

The Newsletter of THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF STRESS

Number 10

1991

The Stress Reduction Effects of Laughter

Norman Cousins popularized the belief that laughter had both stress-relieving and pain-relieving properties. In *Anatomy of an Illness*, he described how a few good belly laughs from watching old Candid Camera programs or Marx Brothers films significantly reduced his requirement for pain medication. Laughter and humor also relieved other stressful aspects of his hospitalization. As previously noted, a whole new industry of laughter and humor specialists and products are now being offered as stress management tools for corporations. The Humor Project, started about 15 years ago as a sort of individual hobby, now regularly sponsors conferences, workshops, and in-house programs to clients ranging from large corporations such as Xerox, Kodak, IBM, and Dupont, to The American Cancer Society, Red Cross, Mayo Clinic, and other medical organizations. They now have thousands of subscribers to their quarterly magazine throughout the U.S. and 20 other countries.

A recent research report seems to support the stress-reduction benefits of humor. Two groups of individuals were told they were to receive an electric shock at the end of a 12-minute period, although no

shock was ever administered. One group listened to humor tapes by Bill Cosby, Steve Martin, and Robin Williams, while controls waited in silence. All the participants were asked to rate themselves with respect to their degree of sense of humor and anxiety levels before, during and after the test period. The comedy group reported much less anxiety than the controls. Those individuals who reported a low sense of humor seemed to derive the most benefit, and those who described themselves as having a very good sense of humor, had the lowest anxiety levels on entry into the experiment.

New Sense Bulletin, May, 1991



"You do ask some tricky questions."

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For further information on the original source of abstracts and other reprints available on similar subjects, please send a self-addressed stamped envelope to: Reprint Division, American Institute of Stress, 124 Park Avenue, Yonkers, NY 10703.

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The Newsletter of
**THE AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF
 STRESS**

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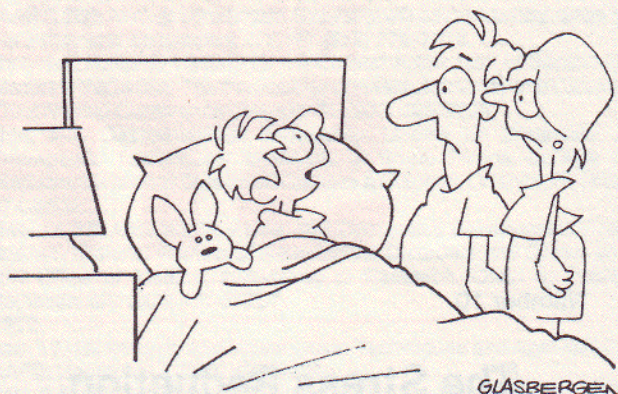
Stress and Eye Problems In Kids

Visual problems in children usually stem from nearsightedness, farsightedness, or astigmatism. However, when these diagnoses have been excluded, the problem may be due to stress. In one report, 23 children between the ages of 6 and 17 years had various eye complaints for which no satisfactory diagnosis could be established. The major symptom was blurred vision, followed by headache, double vision, narrow or distorted visual fields, and rapid involuntary eye movements.

Although no physical cause could be found, there appeared to be a common emotional thread in the form of stress at home or at school. Eight had significant family problems ranging from divorce to sexual abuse. Six were under severe stress because they had been placed in an accelerated study group. Others were concerned about serious sickness in family members and some mentioned that close friends had glasses prescribed just prior to the onset of their symptoms.

Appropriate psychological counseling, and reassurance proved particularly rewarding. Foster home placement was required for two children with severe family problems, but simply prescribing glasses with no corrective lenses in other cases seemed to do the trick. In a third of the children, symptoms disappeared within 24 hours, and 75 percent were completely recovered after two months. Those with supportive parents recovered most rapidly.

