

STRESS: WHAT IS IT AND HOW TO MANAGE IT?

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Tuesdays starting September 26 through November 7 for seven sessions | 10:00 a.m. - noon
IN-PERSON AT NSK | LECTURE/DISCUSSION | MAXIMUM 30

Overview

This course gives an introduction to various empirically validated methods of stress management. Readings and some lecture time will briefly review each method's rationale, history, and validation. Most of the time will be devoted to the experiential practice of these methods. Some of the methods are common knowledge among the public and among various mental health and complementary medicine practitioners. Some of the less well-known finer arts for each method will also be taught. Although each method usually requires more than a single group session for complete mastery, this introduction will provide participants with significant control and knowledge about how to seek further training.

Recommended Reading

Principles and Practice of Stress Management 4th ed. NY: Guilford Publications (PPSM)
by Lehrer, P and Woolfolk, R.

(ca. \$62, but often on sale from Guilford, or obtainable as a used copy)

Weekly Schedule

Week	Topic
WEEK 1	<p>WHAT IS STRESS, AND HOW DOES IT AFFECT THE MIND AND BODY?</p> <p>The mind and body are adaptive systems. We are designed to do a myriad of tasks, and to face various degrees of stress. The body marvelously adapts to all of these demands. Reflexes throughout the body change the way our brain and body work to enable us to handle whatever is put before us. Then the body automatically returns to a resting state and allows us to reconstitute any wear and tear that adaptive processes may cause. Strengthening these reconstitutive processes is an important component in stress management. The concept of allostasis will be explained: the process by which the body allocates resources to modulate the effects of stress. When stress is too great or too prolonged, however, “allostatic overload” occurs, causing stress symptoms. We will review the various ways by which allostatic overload causes many kinds of symptoms, from anxiety and depression to problems with inflammation, and dysfunction in the digestive, cardiovascular, neural, and respiratory systems. As part of this session, we will present a brief overview of some important systems in the brain and body.</p> <p>ASSIGNMENT: PPSM CHAPTERS 1-3</p>

<p>WEEK 2</p>	<p>STRESS AND THE MUSCLES Stress causes muscle tension, and muscle tension, in turn, contributes to stress. The muscles are intricately related to the “fight-flight” part of the autonomic nervous system. When the muscles are completely relaxed, relaxation also occurs in the mind, and all components of the stress management system. Most of this session will be devoted to teaching the method of “progressive relaxation” experientially, as taught by practitioners who use it for the most profound effects. Participants learn to detect small amounts of muscle tension and control it throughout the body. We will demonstrate of surface recording of muscle tension. Participants are asked to practice the method at home, for improving sleep and controlling anxious thoughts, soft tissue pain, and various stress related physical symptoms. ASSIGNMENT: PPSM CHAPTER 7</p>
<p>WEEK 3</p>	<p>HYPNOSIS This session will introduce hypnosis. We will discuss what it is and how it works. You will be asked to record a hypnotic induction, given orally in class, for home practice for managing stress. Everyone also will get a test of hypnotic susceptibility. Some people find hypnosis more useful than others. The test will tell you how useful the method will be for you. Some of the vast body research on hypnosis will be described. ASSIGNMENT: PPSM CHAPTER 19</p>
<p>WEEK 4</p>	<p>AUTOGENIC TRAINING This is a method for self hypnosis. It is easy to learn, and even people with low hypnotic susceptibility are able to use it. The method allows you to control activity in various physical functions throughout the body, including blood flow, muscle tension, and digestive function. The method will be taught experientially after a brief introduction, and discussion will take place of effects in each participant. The theory and research related to this method will be briefly covered. ASSIGNMENT: PPSM CHAPTER 18</p>
<p>WEEK 5</p>	<p>RELAXED BREATHING AND HEART RATE VARIABILITY BIOFEEDBACK Each person has a 'resonance frequency' of the cardiovascular system. When breathe at this rate, about 10 seconds each breath, but different for every person, reflexes are stimulated that improve resilience. (For best results, a little computer savvy is helpful. You will need to download of a free program, and purchase of a bluetooth heart sensor, about \$35 for home practice). This should be done at the beginning of the course. I will work with several people at once, and people can help each other. Everyone will practice the method. The theory and research related to it will be briefly covered. PPSM: CHAPTER 10</p>
<p>WEEK 6</p>	<p>COGNITIVE RESTRUCTURING: HOW CERTAIN IDEAS MAKE STRESS WORSE OR BETTER. The field of ‘cognitive behavior therapy’ is well known, and appears to help a variety of psychological and stress-related problems. Some of the techniques and literature on CBT will be discussed, and some stress management exercises will be taught experientially. ASSIGNMENT: PPSM CHAPTER 17</p>
<p>WEEK 7</p>	<p>MEDITATION AND MINDFULNESS: An introduction and practice. Mindfulness meditation has recently become a very popular approach to stress management, both among mental health practitioners and in the general public. The course will cover some of the theories and research related to mindfulness meditation, and will teach some well validated methods of doing it for home practice. ASSIGNMENT: CHAPTERS 13-14</p>