

# Balancing the Scales

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## STRESS!!!

The nature of work is changing at whirlwind speed. Perhaps now more than ever before, job stress poses a threat to the health of workers and, in turn, to the health of an organization.

During these uncertain times, many employees take on an overwhelming burden of stress in both their professional and personal lives.

Page 2 provides a quiz to test your knowledge and provide real insight into stress and stress management techniques. Please read through the quiz, noting True or False for each question. Then turn to page 4 for the answers and advice on stress management.

25% of workers view their job as the number one stressor in their lives

Job stress is more strongly associated with health complaints than financial or family

### MGCVC MEMBER PROFILES:

#### JENNY PARIPOVICH, WRIGHT COUNTY ATTORNEY'S OFFICE

*Beginning in 2007, MGCVC will profile a member in an effort to further assist in the networking of service providers throughout the State of Minnesota and to provide further guidance as to how other individuals across the state are promoting rights and services for victims of crime.*

When I asked Jenny Paripovich to answer some questions about herself and about her work as a Victim/Witness Assistance Coordinator, the word "gym" came out... I became instantly uncomfortable. I've heard of these things called "gyms"... I've even traveled past them a few times. But somehow, amazingly, with three children and the full responsibility of the Wright County Victim/Witness Assistance Program on her shoulders, Jenny manages to park her vehicle, get out in the frigid cold, and make some alone time for herself. Perhaps she should have been commissioned to write the article on "Stress Reducing Tips."

Humor aside, Jenny truly does it ALL. Working with 14 prosecutors, in a county of 11,000, Jenny has been the sole advocate for Victim/Witness Assistance within the County Attorney's Office for the last three and a half years. She assists victims by providing information and support for pending criminal cases, and assists prosecutors with trial preparation and victim information. Without a doubt, the majority of her time is spent on the phone or in the courtroom!

Over the last several years, Jenny has seen an increase in the number of violent crimes being charged, and the number of identify theft and burglary victims she services. She finds that her greatest resource among this influx is Stacy Doyle, a victim advocate in the Victim/Witness Assistance Program in the Wright County Sheriff's Office who was hired in 2002 to work with victims of accidental death and families affected by suicide, as well as victims in cases that are still under investigation or not charged. As Jenny explains, "When I have challenges with a case or need advice, I go to Stacy for guidance. I can't imagine doing this job without her!"

Jenny takes value and pride in the work she does every day, and hopes that our government will continue to see the importance of the work we do and start to fund expanded, innovative services for victims. For those in Wright County, it's obvious that they already have someone who sees the importance in working with victims and creating innovative services... even if they do make it to the gym every once in awhile.

### UPCOMING EVENTS

- FEBRUARY 14  
10:00-12:00  
Board Meeting  
St. Cloud
- FEBRUARY 27-28  
Violence Against  
Women Action Day

## The STRESS TEST continued...

- \_\_\_\_\_ 1. People who feel that they have support through friends, relatives, and community have much lower stress levels when dealing with difficulties than people who do not have this support system.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 2. One-third of office visits to physicians are for stress-related illness.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 3. Alcohol is helpful in relaxation and is an effective cure for stress.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 4. Relaxation techniques are complicated and require proper instruction.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 5. Caffeine, found in coffee, tea, chocolate, and cola, provides a great pick-me-up and should be used throughout the day.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 6. Exercise releases the body's natural painkillers and helps to reduce tension.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 7. Smoking more when we are nervous is an unhealthy stress response.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 8. A large percentage of the population is chronically sleep deprived.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 9. Sleep is an important tool in reducing stress.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 10. Our bodies have cycles of low energy periods that we should ignore by staying on task.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 11. The main reason we do not have enough leisure is that we do not give our-selves permission to make the time to enjoy it.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 12. Effective time management will help in overall stress management.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 13. Sometimes events that are usually not stressful will cause a stress reaction because they are not what we expected.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 14. In order to feel better about things, sometimes we need to change the way we are looking at them.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 15. We have beliefs that we may not even be aware of that may lead to stress.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 16. When someone is experiencing stress and wants to talk about it, we need to give them advice on what they should do.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 17. Writing in a journal or writing a letter is a form of release that is a healthy stress response.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 18. Watching a funny movie or going to a comedy club is unhealthy when you are experiencing stress because you avoid dealing with your problems.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 19. Stressful situations deplete the body's supply of B-complex and C vitamins.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 20. If you are overweight, you should get to your ideal body weight as fast as possible.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 21. A balanced diet is an effective tool of stress management.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 22. Refined sugars, starches, and junk food create false energy and stress the body even more.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 23. Heart attack, hypertension, stroke, ulcers, cancer, and mental breakdown are common health problems resulting from chronic stress.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 24. The activities that cause stress make you sick.
- \_\_\_\_\_ 25. By attending a stress management class, your stress level should be greatly reduced.

