Stress Management: 
Special Considerations for 
Emergency Services, Rescue and 
Recovery and Health Care Personnel in 
Disaster, Mass Violence and Other 
Critical Incidents 

Satellite Conference 
Wednesday, August 17, 2005 
2:00 - 4:00 p.m. (Central Time) 

Produced by the Alabama Department of Public Health 
Video Communications Division

Objectives 
• Learn the significant differences that 
  helping professionals experience as 
  part of their everyday exposure to 
  highly stressful and often traumatic 
  incidents and how their approach to 
  stress reduction requires a unique 
  and tailored approach.

Objectives 
• Learn the basic physiological 
  responses of the human body to 
  various environmental and emotional 
  stresses. Participants will have the 
  ability to differentiate between 
  normal, healthy stress, 
  environmental stressors and 
  emotional stressors both 
  endogenous and reactive.

Objectives 
• Understand the autonomic 
  responses to various stressors and 
  cognitive reactions that reinforce the 
  occurrence of physical reaction 
  without the benefit of thought 
  processing.

Objectives 
• Learn the ability to regulate the 
  autonomic response to stressors 
  with increased awareness, modeling 
  and practice of regulatory 
  approaches to controlling stress 
  responses. 
• Learn and practice various 
  techniques of stress awareness 
  regulation of stress responses and 
  the cognitive behavioral 
  methodology of stress management.
Objectives

- Learn and practice various, effective, traditional breathing and progressive relaxation methods from the 3 minute to 20 minute models.
- Learn about the self-hypnotic method of stress reduction.

Objectives

- Practice skills in developing tailored methodologies to address their unique styles of reacting to stress, mitigating its effects and avoiding the development of severe stress responses.

The Concept of Stress Is Controversial

- It’s not as simple as once thought
- Everyone perceives stress differently
- Stress is geographic and culture based

The Physiology of Stress

Good Stress vs. Bad Stress

- The good stress allows us to perform at a higher level (fight or flight)
  - The production of cortisol improves memory and enhances immune function.
  - Spikes in blood pressure flood our muscles and brain with oxygen

The Physiology of Stress

- The bad stress is the overload
  - The allostatic system becomes charged too frequently with no chance to vent the build up of energy.
  - Overload of cortisol will damage memory, hurt immune system and enlarge your stomach.

Work Stress

- Stress measured by blood pressure increases is generally twice as high during the work day compared to when at home or time off.
  
  (Pickering, 2005)
Work Stress
• The worst work-related stress is caused by jobs where people have little control over the activities and the rate at which they have to deal with it.

Translation:
• When you feel helpless, that’s bad
• Then you drop into a ‘depressed’ state and have much higher cortisol levels
• Too much cortisol causes damage
• Race is also a factor
• A high fat, high salt diet contributes (via blood pressure increased)
• Professional women with children suffer more (e.g. blood pressure doesn’t go down at home)

What Is Your Profession?
• Think about what you do for a living.
• Do you work under a time pressure in an environment you can’t control?

Environmental Effects
• Consider the disaster situation (fear, grief, pain, uncontrollable conditions)
• Consider mass violence incidents (human induced fear, safety concerns, paranoia of randomness)
• Consider terrorism (human induced terror, security, cultural paranoia)
• Add death, gruesome scenes, screams, heat/cold, water

Automatic Responses
• Law enforcement, rescue staffs, fire personnel, emergency room and other medical personnel staffs are trained to react quickly
• Physical reactions to stressful situations can occur without the benefit of thought
• Cognitive reactions reinforce physical reactions (our thinking controls our actions)

Automatic Responses
• Helping professionals responses are generally self sacrificing
  – many place themselves in danger
  – many will work ‘till it hurts
  – many will skip breaks
  – many will ignore/fight direction to rotate assignments, go off duty or take benefit time even when encouraged
Automatic Responses
• In emergency situations adrenaline is pumping, intensity high
• Staffs recognize the need to perform
• Physical euphoria, numbness or endorphin effect disguises distress
• Coupled with fatigue, cognition can change and create an inability to recognize poor judgment
• Anger is a common defense

What Can You Do?
• Learn
• Regulate
• Control
• Monitor
• Think
• Practice
• Mitigate
• Change

But I Don’t Have Time!

Start with the 333 STOP Method

STOP Where You Are
3 Breaths
3 Times a day
3 Minutes

Graduate to the Relaxation Response

Take It To The Next Level
• Self recognition-When am I stressed?
• Self awareness-What helps me?
• Self regulation-How do I ‘turn it down?’
• Self control-How do I know I am OK?

Tools
• Interrupt the automatic response
  – Cognitive messaging
  – Thought stopping
  – Thought insertion
• Turn down the vibration
• Return to normal
• Practice self hypnosis
Tools

Try acupuncture, art, awareness, create, cook, dance, dream, draw, exercise, enjoy, explore, go home, kick-box, laugh, limit work, loosen up, listen to music, massage, meditate, practice yoga, paint, pet the pet, sing, sit quietly, start a book, stretch, talk to yourself, family and friends, wade, walk, watch a bug (or a movie), whistle, do something other than work.

Change the Picture

Upcoming Program

Temporary Food Events:
Environmental Issues Concerning Permits and Inspections
Tuesday, August 23, 2005
2:00-4:00 p.m. (Central Time)

For complete listing of upcoming programs visit: www.adph.org/alphtn