

# MAKING STRESS WORK FOR YOU

BY SUSAN SELIGER

You can't eliminate stress from your life, but you can learn to use it productively. No matter what (or who) has you climbing the walls, these easy, effective techniques will let you take control in no time

**Y**ou've had a rough day. You woke up ten minutes late and had to race to a meeting. People at the office are working as if they swallowed molasses. The boss expects this big project to be finished at the end of the week. And no one's going to appreciate how hard you've had to slog away, least of all your husband. It's going to mean more late nights this week, frozen dinners, frayed tempers. What does it all lead to?

Stress.

Stress is not a disease, but it has been linked to most of the leading killers and cripples—heart disease, cancer, diabetes, accidental injuries, suicide, cirrhosis of the liver. Feeling that we are under stress can make us more susceptible to migraines, lower-back pain, renal failure, recurrent flare-ups of herpes, even skin blemishes.

There is a great deal of misunderstanding about what stress is and how best to cope with it. The first thing to understand is that it isn't stress itself that is killing us—it is how we react to it. More than 70 million tranquilizer prescriptions are issued a year, and expensive gadgetry and stress-management counselors abound, most of them mistakenly teaching people to flee from stress.

But you cannot flee. Stress is not a single event that can be avoided. It is a series of responses within us, triggered not so much by a situation as by our perception of it. The predicament may not even exist. It may be the mere expectation of it that sets us off, heart

pounding, hormones racing.

Stress is simply a part of life. It can be a destructive or an immensely productive part, depending upon how it is used. If you can channel it instead of avoiding it, take pleasure in your successes and learn the early-warning symptoms of stress overload—and the techniques to reverse it—then you can be healthier than those who avoid conflict and competition altogether. You may find that stress can actually be good for you.

## KINDS OF STRESS

Researchers have come to believe that there are actually three kinds of stress: normal stress; distress, or bad stress (which is normal stress that has become chronic); and eustress, or good stress.

The chemicals released in the stress response seem to vary subtly, depending on whether you feel happy or sad, nervous but basically confident that you can cope or nervous but fearful that you can't. The old notion that has dominated the stress field—that stress involves the same response to change regardless of whether the change is a happy or sad event—is being challenged.

## THE NORMAL STRESS RESPONSE

Imagine that you are walking along a dark city street and you suddenly hear footsteps behind you. Here is what is going on in your body:

The first stage is alarm. The endocrine glands release hormones, includ-

ing epinephrine (formerly called adrenaline); the heartbeat speeds up, as does breathing; oxygen-rich blood is directed away from the skin to the brain and skeletal muscles for fast action. Pupils dilate to take in more information; hearing sharpens. Other hormones entering the bloodstream increase the speed of coagulation in case of injury; muscles tense in readiness; digestion slows so as not to divert any of the body's energy away from fighting or fleeing. This surge of energy, concentration and power enables people to perform in crisis—sometimes well beyond their normal physical capacities.

Once the alarm stage of stress passes, the body enters the second stage, relief and recuperation. The third stage is a return to the body's normal state of relaxed alertness.

## BAD STRESS

While the stress response is very useful if you have to escape a pursuer in a dark alley, most of the time it strikes when you are stuck behind a desk or sitting in a traffic jam. The elevated heartbeat simply leads to elevated blood pressure. Tensed muscles, when there is no attacking or retreating to do, merely give you headaches, backaches and insomnia. The hormones that increase the tendency of the blood to clot—with no injury to attend to—may also lead to clots in coronary arteries and eventual heart disease.

The source of chronic stress can be found not so much in what we do each day but in how we feel about it. Police

Take the test below to see how well you're handling stress.

## ARE YOU PRONE TO STRESS?

Score as follows (unless another scoring procedure is specified in the question):

4 Agree with Strongly or Applies Nearly All the Time

3 Agree Mildly or Applies Sometimes

2 Agree Occasionally or Applies Occasionally

1 Disagree or Rarely Applies

0 Disagree Strongly or Almost Never Applies

\_\_\_ 1. When someone does something nice for me out of the blue, I wonder what they're after.

