

# MCVEY PHYSICAL EDUCATION

Special Edition

## Stress and Our Students!

### Is stress affecting you daily?

Do you feel:

-Depressed, nervous or anxious at times?

-Worried or experience tension type headaches, fatigue or nausea?

-Does your skin often look flushed?

-Do you feel short of breath and is your heart racing?

-Do you experience chest ache or even dizziness?

-Do you have an upset stomach, stomach cramps or even diarrhea?

-Do you feel you can't focus on the tasks at hand or even distracted at work and in everyday activities?

-Do you feel forgetful and accident prone?

-Do your moods change for no reason?

-Do you find it difficult to sleep, have nightmares or wake up for no reason in the middle of the night?

### Why Stress?

There are many causes of stress for children both inside and outside of school, including but not limited to environmental disasters and exposure by the media, family issues and school issues.

This year alone our students have been exposed to a great deal stressful situations with the effects of storms such as hurricane Sandy and the extensive media coverage of recent tragedies. Add this to the "normal" life stresses children face from school, homework, social and emotional factors it can create a difficult and sometimes unhealthy situation.



**Norepinephrine**- As a stress hormone affects parts of the brain where attention and responding actions are controlled.

Along with epinephrine, norepinephrine also underlies the fight-or-flight response, directly increasing heart rate, triggering the release of glucose from energy stores, and increasing blood flow to skeletal muscle.

**Dopamine**- plays in a role in regulation of behavior, voluntary movement, cognition, motivation, reward, attention, learning and mood.

**Serotonin** plays a role in regulation of mood, appetite, sleep, memory and learning and in the gastrointestinal tract, it stimulates metabolism, cellular growth and digestion.

### Tips for Stress Free Homework!

#### Establish a time

Rachel Rudman is a pediatric occupational therapist who encourages parents to pick a consistent homework time and stick to it. "Depending on the child," says Rudman, "that may be right after school, or they may need a break first." Kids thrive on routine. If they know what time they have to do homework, they're able to prepare themselves mentally

#### Pick a place

Homework should be done in a quiet place -- at a bedroom desk or the kitchen table, for instance. Your child can help figure out the best spot.

#### Eliminate distractions

"During homework, there should be no TV, no texting, no computer," advises learning specialist Jill Lauren. Electronics interrupt and stretch out the homework process. "Kids benefit from learning when it's time to work and when it's time to play," says Lauren.

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## Don't Sweat the STRESS

Exercise is one of, if not the best way to reduces stress levels. Essentially what happens is that working out helps burn away chemicals such as cortisol and norepinephrine which cause stress. With this, vigorous exercise also releases endorphins, serotonin and dopamine into the brain creating a feeling of safety and security that contributes to off-setting some of the "internal" causes of stress.

To benefit from exercise, it needs to be regular. Exercise needs to be part of a daily routine. The CDC recommends: Children and adolescents should do 60 minutes (1 hour) or more of physical activity each day. For adults its 2 hours and 30 minutes (150 minutes) of moderate-intensity aerobic activity (i.e., brisk walking) every week and muscle-strengthening activities on 2 or more days a week that work all major muscle groups (legs, hips, back, abdomen, chest, shoulders, and arms).



(Stress Free Homework from pg1)

#### **Build in breaks**

After a long day of school, children can become stressed by the homework looming over them. "The timing can seem indefinite to them," says Rudman. Angela Lin, creator of iWantHighMarks.com, says kids dread the idea of doing homework for long periods without rest and recommends five- to 10-minute "power breaks." Rudman suggests using a kitchen timer to keep track of time.

#### **Include snacks**

"During homework, provide your child with a crunchy snack," suggests Rudman. "Eating something crunchy like carrot sticks or pretzel rods helps with organization." But use care: You don't want your child's books or papers to get soiled!

#### **Be available**

Homework helps your child work independently, so don't hover, interrupt or offer too much input. "Encourage, praise and support, but do not complete any work," says Amy Hilbrich Davis of InspiringMoms.com. "There is important growth associated with the process of understanding, attempting, asking questions and completing the work."