American Health, May 1986



*"Okay, I'll get up early to watch
 the sunrise with you. What
 channel is it on?"*

Stress and America's Heartburn Belt

Over-the-counter sales of antacid preparations bring in close to one billion dollars a year. The competition is obviously quite fierce, as different products jockey to gain a market edge. Since the relationship between stress and acid indigestion is so widely acknowledged, manufacturers are increasingly trying to advertise the stress-reduction value of their products, as in "Maalox Moments" TV commercials. Bromo Seltzer and Alka Seltzer claim to have a double whammy, since they are good for stress-related headaches, as well as stressful heartburn and acid indigestion. Last year, Roloids got on the stress bandwagon by rolling out its "Heartburn Index." It concluded that there were seven California cities among the nation's top ten, based on per capita consumption of antacids. The link with stress was confirmed by a sociologist who concluded that the leading contenders were indeed also "marked by high rates of stress-provoking divorce, unemployment, alcoholism, crime, and population growth." Further support comes from the finding that despite its chili rich cuisine, El Paso, Texas, placed last on the Roloids Heartburn Index. The explanation for this was the low level of stress-induced heartburn in its more laid back, slower growing population.

Despite all the hoopla, there is scant scientific evidence that stress per se causes acid indigestion. Smoking, alcohol, caffeine consumption, as well as dietary intake and eating habits, are all known to contribute to the problem. The link with stress may be related to the fact that excesses or abnormalities in these areas are often stress related.

In Health, July-August, 1991

Leisure Time and Stress Reduction

According to a January Roper poll of more than 1,000 adults, 35 percent of women and almost one out of four men currently agree with the statement, "I feel I am constantly under stress trying to accomplish more than I can handle." A significant percentage of both sexes felt "trapped in a daily routine" and "didn't have time for fun anymore." Six out of ten women and almost half of the men indicated they would be willing to give up a day's pay just to get an extra day of free time. The survey, which was sponsored by Hilton Hotels, found that more than two out of three "would be willing to forgo one or two day's pay, or 20 percent to 40 percent of their income for a day or two of free time a week." A 1990 Roper study had also revealed that more than half of working women with children under 13 would rather stay home than have a paying job. This represents a major shift from a 1985 poll in which the majority of the women opted for employment rather than homemaking. Further support for this trend comes from comparing surveys in 1975 when 60 percent of the males surveyed thought they had enough time off, as compared to less than half who are currently satisfied with their amount of leisure time. The major reasons given for wanting more personal time, were to be with family and friends, to promote self improvement, or simply pursue hobbies and take it easy. Of particular interest was the observation that this trend is occurring at a time when incomes are fairly fixed. This major impetus appears to stem from stress and frustration and a "decline in the belief in work as a source of satisfaction," rather than increased financial security.

Palm Beach Post, Sunday, 10-13-91

"The ant is knowing and wise; but he doesn't know enough to take a vacation."

— Clarence Day

Job Stress and Sexual Harassment In Japan

The recent Senate hearings to confirm Justice Clarence Thomas for the Supreme Court focused on the issue of sexual harassment in the workplace. However, Justice Thomas' purported transgression was mild compared to what goes on in Japan. According to a *Wall Street Journal* article, "for years, posters and calendars of bare-breasted beauties decorated Japan's drab, male dominated corporate and government offices. Male bosses would grab their secretaries' attention by patting them on the shoulders or their bottoms. Male workers would crack lewd jokes and make not so subtle comments about female coworkers' appearances or personal lives." Very little fuss was made

about any of this, since it was generally accepted as part of the "hard-working corporate culture." In recent years, that has changed somewhat, although the concept of "sexual harassment" is so novel that the Japanese are having difficulty in defining it, or knowing where to draw the line.

A Japanese citizens' group, who interviewed 70 harassment victims, found that more than half had lost their jobs as a result of their complaints. However, sexual harassment reports are increasing. About 30 sexual harassment cases were handled in Tokyo in 1988, but averaged more than 10 cases a month in 1989 and are steadily increasing. Most cases are still not reported because Japanese women have been traditionally taught to say "yes, yes," since it is not feminine to say no. However, more and more Japanese women are now likely to remain on the job after getting married, and even after having children. They are much more likely to speak out against unwanted advances as well as other issues such as promotions and day care. Unions are also attempting to remove outdated rules restricting women from certain jobs promised under the 1985 Equal Opportunity Law. Significantly enough, this made no mention of sexual harassment and the Tokyo Bar Association is now pushing for new legislation to correct this.

