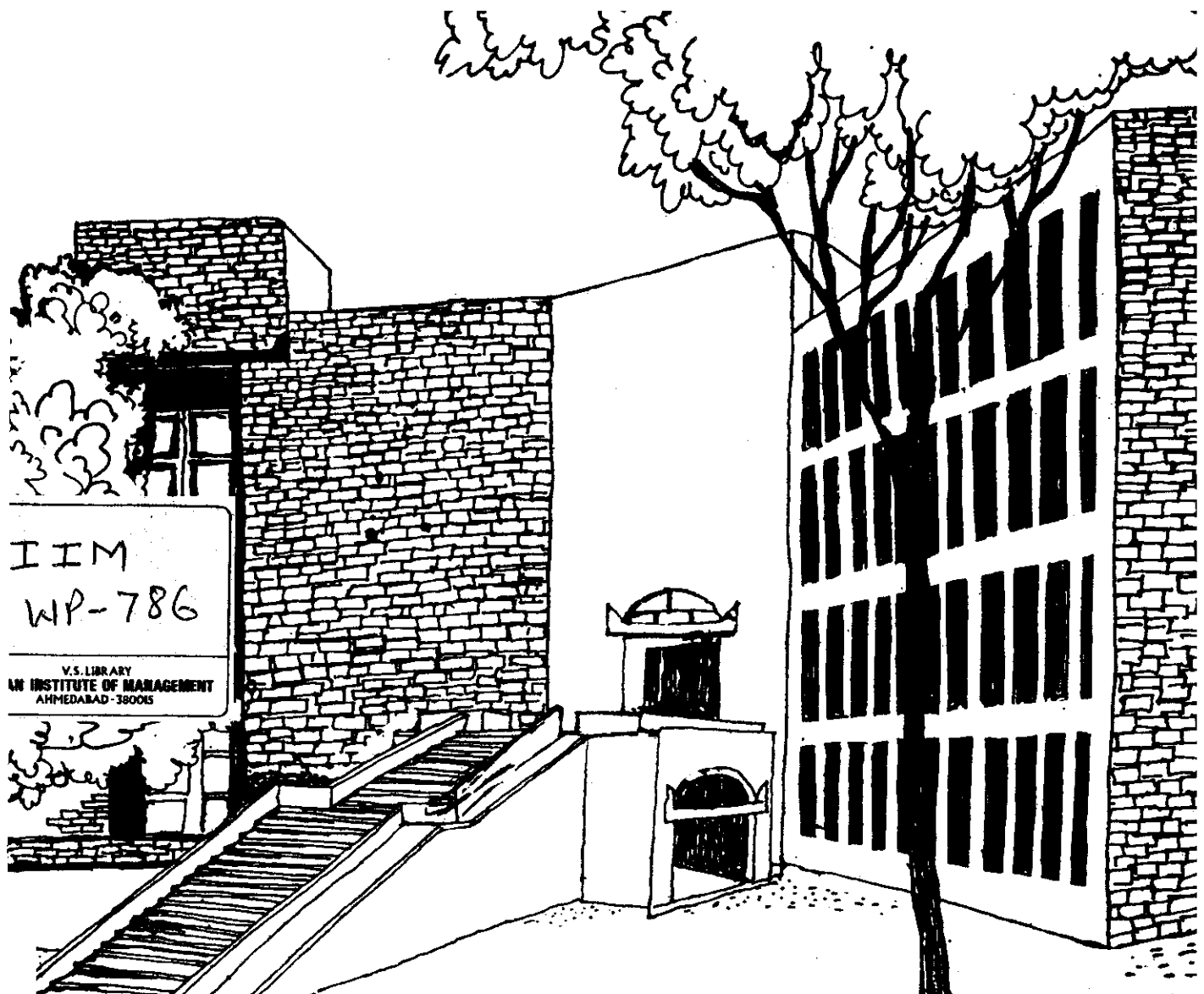




# Working Paper



EXECUTIVE HEALTH - AN OFT  
NEGLECTED ASPECT OF HRD

By

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## Executive Health - An Oft Neglected Aspect of HRD

by

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Scientific concern with the manual worker and his problems is of fairly recent origin although scattered references to the subject may be traced back to as early as 1567 in Paracelsus' monograph on 'Miners Sickness and other Miners' Diseases, but the earliest text book seems to have been the 'Disease of Tradesman' by Bernardino Ramazzini (1633-1714) (Source: JAC Brown, 1954).

