



National Wellness Institute Members

# Ask the EXPERTS

An e-publication of the National Wellness Institute

Vol. 2 No. 2

## on... Managing Stress and Achieving Balance

### Meet the Expert



**Brian Luke Seaward, PhD**

**Brian Luke Seaward, PhD**, is Executive Director, Inspiration Unlimited and The Paramount Wellness Institute, Boulder, CO. He is an internationally recognized expert and respected pioneer in the field of holistic stress management. He is the renowned author of *Managing Stress: Principles & Strategies for Health and Well-being*, *Stressed is Desserts Spelled Backwards*, *The Art of Calm*, *Stand Like Mountain*, *Flow Like Water*, and his latest book, *Quiet Mind, Fearless Heart: The Taoist Path Through Stress and Spirituality*.

As Executive Director of Inspiration Unlimited and The Paramount Wellness Institute, Dr. Seaward does consulting in health promotion and wellness providing information for both personal development and professional training. He conducts a variety of educational programs on stress management, as well as other wellness topics. He also serves on the faculty of the University of Northern Colorado-Greeley. For more information, please visit his website [www.brianlukeseaward.net](http://www.brianlukeseaward.net).

### Special Note to NWI Members from Brian Luke Seaward

Hi Everyone!

First, I wish to say that it was fun doing this Q&A session, very time consuming, but fun. Thanks for all your questions! Despite being an author of several books on managing stress, I am far from an expert in this massive field. Stress management is so encompassing that I have yet to meet an expert, just a lot of passionate souls trying to make the world a better place. For this reason, I don't claim to have a monopoly on the answers, so please, seek out other sources if you want another perspective. I won't be offended.

For those who may not be familiar with my work, my perspective on the topic of stress management is holistic in nature—the integration, balance and harmony of mind, body, spirit and emotions. I do not, repeat, do not subscribe to or endorse the bio-medical (reductionistic) model of health and health care.

**The information provided in this edition of *Ask the Experts* and a WHOLE lot more are included in my 2005 National Wellness Conference's [Holistic Stress Management Training Certificate Training Program](#), July 11-13. For more information, call (800) 243-8694.**

Finally, to repeat the words of Mark Twain, "Be careful when you read a health book (or this collection of answers)...you might die from a typo."

Best wishes,

**Brian "Luke" Seaward, Ph.D.**

## Special Note to NWI Members

In our fast-paced, stress-charged world, helping others reduce their stress and also reduce the causes of stress are major challenges for health and wellness promotion professionals. There is growing evidence that a large percentage of disease and illness is stress related.

In this edition of *Ask the Experts*, the National Wellness Institute is pleased to have internationally recognized authority on stress management and renowned author Brian Luke Seaward, PhD, answer NWI members' questions on managing stress. Dr. Seaward is a much sought-after speaker, workshop leader, and consultant on stress management and other wellness topics.

**Thank you to Brian Luke Seaward** for sharing his expertise with NWI members on this very important wellness topic.

**Thank you to all the NWI members** who submitted questions on a variety of issues in managing stress that generated the informative discussion that follows.

Anne Helmke  
Member Services Team Leader  
National Wellness Institute

### Seaward to Lead Holistic Stress Management Training Certificate Program, July 11-13, 2005 at National Wellness Conference

Brian Luke Seaward, PhD, will facilitate the [Certificate Program on Holistic Stress Management Training](#) for practitioners July 11-13, 2005 at the 30<sup>th</sup> Annual National Wellness Conference at the University of Wisconsin-Stevens Point Campus.

Participants will learn how to teach, direct, and facilitate quality presentations and workshops on holistic stress management. The focus of this certificate program honors the integration, balance and harmony of mind, body, spirit, and emotions for optimal well-being.

For more information or to register, see website <http://www.nationalwellness.org/> or call the National Wellness Institute at (800) 243-8694.

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## What is Stress and Its Signs?

### Q1.

**NWI MEMBER:** What is your definition of stress? (Why isn't there a standard, accepted definition for stress? Why so many different definitions?)

**BRIAN LUKE SEAWARD:** Perhaps the reason why there are so many different definitions of stress is that stress knows no demographic boundaries. As I often say, "Stress is the equal opportunity destroyer." When one considers all the different disciplines of study (e. g., physiology, sociology, psychology, physics, theology, anthropology, nursing, medicine, etc.) combined with the fact that, by and large, most people do not look (or study) outside their own discipline, one begins to understand why there are so many definitions. Perhaps we can thank Rene Descartes for that trend in reductionism!

Unlike many people who study things from a reductionistic (exclusive) background, my background and focus is a holistic (inclusive) one. As such, my working definition of stress (and I make no claims that it is the best, just a more holistic one) goes like this: Stress is a perceived threat (real or imagined) to one's mind, body, spirit or emotions.

### Q2.

**NWI MEMBER:** What are the telltale signs you are under stress?

**SEAWARD:** The telltale signs for stress may vary from person to person. It could be rudeness, sarcasm, anger, impatience, road rage, prolonged grieving, denial, lack of faith, loss of appetite, boredom, bulimia, and perhaps a thousand other behaviors. The Western-trained mind tends to think of signs of stress in physical terms such as headaches, stomach cramps, migraines, back pain or constipation. While these are certainly signs and symptoms of stress, I come from the school of thought that the body is the last place these signs show up, rather than the first place.

Keep in mind that some people express their levels of stress with the first signs of rain, while others (more stoic in nature) never let on to stress, yet ultimately things may manifest in the body of each of these types of individuals. So what are the telltale signs of stress, you ask? Hard one to answer, because everyone is so different (perhaps you have noticed!). Let's take anger (the FIGHT of "fight or flight"). There are thought to be four distinct styles of mismanaged anger. In the interest of time, I cannot go into great detail here, but

they range from the somatizer, one who never expresses anger to the exploder, one who makes headline news going ballistic.

### Q3.

**NWI MEMBER:** What is missing in a life engulfed by stress?

**Seaward:** In a word, BALANCE! The biggest problem I see today in terms of stress is poor boundaries. For example, people who take their work home, people who bring their personal problems to work, finances (we have a population with HUGE credit card debt and no savings), nutritional boundaries, relationship boundary issues. The list is endless. To be quite blunt, things are out of balance.

We have become a nation of spoiled brats who want everything ON DEMAND and get irate when things don't happen immediately. Perhaps you have noticed.

To answer this question from a different perspective, what is missing is a "domesticated" ego. With issues of unresolved stress (prolonged anger or fear) somewhere lurking behind the scenes is a control issue put in play by the ego. A domesticated ego is one where the focus shifts from control to empowerment, from reaction to response.

## Good Stress and Bad Stress

### Q4.

**NWI MEMBER:** How can we get people to stop looking at stress as such a solitary problem to be avoided at all costs, and start looking at it as a source of energy and motivation to grow personally and to then help others, and the community?

**SEAWARD:** Good question! As viewed from the Yerkes-Dotson hypothesis, too little stress (as expressed through boredom) can be as problematic as too much stress (completely overwhelmed). The answer is balance.

Good stress never really makes the headlines (because fear, not love, is what sells products on television). Perhaps it comes down to semantics. Take Lance Armstrong, for example. There is certainly huge stress in preparing and competing in the Tour de France, yet you never hear Lance complain about it. He is someone who has taken, what some people call the Taoist attitude: Where there is challenge, lies opportunity.