# STRESS REDUCING TIPS

## SLOW-DOWN TECHNIQUES

### **10-SECOND BREATHING**

In an acute situation, when your mind or body is racing out of control, slow down your breathing to a 10-second cycle, 6 breaths a minute. Find a clock or watch with a second hand and inhale for 5 seconds (odd number on clock face) then exhale for 5 seconds (even number). Keep it up for 2-5 minutes, or until your pace slows down.

### **60-SECOND BREAK**

Close your eyes and take a deep breath. Visualize yourself lounging on a sunny beach or watching the sunset or relaxing in the shower or sauna.

### **5-MINUTE VACATION**

Close your eyes and take a few deep breaths. Then visualize a favorite place or activity. Let your imagination carry you away to a special spot that's refreshing and relaxing.

### **BOTHER LIST**

Write down a list of all the worries, pressures and concerns that are crowding your mind and clamoring for attention. Then burn the list or tuck it in your wallet for later attention.

### **PEACEFUL FOCUS**

Focus on something pleasant and beautiful in your immediate environment (a blade of grass, a painting, a color). Concentrate on the beauty you see and breathe it in. Allow that beauty to slow you down.

## GEAR-UP TECHNIQUES

### **STRETCH AND MOVE**

Stand up and stretch. Arch your back and stretch your arms and fingers out to the side. Hold that posture for awhile and then let go. Now move your body all around to get the blood pumping. Clap your hands. Jump up and down. MOVE!

### **EXHILARATION BREAK**

Imagine yourself somewhere exciting, exhilarating or awe-inspiring (e.g., standing on a cliff above the ocean, performing for a large audience, cheering at an exciting football game, crossing the finish line at a race, laughing uproariously with friends, peering over the rim of the Grand Canyon, giving birth or watching birth). Let the vividness of that vision charge your batteries.

### **STIRRING MUSIC**

Turn on some lively music like a march or a mazurka. Start moving. Dance. Bounce. March. Sing along. Get involved. Let the music pump you up and pull you along.

### **BODY BRACER**

Gently pat or tap all over your body in an energizing rhythm. Keep it up until you tingle all over and are charged up.

### **EXERCISE**

Vigorous exercise of any kind is a sure-fire way to get geared up. Add a creative twist for some extra punch.

### **Reference:**

Nancy Loving Tubesing and Donald A. Tubesing (1990). *Structured Exercises in Stress Management*, Whole Person Press.

## Answers to STRESS TEST

- 1) True. We need to make sure we have people we can talk with. If we don't have this support, we need to work on building it.
- 2) False. Over 2/3 of all office visits to physicians are for stress-related illness.
- 3) False. Although alcohol may help some people relax, it is not a cure for stress. Frequent and long-term use can lead to dependence and avoidance of the source of stress.
- 4) False. There are many ways to relax, ranging from the simple to the more complex. Relaxation techniques reverse the stress reaction and produce a calming effect—our pulse slows, blood pressure falls, breathing slows and muscles relax.
- 5) False. Here are some facts about caffeine:
  - People who gave up caffeine report being more relaxed, less jittery or nervous, sleep better, have more energy, less heartburn, fewer muscle aches.
  - Instead of cold turkey, which may produce withdrawal symptoms and headaches, slowly decrease caffeine intake by one drink per day until you are down to zero.
  - After the caffeine is out of your system, you should notice a difference in three weeks.
- 6) True. Exercise dissolves muscle tension and releases your body's natural painkillers to give you a general sense of well-being. Exercise also accomplishes the following goals:
  - Exercise serves as a "stress-proofer" by giving your body the energy required to draw on in times of extra stress.
  - Exercise helps burn accumulated blood sugar, promotes fat metabolism, speeds the removal of other waste products from the blood, and makes heart muscles stronger.
  - It is important to get regular exercise – 3 times a week for 30 minutes where you are vigorously and continually moving large muscle groups.
- 7) True. Nicotine is a blood pollutant and should be used in moderation. Occasional use to relieve stress can quickly turn into stressful dependency. Find another way to cope with stress. If you do smoke, try not to increase smoking when you are nervous or experiencing stress.
- 8) True and 9) True. Keep this in mind about the importance of sleeping:
  - Most people know their sleep requirement (5-10 hours per night) but just don't sleep that much.
  - If you wake up refreshed, have energy, and wake up naturally, you are probably getting enough sleep.
  - A 5-20 minute nap can be rejuvenating. More than 30 minutes can make you feel groggy.
- 10) False. Everyone has cycles of low energy periods. Ignoring them and working through them actually builds up stress. Instead, take short recesses throughout the day. We need to be aware of our down times and take a break. There are many ways to do this: short walks, stretching/relaxation techniques, daydreaming, meeting with a friend, refreshment break, listening to music, change to low-concentration tasks.
- 11) True. Leisure is one of the most pleasant stress relievers ever invented. We often resist it because we feel selfish or guilty. Everyone needs a healthy amount to get away from everyday pressures. Studies have found that the less leisure we have, the more stress we experience.
- 12) True. Time management can be an easy and effective way to manage stress. Here are some effective time management techniques:
  - Take 5 minutes at beginning of each day and make a "things to do" list. Convert this list into a priority list of primary tasks, secondary tasks and miscellaneous tasks. Do primary tasks and continue until the list is completed.
  - Be careful not to over schedule your day. Leave time for unexpected events, phone calls and emails.