The philosophy of HRD is comparatively new but modern organised industrial manpower has many safe guards and protections which make the HRD practices possible.

An interesting factor which has come to light is that most of the writings on HRD, HRM, HRP etc. focus mainly on the organisational roles and role consequences. The human resource at a more intensely personal level has generally been overlooked.

The care for the health of the individual executive is certainly one of the basic self-imposed requirements of all progressive and forward looking organisations. It has been seen that many ailments from which executives suffer are not purely physiological but could also be psychological or psychosomatic in nature. Their roots may lie in mental tensions, anxieties, and stresses.

Health is a state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease according to WHO. It is physical fitness plus well-balanced emotions. Today's executive is often subjected to mental tensions, anxieties, stress, depression, frustration etc.

In the present paper an attempt is made to project some data on executive health in India. For purposes of presentation, we have classified health data as (i) psychological, (ii) psychosomatic, and (iii) physiological.

#### 1. Psychological Ailments:

Emotional stress is a well-known aspect of the modern world. It is estimated that 50% of the executives suffer from emotional strain and anxiety as they have to face various organisational problems and sometimes the job requirements also produce anxiety. One is usually unaware that headaches, backaches, indigestion, raised blood pressure and fatigue are due to emotional stress. One may not have the faintest idea that his unpleasant emotions are responsible for his physical disturbances.

It is the unpleasant emotions like aggressiveness, hatred, rage, jealousy which cause not only all the illnesses but also depression and chronic tiredness because of excessive production of stress hormones. These are called the ACTH Stress Disorders.

Infections as well as prolonged, unhealthy emotions trigger STH Stress Disorders. In the beginning the individual feels tired, lethargic and has muscular aches and pains all over his body. If

this prolongs, numerous STH disorders manifest themselves. Bronchial asthma, rheumatoid arthritis and high blood pressure are some examples.

Another psychological factor that can cause illness is the inability to adapt oneself to a new circumstance. Man can only function in a suitable environment and there is a limit to which he can adapt himself to the changing circumstances or environment. Repeated changes in life style disturbs the individual, some individuals adjust and adapt themselves to the changes but others may become tense and anxious and may become more prone to sickness.

Depression is the emotional state of dejection, gloomy ruminations, feelings of worthlessness and guilt, and usually apprehension. Take the example of an executive who is qualified, experienced, sincere but is deprived of a promotion which is given to his junior only because of his influential contacts. Here the executive may become depressed, loose interest in his job and if it prolongs it may manifest itself in some psychosomatic disorder like bronchial asthma or rheumatoid arthritis etc. High aspirations and low self-image also causes depression.

Anxiety is a state of emotional tension characterized by apprehension, fearfulness, and psychic pain.

Every executive's job has certain aspects which can cause anxiety and he deals with it either by directly attacking the

source or escaping. Almost all executives, however, escape some job-induced anxiety through a variety of unproductive, often unconscious psychological mechanisms - such as rationalization, blaming, denial and so forth. One of the most prevalent and costly of these escape mechanisms is what we call busyness: the escape into time consuming activities that managers find less threatening to perform, than the tough aspects of their jobs.

There are basically three job requirements which cause anxiety to the executives:

- 1) Constant changes in work patterns and routines
- 2) Pressure from superiors for better performance
- 3) Dealing with and getting better results from subordinates.

The three job requirements are, alone or combined sources of considerable uneasiness and anxiety for many managers.

The most common mental component of harmful stress is abnormal anxiety. Short lasting feelings of anxiety are often helpful even though they may seem unpleasant at the time.