Your questions also speak to the nature of looking outside oneself to see the bigger picture. Stated differently, How does one stop seeing oneself as victim, and instead a victor, or hero, where once returning from the hero's journey (see the work of Joseph Campbell), one shares with one's community what one learned along the way?

I wish I had a better answer for you. Until people can see beyond their own issues and problems, I have little hope in them seeing the needs of others. Maslow addressed this in his hierarchy of needs, where until the safety needs are met, the issues of altruism are never met.

We are living in a time of great fear right now, where everyone is ducking for shelter (metaphorically speaking) to address personal safety issues. How can you get people to stop fixating on their personal stress? Sometimes it takes a hero to tell their story to wake people up to realize they actually have it pretty good (and they, too, can make it!). There are lots of unsung heroes around; cancer survivors are my favorite.

## Q5.

**NWI MEMBER:** Are there such things as "good stress" and "bad stress"?

**SEAWARD:** You know, when I taught my first college stress management course (1981), I addressed the topic of good stress and bad stress the very first day of class. A student asked to give an example of good stress, and I was a little caught off guard at first, because in all my studies, I have never come across one. So I looked the student straight in the eye and said, "Falling in love." Since that day, I have accrued a few more examples, but they all can be summarized by saying that anything that makes you feel exhilarated, motivated or euphoric. Going to a rock concert, standing on top of a Colorado mountain peak, having lunch with Jane Goodall, eating creamy chocolate, making love; these all constitute examples, albeit personal, of good stress. No doubt your experiences may differ, but the feelings of euphoria should be the same.

Bad stress can best be defined in terms of acute (intense but short lived) and chronic (no where near as intense, but lasts days, weeks, months, years even decades). Bad stress (also see the definition in the answer to question #1) is any perceived threat (real or imagined) to one's mind, body, spirit or emotions.

Please keep in mind that one person's good stress can be someone else's bad stress. Perception is the key.

## Impact of Stress on Illness and Disease

### Q6.

**NWI MEMBER:** Could you list the studies where you get the figures that 80-85 percent of all disease and illnesses are stress-related?

**SEAWARD:** Actually, at this moment, I cannot list the studies. I can tell you what I have come across in terms of research. Let's start with Edmund Jacobson, M.D., the creator of the progressive muscular relaxation technique. He stated that EVERY patient whom he saw with physical symptoms of disease and illness had stress. He equated emotional stress with muscle tension (and the subsequent maladies that followed). So he set out to find a way to fix it, hence, the origins of PMR.

I first heard the estimate of 80-85 percent presented at the 2<sup>nd</sup> Annual International Society for the Study of Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine (ISSSEEM) Conference, in Boulder, CO, in 1992. On a panel with several healers who participated in a Harvard study (where the results were not published due to bio-medical bias), it was stated that the association between stress and disease was about 80-85 percent. In the course of the conference, this figure, as an estimate came up again and again from healers from around the world.

Years later I had the chance to chat one on one with renowned healer, Carolyn Myss, Ph.D., and when asked, from her personal experience what the association was, she stated point blank, and I quote, "About 100 percent!"

My teacher in bio-energy, renowned healer, Mietek Wirkus, who maintains a 95 percent accuracy rate of predicting physical disease by observing disturbances in the human energy field, also told me the current understanding among researchers in energy medicine is 80-85 percent.

Of course, this begs the question, What gives with the remaining 15-20 percent? Not knowing your spiritual beliefs, I'll refrain from printing this answer in public. You can call or email me if you wish (303-678-9962, [brianlukes@cs.com](mailto:brianlukes@cs.com)).

Consider this: The theory of specific etiology (Pasteur's Germ Theory) suggests that all disease comes from microbes that invade the body. This alone is a form of stress (bio-ecological stress). On top of this we have electromagnetic stress (check out the

unbiased research on cell phone use, power lines, etc.) ultraviolet radiation, etc., and this also constitutes stress. Add to this, environmental toxins from food sources alone (herbicides, pesticides, fungicides, and fertilizers), and this, too, is stress to the body. Not all stress is emotional stress! If you go back to the first question and begin to comprehend that people in various disciplines don't communicate, perhaps Carolyn Myss is right.

You are never going to see designed studies on this issue, because they would never pass the human review board. What we have to go on is case studies. Given the initial work by Hans Selye, M.D., D.Sc., F.R.S., (General Adaptation Syndrome) and the flood of research regarding stress and the immune system (see all studies by Janice Keicolt-Glasser, Ph.D., and Ronald Glasser, Ph.D., for starters—listed at [www.osu.edu/ibmr/keicolt-glaser.htm](http://www.osu.edu/ibmr/keicolt-glaser.htm)), you can begin to connect the dots. Answering these questions between two road trips leaves me a little unprepared, but I think it was Herbert Benson, M.D., (<http://www.mbmi.org/>) who stated that approximately 80 percent of office visits are stress-related.

Please keep in mind that not all research is based on clinically designed double blind studies. Estimates are often based on clinical practice of health care practitioners.

## Q7.

**NWI MEMBER:** The role of stress as a contributor to disease has been debated for many years. Stomach ulcers, long thought to be the direct result of stress were later found to be more directly linked to infection by helicobacter pylori. Controlled studies of the relationship between cancer and stress (can you possibly have the former without the latter?) have found little or no correlation between the two. Arthritis, heart disease, headache, and infectious diseases, however, may be another story, since stress has its own cascading chemistry that seems to have an impact on various systems and on the integrity of the immune system.

**QUESTIONS:** With what particular disease states is stress clearly associated? Has anyone compiled a database of controlled studies that explore (1) the impact of stress on risk factors for infectious and chronic diseases in healthy persons (2) the impact of stress on the incidence of specific diseases, and (3) the impact of stress on chronic and infectious disease outcomes? Having such a resource would be priceless.

**SEAWARD:** From the wording of your statement and questions, it appears to me that you are approaching the stress and disease phenomenon purely from a bio-medical model. I cannot even begin to answer your questions because this is not the paradigm I come from nor have an interest in. I can only suggest that you direct your questions to experts who do support this paradigm or consider a more holistic paradigm. Sorry!

P.S. About 80 percent of the American population is said to have the helicobacter pylori, yet not all of these people have stomach ulcers. And there are people who have stomach ulcers who show no trace of the HP. Something to ponder.

## Q8.

**NWI MEMBER:** What have you seen for research on stress and rheumatoid arthritis?

**SEAWARD:** Again, the research I have come across is based on case studies from energy healers. Rheumatoid arthritis, like lupus, chronic fatigue syndrome and many other diseases of this nature is classified as an overactive immune system where the body literally attacks the body. Energy healers and energy psychology practitioners state that these diseases are highly associated with unresolved anger issues. When latent (or even obvious) anger issues are addressed, symptoms of the diseases go into remission.

## Q9.

**NWI MEMBER:** There are many physical manifestations of stress that are misinterpreted as illness. Is there an easy way to determine if those physical symptoms are caused by stress or by some other malady?

**SEAWARD:** I am not sure what you mean by your question. Perhaps I need an example to clarify your question. Since this format does not allow a standard dialogue, please consider contacting me directly ([brianlukes@cs.com](mailto:brianlukes@cs.com)). Perhaps then I can give you a better answer. Sorry.

