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STRESSBUSTERS IV: Time to Get Physical

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The very core of *Corporate Clinic's* "Stressbusters Series" can be summed up in three words: STRESS, STOP, GO! We have exposed the nature of stress, as well as the infinite avenues for entry of stress into your life. You have learned to stop and seize precious moments during your busy day, and to relax and interrupt the cumulative physical and mental buildup of the stress cycle. Now, it is time to take action by integrating physical activity into your own stress management routine.

THE VALUE OF EXERCISE

Your body produces chemicals during stress to mobilize your body in a "fight" or "flight" response. Muscles tense and your body is prepared for vigorous or quick activity that seldom takes place through the course of your work day. Structured physical exercise can be an extremely effective method of reducing stress. Plan a time to systematically vent this unanswered instinct for physical action. Researchers have learned that people under stress who work out regularly stay healthier than those who don't. Many businesses have recognized the value of exercise and have installed gyms and running tracks for the benefit of their employees. Another approach, which has certainly become more popular, is to offer staff members fitness club memberships – or, possibly offer to pay 50 percent.

Exercise provides a physical release of the effects of stress, and when this is accomplished that has a relaxing or calming effect on the body. Enjoyable exercise, as well as other hobbies, can provide a diversion from the stresses of the day plus provide personal fulfillment. Dr. Herbert A. DeVries, director of physiology at the Exercise Research Laboratory, University of California, has shown that even mild rhythmic exercise, such as regular walking or cycling, can be more effective in stress control than tranquilizers, without the adverse side-effects of these drugs.

SMART SELECTION

Be sure you choose exercise activities you find enjoyable and beneficial, or you will feel forced to do them. This may not only cause you to stress, but you will find excuses to delay, postpone, or quit. You must regularly and consistently exercise for maximum benefit. Feel good about giving your body what it needs!

Laughter/Humor

Laughter can have tremendous therapeutic value. Laughing at jokes, at life, and at yourself can serve to put your stresses into perspective. Laughter, like vigorous exercise, not only satisfies emotional or mental needs, but it also seems to create positive chemical changes in the body that promote health and well-being. It's bound to make you feel better. Norman Cousins, famous author and editor, used laughter that he described as "internal jogging" to help cure a stressful "incurable disease." His book, *Anatomy of an Illness*, may provide you with some enlightening insights.

Hobbies/Leisure Activities

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Hobbies also provide an important diversion from stress. We live in a marvelous time in history in which we can take advantage of many pleasurable activities. Choose hobbies you enjoy, that won't add to or compound stress on your mind or your body. Take advantage of whatever brings you pleasure, including music, movies, dancing, or any other activity which interests you, relaxes you, and refurbishes your mind.

REQUIREMENTS OF EXERCISE

The exercise techniques that you choose should fulfill several basic body needs. The first is flexibility. Your exercise should move your joints through their normal motions safely and adequately. This concept holds true for general stretching before, during, and after work, as well as warming up and cooling down from more vigorous activities such as aerobic dancing. Next is strength development. Your exercise should stretch, challenge, and strengthen your muscles. You use many muscles in your daily activities, but some are used more than others. All of your muscles need to be used regularly, whether in work or exercise activities.

Your exercise should condition your body because you sit a great deal of the time at work and probably do not move about vigorously. You need to choose among the exercises that help strengthen the heart, diaphragm, and lungs. Aerobic dancing, bicycling, jogging, swimming, racquetball, tennis, squash, brisk walking, and many other vigorous activities, when done properly, can boost and sustain the heartbeat rate, make you breathe deeply, and make you perspire. They help your body utilize oxygen more fully, improve blood cholesterol balance, lower blood pressure, aid in weight control, and help relieve stress and depression.

Finally, your exercise should promote balance and alignment. The exercise programs you use should counteract the effects of long-term sitting and promote equal use of both sides of your body. It should counteract the tension you may feel in your shoulders, arms, neck, back, or legs. Remember: one of the major ways to counteract the detrimental effects of a stressful job is to vent the energy and tension that builds up within your body...by getting physical.