Problems are particularly apt to occur when Japanese employees are transferred to the United States because of the vast cultural differences. One American employee of a car manufacturer sued because a Japanese executive repeatedly put his hand on her knee during business meetings. He viewed this as an ordinary practice in Japan, without any sinister implications. Although he could have been fired, he was sent back to Japan, since he was considered to be a lifetime employee, and the complaint was settled internally. Most Japanese men don't know what all the fuss is about. As the president of one securities company noted, "Beauty is beauty. The men are just admiring the ladies. It is a wish or a hope. It is nothing serious." Try and tell that to Justice Thomas.

The Wall Street Journal, 3-21-90

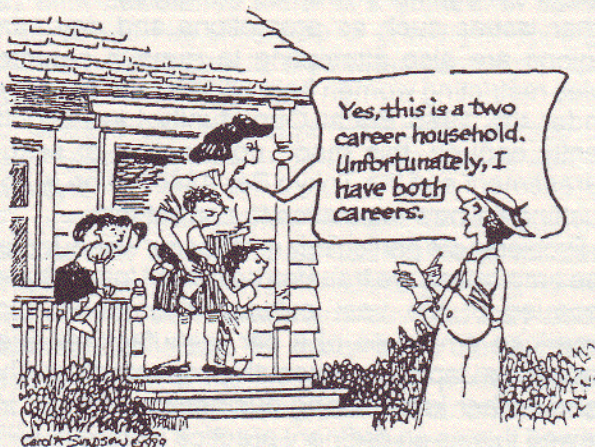
Two-Career Family Stress On the Rise

Marriages in which both individuals pursue separate careers are increasing. This may create problems in those with children, in the form of new stresses seldom encountered decades ago. According to a recent article, "Women often feel they have to be super mom, getting ahead at work, getting the kids to and from little league and ballet, and still having dinner on the table at six every night." Men who were raised to see themselves only as bread-

(continued on page 4)

Two Career Family Stress On the Rise (continued from page 3)

winners often have difficulty in assuming "housework, family and nurturing responsibilities." According to the Director of a Stress Consulting Center in New York, "two-career couples may talk with each other as little as fifteen minutes a day, and much of their minimal conversations is devoted to such home-maintenance issues as bill paying, housework, and child care." Many also lose interest in sex, which now represents one of the leading reasons why couples consult sex therapists. Other common complaints are irritability, loss of patience, loss of sense of humor, sleep problems, increased alcohol and drug use, and a progressive lack of interest or pleasure in life.



Suggestions on how to deal with this include:

- 1) listing the stresses in your life and separating them into those you can't avoid, and those to which you should devote your time and talent.
- 2) being more realistic about financial necessities and considering the possible benefits of working less, but enjoying family life more.
- 3) prioritizing the people in your life so that you spend your time with those who are most meaningful to you.
- 4) making a list of what must be done and what might be done, and determining which are most important and who is responsible for each task.
- 5) planning for regular personal time out together and making sure you are always available for an emergency.
- 6) taking more of an interest in your spouse's work and needs.
- 7) not relying on drugs or alcohol to cope with problems, and not being afraid to seek professional counseling.

- 8) Don't attempt to do all of the above at once. Practice one or two that are particularly applicable to your situation for one month, and then move on to others.

Washington Post, 9-12-91

"Being a woman is a truly difficult task since it consists principally in dealing with men."