## Q10.

**NWI MEMBER:** Do you believe that cancer can be stress induced?

**SEAWARD:** In a word, yes! But keep in mind that stress is more than emotional stress (please read previous answers). Also, cancer is such a complex disease with so many causes, it would be foolish to state that stress is the sole cause or catalyst.

I agree with Louis Pasteur's nemesis, Claude Bernard, who stated that when the body is out of homeostasis for a prolonged period, the stage is set for disease (any disease) to take place. Stress (of any kind, but certainly emotional stress) can certainly throw one out of physiological homeostasis.

The research is quite conclusive that prolonged levels of cortisol and other stress hormones and neuropeptides (THE STRESS COCTAIL) have a negative effect on the immune system, causing immunosuppression. I am not sure I would use the word "induced" but in essence, yes! And not just cancer either.

## Q11.

**NWI MEMBER:** Do you have a "layman's" version of showing the growing evidence of how stress is the root cause of the many health conditions today? We are always looking for ways to deliver this information at the individual and organizational levels.

**SEAWARD:** When I give presentations I hit rather heavy with facts of the fight or flight response: catecholamines, stress hormones, cortisol, immunosuppression, etc.

## Impact of Stress on Weight Gain and Obesity

## Q12.

**NWI MEMBER:** Is there a direct connection between major stress (distress) and a person's weight gain, particularly in the midsection?

**SEAWARD:** Current research (try a Google search) on cortisol and weight gain suggests that indeed there is a direct connection. There is also some new research about adrenal fatigue and weight gain (consider reading books by Dr. Diana Schwarzbein).

Here is something you won't see in the literature about weight gain, but is certainly a factor to reckon with—Air conditioning was developed in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century and was quickly adapted in the movie theaters to help people cool off during the summer flicks. Soon came AC into homes, cars and the workplace to where it has become a seemingly essential part of our lives, including restaurants where so many Americans eat these days. (...Time to connect the dots!). The hypothalamus (center of your brain) controls body core temperature. The hypothalamus also controls appetite. AND the hypothalamus with the amygdala controls or

is associated with stress (fear and anger). It is a well-known fact that when the ambient temperature outside increases, appetite decreases. It is also noted that more anger-related crimes occur in the summer (when it's hot) than in the winter.

Check out the temperatures in restaurants these days. You need a coat or sweater to feel comfortable, in most cases. These people know this, because they know appetites increase with cooler ambient temperatures. Bigger appetites mean larger profits. Do you see where this is leading? Something to think about, huh?

## Q13.

**NWI MEMBER:** I have been hearing some discussion on the relationship between stress and depression and the "obesity epidemic." What is your opinion on this? Does it have any merit in recent and past research?

**SEAWARD:** I am neither an expert on the obesity issue, nor depression for that matter. But I do know something about anger and the manifestations thereof. Of the four styles of mismanaged anger, one is called the self-punisher. This style of mismanaged anger manifests in obsessive-compulsive behavior, the most common of which is overeating (other examples include sleeping, exercise, sex and cutting self-mutilation). Food is a natural pacifier (even from day one). For some people food is a way to deal with anger issues that transform into guilt. Stress tends to make one eat foods high in CHO's [carbohydrates] for energy in the event one decides to fight or flee. There is a complex relationship between simple sugars and the chemicals released in the brain (serotonin, melatonin, dopamine, and perhaps more that we are unaware of at this time).

There is a great book called *Food and Mood* by Elizabeth Sommers which highlights the association between the food and emotional processing. I highly recommend it. I think she also has a new cookbook to go with it.

I am not familiar with all the research on obesity and depression, but you don't need to be Freud to figure that one out.

On a related note, I highly recommend using the treatment of classical (five-element) acupuncture for the treatment of stress, depression and weight control.

## **Engaging People to Recognize and Manage Their Stress**

### **Q14.**

**NWI MEMBER:** Many people know they need help managing stress, but they want the quick fix, and not take the time that is needed to practice the skills and learn the tools. How do you convince them otherwise?

**SEAWARD:** Buy them a cemetery plot or a cremation urn. Sorry, I thought a little black humor was called for. Personally, I don't try to convince anybody of anything. There are no quick fixes for stress, and skills take time to practice to achieve a sense of mastery. You cannot live someone else's life for them, no matter how much you may love them.

Sadly, more men than women have a less than exemplar view of their personal health, and I am guessing that hidden in your question lies the male dilemma. The best way to turn somebody off to inner peace is to become a stress management fanatic.

Personally, I think the best way to turn them on is by example. Invite them to meditate with you. Invite them to exercise with you, etc. Just like people are addicted to alcohol and drugs, many people (and the number is growing) are addicted to adrenaline. To the best of my knowledge there are no 30-day programs for stress addicts (hey, what a great idea!).

Usually human behavior is such that people don't seek help till they hit rock bottom, or are moving light speed in that direction. I guess the best you can do is be there for them if they are family, and if you are working/designing wellness programs with a stress focus, consider reframing stress as an addiction that needs attention. Good luck. Keep me posted.

### **Q15.**

**NWI MEMBER:** We've used the words "stress management " for so long, its almost an invisible phrase....we try to use "catchy" titles to get people to come to programs, yet sometimes those titles don't really say what we want them to. Many articles will also tell you there is no such thing anymore as "good" stress. So what are the best terms to use to title a class/course and get people to pay attention and come?

**SEAWARD:** Good question. I think it behooves us as health promotion practitioners to remain on the vanguard of creativity in titling course descriptions and

course content. You are right! Just as news of murders tend to be pushed back to Section B of the local papers, stress is so ubiquitous, as a culture, we have become numb to it. There are so many ways to enhance your programming with a stress focus, time doesn't permit to explain them all. (The National Wellness Institute does offer a certificate program in [Holistic Stress Management Instruction](#) during their National Wellness Conference.)

Phooey on the articles that say there is no such thing as good stress anymore. Remember the moral of Michael Moore's movie, *Bowling for Columbine* (which I highly recommend)—fear sells advertising products. I haven't seen the articles you mention, but I am guessing that this may be a marketing ploy to get people to buy magazines and read their articles. Also remember... we are living in a fear-based culture now (perhaps always, but clearly now more than ever before). As Morey stated (and I am paraphrasing), in *Tuesdays With Morey*, "If you don't like the culture you're in, create your own culture!"

### **Q16.**

**NWI MEMBER:** How do you help someone to realize that their stress level is too high, when they don't see it?

**SEAWARD:** In the AA model of recovery, you sit this person down with several loved ones and diplomatically confront them—in a non-threatening way. Also remember, some people use stress to validate their existence. They need to feel busy (to the MAX) to feel needed/accepted. It's that ego thing I mentioned in one of the earlier questions. Others use stress as a means to control themselves or others (also ego driven). Please also read the answer to question #14.

### **Q17.**

**NWI MEMBER:** How do you get individuals to attend a stress management workshop when they do not even recognize that they are stressed (Precontemplators)?

