



Keeping Your Spirit Healthy

People talk about the importance of keeping their lives in balance. But when it comes down to it, few people really know how to achieve it.

“When you’re stressed, taking steps to strengthen your personal integrity can bring you back to a sense of balance that restores a sense of inner peace and harmony,” says Brian Luke Seaward, Ph.D., author of *Quiet Mind, Fearless Heart*. “The human spirit is composed of free-flowing energy. But unresolved anger, fear and other negative emotions can choke the spirit by creating stress.” According to Dr. Seaward, you can reduce stress by understanding the unique relationship that exists between less stress and more spirituality in your life.

“For many people, spirituality has been the missing link in strengthening the mind-body-spirit continuum that’s the basis of a healthy life,” he says. “People who have healthy minds and bodies but still feel stressed or uneasy haven’t satisfied their spiritual hunger because it can’t be satisfied by material things.” The following strategies can help you change or modify behaviors that increase stress and replace them with behaviors that promote harmony.

Keep Everything in Perspective

When you’re stressed by a particular event, it’s easy to lose perspective, particularly of how good your life is overall. “When you find yourself focusing on the foreground of a problem or a crisis, take a step back and look at it in the context of the big picture of your life,” says Dr. Seaward. “Doing so helps you realize that in many areas of your life things are going well.”

Establish Healthy Boundaries

Boundaries let other people know how far they can go before they infringe on your personal integrity. Setting clear boundaries helps minimize misunderstandings between friends, family and co-workers.

Manage Anger

Keep anger under control by changing your expectations. Many episodes of anger in day-to-day life are the result of

unmet expectations. By lowering your expectations, especially about things you can’t control, you can reduce angry and stressful responses. For instance, plan in advance to let go of things you know will drive you crazy, such as traffic delays.

Be Thankful

Adopt an attitude of gratitude by directing your thoughts away from negative thought patterns that are common when you’re stressed. “When you’re feeling as if nothing is going right, stop and make a list of all the things you’re grateful for or take for granted,” says Dr. Seaward. “Start with simple things, like being able to see and breathe. Then move on to personal things, such as family members and your job. Don’t stop until you reach 100 items.”

Turn Off the TV

Prolonged TV viewing can increase stress because of violent or disturbing content and the constant visual stimulation.

Forgive Others

Carrying the weight of a grudge becomes immobilizing over time. But when you forgive someone, you bring light into your heart and the whole world benefits.

Seize the Day

Choose one of your unmet personal goals and map out a strategy to make it happen. Fill in the specifics, identify the resources you need and come up with an estimated completion date. “Human behavior is slow to change, but it can be done,” says Dr. Seaward. “Start by selecting one strategy from those above and incorporate it into your life for several weeks. Then try another one for a while. Over time, you’ll feel more whole and less stressed because you’re consciously seeking balance in your life instead of imbalance.”

Continued on back





Hope for Chronic Fatigue Sufferers

Jennie Spotila felt she had reached the pinnacle of life. She had a promising career as a litigation attorney for a large firm in Philadelphia. Her social life was equally as exciting. Then, over the course of an October day about 10 years ago, she came down with the flu: headache, muscle ache and sore throat. Her doctor assured her it was a virus and she'd feel better in two weeks.

A month later Ms. Spotila still had the "flu" and also began experiencing dizziness, foggy thinking and loss of stamina. Still, her doctor insisted it was the flu.

"There was a resistance to my movements, like I was moving through jello," she remembers. "Everything became difficult."

She stopped her 5:30 a.m. workouts at the gym and her eight block walk to work and reduced her work to part time. Nothing helped. She consulted other doctors to no avail.

Finally, five months later, a physician diagnosed her with chronic fatigue and immune dysfunction syndrome (CFIDS), also known as chronic fatigue syndrome (CFS) and began treating her symptoms.

What Is CFIDS?

CFIDS is a major medical condition experienced by about 800,000 American men, women and children.

To meet the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's case definition and diagnostic criteria for CFIDS, a patient's fatigue must have lasted for six months or longer without any other possible cause and must include at least four of the following symptoms: extreme muscle or joint pain, headaches, tender lymph nodes, cognitive problems, sleep that does not relieve fatigue, fatigue after exercise or exertion that lasts more than 24 hours.

The cause is unknown, but one leading theory is that the illness is rooted in the central nervous system and immune system.

There Is New Hope

A cure for CFIDS remains elusive. Up to 60 percent of those with CFIDS, however, return to near normal activity with no treatment. For the people who don't improve, the strategy is to attack the symptoms.

"We don't know the cause or cure, but neither do we know what causes or cures migraines or irritable bowel syndrome, yet we can make those better because we can treat what we do know about them," says Charles W. Lapp, M.D., an internist and pediatrician with Hunter-Hopkins Center in Charlotte, N.C., and on clinical faculty at Duke University School of Medicine. Dr. Lapp began treating patients with CFIDS in 1985.

"The first step is to manage sleep with sleep medications," he says. "The next step is to manage fatigue with a combination of antidepressants and stimulant drugs. Antidepressants are used because most patients with chronic illnesses and chronic pain are low in serotonin and dopamine, which makes for sleep disruption, low pain thresholds and irritability. This treatment makes patients feel more motivated and alert.

"The third step is to treat pain, and the fourth is to treat autonomic dysfunction, which has been demonstrated in 96 percent of patients with CFIDS. In all these areas we have reasonable successes."

Jennie Spotila has not improved, but she has learned ways to cope.

"My coping focuses on lifestyle management; making good decisions on what I spend my energy on, how to recognize when I'm running out of energy and how to cope with the fallout and effect on my life," she says.

"Learning about the emotional side of chronic illness was most beneficial personally," she says. "Emotions in chronic illness are cyclical and normal. When I recognized that, I was able to spend more time in a good emotional place and be more honest with people about what I can and cannot do."