\_\_\_ 2. I eat breakfast and at least one other fully balanced meal a day. Yes, daily—0. Most days—2. Hardly ever—4.

\_\_\_ 3. Waiting in line or waiting for other people really annoys me.

\_\_\_ 4. If I feel tense at the end of the day, I use deep breathing or other stress-reduction techniques to relax. Often—0. Occasionally—1. Rarely—3.

\_\_\_ 5. I often find myself having heated arguments with people close to me.

\_\_\_ 6. I was recently divorced or separated. No—0. Yes—4.

\_\_\_ 7. I don't show my anger about everything that makes me

mad, but when I do I blow up. \_\_\_ 8. I have trouble falling asleep and waking up feeling refreshed.

\_\_\_ 9. I feel as though I'm wasting time if I'm not working on at least two things at once.

\_\_\_ 10. I have a network of friends who are important to me. Yes—0. No—4.

\_\_\_ 11. I do not look forward to going into work every day.

\_\_\_ 12. Most people I know would bend the truth a little if it helped them get ahead.

\_\_\_ 13. I have had more than three colds or bouts with other illnesses within the last year. No—0. Yes—4.

\_\_\_ 14. There's never enough time to do everything you want to do in life unless you really hurry up.

\_\_\_ 15. I work out strenuously for at least 15 minutes three times a week. Yes—0. No—4.

\_\_\_ 16. Someone very close to me has died in the last year. No—0. Yes—4.

\_\_\_ 17. I smoke: More than a pack a day—4. Less than a pack (or a pipe or cigar)—2. Nothing—0.

\_\_\_ 18. I drink the equivalent of three alcoholic drinks a day. Yes—2. Less—0. More—4.

\_\_\_ 19. I play to win at work and in sports; otherwise why bother?

\_\_\_ 20. I take time out for myself

every day (even if it is only five minutes) to relax or think private thoughts totally uninterrupted. Yes—0. No—4.

\_\_\_ 21. I eat both fruits and vegetables at least once a day and resist eating junk food. Every day—0. Most days—2. Rarely—4

\_\_\_ 22. I believe that nobody does something for nothing. Anyone who helps you will expect something in return.

\_\_\_ 23. I fly off the handle easily.

\_\_\_ 24. I am not very happy in my job and would really like to get out of it.

\_\_\_ 25. There is at least one steady person in my life whom I love and who loves me and helps me live through the daily struggles of life. Yes—0. No—4.

\_\_\_ Total

### YOUR SCORE

Over 80: You are dangerously prone to stress and at risk for stress-related problems. It's time for a change.

60-79: You are seriously prone to stress. Learning some stress-management techniques will lower your risk.

29-59: You are about average but can still afford to relax a bit.

Under 28: You are fairly relaxed and not at much risk for stress-linked problems right now, so help a tense friend.

officers, for example, complain that they feel more stress handling paperwork than they do while responding to crimes. They were trained to act, not sit and write, and that is what they feel most competent doing.

If you sense that you are not entirely in control of your life, if every little move makes you anxious or dissatisfied and sends out a stress alarm, then you are never allowing yourself the chance to recuperate. It is the buildup of small but constant stress responses, not the occasional big ones, that inflicts the most bodily harm.

Stress lowers our immunity to infections and disease. In one study, researchers at Harvard Medical School, Tufts University and Beth Israel Hospital in Boston found that, when dental students were taking exams, their immunoglobulin-A (antibody) levels dropped, making them more susceptible to colds, respiratory diseases and even tooth decay.

Most people can bounce back from the temporary lowering of immunity under acute stress. The serious problems arise when you are under chronic stress—and lowered immunity leaves you constantly vulnerable.