**SEAWARD:** Offer a class/course for pre-contemplators? (Please see answers to questions #14-16).

**Q18.**

**NWI MEMBER:** What other terminology do you use other than "STRESS" to attract people to your presentations/workshops.

**SEAWARD:** OK, time to think outside the box here. Stress is such a huge topic, that you might wish to offer courses in some of the many subtopics. Here are some suggestions based on talks I have given:

- Comic Relief: The Healing Power of Humor
- By Jove, I've got it: The Creative Problem-Solving Process
- 10 Secrets to Inner Peace
- The Art of Calm: Relaxation Through the Five Senses.
- Forgiveness: The Art of Letting Go
- Nirvana on 5 Dollars a Day
- Stressed is Desserts Spelled Backward
- 10 Must See DVDs Before the Rapture (just kidding)
- Stress, Disease and the Human Energy field
- Keep out: Establishing Healthy Boundaries for life
- 10 Ways to Boost Your Immune System
- The Art of Resiliency
- Ten Tips for the Financially Challenged Individual
- Joseph Campbell and the Hero's Journey
- Insomnia and You!
- Adrenal Fatigue and Menopause

**Q19.**

**NWI MEMBER:** When developing worksite health promotion programs on stress, what is your strategy for engaging individuals? Group sessions, individual? Should the program be a series (example: 6-8 weeks) or a one-time brown bag session?

**SEAWARD:** I would try a variety of methods. There will be people who will come to a brown bag but would never come to a one-on-one session and visa versa. Obviously the more contact you have with participants, the greater the impact for change. Four-week classes work well because they don't appear to be a big time commitment. All-day workshops work well, too, if you can pull this off. Also consider offering some innovative courses (see above). Someone who may not come to an anger-management class, might come to a course on forgiveness.

## General Effective Stress Management Techniques and Tips

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**Q20.**

**NWI MEMBER:** What is needed in order to deal with stress?

**SEAWARD:** This question is really too big (and a bit vague) to address in this format. In simplest terms, what is needed is a big heart, since stress is fear (and anger) generated.

What I would like to suggest is to get your hands on a few good books on stress management and start reading. Start with these: *The Four Agreements*, *Don't Sweat the Small Stuff*, *Love is Letting Go of Fear*, and *Stand Like Mountain, Flow Like Water*

**Q21.**

**NWI MEMBER:** What evidence-based strategies show the greatest promise for helping individuals manage stress?

**SEAWARD:** You ask a loaded question! There is no one technique that works for everyone, and if a study came out and said they found one, I would run in the opposite direction. Human personalities combined with their experiences are so varied in today's world that no one can make a claim for any one technique to hold dominion over the rest.

There are great evidence-based claims for hatha yoga, jogging, swimming, T'ai chi, diaphragmatic breathing, music therapy, and heaps of research on meditation. Take your pick! It's all there for the asking.

The question isn't "what is the best technique out there?" The question is, "What is the best technique for me?" Don't stop looking till you find it. For this reason, when I teach a course in stress management, I offer as wide an array of techniques as possible so that students/participants can find what works best for them.

**Q22.**

**NWI MEMBER:** What different techniques do you use to assist individuals or a group of people to manage stress?

**SEAWARD:** I begin by explaining that to effectively deal with stress one must address the causes and the symptoms of stress. Coping techniques help address



the causes, whereas relaxation techniques help address the symptoms of stress. My approach is to combine both coping and relaxation techniques in each course when I teach. Using a smorgasbord approach, I expose students/participants to as many different types of techniques as possible and let them pick and choose what works best for them, including such favorites as journaling, art therapy, humor therapy, creative problem solving, and resource management

### Q23.

**NWI MEMBER:** What have been your most effective strategies with helping someone work through relapse?

**SEAWARD:** I don't have a private practice anymore (I did for a brief time back in 1993), and I never worked with people in recovery. I do have friends and colleagues who emphatically proclaim that meditation was the best thing they ever did in the recovery process. There is a wealth of relaxation CD's with a host of guided mental imagery tracks on them. I would start *Letting Go of Stress* by Emmett Miller, MD, and then add any of the CDs by Belleruth Naparstek, MA, LISW, BCD. I have some, too, if you are interested ([www.brianlukeseaward.net](http://www.brianlukeseaward.net)).

## Stress and Time Management

### Q24.

**NWI MEMBER:** How can stress reduction techniques be implemented when the biggest cause of stress is lack of time to get anything done?

**SEAWARD:** Humm! Sounds like we are talking priorities here. We are also talking healthy boundaries or lack thereof. I agree—all of the best advice on stress management in the world, won't make a bit of difference if one doesn't make time to practice it. Like Yoda said to young Luke Skywalker, "Practice, you must!"

I suggest evaluating your typical day and see what can be tossed overboard. Start re-prioritizing your life. Typically, for the average American, this means engaging in the rules of subtraction. Start by getting rid of your TV and see how much time that frees up. This question reminds me of an ad I saw in Vermont: Ignore your teeth and they'll go away. The same can be said about our health.

## Spiritual Health and Managing Stress

### Q25.

**NWI MEMBER:** What type of research is available to show that spiritual health plays a significant role in the management of stress?

**SEAWARD:** Sadly, there is no research on this topic. There is some research on religion and health and some research masquerading as spirituality and health, but it's really religiosity and health. I was involved with an NIH group on this topic, and the consensus was we cannot measure spirituality, so we will stick with religion. At that point, I got up and walked out. The topic of spirituality is quite inclusive, to say the least. If you are really looking for research, consider doing a Google search on these topics:

- Creativity and health/stress
- Humor and health/stress
- Purpose in life and stress

### Q26.

**NWI MEMBER:** I just finished reading your book *Stand Like Mountain, Flow Like Water* for a second time. Since spirituality can play such an integral role with stress, how do you approach getting in touch with your spiritual side in the workplace? It's a difficult balance to introduce spirituality without staff thinking it is too new age or linked to religious concepts.

**SEAWARD:** First of all, thanks for reading my book (oh, you were the one!) Yes! I agree, spirituality plays a pivotal role in health, Big Time! Remember, spirituality is a lot more subtle than it is dynamic, and the same can be said for how it is incorporated into wellness programming. You can address many, if not all, the issues of human spirituality and spiritual well-being and never once use the word, spirituality. Here are some examples of topics for programs/presentations:

- Forgiveness as part of anger management
- Creative anger management with a focus on forgiveness.
- Humor as a coping technique
- Creative problem solving
- Journaling
- Healthy grieving
- Dream interpretation
- Importance of hobbies
- Meditation (or centering)

Without sounding like a commercial, I spend a lot of time on this very topic in the Holistic Stress Management Instructor Certificate Program at the National Wellness Conference.

## Tools and Resources for Stress Management

### Q27.

**NWI MEMBER:** I work in a corporate wellness setting, and we just instituted a health coaching program for employees returning to work. Since many of them cite stress as a leading factor in managing their health, do you have a recommended assessment for determining root causes? Is there a good web-based assessment?

**SEAWARD:** I am sure there are some good assessments, but honestly, I cannot recommend any offhand right now. The root causes of stress are fear-based issues (and the mirror side, anger-based issues). In simplest terms (which may lose something in the watering down process), all of these come down to ego issues and the lack of control (control issues). I have yet to see a good survey or assessment that deals with these aspects that I have addressed. Most assessments are 20-40 questions that basically skirt around the core aspects of stress. I tend to think that the best assessment is a yes or no question: ARE YOU STRESSED?

