to listen. If you start presenting symptoms of repetitive stress injuries or your body is feeling achy and exhausted, give yourself a vacation and if the symptoms persist consult your physician.

References

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2. Foster, M.A. *Visualizing Bones in Body Mechanics, Massage & Bodywork*. In <http://www.messageandbodywork.com/Articles/DecJan2007/SomaticAnatomyDJ07.pdf> August, 2007
3. Khan A, Warner HA, and Brown WA. (2000) Symptom reduction and suicide risk in patients treated with placebo in antidepressant clinical trials. *Arch Gen Psychiatry*.
4. Latz, J. *Connective Tissue Massage*. In http://www.johnlatz.com/keyelements_article.html, February, 2007
5. <http://www.medsci.uu.se/ocmed/webkurs/trends/emf.htm>
6. <http://www.mypyramid.gov>
7. <http://www.stress.org/job.htm>

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Answering sheet

If you're taking the Self Care Class, please copy the test,
answer the questions and send to
Eyes Wide Open
1260 Wildwood Lakes Blvd Apt 201
Naples, FL 34104

Name: _____ **Order No.** _____
Profession: _____
Email: _____
FL License Number: _____ **Renewal date:** _____
Address: _____
Street Number _____
City _____ **State** _____ **Zip code** _____
Phone Number _____

Please read carefully and circle the option that your feel is right.

2. What is the number one reason forcing massage therapists out of business?
 - a. Competition
 - b. Lack of training
 - c. Lack of clients
 - d. Burnout

3. The main elements of a healthy life are:
 - a. Eating less, working more, being happy
 - b. Avoiding uncomfortable situations
 - c. Balanced nutrition, stress management
 - d. Caring for as many people as possible

4. Lasting lifestyle changes are dependent upon:
 - a. Having a partner that forces us to have healthy habits
 - b. Gaining awareness and establishing realistic goals
 - c. Reading about health to better inform our clients
 - d. Becoming multidimensional

5. Healthy life style choice include:
 - a. Drinking alcohol in moderation
 - b. Expressing your needs and asserting yourself
 - c. Having a good support system
 - d. All of the above

6. Burnout is a condition characterized by:
 - a. Unrelieved long term stress and acculturation problems
 - b. Lack of mental clarity and driving long distances
 - c. Being unhappy all the time and sleeping long hours
 - d. Exhaustion, lower resistance to illness and lack of interest in work

7. Poor body mechanics and bad posture increase the chances of suffering burnout
 - a. True
 - b. False

8. Physical signs of burnout include:
 - a. Fatigue and changes in appetite
 - b. Frustration and irritability
 - c. Not wanting to learn any more
 - d. Isolation

9. Mental signs of burnout include:
 - a. Fatigue and changes in appetite
 - b. Frustration and irritability
 - c. Not wanting to learn any more
 - d. Isolation

10. The best way to prevent burnout is: _____

11. List the two main differences between healing and curing
 - a.
 - b.

12. A good posture while you work will:
 - a. Increase comfort and prevent injuries
 - b. Help you deliver a better massage
 - c. Prevent burnout
 - d. All of the above

13. Good body mechanics allows for:
 - a. More efficient use of the body
 - b. Avoiding back pain
 - c. Preventing exhaustion
 - d. All of the above

14. Our center of gravity is:
 - a. Around S2 when standing in anatomical position
 - b. The most consistent force encountered by the human body
 - c. The point around which we suffer the most injuries
 - d. None of the above

15. A lever is:
 - a. A mechanical device that makes the work of moving a weight easier
 - b. A long bone in the body
 - c. A load that needs to be carried
 - d. A rod used to facilitate gravity

16. A massage therapist can use gravity to her advantage when she is doing compressions
 - a. True
 - b. False

17. Studies show that at least _____ of individual receiving a placebo experience relief of symptoms and a measurable improvement in their condition:
 - a. One percent
 - b. A quarter
 - c. Fifty percent
 - d. Ten percent

18. “Inner healer” refers to:
 - a. A blueprint within our cells that guarantees regeneration and reparation of tissues
 - b. The capacity of the body to adapt to the environment
 - c. Instinctive responses of the body
 - d. All of the above

19. Stress is defined as:
 - a. The scarcity of environmental resources
 - b. Imbalance resulting from emotional states
 - c. The result of environmental changes perceived as a challenge
 - d. Breakdown of the body systems

20. The following statement is true about free radicals:
 - a. Oxidation processes are common in the body
 - b. They damage cells, accelerating the aging process
 - c. Are chemical reactions taking place in the environment
 - d. Are essential for the optimal function of the immune system

21. Radio waves and chemicals in water, air or food:
 - a. Cause antioxidation
 - b. Stimulate cell growth
 - c. Cause damage to our organism
 - d. None of the above

22. Conflicting thoughts be the cause of:
 - a. The release of endorphins in the body
 - b. Viral infections
 - c. Translate into anxiety, fear and distress
 - d. All of the above

23. Abusive relationships are a source of emotional and mental stress. An abusive partner makes you feel:
 - a. Confused, uncomfortable and worthless
 - b. Angry and sad
 - c. Guilty and afraid
 - d. All of the above

24. Abusive people are easily recognizable for one main feature. They:
- Exert their identity and master the environment
 - They easily lose control of their temper
 - They progressively debilitate their partners
 - Do not have own opinions
25. The following statement is true:
- A healthy person apologizes every time that makes the same mistake
 - An abusive person never apologizes because they cannot recognize a bad behavior
 - A healthy person not only apologizes for her behavior but also makes sure it doesn't happen again
 - A healthy person never misbehaves
26. Developing communication skills:
- Will cut down a significant source of stress in interpersonal relationships
 - Will guarantee job promotions
 - Is impossible. Our communication patterns cannot be changed
 - None of the above
27. List four behaviors that would improve interpersonal communication
- ..
 - ..
 - ..
 - ..
28. It's important to include pauses in your work. They will
- Improve your performance
 - Allow for free time to take care for yourself
 - Give you time to fill in reports
 - All of the above
29. List four of the recommendations of the American Cancer Society regarding a healthy nutrition
- ...
 - ...
 - ...
 - ...
30. A healthy diet includes:
- Mostly animal fat and plenty of nuts
 - A high amount of free radicals to protect the cells
 - Plenty of antioxidants to counteract stress
 - As little intake of calories as possible
31. Among the recommendations by the American Cancer Society are:
- Thirty minutes or more of daily moderate activity
 - Maintaining a healthy weight
 - Limiting alcoholic beverages

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- d. All of the above
32. Inflammation should be counteracted as soon as it appears
- a. True
 - b. False
33. Anti-inflammatory food are:
- a. Those rich in omega 9 and 6 fatty acids
 - b. Those rich in omega 3 fatty acids
 - c. Fruits like papaya that contain papain
 - d. B and C are true
34. Two substances that are common in processed food and seem to be related to weight gain are:
- a. Monoglutamate and prostaglandins
 - b. Endorphins and salt
 - c. Monoglusodic glutamate and high fructose corn syrup
 - d. None of the above
35. Sodas sweetened with Aspartame are preferable for a healthy nutrition
- a. True
 - b. False
36. In deep tissue massage:
- a. Pain is the goal
 - b. Knots dissolve and never reappear
 - c. Endorphins are released and pain addiction is likely to occur
 - d. The client is pleased about the Massage therapist's skills and always comes back.

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