



News & Views

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Stress Reduction: Enforcing Lifestyle Changes vs. Effortless Self-Regulation

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In today's fast-paced society, the issue of stress and its management has undoubtedly become a foremost public health concern. Ironically, many of the methods used to manage and resolve stress (which enforce "lifestyle changes") seem to induce yet even more stress.

Keeping this in mind, Health promotion MPH students from the Loma Linda University School of Public Health in California designed a novel wellness program with the objective to effortlessly counteract stress and anxiety disorders. The program, which was based on the Health Belief Model, was comprised of simple techniques that encourage self-regulation of mind and body behaviors, promoting homeostasis (equilibrium) in lieu of enforcing lifestyle changes. Methods used included exercise physiology comprising of respiration control (6 different types of breathing rhythms), sun salutation postures (dynamic yoga postures that are known to regulate biologic drives such as hunger and thirst as well as increase energy levels and zest), endurance/resistance training, and nutrition therapy. Implementation and compliance to these techniques were made through cognitive restructuring methods. A new standard (consisting of a relaxed and still state of mind) was set for the mind and body, and participants were trained to become observant of this state of being. Any discrepancies from this new standard (stress/indulgence, turbulence, etc.) were observed. Self-regulation into the set standard was triggered through incompatible response. For example, if your biologic response to any stress (including over-eating food) is anxiety or restlessness, you apply a behavior that is "incompatible" to this undesired behavior, which is "stillness."

The stress reduction program is a two week program (six sessions, three times a week) or a one month program (eight sessions, two times a week). This program has been successfully implemented for students, faculty, staff, and their families and friends at Loma Linda University. It has also been implemented at Beaver Medical group in Redlands, California for their patients, doctors, and paramedical and non-medical staff.

Research was conducted on mental health parameters to validate the efficacy of the program. Overall, participants felt a significant reduction ($p < .001$) in anxiety, depression, and cognitive disorganization, while their performance and vigor increased considerably ($P < .001$). Indeed, preliminary data indicate promise for commencing this wellness program in schools and workplace as an efficient, easy, and adherence-friendly health promotion approach to reduce daily stress, anxiety disorders and increase work performance.

The program is an ongoing program and can be implemented through Loma Linda University School of Public Health in California. It offers stress reduction, weight loss, and preventive care strategies for any target population (all age groups, gender and professions) afflicted with stress, overweight and anxiety disorders. For more details, please check the website, www.wellnesshomeostasis.com.

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