Joseph Conrad

More on Stress And Cholesterol

It is not generally appreciated that stress has a far more powerful effect on blood cholesterol than dietary fat intake. The importance of genetic factors is evidenced by a recent medical report of an 86-year-old man who had eaten two dozen eggs a day, every day, for the previous fifteen years, whose cholesterol and heart were perfectly normal. Monthly cholesterol levels in tax accountants show a sharp elevation as April 15th approaches, and an equally impressive decline following this that is not related to any change in diet. Similarly, blood cholesterol levels taken at six-hour intervals prior to final examinations in senior medical students, showed a sharp rise, which plummeted after the examination was over, only to soar again, after the aspiring doctors were told that they had failed the exam, when they had actually passed.

In a recent report, a study of almost 350 Texas teen-agers with increased cholesterol levels, showed a link with stressful life change events, such as the breakup of a romantic attachment, or arguments with parents. Adolescent girls were much more affected than boys. In another study, a personality test administered to more than 800 male and female college freshmen in the 1960's, was specifically evaluated for high levels of stressful traits, such as hostility, cynicism, distrust, and antagonism. Those who scored high in hostility at age 19, also had higher ratios of total to "good" cholesterol at age 42. The higher this figure, the greater the risk for heart attack. This group was also more likely to be overweight, smoke more and also consume more alcohol and coffee, factors that also may reflect increased stress levels. Adrenal hormones which are released in increased amounts during stress are known to raise cholesterol and blood fats. It has been suggested that perhaps such responses occur more frequently in these individuals, hastening the development of arteriosclerosis.

Heartbeat, Spring 1991

"Jealousy and anger shorten life, and anxiety brings on old age too soon."

Apocrypha

SCIENCE

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*"Do you
believe
there is
a
conspiracy
to add
stress
to the
American
worker?"*

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of SCIENCE Magazine.*

Stress for Success

Science. Dr. Noitall, you are the world's supreme authority on stress, the man who once routinely cleaned out the Augean stables until Hercules took over, the man who treats Atlas for lower back pain, the man who can see a bleeding ulcer without even a scanning electron microscope.

Noitall. A vast understatement of my true worth.

Science. It has been reported that 70% of U.S. workers feel great stress on their jobs, and a high proportion of these are considering suing their employers or quitting completely. Do you think those figures are accurate?

Noitall. Quite frankly, I suspect the stress figure may be more than 70%. Most American workers are in an unnatural situation of incredible complexity, far beyond any evolutionary selection for survival of the fittest. *Homo sapiens* could cope in the good old days when stress came from such simple threats as lions, tigers, and an occasional flood or two.

Science. But why should the modern office be more stressful than the jungle?

Noitall. What a stupid question. Take information transfer as a simple case. Can anyone operate a computer using the instruction booklet given by the company? Or assemble a scientific instrument after reading the operating instructions? In the good old days, there were the Ten Commandments—clear, simple, direct—they don't have writers like that anymore.

Science. But surely, threats to life and limb were much greater in those days.

Noitall. That is exactly the problem. In the good old days, the boss had a cat-o'-nine-tails, and job expectations were clear-cut. After 12 hours a day at hard labor, no one had trouble sleeping. Today, between psychiatric counseling, management techniques, sexual, political, and disability harassment, and truth in advertising, the terra ain't firma anymore.

Science. But at least modern jobs don't require much physical strength.

Noitall. What a silly thing to say! Have you ever tried to open one of these modern courier packages in tearproof plastic? I have seen grown men burst into tears after trying in vain to open a little bag of peanuts.

Science. But communication is certainly better today.

Noitall. Not true. Sign language came naturally for cavemen, but today communication is done through answering services, automated messages, faxes, and dictating machines. An executive does not talk to human beings! Even picking up your own phone is not compatible with modern civilization.

Science. Do you believe there is a conspiracy to add stress to the American worker?

Noitall. Absolutely. There are certain unexplained phenomena that are clearly designed to create doubt in the rational mind. For example, bill forms that are too big to fit into the envelopes provided must be a CIA plan to create vulnerability. Then dressing for work is a major pressure point. Wearing a tie classifies you as too old, and a miniskirt as too young. Jeans are too devil-may-care, and a gray flannel suit too conservative.

Science. But surely we have drugs that can help relieve stressful symptoms.