### Q28.

**NWI MEMBER:** What is the single most effective tool for managing or coping with stress?

**SEAWARD:** Sorry, but there is no one most effective tool for managing or coping with stress. The reason for this is that everyone is so different (personalities, work schedules, lifestyles, age, etc.). There is no one-size-fits-all technique or skill that works for everyone all the time.

Perhaps the one technique that comes close is diaphragmatic breathing (and that is because everyone knows how to breath anyway). This is just a refinement of this basic biological process.

There are those who say that meditation is a close second, and for the most part, I would HIGHLY recommend this technique for everyone. In this day and age of information overload, people need to unload from the barrage and assault of sensory stimulus Americans receive on a daily basis.

I also strongly advocate cardiovascular rhythmical exercise. Not only is there a great psychological benefit, but the physiological benefits are beyond substantiated. As a side note, consider combing through the book section of any bookstore on the topic of cardiovascular exercise. What was once a booming area of interest (mostly because of the epidemic of heart disease and the work of Ken Cooper) has faded from sight. We kind of got off track with aerobic exercise and the whole weight-loss issue. I advocate aerobic exercise as a means to flush out the build-up of stress hormones that over time can cause real damage to the body.

Kenneth Pelletier, Ph.D., in his book *The Best of Alternative Medicine: What Works? What Does Not?* says that of the 600 or so modalities of CAM, physical exercise is the most well researched and well documented for maintaining health and homeostasis. One of the early documented benefits of aerobic exercise is less stress and greater relaxation effect.

### Q29.

**NWI MEMBER:** Is there any type of "biofeedback-type" mechanism that you wear that will give you some type of signal say every 15 minutes or so to remind you to breath deeply or relax your shoulders? I find that my tension headaches turn into migraines, and I THINK it's partially due to the fact that I don't relax!

**SEAWARD:** I am not aware of any type of biofeedback device that does this, but perhaps when National Wellness Institute members read this document someone can respond to your question. I can point out a company that offers many types of items ([www.stressstop.com](http://www.stressstop.com)), and perhaps you can contact them.

Some people place bio-dots on their skin, or even watch (or some place they can see them regularly) to remind them to adopt a healthy behavior like belly breathing or such.

Keep in mind, that in the mind-body-spirit continuum, migraine headaches are associated with unresolved anger issues. Muscle tension is simply a symptom of a deeper issue yet to be resolved.

While I am at it, have you heard of the herb, feverfew? I am told this is a good herb to take for migraines. Also you might wish to consider a session or two of Classical (5-element) acupuncture (not TCM). Both modalities I suggested work at the energetic levels to help bring homeostasis to mind-body-spirit. And finally, biofeedback machines help us by reminding us to align

our mind and body together for the best outcome. Since you mentioned that you are stressed, taking time each day to relax might seem like a great idea.

### Q30.

**NWI MEMBER:** Is there a good tool to use in worksite health for a practitioner to follow to determine the action steps for someone who wants to address stress? For instance, if a person wants to change two or more behaviors such as smoking cessation and stress management, how do you recommend the practitioner advise on the change process and timeline?

**SEAWARD:** I advocate the one-behavior-at-a-time behavior change model. If a person tries to make too many changes at once (e.g., quit smoking, give up diet coke, start a walking program, etc.), then usually what we see is a failure to comply with these changes within a two-week period. Too much change at one time tends to backfire.

The method I have seen become most effective is a cognitive therapy approach where a strong base of attitude and belief systems are diplomatically challenged and restructured before a change is implemented, followed by a 6-8 week period of implementing the change so that it becomes over time second nature. Granted this process is slower, but we often see sustained results. People tend to want immediate results (the key phrase now is ON DEMAND). It just isn't going to happen.

I am also a strong supporter of a strong social support system (e.g. family friends, colleagues, etc.). This is one reason why programs like AA are so successful.

### Q31.

**NWI MEMBER:** What, in your opinion, are the best websites out there today on managing stress?

**SEAWARD:** Boy, this question is like asking what is your favorite food? At best, best is a qualitative word. Is it information you are looking for? Is it inspiration? Is it mind-challenging theories? Or is it something that supports an already existing belief system. Or perhaps is it all of these things? I have yet to find one website that addresses all of these aspects, but then again, that is the beauty of searching the web, the ability to explore and see what's out there.

Personally, I like information that tends to expand my consciousness. For this reason, I am a big fan of the Institute of Noetic Sciences website, [www.noetic.org](http://www.noetic.org). I also think that the Institute of HeartMath

([www.heartmath.org/](http://www.heartmath.org/)) has a great website which lists its current research topics. I like Donna Eden's website about energy medicine ([www.innersource.com](http://www.innersource.com)). Those are the ones that come to mind at the moment.

### Q32.

**NWI MEMBER:** How do you feel about the SMART goal process? Do you have any data that supports the successful use of this type of intervention?

**SEAWARD:** I am going to plead ignorance here and tell you that I am unfamiliar with the SMART goal program (although I intend to look it up now that you have made me aware of it.)

## Employee Stress Management in Today's Stress-Charged Worksites Stress Management Programming for Worksites

### Q33.

**NWI MEMBER:** The workplace, regardless of the type of organization, continues to require employees to work harder and longer to be considered "good" employees. Employers seem to be saying that these conditions are "necessary" to keep organizations afloat. Obviously this situation generates a great deal of stress that seems only to get worse and may have serious and far-reaching consequences. However, we seem to believe that this is the only way to do business. What are your observations and recommendations?

**SEAWARD:** I agree with your assessment. We have a VERY dysfunctional (cancerous) economic system, and I see no signs of it getting better in the near future, save a meteor hitting the planet. More likely, an economic collapse!

For a while I was called in to do stress management programs in Corporate America, right after hundreds of people got laid off. Very toxic environment! I ended up doing a great many presentations on Creative Anger Management. This dynamic stated, the focus (in my humble opinion) seems to be to teach people how to cultivate and utilize their inner resources (humor, optimism, faith, patience, tolerance, etc.).

I am reminded of Victor Frankl's story of survival in the Nazi concentration camp of Auschwitz (and there are those who have made some interesting comparisons to today's workforce). What separated those who lived

from those who were allowed to live, yet died prematurely, was a survival attitude based on a meaningful purpose in life.

I like the idea presented in the book, *Tuesday's With Morrie*, (can you tell I liked this book?) where Morrie said, "Create your own culture!" I do see many people lining up their ducks, taking wing and fleeing the coop to start their businesses. This typically happens when good employees get frustrated and decide not to play the game anymore. Obviously everyone in the workforce cannot simply walk out and start their own business, (but wouldn't that be a statement if it happened?).

I think we need to re-evaluate our values of the keeping up with the Jones' (read the book, *Affluenza*), mass consumption, controlled media and the incredible influence of corporate America on governmental regulations.

But I digress. What was the question? Oh yeah, teach inner resources, as a step to personal liberation.

### Q34.

**NWI MEMBER:** In the corporate world, employees are feeling stressed just to get all of their work done while in many instances worrying about whether their job will be the next to be eliminated. What suggestions do you have for effective programming around stress management when employees are worried about "leaving their desks for too long" for fear of being seen as not working as hard as others? What stress management programs are most effective for the workplace?

**SEAWARD:** You present an interesting dilemma. Any hint of weakness is seen as a vulnerability to job displacement. And this will surely affect course attendance.