## HOSTILITY AND ANGER DO YOU IN

There are a number of emotions one can experience under stress, but anger and hostility seem to be the most self-destructive.

See how you answered questions 1, 5, 12 and 22 on the Stress Test. A total score of over 8 for just those questions means you would probably benefit by trying to reduce your hostile feelings. (People who are very hostile are usually cynical. They are also likely to be angry.)

Look at your answers for questions 3, 7 and 23 on the Stress Test. A total score of over 6 for those questions indicates you may be getting angry too often for your good health.

There has been much debate about whether to express anger or not. As far as your health is concerned, the issue is not so much whether you should express anger as whether you should feel it so often in the first place. The emerging consensus is that the less anger you feel, the better. This doesn't mean you should never get angry—no extreme is healthy. But choose which circumstances are worth it, instead of

letting petty problems keep you under chronic stress.

If you know that anger is putting you at risk, try to cut back on some other health risk—smoke less or drink less or eat junk food less often.

## GRIEF

Grieving for someone you loved, while natural, also puts you under stress and lowers your immunity to disease. That does not mean that the 700,000 people over age 50 who lose spouses every year must resign themselves to poor health. For the bereaved, as well as for others suffering from bad stress, the point is to face that you are at heightened risk and then make changes to lower that risk.

## GOOD STRESS TO THE RESCUE

Successfully rising to a challenge and feeling that glow of confidence and a sense of control over one's destiny seem to go a long way toward counteracting the ill effects of stress. It may even help cure disease.

High-powered successful men and women may work hard, but they are not doing themselves in. Success is a

politan Life Insurance Company examined 1,078 men who held one of the top three executive positions in Fortune 500 companies and found that their mortality rate was 37 percent lower than that of other white males the same age.

The explanation may lie in a study of 259 executives at Illinois Bell conducted by a psychologist at the University of Chicago. She found that the people who were able to handle stress, no matter how intense their job pressures, shared a common attitude: They all felt a sense of purpose, viewed change as a challenge instead of a threat and believed they were in control of their lives.

It is simply a myth that if you work like a man you'll die like a man. Indeed, the highest rates of heart disease in women are not among executives but among secretaries and salesclerks, women who have little job security or control.

## COPING WITH STRESS

So how can you gain control over stress? Once you recognize the early warning signs and master some simple techniques, you can turn off the stress alarm before it starts to harm you. You can handle pressure and tension smoothly, without wasting energy, and then dive back into the fray with greater chances for success. Here's how to do it.

## RECOGNIZE THE EARLY WARNING SIGNS

The following symptoms are your body's way of telling you that you're reaching stress overload. None of the symptoms is particularly harmful in itself, but if ignored any of them could lead to trouble.

1. Sweaty or cold hands, especially if one is colder than the other.
2. Shortness of breath.
3. Catching every cold or virus that goes around because the physical strains of distress have lowered your immunity.
  - Headaches, tiredness, irritability.
  - Indigestion, diarrhea, too-frequent urination.
6. Muscle spasms or a tightness in the jaw, back of the neck, shoulders or lower back.
7. Difficulty sleeping, or sleeping too much without feeling rested.
8. Increase in eating, drinking, smoking or use of drugs.
9. Moodiness and difficulty concentrating.
10. Becoming accident prone.

As soon as you notice one of these warning signs, stop what you're doing, and try one of the following stress-management techniques.

You can do this discreetly any time, anywhere. If you use it throughout the day, at the first signs of tension or pressure you should be able to prevent the whole cycle of the stress response from escalating into bad stress.

1. *Squeeze your thumb and index finger together hard for two seconds when you're feeling tense (or at any point when you feel the impulse to engage in a habit you want to change or simply when you need a peaceful break).*

This serves two functions. First, if you squeeze hard, the tensing of those muscles in your hand and arm and the slight discomfort will give you a controlled physical outlet for the frustration that stressful emotions arouse. Second, it will transfer your attention and your tension from the issue at hand to your fingers:

2. *Now, roll your eyes heavenward as you inhale deeply for two more seconds—still squeezing the fingers.*

You can think of this as rolling your eyes in mock disgust at the events that cause you to feel so tense. If you can make fun of a situation or, better yet, yourself and your overreaction to it, you'll feel more in control of it.