The student working for an exam is likely to work harder if he is anxious about doing well. The mother who gets anxious about her son playing on the road will move him to a safer place and so reduce the risk of an accident. The list is endless; without anxiety all our lives would be poorer. But harmful stress anxiety is so crippling it stops us from doing anything constructive.

Once it gets out of hand it seems to be with us constantly. Instead of being turned on by demand it surrounds us like a cloud. When this happens we cannot say what we are anxious about and make feeble excuses to satisfy others. But in reality every little change is taken as a serious threat. If anxiety continues at this pitch for any length of time we become inefficient shadows of our normal selves.

By teaching mastery of anxiety through relaxation techniques, biofeedback and self-assertion, the ambitious type of people can improve their self-confidence and prevent their surroundings from dictating their actions. They will still be worriers but will no longer be imprisoned by anxiety.

#### Burnout Stress Syndrome: BOSS:

All gainful activities classified as work or job are fraught with some risk of stress. BOSS is a debilitating psychological condition brought about by unrelieved work stress. Four types of consequences can arise from it (Veningle & Spradley, 1981):

- depletion of energy reserves
- lowered resistance to illness
- increased dissatisfaction and pessimism, and
- increased absenteeism and inefficiency at work.

#### II. Psychosomatic Ailments:

The emotional aspects of conflict can reach a resolution in specific somatic ways.



The tension that comes with anger or resentment can be internalised as a duodenal ulcer or hypertension. It is often difficult to accept that some aches and pains, indigestions, asthma etc. are due to unpleasant emotions.

Chronic anxiety is found to have adverse results. In psychosomatic disorders the psychological and physiological variables are intermeshed.

A normal person is able to discharge emotional tensions through appropriate verbal, fantasy or physical activities. However in psychomatic disorders, the usual channels of emotional outlet are largely blocked; the tension is discharged instead through the visceral organs, this takes place on an unconscious level.

Psycho-emotional tensions can cause a number of organic diseases, and these are on an increase all over the world. Here is one investigator's findings regarding the percentage of times physicians find physical complaints to be emotionally induced in whole or in part:

|                         |     |
|-------------------------|-----|
| Pain in back of neck    | 75% |
| Ulcer-like stomach ache | 50% |
| Gall-stone like pain    | 50% |
| Dizziness               | 80% |
| Skin rash               | 30% |
| Flatulence              | 90% |

|              |     |
|--------------|-----|
| Headaches    | 80% |
| Constipation | 70% |
| Fatigue      | 90% |

Source: Dr. M.M. Bhangara - "Stresses of Life - How to Cope with Them".

Headaches: Most headaches are due to tension. Ninety-five percent of headaches and pain at the back of the neck are due to psychological factors rather than a severe illness or injury.

The most frequent headaches are the (a) tension headaches and are caused by the head and neck muscles going into spasm due to prolonged and sustained contraction. The muscle spasm leads to constriction of blood vessels, producing pain. The muscle spasm is due to stress. (b) Psychogenic Headaches are brought on by psychological stress and frustration, either in the home or at the office. (c) Migraine: This headache is a half-headache, splitting and throbbing in nature, and occurring periodically - usually after periods of tension. The headache is usually preceded by a short period of tenseness, loss of appetite etc. This is followed by severe headache with nausea and vomiting. Migraine-prone individual is sensitive and a perfectionist, and a constant worrier.

Some remedies for headaches are: Drugs, Massage of the head and neck, application of a balm and to avoid mental tension and stress.

### Backaches:

Homo sapien is the only mammal that walks on two legs. To maintain vertical position, man has powerful back muscles.

Modern man however hardly walks, especially in the cities he always makes use of some mode of transport or the other. This constant inactivity weakens his muscles of the back and calf and may lead to some back problems. Emotional tension also produces a spasm leading to a chronic low backache.

The best remedy for it is yoga and certain exercises which help to strengthen the muscles.

Tight Colon: Tense individuals have tight colons. The commonest complaint of a tense executive is incomplete evacuation of the bowels. Thus the individual should learn to relax. There are many methods which help like TM, Walking or even a game tennis may help.