## Answers to STRESS TEST

- 13) True. We often become upset about something, not because the event itself is stressful, but because it is not in-line with what we expected to happen. For example: rush-hour traffic – we may not like it, but it does not surprise or upset us. But, a traffic jam on a Sunday afternoon, which makes us late for something, causes us stress. Having realistic expectations makes life more predictable and manageable because we can plan and prepare.
- 14) True. The key to changing your frame of mind is recognizing that there are many ways to interpret the same situation. (Ex: half full/half empty glass) Try to see the positive side of every situation. While this might not change reality, it helps us see things differently and less stressfully.
- 15) True. We have beliefs that we are unaware of that can cause stress in our lives. Examples: “Men shouldn’t show their emotions,” “I can never remember people’s names,” “If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself.” Beliefs can stress because of the behavior that results from them or because your beliefs may come into conflict with those around you. We must recognize that our beliefs are opinion, not truth.
- 16) False. When someone needs to talk, we need to be good listeners. We should give our advice only if they specifically ask for it.
- 17) True. Writing is a good form of ventilation – it helps us to express our feelings.
- 18) False. Humor is a great stress reducer. Laughter helps us to relieve tension.
- 19) True. Our bodies use B-complex vitamins, vitamin A and vitamin C to fight stress. Consequently, in stressful times, these vitamins are depleted from our systems. We need to make sure we are eating foods high in protein, vitamin A, vitamin C and B-complex so that we are protected against the effects of stress. Some foods that are rich with these vitamins are whole grain products, fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy products.
- 20) False. If you need to lose weight, use a slow, steady and nutritious weight loss program. You should include regular exercise in your weight loss program.
- 21) True. A balanced diet is an important factor in controlling stress. Here are the characteristics of a healthy diet:
- Three balanced meals a day.
  - A wide variety of foods.
  - Complex carbohydrates provide extra stamina. They are found in cereals, grains, beans, fruits and vegetables
  - Stay away from high-fat snacks, especially late at night. Eating late at night doesn’t give your body a chance to work off the food.
- 22) True. These foods give us short-term energy. Shortly after, we feel hungry and low on energy.
- 23) True. Prolonged stress that is not moderated may lead to more serious breakdowns in health. These are a few of the more common health problems that result from chronic stress. Controlling your stress will reduce the chances of experiencing these breakdowns.
- 24) False. It is our reaction to stress that can make us sick, not a stressful situation. We need to monitor the way that we react to stressful situations.
- 25) False. You have to take the information that you have learned in the seminar and apply it to your life to develop your own stress management plan. You have to make a personal commitment and accept stress management as your responsibility.

### ***One Final Point About Stress Management:***

In order for stress management plans to work, you must practice the techniques. Keep in mind that you may experience setbacks, but just keep at it.

**Minnesota General Crime Victim Coalition**

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**We're On the Web!!**  
**[www.mgcvc.com](http://www.mgcvc.com)**

**DO YOU HAVE UNUSED  
RESOURCES??**

*MGCVC is looking to expand our resource library, and asks that members forward on any unused resources or duplicates they may have lying around. These resources may be of great value to our membership!*

**MGCVC EXISTS TO HELP!**

In the early 1990's, several crime victim service providers around the state began meeting informally for the purpose of providing support and to share knowledge and resources with each other. Fro this group of dedicated individuals, the need was identified to become more organized in their efforts. Out of this need, the Minnesota General Crime Victim Coalition was born and was incorporated in 1993. For the first years, MGCVC operated only with volunteer help, then in 1998 an Executive Director was hired. Today's membership includes around 70 members from all areas of victim services: community-based programs, law enforcement, prosecution, and probation agencies. We are working together by "joining hands across Minnesota" to better assist victims and further their rights statewide.

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