Noitall. That of course is part of the conspiracy. We have better and better medicines in absolutely safe bottles that can't be opened. A worker in Michigan was arrested for bringing blasting caps to the office to open an aspirin bottle, but was acquitted when the jury found there was no other method.

Science. Are these anxieties directly related to job performance?

Noitall. The work itself has to be squeezed into a 35-hour week interrupted by coffee breaks, power lunches, and phone calls from relatives. Ambitious executives are under social pressure to jog 10 miles before work and to stay awake during interminable office safety meetings. Cigarette smoke alarms and bottled drinking water alerts are incessant.

Science. How does the stress in other countries compare to that here?

Noitall. All our objective stress indicators, such as the low number of psychiatrists per capita, indicate that people in other countries are more relaxed. We have found one country without ozone, asbestos, health insurance problems, power lunches, or complaints to OSHA, and we have sent stress experts to learn why they don't have U.S. anxieties.

Science. Could I ask the identity of this country?

Noitall. Of course. Bangladesh.

—DANIEL E. KOSHLAND, JR.

Dealing with the Stress Of Condolence

Writing a condolence letter is not an easy task for those who find it difficult to express their compassion or feelings in words. According to one researcher, the following suggestions may be helpful:

- 1) mention the deceased by name and don't hesitate to acknowledge your shock and dismay at the loss.
- 2) express your sympathy and don't be afraid to use the word death, or to mention its cause, even if its cancer or suicide.
- 3) make a point of acknowledging the special qualities of the deceased, whether it be a certain type of personality, a sense of humor, devotion to the community, love of sports, etc.
- 4) try to include some personal memory or anecdote that illustrates the above.
- 5) offer assistance either of a general or specific nature, such as child care or grocery shopping or indicate some special time when you might visit or call.
- 6) always end your note with some phrase that expresses support, such as "our love is with you always."
- 7) don't forget the power of touch. Often a hug, kiss, or pat can communicate your feelings far better than any words. Don't assume that grieving individuals want to be alone. Many say that they deeply appreciated notes or calls from close friends, especially on the anniversary date of their loss.
- 8) avoid such comments as, "be thankful you have another child," "it was a blessing, think how he must have suffered," and "I heard you're not taking it well."

Gannett Suburban Newspapers, 9-16-91

"He that lives to forever never fears dying."

William Penn

New Approaches to Preventing Job Stress

Corporations are getting more aggressive about taking an active role in stress management. A stress audit which attempts to identify potential problems is a must to determine the efficacy of any intervention. This can help in developing strategies to anticipate and prevent future problems. In the situation noted above, utilizing trained individuals to explain to employees the minimal risk of exposure to asbestos at sites of perceived potential peril, resulted in completely eliminating such claims in a year and a half.

Bank robberies rose 37% in this year's first quarter at Wells Fargo, causing an increase in stress claims from traumatized tellers. Rather than dis-

pute these, the bank sent counselors to conduct group debriefings, very much the way the Army handles soldiers with post traumatic stress disorder. By explaining to individuals that the way they feel is normal and what to expect down the line, significant savings were realized. As noted, "one person's trauma can wind up costing the bank a hundred thousand dollars," in terms of lost time, medical treatment and retraining costs. One manager who had survived ten robbery situations in his 16 years' employment with the bank was concerned that a recent robbery attempt would have disastrous effects on more than 20 of his employees. However, a prompt intervention by trained counselors worked wonders, and no worker's compensation claims were filed and nobody quit. Innovative preventive programs, such as child care and flex time, have also proved effective in reducing stress claims when appropriately implemented. Giving workers more control over their activities and letting them work on some task that they have selected has also proved to be particularly rewarding. Other efforts are designed to prevent abuses of the system, although this is a more delicate and difficult task. As one aerospace manufacturer complained, "There is always an epidemic of 'sore backs' after a layoff. Or they say they can't perform sexually. How the hell are you going to defend against that?" Some companies try to avoid this by asking new employees during their initial medical evaluation, "Have you ever been out of work due to a stress-related illness?" Such information can be helpful in determining future job assignments. Stress management training has also now become a leading priority because of escalating workers' compensation suits for job stress. As the Dean of one business school noted, "even a sloppy attempt at stress management can be a legal defense."