The roll of the eyes should be a sweep from your chest upward to your forehead and beyond, as if you were trying to see through a skylight on the top of your head. At the end of the sweep, close your eyes, but keep looking skyward.

3. *Hold your breath for two seconds while still looking upward beneath closed eyelids.*

4. *Then exhale slowly, completely. Let your eyes relax, keeping lids closed. Let the tension in your fingers and the rest of your body go. This should take four seconds.*

The pleasant release of tension from your fingers will be the cue to your entire body to go pleasantly slack. As you exhale, listen to the whooshing sound, and imagine the tension as rushing water flowing out of every limb. You may find that it helps as you exhale to repeat silently words like "peace" or "let it go" or "it's only life."

If you have more than ten seconds, you can, after reaching stage four, give yourself suggestions about changing habits or feelings. The brain is especially responsive to such suggestions in this relaxed state. For example, you might say, "When I open my eyes, I will not be hungry," or, "I will feel calm and relaxed even if the kids yell."

Whatever suggestions you give yourself, it helps to end with something like this: "When I open my eyes, I will feel relaxed, refreshed, alert and happy. I will open my eyes on the count of three: one ... two ... three."

## THE INVISIBLE QUICK-FIX

Once you're comfortable with the ten-second procedure, you will be able to get nearly as much tension relief with an abbreviated version that does not even involve closing your eyes and thus can be done in public. The shorter version works only if you have done the original stress-fix long enough so that your brain instantly connects the finger-squeezing cue with deep relaxation. A few weeks of steady practice should be all you need.

The quick-fix is an especially handy technique to use right before delivering a speech or during a tense meeting or any time you are in the heat of battle and need to calm down but stay alert.

1. Just squeeze your thumb and finger together as in the longer version, keeping your hand in your pocket or under the conference table. Take a deep breath and hold a fraction of a second.

2. Then release the fingers and exhale slowly but quietly.

## END THE I-HATE-TO-WAIT STRESS BLUES

Whether you're waiting for the bus or the limo, time is passing and nobody likes it. But some of us are worse about waiting than others. And most of us inflict more pain and suffering on ourselves at those times than we need to.

1. Take a deep breath, and use this time to practice the Stress-Fix. You can do the longer ten-second version, eyes closed and all. Everyone else is so busy working up ulcers and heart conditions that no one will notice.

2. Expect to wait at some point every day and prepare yourself. If you don't carry a book with you, keep a poem in your wallet that you'd like to memorize for when you're stranded on a desert island with only the literature in your brain to amuse you.

3. If you haven't come equipped with literary props, use the time to see the funny side of humanity. Seek out the amusing aspect of everything around you. Notice how silly other people look as they stand in line and stew.

4. Exercise while you wait. There are any number of discreet movements you can do to strengthen muscles. Several that you can do without drawing attention to yourself are: ankle circles, standing up straight with stomach pulled in tight, lifting up onto the balls of the feet and balancing, buttocks tucks (if you're wearing a coat).

You know you've got the I-hate-to-wait stress licked when you find yourself mildly disappointed at the end of a day in which your new waiting skills have not been put to the test.

## PEACE PLAN Ten-Minute-Relaxation Technique

Allow at least ten minutes for this exercise; if you have more time, it works even better.

**POSITION:** Sit on a cushioned chair that supports the back, lets your feet rest flat on the floor and your hands settle (palms slightly up) on the arms of the chair or on your thighs.

**ENVIRONMENT:** Take the phone off the hook, close the door and let everyone in the house know that you do not want to be interrupted unless the firemen are at the door with hoses.