Given these dynamics I might consider approaching and marketing wellness classes as "productivity enhancers":

- Creative problem solving
- Humor and health
- Resource (time/money) management

### Q35.

**NWI MEMBER:** In the present-day corporate environment where more productivity is emphasized with fewer employee resources, how can employers assist with improving the increased stress that is felt by their employees--so that health and wellness is maintained and even improved?

**SEAWARD:** I think I have answered this in previous questions, but here is another take on it. People who say they don't have time for exercise or stress breaks are the ones who need it the most. I cannot quote the study offhand (and there may be more than one) that showed people who spend long hours at work tend to show decreased productivity over the course of the day.

The human mind needs to take frequent breaks in the course of a day. Few people can concentrate intently for prolonged periods of time and function at optimal levels. Ironically, the ones who can concentrate are the ones who practice meditation! This would imply that taking exercise and relaxation breaks only serves to benefit not only the individual, but the company that she or he works for. This falls in the category of common sense, but as we all know, common sense is not too common under pressure.

### Q36.

**NWI MEMBER:** What are some key ways employees can manage stress in an environment in which workloads have increased substantially and budget cuts are happening? What can the wellness program here do to facilitate that stress release?

**SEAWARD:** Please see the answers to questions 33-35.

### Q37.

**NWI MEMBER:** Beyond the traditional stress management classes, on-site massage, EAP programs, etc., what have you seen companies do that have been effective in creating a less-stress work environment?

**SEAWARD:** I haven't seen them, but I have heard stories on NPR that companies like Google and some other Silicon Valley companies encourage employees to take time to play during breaks and lunch hour. There are pool tables in the lobby and foosball games elsewhere. The parking lot has multiple basketball courts, etc. The newer generation of young CEO's decided to rebel against the lifestyles their corporate father lived (and died) with. They opted to have a balance of work and play.

Having been in this profession for over 25 years, it's a well-known fact that the culture of the worksite starts from the president/CEO and works its way down to the front line. So the obvious answer would appear to be to sit down with the top person and either persuade or validate the need for health programs.

**Q38.**

**NWI MEMBER:** How can supervisors better manage workforce stress reduction? How can they juggle the extra demands of the job and be helpful to their staff at the same time?

**SEAWARD:** This answer will take more space than I have room for, but let's begin with good communication skills. Be honest with the employees/staff, diplomatic but honest. Also with staff members, give honest, positive strokes. Balance emails with personal contact. Ask staff members about their families, hobbies, etc. In other words, don't just view staff as clones or that is how they will act. (And I think every supervisor should see/rent the movie, *Office Space*.) In terms of what can managers do to deal with their stress? I think I have addressed this in other answers, but perhaps it's worth repeating: Establish and maintain HEALTHY BOUNDARIES!

## **Stress Management Programming for Worksites**

**Q39.**

**NWI MEMBER:** Understanding all the components and varied approaches of stress management, what would you recommend for a comprehensive approach to addressing stress management in the workplace? We have offered two-three hour workshops/trainings on resilience to our employees, but continue to hear requests for the next step. What recommendations would you suggest?

**SEAWARD:** Not really knowing what you have done in terms of programming, from your question, I am going to (naively) assume you've done the common approach, but perhaps not the holistic approach? Please see the first couple of answers. Also consider picking up my book, *Managing Stress: Principles and Strategies*, if you have not already seen it. Believe me, it will take your people beyond the next step. Most people stay clear of the stress and spirituality topic. That would be a good next step.

**Q40.**

**NWI MEMBER:** What stress-related component would be best for trainers to focus on when providing workshops to employees at the worksite—cognitive restructuring, communication skills, positive self-talk? Is there any effective group work to get employees to actually DO the suggested techniques?

**SEAWARD:** This is a great question, but the answer would take the entire *Ask the Experts* pages I have written. There are a series of lesson plans used in conjunction with the Holistic Stress Management Instructor's Certification Program that I facilitate at the National Wellness Conference. I could suggest a few here (and I will), but there isn't time or space to explain them. Here goes:

1. The Tantien exercise
2. The BMW exercise
3. The double-sided coin exercise
4. Creative problem-solving skills exercise
5. Art therapy exercise
6. The embrace the shadow exercise
7. The domesticate the ego exercise
8. Positive attributes exercise
9. Tickler notebook exercise

**Q41.**

**NWI MEMBER:** What stress management workplace programs have demonstrated effectiveness for employers with remote and/or multiple locations? What are program delivery methods?

**SEAWARD:** I am going to have to plead ignorance on this question. I have done programs for many Fortune 500 companies, some in different locations (such as Hewlett Packard, all locations in Colorado). I have also done a few programs for Conoco Oil where there was a video camera set up for one of their remote locations. Although they all were well received, there is no replacement for live instruction.

**Q42.**

**NWI MEMBER:** From the corporate sector perspective, what are some suggestions for fostering cultural change towards the attitude of stress? In some organizations, stress is perceived so negative that discussion surrounding coping techniques becomes difficult.

**SEAWARD:** Please take a look at the previous answers, and if you feel I haven't answered the question, feel free to contact me personally ([brianlukes@cs.com](mailto:brianlukes@cs.com)).

Stated bluntly, yes, we have a culture of fear and nowhere more evident than in many corporate settings where employee loyalty is largely a myth. People are afraid of going to the bathroom for fear of finding their things placed in a box at the front door with a security guard ready to escort them out. I mean, really, I hear these things when I go to speak at various places. Is this any way to run a business?

So even talking about stress, let alone going to a stress presentation is perceived as the kiss of death. That's why you need to be REALLY creative with your programming titles. If you do this right, you not only have fun, but really make some impact on the culture, and that can only be a good thing.

### Q43.

**NWI MEMBER:** What is the role of the health educator when asked to present stress related topics. Not being a mental health professional, what would be the scope of the health educator intervention? How can this be applied to health promotion programs in the workplace where the health educator leads or intervenes as a resource?

**SEAWARD:** In my humble opinion, the role of a health educator, is to educate, not to counsel or do therapy. Know your professional boundaries! As such, I think it is the role of a good health educator to have a current list of resources (therapists, books, CDs, DVDs, etc.) to have on hand to refer people to on an as-needed basis. Health education may be therapy, but educators should not be therapists (unless you have a degree in counseling or social work, and even then know when to wear the right hat!). Your role is to provide the information and let them take the responsibility to do something with it. I am a big advocate of having healthy boundaries with our professional responsibilities. I hope I answered your question to your satisfaction.

## Single Session Stress Management Program Tips

### Q44.

**NWI MEMBER:** If given only one hour to present a stress management lunch-n-learn, and it is for mostly men in a factory, what would be the most appropriate or relevant key topics to target for that particular population?

**SEAWARD:** I have done just this type of program. I walked in with a slide show and quickly canned that and dragged over the flip chart and began to ask questions: Who here is stressed? Who here gets angry? What word comes to mind when you hear the word anger? Etc. It was my experience that these guys didn't want to be lectured to; they wanted to discuss their problems and issues. What began as a link between stress and disease, soon changed with regard to the questions asked. So be a good listener.