Stomach Ulcer: Ambitious, driving individuals with underlying dependency problems often suffer from ulcers. They generally react to problems with anxiety, aggression and anger. These unpleasant aggressive emotions when prolonged are internalised and lead to ulcers.

Among the diseases which afflict the executives is one which is exclusively due to bad habits: peptic ulceration of the stomach. Many chronic diseases like hypertension, diabetes and heart attack are due to factors over which a person has very little or no control.

In the case of peptic ulcer, however, sheer neglect and that too over a period of years - is the cause of this excruciatingly painful and often embarrassing disease.

It is now universally accepted that a multitude of factors cause and contribute to the formation of peptic ulcers.

The most common cause is hyper-secretion of gastric juice containing acid which is basically corrosive in nature.

Improper food habits have also an important role to play in the formation of ulcer. Regular intake of alcohol and consumption of spicy food also lead to formation of ulcers.

Smoking is yet another habit which causes secretion of excessive acid and formation of ulcers. Ulcers may also run in some families. According to the latest scientific data, it is usually a combination of many of the above factors which leads to formation of an ulcer.

However, those who do not appreciate the fact that ulcers is a psychosomatic disease do not fully understand the cause of ulcers.

As with other disease states, there are many contributing causative factors such as mental attitude, undisciplined emotional state, diet etc.

What we eat affects our body directly. It can also affect our body indirectly by influencing how we think and feel.

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The stomach and duodenum are figal "shock" organs which reflect an imbalance occuring elsewhere in our being. The real problem may be an inability to cope with the job situation, conditions at home with wife and children, a distorted social life, etc.

To focus on the diseased organ while ignoring the causes will never result in a successful cure. All ulcers, whatever the cause, tend to recur inspite of the best treatment including surgery. The reasons are not difficult to fathom. Most patients do not avoid the factors which caused the ulcers in the first place. Regular food habits, adequate mental relaxation, reducing smoking, avoiding pungent food and alcohol, and adequate behavioural changes are an integral part of treatment which are often neglected. In fact, with a little care and health - consciousness, peptic ulcers can be totally avoided and prevented.

Hypertension: or high blood pressure is more important than as just an index of stressful circumstances. It is one of the most important factors predisposing man to heart attack and strokes. It has been seen that 20% of the executives had high BP. Intake of salt is directly connected with blood pressure. High salt content in the diet increases blood pressure.

In most cases it can be controlled by drugs, yoga and a different pattern of living.

### III. Physiological Ailments:

Modern male is more prone to illness than the female. Good health is hereditary but certain amount of care is also essential like regular check-up, regular exercise, good nutrition, and control over one's emotions. The individual should try to be relaxed, optimistic, less anxious and have pleasant thoughts because continuous depression, anger, jealousy, etc. leads to adverse effects.

Overweight: 40% of executives are overweight. Due to overweight the risk of death goes up because it leads to many other complications like High Blood Pressure etc. The main cause of overweight is overeating and drinking and lack of exercise.

It is sometimes of interest to make a check on how many calories one is taking daily, but it is usually not necessary because the body weight constitutes an unerring index of whether the food is furnishing energy equal to, in excess of, or below the energy requirements of the body.

When the energy intake just about balances the energy expenditure, the body neither gains nor loses weight. Minor weight variations (1-2 lb.) from day to day are of little significance and often may be due to fluctuations in the water content of the body.

If the body weight is stagnant over a considerable period of time, it means that the fuel value of the food intake is adjusted naturally so that it is practically equal to the energy requirement.

Overweight or underweight represent disadvantages which usually result in lesser efficiency or poorer health. Insurance companies and health officials urge people to attempt to maintain in later life the weight which is normal at 25 or 30 years of age.

If body weight is persistently, even though slowly, increasing, there is certainty that the fuel value of the food intake is greater than the energy needs of the body. Usually overeating of calories is the result of too great a fondness for foods of high fuel value (fried foods, sweets and starchy foods).

Decreased muscular activity is also often a contributing factor, for instance, the sedentary nature of office work. As one becomes older, there is a tendency for both the basal metabolism and the physical activity to be lessened.