**ATTITUDE:** Don't try to measure how deeply you relaxed this time as compared to last time. No matter what happens, you will always emerge more relaxed than you began.

As you breathe in and out deeply and regularly, focus your attention up and down your body; look for any little pockets of tension and let them go.

Release the tightness in your jaw and neck muscles: Let your jaw drop open and your head flop gently down. Let your neck lengthen as your shoulders sink down several inches. Your chest should merely obey the smooth billows of your breath. The stomach will slacken. As the muscles in the thighs and calves release, allow your legs to flop open. Feel your toes uncurl and your feet sink into the floor.

Sometimes you'll find that, as the tension escapes from your mind and body, all the worries of the day rush in to fill the vacuum. Don't panic. Try examining a few of those problems to see if they look less formidable in this calmer state of mind.

If you don't want to spend your relaxation time rehashing worries, think of your brain as a movie screen with a bad movie playing, and either make the screen go dark or speed ahead to the end of the reel and make the screen go bright white. You may have to try clearing the screen repeatedly since worries can be persistent.

**CATCHWORD:** Repeating a catchword in a rhythmic drone helps block out extraneous thoughts. If no word or phrase comes to mind, you may find it relaxing simply to focus on the rhythmic whooshing sound of your breathing. Counting with each breath helps pace your breathing—"inhale one, two, three; exhale one, two, three."

**EXPECTATION:** Expect to feel better after ten, even five, minutes of this therapy. Twenty minutes feels as good as a nap. Before you open your eyes again, say to yourself, "I will open my eyes and feel relaxed, refreshed, cheerful and ready to face the world." You might also want to give yourself a spe-

cial suggestion about something you want to do next; for example, "I will feel

for that test." And you will.

## TALK NICELY TO YOURSELF

Imagine an ordinary stressful situation. You have a deadline for a report; you're afraid you won't finish on time; your hands are sweating, your heart is thumping, you can't concentrate.

Now what is that little voice inside you saying?

"I'll never make it. Why did I wait so long to start? If I mess this up, I'll never get that promotion. Boy, I hate this job. I hate my boss. I hate myself for getting so worked up. I give up."

### STRESS TALK

I'll never get this done.

I'm so nervous I can't think straight.

What if they hate what I come up with even if I can do it in time?

I never should have waited so long to start. Why do I always do this to myself?

Blood pressure rises, arteries begin to clog—and all for what? It doesn't get the work done; in fact, it interferes with efficiency.

So what can you do instead?

Practice talking nicely. Encourage yourself.

Here are examples of the kind of negative perspective that promotes stress—Stress Talk—and the more positive alternatives you could adopt to help reduce it—Stress-Less Talk.

### STRESS-LESS TALK

Just dive in, and take it one step at a time.

Take a deep breath, relax and let's get started. Once I get rolling I know I'll feel and work better.

You never can tell what they'll think, but things have worked out before, so they probably will again. I'll just do the best I can.

Everybody would feel some tension in a situation like this. I can handle it. Come on, brain, use that adrenaline and let's get this job done.

Next time you find yourself in a situation that is making you feel anxious and tense, try to listen to what your inner voice is saying. Write it down. You'll see how pointless and self-

defeating it can be. Then write down a more soothing alternative. It shouldn't be mindless pep talk of the "Hey, kid, you're the greatest" variety. It should be realistic but encouraging.

## DO-IT-YOURSELF MASSAGE

Massage feels wonderful, relaxes tight muscles and makes you feel refreshed. Some masseurs claim that an hour of massage is equivalent to two hours of sleep.

Massage is hard to do alone but not impossible. Here are a number of things you can do for yourself to relieve tension.

### Face-and-Scalp Massage

Lie down. Cover your face with your hands, and rest in the darkness a moment. Then use your fingertips and thumbs in stroking circular motions beginning at the forehead, sweeping down to the temples; along the top of the jawbone, beneath the cheekbones and back up the bridge of the nose. Fan out along the scalp with continued pressure and circular motions, pausing at the tender points above the ears and at the base of the scalp where tense muscles tend to knot up.