Fortune, Oct. 7, 1991

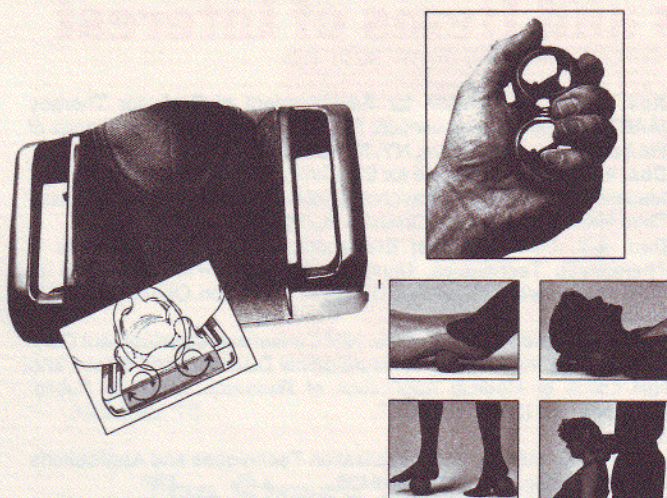
"The natural role of the twentieth-century man is anxiety."

Norman Mailer

Goals for the 21st Century

The recent U.S. Public Health Service goals for the year 2000 emphasized the important need for more expanded stress-reduction services. However, when *U.S. News and World Report* asked almost 200,000 college freshmen what they considered to be their most important goal, the leading answer was "being wealthy." Next in order of importance were: 1) raising a family, 2) being an expert in their field, 3) helping the less fortunate, 4) developing a philosophy of life, 5) promoting racial understanding, 6) cleaning up the environment and 7) creating artistic work.

A.F., Vol. 43, No. 6, p. 1914.



Oriental Stress Reducing Devices

Shiatsu therapy is hundreds of years old. It involves a circular, kneading massage applied to different parts of the body by someone skilled in the practice. Acupressure is another ancient Chinese technique used to reduce pain and stress by pressure stimulation of very specific body areas that correspond to acupuncture sites. Another traditional Oriental stress-reduction approach are "worry" stones and beads. These are various-sized smooth, odd-shaped stones that are held in the hand and constantly massaged or stroked during times of stress to relieve tension.

Entrepreneurs are increasingly anxious to cash in on these ancient remedies. For \$200.00, you can get your own personal, motor-powered shiatsu massager. Its Teflon-coated "massage nodes" are used to "pinpoint and relieve deep strains and tension." They can be adjusted to suit different areas of the body. Just lie face down, and have your partner begin the massage by straddling the nodes across the base of the spine and then slowly "walk up and down the back." Or you can simply prop it up against a chair, lean back, and "let it renew the natural harmony of your body and mind." Or, for less than \$30.00, it is now possible to purchase two beautifully hand-crafted 45 mm. polished chrome balls. These are allegedly similar to the Chinese exercise balls that Mandarins used 800 years ago. The manufacturer claims that "rotating the balls in the palm of each hand stimulates the fingers and acupuncture points, improving the circulation and vital energy throughout the body. They emit a distantly mysterious chime, making them effective in relaxation and meditation."

For those with a still smaller budget, \$16.00 will buy you some washable, vinyl "goosebumps." These 3-1/2" spheres look like golf balls, but instead of having dimples, some 186 massaging nodes protrude from the surface. These are also designed to "relax tense muscles and stimulate acupuncture pressure points by rolling them over your neck, shoulders, back, buttocks, thighs, calves, and even the soles of your feet." According to the advertisement, "your own weight provides all the pressure needed for a deep, soothing massage. Just go slow and soon you will be, yes, actually smiling."

Sharper Image, Lifestyle Resource catalogs.

"Work is the greatest thing in the world, so we should always save some of it for tomorrow."