#### **Be a guider not doer.**

Insist homework be your child's responsibility not yours. Offer your help only when it's really needed. If your child is having difficulties, help him/her understand the work by making up similar problems and showing her/him step by step how to do it.

#### **Do "adult" homework.**

While your child is doing homework, perform tasks such as your own work or projects you may need to complete, making dinner or opening the mail, to help your child realize that adults have homework, too.

**Be a positive role model.** Your attitude about the work affects how your child sees it, so make homework fun, not a chore.

Staying positive includes not acting negative towards the amount of homework or the difficulty of the assignment in front of your son/daughter, they could perceive this as an attack on the teacher and could only add to stress and complicate the learning environment .

**Watch for frustration.** Let your child take a break or move on to other assignments if one is causing frustration. Return later to work on the frustrating assignments together.



## **What to Look out for**

Stress can have both positive and negative effects on a child. Some stress for everyone is normal and healthy; it keeps us alert and aware of the things that are happening around us. However, excessive stress can be quite harmful to a child. Research has shown that the negative effects of stress on children under the age of 10 are far more profound and longer lasting a child's physical response to stress may be presented as more intense than that of an adult and often times involves the whole body. The body can react in a number of ways such as blurred vision, headaches, tense muscles, back pain, cold hands and feet, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, dry mouth, stomach aches, digestive problems, unusual sweat and perspiration (Frank, 2003). Symptoms can also present themselves in emotional and behavioral changes in a child. Possible symptoms are: changes in sleeping patterns, changes in eating patterns, restlessness, loss of interest in normal activities, feeling of worthlessness, poor self-esteem, poor self-efficacy, difficulty concentrating, feeling of irritability, fatigued, withdrawn, self-medicating (drug or alcohol abuse), poor school performance, hyperactivity, nightmares, aggressive behavior, excessive worry, outbursts of anger, long lasting depression, and complaints of physical illnesses, aches and pains



## **Combating the Stress of Life**

Everyone has stress in their lives and could benefit from simple techniques that can help reduce stress levels and improve their quality of life.

#### **Making a Choice**

Youngsters can learn to do an "stress check," and make a choice to adjust the situation. Even young kids can use a simple mental signal like a big red stop sign when they feel early stress or frustration symptoms. They can ask, "What can I do right now to stop this situation or make it better?" This teaches them to recognize danger signs and make a choice, rather than just giving in to something negative.

#### **Muscle Relaxation**

Kids can relieve stress before bed by using muscle relaxation, the Stress Free Kids website advises. They can easily learn to tense and relax each muscle group while they are lying in bed. The activity starts at the top of the head; the child works her way down to the tips of her toes. The child simply tenses up each muscle group, then releases it and continues on to the next one until she has gone through her whole body.

#### **Controlled Breathing**

Any kid old enough to count to four can do a controlled breathing exercise to lower her stress level. The Stress Free Kids website explains that the child can concentrate on slowing down her breathing by counting slowly to four as she breathes in, then doing the same thing as she lets the air out. This can be continued for several minutes until the stress starts to melt away.

#### **Exercise**

Exercise is one of the best stress relief activities for kids. D'Arcy Lyness, Ph.D., a psychologist and the behavioral health editor for the Teens Health website, explains it must be done regularly for maximum effect. The exercise can take any form as long as it is a physical activity. Children can participate in exercise simply spend a regular amount of time outside playing with friends. Help your child emphasizes fun over hard-core competition. Otherwise, the exercise itself might become a new stress source.

### **For More Information check out these Resources from Ms. Arnone**

<http://pubs.ext.vt.edu/350/350-054/350-054.html>

- 1) **Wilma Jean the worry Machine** by Julia Look
- 2) **101 Relaxation Games for Children** by Allison Bart
- 3) **Stress Relief for Kids: Taming Your Dragons** by Marti Belknap