### Neck-and-Shoulders Massage

Reach with your fingers up over your shoulders and as far down your back

as you can, pressing the fingertips hard on either side of the spine. Squeeze and knead as strongly as you can, moving outward from the spine and upward to the shoulders. Use your right hand to knead the left shoulder, and vice versa. Then, using the right hand for the right side and the left hand for the left side, move hands up along the neck to the base of the scalp.

## DAYDREAM, VISUALIZE, REHEARSE EVENTS

Daydream to prepare yourself for a stress-provoking situation. Visualize it in complete detail; rehearse what you would do. For example, if you are prone to anger and hostility, visualize yourself in a situation that always makes you angry. Then visualize yourself responding calmly instead: Follow what you would say, how you would move. Even imagine how calm you would feel. When the situation presents itself again, you'll be prepared: You've already been through it and reacted the way you want to—with calm and control. If you can do that, you're well on your way to getting stress under control, too. ■

Relaxation

Posture-oriented  
Easy Stretches

When tension strikes, neck, back, and shoulders tend to carry the load. Whether at home or the office, take five to unwind with these stretches from New York City fitness trainer Angela Casola.



▲ UPPER-TORSO STRETCH

Sit at edge of chair with back straight, feet flat on the floor. Clasp hands behind head as shown, above, left. Inhale. This "opens up" chest area. To stretch taut neck muscles, exhale as you lower chin to chest and press elbows in until shoulder-width apart. Repeat three times.

► UPPER-TORSO LATERAL STRETCH

Remain seated at edge of chair, back straight, feet flat on floor. Lift arms straight up as shown, right, clasping hands together. Be sure elbows are not locked. Inhale. Next, exhale as you gently sway to right, stretching right arm and shoulder. Inhale; return to center. Exhale and repeat to the left. Repeat three times.



◀ SPINAL TWIST

Sit tall at edge of chair, feet flat on floor. Place right hand on seat. Bring left arm across chest and clasp back of chair. As you exhale, slowly twist upper torso in the same direction. Left hand should be at elbow level, chin and shoulder parallel, as shown. Feel the stretch across your upper back and shoulders. Return to starting position. Repeat on opposite side.



▲ HEAD-TO-TOE BODY STRETCH

Sitting tall at edge of chair, stretch right leg out with foot flexed. Place left hand on left knee and stretch right arm overhead as shown, above, left. Inhale; exhale as you gently round back and reach toward right foot, above, right. Inhale; return to starting position. Repeat three times on each side.

**PLEASE BE SEATED.** Sitting properly helps to prevent muscles from tightening up. ❶ For the best support, choose a chair with a high back. As you lower yourself into the chair, bend at hips and keep spine straight. ❷ Place spine firmly against back of chair. A small

cushion behind the back may be helpful. ❸ Chair should be low enough so that both feet are on the floor. Knees should be slightly higher than hips. ❹ Pull chair in as close to desk or table as possible so you don't have to bend over your work. ❺