On the other hand, a decrease in food intake of 500 calories daily below the amount that would presumably keep the body weight constant will normally result in "burning off" or melting of fatty tissues of the body to an extent that will reduce the body weight by about 1/2 kilo per week.

Obesity is certainly not desirable as it leads to inconvenience in moving about, embarrassment of disfigurement.

inefficiency and lack of ambition. Obesity also results in diseases of the heart, circulatory system, kidneys and pancreas (diabetes) and lessened chances of long life. Overweight is prone to develop at 35 - 45 years of life and is especially disadvantageous after 50 years of age.

For an ordinary overweight individual, by far by most satisfactory way to effect weight reduction is simply to cut down sharply on the concentrated fuel foods (sugar, starch, and fats), keeping on with an otherwise well balanced and adequate diet.

Being overweight is unhealthy, but being underweight is no better. Some persons are inclined to leanness, have a poor appetite, or have acquired poor eating habits or faulty health habits that lead to undernutrition. Being underweight has its own disadvantages. Such a person tires easily, is liable to nervousness and indigestion and is more susceptible to infections than one who is more adequately nourished. More rest coupled with increased food intake, will lead to an increase in weight usually accompanied by a surprising increase in general vitality and well-being.

Weight control, although important to health, is an easy matter if taken up in time.

Obesity: One of the common problems faced by medical profession, particularly in urban areas, is that of obesity. In the case of executives as a class, rich food and obesity are relatively common problems. Obesity is not recognised as a disease in many



communities. Even in the medical profession, the importance given to obesity differs from physician to physician. What is undesirable, however, is that the obese state makes a person prone to certain well-known disease entities.

To define obesity, one must have a clear idea of what is an average weight of a person at a certain age. Technically, any person whose weight exceeds the ideal by more than 10 per cent can be labelled 'obese'.

Obesity is the disease of the rich and upper classes. Several causes have been identified for its occurrence. In the middle-aged executives, it is due to sustained eating of rich foods for years on end. Quantity and quality of food both make a difference in the ultimate weight of an individual. In older persons, reduction in the body's metabolic rate, reduced physical activity and extra time available to enjoy food at leisure also add to the chances of putting on weight.

Another theory of obesity is the role of mind in causing this disorder. It is believed that people who are emotionally deprived of family, friends or success in work take to eating as an alternative source of pleasure. Increased eating is also sometimes due to deep rooted anxiety or depression.

Obesity by itself does not kill, but it provides a foothold to many life threatening diseases. The obese person usually has a high level of fat in his or her blood which deposits in and around the heart leading to 'heart failure'. The obese person

also runs the grave risk of suffering from serious respiratory disorders like bronchial asthma.

The bones and joints are also not spared the sins of omission and commission committed by the obese individual. Pain in the knees, ankle and lower part of the back (Osteoarthritis) are invariably due to this obesity. Obese persons are also prone to diabetes.

Overall, the average life expectancy of an obese person is less than of his normal weighing counterpart.

Diabetes: 10% of the overweight patients were potential diabetics it has been seen. Diabetes is the increase of sugar content in the blood and it affects all vital organs of the body like the heart, eyes, brain, kidneys etc. One per cent of world's population, especially in developed countries, suffer from diabetes, a multi-faceted and complicated disease. Diabetes can be controlled but seldom cured.

The diabetic is usually treated with diet control and drugs. Research shows that with regular walking symptoms of diabetes often disappear.

Urogenital: It has been found that 40% of the executives had sexual problems which were mainly due to emotional tension, excessive drinking, overweight, and a very demanding life partner.

The most common sexual problem is impotency and most of the time it is psychogenic in origin. In today's space age, where man is always fighting against time, it is the physical and emotional tiredness which causes impotency in most cases. Sometimes just the fear of impotency may produce symptoms of impotency.

Another common urogenital problem is urinary infection which requires prompt but prolonged treatment by drugs and adequate fluid intake otherwise it leads to kidney damage.

Liver: The three common liver complaints are: (i) feeling of "liverishness" leading to nausea, vomiting etc. (ii) Infectious Hepatitis and (iii) Amoebic Hepatitis.