The conversation soon became dominated by the side effects of drugs for hypertension and decreased sexual performance. This leads to non-compliance issues. Boy, did I get an education that day. The remaining conversation revolved around alternative medicine (herbs, acupuncture, etc.). If I were to do this again, I would do it the same way, except start right off asking questions and skip the slide show all together.

So my suggestion to you, based on my personal experience, is to talk with them, not at them and get them involved in the discussion. As a side note, one guy from the talk I gave called me a year later to tell me that he had dropped 60 pounds from a walking program, been taken off his hypertensive meds and was enjoying an active sex life.

### Q45.

**NWI MEMBER:** I facilitate a life balance for leaders class. What are three things I could incorporate into the three-hour class to help them learn more about themselves in finding a healthier balance between work and home?

**SEAWARD:** I would choose four, not three, areas and select a couple of concepts/ideas in each area: mind, body, spirit, emotions—all with the focus of balance.

- **Mind:** Balance sensory stimulation with quietness such as meditation.
- **Body:** Balance healthy lifestyle choices with an occasional healthy pleasure (coffee ice cream comes to mind and a massage is right behind it).
- **Spirit:** Balance between inner work (soul searching, centering, and even some hobbies) and community involvement (community can be anything from raising the kids, and support groups to volunteer work, to going to a PTA meeting).
- **Emotions:** Balance feelings of anger and anxiety with feelings of joy and happiness.

I might address the issue of balance from physiological homeostasis as a result of physical exercise, to mental stimulation through creativity projects to meditation and inner peace—the essence of spiritual balance. Work/home balance also speaks to the nature of healthy boundaries (once again) and this includes a balance between using technology and knowing when not to use technology.

Not sure if this is what you were looking for in an answer. Hope it helps.

**Q46.**

**NWI MEMBER:** We have started a small wellness program at a worksite, and the employees want some programming on stress in the workplace. We have a small budget for the wellness program. If we wanted to develop a small two-hour workshop in house, what are some key elements we should focus on.

**SEAWARD:** If I had two hours, I would use the first hour to give some basics on the nature of stress (see below for some highlights), and then I would be sure to have at least half the course be experiential (e.g. diaphragmatic breathing, autogenics, visualization, humor therapy, music therapy, PRM, and yoga, if you have the space). I might have the first half-hour be a discussion, the second half-hour be designated as experiential, the third half-hour be more discussion and the last half-hour be more experiential again.

Basics in the nature of stress include:

- Types of stress (acute vs. chronic)
- Fight or flight in the 21<sup>st</sup> century
- Tend and befriend (the female survival skill)
- The stress emotions (anger= fight, fear = flight)
- Stress and disease
- Good stress management means working causes and effects
- Holistic wellness paradigm (mind, body, spirit, emotions)

Here are some additional ideas: I think if you plan this right, you will hit a home run and have them begging for more. Some hot topics to select from:

- The body is the battlefield for stress: stress and disease
- Stress, nutrition and eating behaviors
- Adrenal fatigue and menopause
- From victim to victor in the rat race.
- Don't cross this line: healthy boundaries

## **Stress Management for College Students**

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**Q47.**

**NWI MEMBER:** We will be using your "Managing Stress" textbook this coming year for our 200 level (essentially freshmen/sophomore) college Personal Health course. What stress management topics and techniques do you find especially successful with college-age students?

**SEAWARD:** What I find works best is delving right into the relaxation techniques: breathing, mental imagery, massage, yoga, music therapy etc. I have found that students sit there with a "prove it" mentality. So, by having them experience some of these techniques creates the "hook" to keep them engaged. I have also had great luck with art therapy and humor therapy. Stress and disease these days is another topic that becomes a hook as well.

I would try to have some experiential experience as often as possible.

By the way, the CD-ROM that comes with the book has a series of lesson plans that I created, and these may be of help to you. (If you don't have it, ask the Jones and Bartlett sales rep or call my editor, Jacqueline Mark at 1.800.832.0034. and ask to have one sent to you.) Thanks for using my book. Let me know how it goes.

**Q48.**

**NWI MEMBER:** In a society that often views stress as a badge of honor, how can we educate high-achieving college students about the importance of setting limits?

**SEAWARD:** Great question! The best we can do is sow seeds of wisdom, giving the students as much experiential experience as possible. Sadly, we live in a culture that honors high incomes, mass consumption and ego driven aspirations. We also have a culture that is overweight, overmedicated on antidepressants, and saddled with major credit card debt. It doesn't take Einstein to figure out that something is seriously wrong with this picture.

The best we can do as educators is to state the obvious and then teach the skills that will help this next generation to come back to center, by not buying into this dysfunctional lifestyle. Setting limits, in my opinion, is the same as establishing healthy boundaries.

**Q49.**

**According to the National College Health Assessment results (2004 and 2005), stress has been reported by survey respondents to be the factor that most affected their academic performance in the past school year. Sleep difficulties and cold/flu/sore throat are two other high-ranking factors. In addition, students are reporting in higher amounts that they feel "overwhelmed" by all they had to do, as well as, "exhausted," "sad," and "hopeless." As we know, these can be related to unmanaged stress.**

Undergraduate students experience many transitional issues such as those related to newfound independence in their first year, as well as their last year of school. What practical tips can you provide to undergraduate college students in their unique situations that may help them balance their work, volunteer, academic and social lives?

**SEAWARD:** Boy, you have asked the million dollar question! I am afraid my answer won't match this offer. I love teaching college students because they are like sponges and soak up a wealth of information. On the flip side, the college years are also the trial-and-error years, and as we both know, more learning takes place outside the classroom than in it. When I teach stress management courses to college students (whether it's a full 16-week course or an hour brown bag presentation in the dorms (oops, residence halls) during midterms or final exams, I do a lot of practical experience stuff. In terms of practical tips, here is a short list:

1. As best you can, create a healthy sleep environment (also called sleep hygiene).
2. Try not to drink any caffeinated beverages after 6:00 p.m. to ensure a better night sleep.
3. Try to go to bed at the same time every night.
4. Establish and practice a cardiovascular exercise routine (to help flush out the stress hormones).
5. Nurture a strong support system of friends (three to four really close friends).
6. Establish at least one outside interest (hobby, sport) from one's school work.
7. Nurture your sense of spirituality (whatever this means to you), but see yourself as an essential part of a much bigger whole.
8. Eat one meal a day for your immune system! This means one meal without a high sugar, fat or sodium intake.
9. Learn to meditate and practice this habit regularly. It will prove to be your ticket to sanity.
10. Practice compassion. Keep an open heart as well as an open mind.

## Stress Management Tips for Caregivers

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### Q50.

**NWI MEMBER:** How do caregivers manage their stress, stay healthy, and take care of themselves when they are taking care of a severely disabled person who is also very demanding?

**SEAWARD:** As a caregiver, it becomes very easy to feel like a victim when we don't take time for ourselves. Caregivers, by their very nature are always giving. However, one can only give so much before the well runs dry, and there is nothing left to give (this is called burnout in the trade). Burnout is exacerbated when feelings of victimization are added to the work/family equation.

If you have read several other questions and answers you may see a recurring theme. That theme is healthy boundaries. We each need to make and take time for ourselves (to meditate and exercise, and let's not forget some of the essential pampering techniques such as an occasional massage).

Another theme I would like to mention here is the importance of support groups. Caregivers need to associate (even play) with friends and colleagues.