— Don Herold

Job Stress Due to Incompetent Bosses

According to two researchers, at least 60 percent of working Americans are dissatisfied with their bosses. Their survey revealed that almost all employed adults had worked at least once for a boss they couldn't stand. In many instances, this is because many individuals are often promoted to management levels without any special training or consideration with respect to their ability to handle people. In other cases, executives are hired "on the basis of their charm, not on the basis of competence or talent . . . interviews focus on what people are like at their best, but ignore what people are like at their worst." Unfortunately, incompetent bosses are often popular with their superiors and peers, simply because they work harder to gain their friendship and respect, than those working under them. Subordinates need to be given more opportunity to rate their superiors. They are usually more apt to be aware of unethical or unfair ways in which they are being treated and evaluated. These findings did not appear to vary with either occupation, or geographical location.

New Sense Bulletin, September 1991

"It is not the crook in modern business that we fear but the honest man who does not know what he is doing."

— Owen D. Young

Book Reviews • Meetings and Items of Interest

Guilt Is the Teacher, Love Is the Lesson. Borysenko, J., Warner Books, Inc., New York 1991, 239 pp., \$10.95 (softcover).

This is a well written book that should have great appeal for health professionals as well as the general public. Its important message is culled from the author's insight into her personal experiences, as well as her professional activities as a therapist. What distinguishes it from other "self-help" offerings is a rare blend of science, philosophy, religion and spirituality, that combines age old wisdom and observations that are supported by new scientific discoveries. Emphasis is placed on "unhealthy guilt," particularly as it affects contemporary women and their relationships to others. Some of the common manifestations of this are making too many commitments to others, not putting aside adequate personal time for yourself, establishing unrealistic goals and pursuing them in a perfectionistic fashion, and the deep-seated fear that you are basically a very selfish person. Advice on how to deal with this is attractively presented, both in terms of personal experiences and patient reports. The final chapter lists a variety of techniques and resources to provide further assistance and growth in special areas of interest. Highly recommended.

Meetings and Items of Interest

Nov. 16-19, Southern Medical Association, 85th Annual Scientific Assembly, Atlanta, GA (800) 423-4992.

Nov. 20-21, Seminar on ELF and VLF Magnetic and Electrostatic/Electric Fields, Ergonomics, Inc., Orlando, FL (215) 357-5124.

Nov. 22-24, The Psychiatric Interview, Univ. of Chicago School of Medicine, Chicago, IL, 312-702-1056.

Nov. 21-24, Association for Advancement of Behavior Therapy (AABT) 25th Annual convention: Sessions will cover a broad range of the behavioral perspective, NY, NY (212) 279-7970.

Dec. 4-7, National Institute for the Clinical Application of Behavioral Medicine (NICABM): The Psychology of Health, Immunity and Disease Third National Conference Orlando, FL (203) 429-2238.

Dec. 4-7, Gastrointestinal Endoscopy: Update on Diagnostic & Therapeutic Techniques, University of South Florida College of Medicine Division of Digestive Diseases & Nutrition, Orlando, FL (813) 974-2034.

Dec. 11-13, Acoustic Neuroma, NIH Consensus Development Conference, National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke and NIH Office of Medical Application of Research. Open to Public. Bethesda, MD (301) 468-MEET.

1992

Jan. 17-18, Imagery and Visualization Techniques and Applications AAPD, Houston, TX (303) 422-8436.

Feb. 2-5, Clinical Problems in Gastroenterology IX. Stowe, University of Vermont. Stowe, VT (802) 656-2292.

March 19-24, Association for Applied Psychophysiology and Biofeedback Annual Meeting Colorado Springs, CO (303) 422-8436.

June 14-19, First World Congress for Electricity and Magnetism in Biology & Medicine, Orlando, FL.

Aug. 17-21, Hans Selye Symposia on Neuroimmunology and Stress Advances in Psychoneuroimmunology, Satellite Meeting of the 8th. International Congress, Budapest, Hungary. In North America (204) 788-6320, In Europe 36-1-185-2255.

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