

# SOUND MIND, SOUND BODY COLUMN:

## Stress natural, but pay attention

WALLA WALLA UNION-BULLETIN

Friday, January 14, 2011

The last few months I have been analyzing people's moods, body language and habits.

I have come to realize that people are consistently stressed with work, financial and relationship issues. Stress is a part of daily life, but people must maintain stress with healthy choices to avoid addicting habits such as excessive drinking, smoking and binge eating.

I truly relate to people and their stressful situations because I innately am a highly stressed person. In fact if it were not for my "stress crisis" I may not have fallen into such a deep passion to work in the health and recreation industry.

In 2006, my life was bombarded with 18 credits of university classes, three jobs to pay the bills and one amazing relationship that was heading into different directions. My life took a 180-degree spin toward stress insomnia, caffeine addiction, stomach issues, crying sessions and excessive hair loss. I quickly "hit the wall" to burnout where I was sleeping in class, but awake at 3 a.m. pondering all my responsibilities. Walking home from campus, I found a poster that said, "What could you do if you could do anything?"

My mind spun with ideas of going back to Australia, scuba dive with great white sharks in South Africa or study yoga in India. I analyzed my life, and realized I was truly stressed out-of-my-mind". The poster promoted a fellowship, and I immediately applied to study yoga since I truly needed balance. During my trip abroad, I "found myself", and slowly accumulated balance.

Upon my return, I knew that assisting people's health would be my greatest achievement in life. I also reached out to a campus stress management group to view "balance" from a non-holistic point of view.

My life is not perfect and still encounters stress; however, I learned the tools through educating myself on what helps me beat stress. Nowadays traveling, outdoor recreation, yoga, writing and photography are my saviors to keep life balance. In the past, my choices were panic attacks, chugging coffee and crying on the phone to family members wondering, "What is wrong with me?"

Everyone undergoes a stressful period in life, but maintaining stress with healthy choices

is vital to not further feed it. The American Institute of Stress states that stress is challenging to define. According to WebMD, "Stress is what you feel when you have to handle more than you are used to. When you are stressed, your body responds as though you are in danger. It makes hormones that speed up your heart, make you breathe faster and give you a burst of energy."

When a person encounters consistent stress, the burnout effect happens and a person is highly susceptible to illness or disease. Common symptoms of accumulated stress include headaches, stomach pain, back pain, moodiness, depression and difficulty sleeping. In addition, a person's immune system is weakened along with triggering allergies. A person's body language also shows stress response with shrugged shoulders, twitching eyelids, clenched hands, tense shoulder blades and persistent shaking of a leg or foot. To find 50 common mental and physical symptoms visit [stress.org](http://stress.org)

If you are living a stressful life, try to analyze what is the root cause for the stress. Next, focus on how you handle stress. Finally, find what you enjoy in life that brings a smile and a mental escape from the stress. For some people, an escape from stress maybe playing with a pet, walking in the park or reading a book. Mind-body and cardiovascular exercise are known to be stress-busters.

In my opinion, "stress kills" people's health, mental clarity and outlook on life. Maintaining stress is achievable without medication; however, managing stress takes time, effort and patience.

Everyone is human and has stressful circumstances to deal with. Hopefully, my situation will help you understand that coping with stress is achievable for everyone at any age.

*Elizabeth Kovar has been working in the fitness industry since 2006 with international experience from India and Australia. She has a master's degree in recreation and tourism and is the associate director of healthy living at the YMCA. She can be reached at [ekovar@wwymca.org](mailto:ekovar@wwymca.org).*