LOIS GREENFIELD

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## CROSS COMMUNICATION

### STRESS REDUCERS

1. Get enough sleep. If necessary, use an alarm clock to remind you to go to bed.
2. Don't rely on your memory. Write down when to pick up laundry, when your appointments are, etc.
3. Don't put up with things that don't work right. If something is a constant aggravation, get it fixed or replace it.
4. Plan ahead. Don't let the gas tank get below one-quarter full, keep a well-stocked "emergency shelf" of supplies at home and at work, etc.
5. Make friends with non-worriers.
6. An instant cure for most stress: 30 minutes of brisk walking or other aerobic exercise.
7. Forget about counting to 10. Count to 1,000 before doing something or saying anything that could make matters worse.
8. Take the scissors to your credit cards.
9. Think of your next embarrassing situation as an episode on TV's Candid Camera.
10. Every day, make time for some solitude.
11. Schedule a realistic day. Allow ample time between appointments so you don't have to rush, worry, and apologize for being late.
12. Talk it out. Discussing your problems with a trusted friend can help clear your mind of confusion so you can concentrate on problem solving.
13. Instead of doing something tomorrow, do it today; instead of doing it today, do it now. Hard work is simply the accumulation of easy things you didn't do when you should have done them.
14. Relax your standards. The world will not end if the grass doesn't get mowed this weekend.
15. Add an ounce of love to everything you do.
16. Say "No, thank you" to extra projects you don't have the time or energy for.
17. Donate extra stuff to charity. Getting rid of what you don't need makes what you do need easier to find.
18. Do nothing which, after being done, leads you to tell a lie.
19. Carry a duplicate car key in your wallet.
20. Resolve to be tender with the young, compassionate with the aged, sympathetic with the striving, and tolerant with the weak and erring -- for sometime in life you will have been all of these.

# Head-to-Toe Fitness

Stress-Releasing  
Mental Exercise Is  
the Newest Way  
to Work Out

BY PADDY CALISTRO

**A**N HOUR OF advanced aerobics a day is no longer enough. The newest trend in fitness is exercise with benefits that extend beyond the body. Experts say that after more than a decade of fascination with the physique, Americans are expanding their fitness goals to include mental well-being. These specialists add that relaxation and deep-breathing drills soon will be as essential to daily workouts as aerobics and strength training.

The goal of these mental activities is the reduction of stress, which has become a health-threatening problem for many who are now seeking ways to work relaxation into daily activity. "In the same way that people had to join a class or hire a trainer to get activity into their day, they are now making appointments for relaxation," says Douglas Brooks, a West Los Angeles-based exercise physiologist and personal trainer. "In the same way that we had to learn to exercise, we have to learn to relax."

Exercisers may pay \$45 for a 40-minute session with the Genesis stress-reduction system, which couples biofeedback with music. One such system was recently installed at the Excelsior Club, an upscale Manhattan gym. Others practice traditional tension relievers such as yoga or martial



Yoga teacher Larry Payne designs nerve-soothing exercise routines. "Benefits show up quickly," he says.

arts. And some now walk or hike for an aerobic workout during which mental techniques can be practiced.

Some aerobics teachers now build relaxation breaks into classes, says Kathie Davis, executive director of San Diego-based Idea, the Assn. for Fitness Professionals. "People now depend on instructors to provide both the physical and mental parts of the fitness program," Davis says, noting that more instructors are teaching visualization and imagery techniques in their classes. These involve using mental pictures to release stress and to foster a positive self-image.

For several years, strenuous exercise was touted as a way to reduce stress. But for many, working out has become yet another source of tension. "The time pressure of getting to class, the compulsive manner in which the exercise is performed and the competitive nature of the participants can add more stress," says Dr. Anthony Reading, an associate clinical professor at the UCLA School of Medicine and a specialist in stress reduction.

Margaret Pierpont, senior fitness

editor of *Self* magazine—which, in its March issue, cites the mind-body connection as a trend for the '90s—says: "When people hear the words *mind-body connection*, they immediately think of yoga. But any exercise that allows you to focus, to change your thought process, to clear your head—that's the key."

Reading adds: "Studies show that exercise alone doesn't automatically lead to a positive mental state."

Yoga instructor Larry Payne, of the Samata center in Marina del Rey, specializes in individualized programs intended to treat stress. "Mind-body relaxation techniques are not difficult, but they take some practice. The stress-reduction benefits show up quickly," says Payne, who has taught Dolly Parton and Ted Danson.

Brooks, who does not teach stress-reduction techniques, says about half of his aerobic- and weight-training clients engage in some form of relaxation exercise. "I have never heard of anyone who tried it and didn't like it. We need to define it as having worth. It is the future."