Assertiveness is a third characteristic to add to the mix. Without assertiveness, one's boundaries will be violated, and lack of assertiveness—to ask for help every now and then—leads to feelings of victimization.

## Stress Management Tips for Shift-work Nurses

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### Q51.

**NWI MEMBER:** What is the best single thing for nurses to do in a 12-hour shift to help decrease stress?

**SEAWARD:** I am a big advocate for meditation—for everyone, but nurses would benefit greatly. Before you go to work, spend 5-10 minutes sitting quietly (uninterrupted time) and focus on your breathing. More, if time allows. Meditation is a great way to get and keep grounded, particularly for long shift work. Additionally, I would also avoid any foods with caffeine (coffee, tea, and chocolate). Herbal teas are great.



Also, I would like to recommend a new book (you may have already heard of it) called *Nursing Against the Odds* by Suzanne Gordon.

## Managing Stress in a High-Tech, Often Socially Disconnected World

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### Q52.

**NWI MEMBER:** Can we teach social stress management with emphasis on social solutions for stress, i.e., social support, cognitive therapy, friendship? With the younger generation more tuned into headsets and computers, should we be concerned that social supports that were taken for granted for generations are missing in our young people?

**SEAWARD:** Bingo! You raised a really good and valid point. Whether we like it or not, we are in the high-tech age. I share your concerns because working with teens in middle school, I and my colleagues who teach full-time note a shift in their attitudes, social skills and levels of detachment. This shift is not a good one. Today, people spend more time with a computer screen, cell phone or blackberry than they do with actually human beings. I think we should be concerned about social support groups, and lack thereof. As concerned as I am, I also have great faith in the power of adaptation.

## Stress Management Tips for Seniors

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### Q53.

**NWI MEMBER:** What is the best way to help my senior clients deal with the anxiety concerning pending cuts in Social Security and Medicare—the perceived threat of removal of a "safety net" many have anticipated would be there for them in retirement?

**SEAWARD:** I could be wrong, but it appears that the Social Security overhaul proposed by our beloved President isn't going to be overhauled anytime soon. Medicare could be another story though, altogether. There is a lot of fear in the American culture regarding this topic. Perhaps you have noticed. This is also fueled by the pharmaceutical companies, Congress, and the insurance companies. If I were in your shoes, I would encourage such skills as healthy boundaries, fiscal stress management, creative problem solving,

social support groups, and complementary medicine. Consider programming that offers a sense of empowerment.

## HeartMath Science

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### Q54.

**NWI MEMBER:** What do you think of the HeartMath science?

**SEAWARD:** I am a big fan of the people and work at the Institute of HeartMath ([www.heartmath.org](http://www.heartmath.org)). I have heard first hand some of the research by Glen Rein (at the Annual International Society for the Study of Subtle Energies and Energy Medicine Conference) and continue to follow the current areas of research that they conduct. I am impressed! I don't know whether the people at HeartMath would say they are researching the heart chakra as it interfaces with the anatomical heart, but as I see it, that is what they are doing. I have talked with some of the people at HeartMath recently (I received permission to reprint one of their photographs in the forthcoming four-color edition of my book *Managing Stress*—yeah).

I know that to be taken seriously, they line up all their ducks through the scientific method protocol. The research is well respected by people whom I consider high integrity (e.g. Larry Dossey, MD, Dean Ornish, MD, etc.) So, I encourage everyone to check them out on the Internet, and see for yourself. I also want to encourage people to check out their bio-feedback program (I don't get paid to say this). Sadly, they don't have a Mac version (and I am a Mac person), so this is its biggest drawback.

Speaking of biofeedback programs, the yin version of Heartmath's yang Freeze Framer program is a wonderful (right brain) version by Journey to the Wild Divine.

## Innovations and Trends in Stress Management

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### Q55.

**NWI MEMBER:** I lead several short workshops for employees at our university on stress and stress management. Can you share any new and innovative stress management ideas?

**SEAWARD:** Many ideas for new programming have been provided in previous answers. Without sounding like a commercial, the Holistic Stress Management

Instructor Certification Program at the National Wellness Conference offers a vast array of new programming ideas. If you are still not satisfied with this answer, feel free to contact me at [brianlukes@cs.com](mailto:brianlukes@cs.com).

## Q56.

**NWI MEMBER:** The past few years, *mindfulness* was the “buzz word” for stress management programming. This year, we are emphasizing “*resilience*.” What is the trend going forward in these areas and how do we market these programs to our mainstream corporate culture?

**SEAWARD:** Great questions! Actually, I see two trends going on, and in two diametrically opposed directions.

First is the trend to do an MRI on every thought, attitude and behavior under the sun and try to substantiate the mind as a function of the brain. Now we have the MRI studies to back it up. I am sure the ghost of Rene Descartes is applauding these efforts. Not far behind is the Genome project where now every aspect of human physiology and subsequent behavior is traced to a specific gene in the DNA structure.

The other trend continues to build a bridge across the abyss between science and spirituality, with quantum physics as the brick and mortar to build this bridge.

Keep in mind that what tends to drive the buzzwords is the hunger to capture the newest scoop by the media, from *Good Morning America* and *Shape Magazine* to *National Geographic Magazine*. To be honest, I thought by now we would have seen more about energy medicine. It’s out there, but not to the extent that I thought it would be, or could be.

At this point and time, what I see on the horizon are these issues: 1) insomnia, 2) adrenal fatigue and 3) Immune system enhancement 4) GMOs (genetically modified organisms) and health.

The real area of exploration will always include the frontiers of the mind, however you choose to encapsulate it. I would love to think that love and compassion will be topics at the vanguard of stress management programming, and I hope I am right in this fear-based culture.

Resiliency is a great word/concept (particularly with the prevalence of cancer these days). Keep in mind that we are living in a fear-based culture (back to fight or flight), so we have actually lost ground in what truly is at the cutting edge. Just my opinion, but that’s what I sense at this time.

Another catch phrase (old but coming back again) is “adaptation.”

How do you market these into mainstream corporate America? Very conservatively! I think you can present any of these topics and do it well by a cautious, well-grounded approach.

As I mentioned before, the general (umbrella) topic of stress management is so colossal, there is no shortage of topics to incorporate into wellness programs. I am of the opinion that wellness programming with an emphasis of stress management should be largely experiential.

## Q57.

**NWI MEMBER:** What are your thoughts on the theory of the “tend and befriend” response to stress?

**SEAWARD:** A word about the “tend and befriend” theory by Shelley Taylor, PhD. I am a big fan of Shelley’s work. I mention it in my textbook as well as in my talks about stress management.

The tend-and-befriend theory speaks about the nature and importance of support groups, among other things. While there are obvious differences between men and women and how each gender copes with stress, there are similarities, too. And as I have mentioned, women are known to throw new-born babies in dumpsters just as men can bond over a golf game and a few beers. Nothing in life is simple, cut and dried or black and white, particularly how people, male or female, deal with stress.

I try to focus on the common denominators when I teach stress management techniques. Sadly, men and women can both have bad coping skills.

Our jobs as health educators are to help increase awareness so that people can reach that optimal level of mind-body-spirit wellness, and perhaps ultimately, inner peace.

Thanks for your questions.

Peace and best wishes— *Luke*

## ASK THE EXPERTS

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