#### Need for Complete Medical Check-up:

We live in a health-conscious world today. Medical science has progressed rapidly to an extent that an average physician can now foretell the occurrence of disease much before its actual occurrence. In the 1980s, the latest craze among executives and office-goers is, to undertake a 'complete medical check-up'.

A complete medical check-up attempts to discover diseases or disorders which are obvious or in sub-clinical form. Its great role, however, is to detect the signs and possibility of certain diseases like heart disorder and kidney malfunction at an early stage, so that preventive treatment or suitable alteration in the person's life style can significantly change the cause of the disease.

A complete medical checkup can test each and every organ in the human body. In the following table, we have reproduced the results of periodic check-up on 4000 executives in India (Dastoor, 1986).

**Findings of Periodic Check-up on 4000 Senior Indian Executives  
(38 - 58 Years) (1973 - 1984)**

| Findings                       | Per cent | Remarks   |
|--------------------------------|----------|---|
| Emotional Stress and Anxiety   | 50       |   |
| Overweight                     | 40       | 10 to 30 Excess above Normal.   |
| High Blood Pressure            | 20       | Systolic above 140<br>Diastolic 90  |
| Heart Attacks and Strokes      | 2        | Heart Attacks 1.5%<br>Strokes 0.5%  |
| Raised Serum Uric Acid         | 18.5     | Between 5.6 and 6.5 mg/100 ml.  |
| <b>Stomach and Intestines:</b> |          |   |
| (a) Functional                 | 20       |   |
| (b) Organic                    | 8        | Dysentery 5% Ulcer 2%<br>Rest 1%.   |
| <b>Urogenital:</b>             |          |   |
| (a) Sexual                     | 40       |   |
| (b) Infection                  | 6        | Premature ejaculation   |
| (c) Urinary Crystals           | 15       | Impotence   |
| (d) Kidney stone               | 10       |   |
| <b>Liver:</b>                  |          |   |
| (a) Infections Hepatitis       | 6        | Jaundice  |
| (b) Amoebic Hepatitis          | 3        | Unexplained low fever,<br>pain on the lower side<br>of chest, nausea and<br>loss of a appetite. |
| <b>Lungs:</b>                  |          |   |
| (a) Chronic obstructive        | 5        | Asthma, chronic Bronchitis and emphysema.   |
| (b) Virus Pneumonitis          | 1        |   |
| <b>Eyes:</b>                   |          |   |
| (a) Errors of refraction       | 30       | Corrected by glasses  |
| (b) Cataract<br>(Independent)  | 0.25     | 75% were diabetic   |

### Coping with Stress and Related Ailments:

There are basically two methods of coping with stress (i) Drug Therapy (ii) Non-Drug Method.

In today's space age where one is always faced with various problems and tensions it is not advisable to use drugs continuously to cope with stress and related ailments like headaches, backaches etc.

The non-drug methods of coping are more advantageous and safer. We will be discussing a few of the non-drug methods like Walking, Exercise, Acupuncture etc.

One method of counteracting the harmful effects of the physiologic response to stress is the possibility of regular elicitation of relaxation response.

The relaxation response is an innate, integrated set of physiological changes opposite to those of the fight-or-flight response. It can be elicited by psychological means. Until recently, this relaxation response has been elicited primarily by meditational techniques. The effects of some of these techniques is given in the following Exhibit.

Comparison of Methods for Inducing the Polysomnogram Response

| Technique                               | Physiologic Measurement |                  |              |                      |                |
|---|-------------------------|------------------|--------------|----------------------|----------------|
|   | Oxygen Consumption      | Respiratory Rate | Heart Rate   | Blood Pressure       | Muscle Tension |
| Transcendental Meditation               | Decreases               | Decreases        | Decreases    | Decreases            | Not Measured   |
| Zen and Yoga                            | Decreases               | Decreases        | Decreases    | No Change            | Not Measured   |
| Autogenic Training                      | Not Measured            | Decreases        | Decreases    | Inconclusive Results | Decreases      |
| Progressive Relaxation                  | Not Measured            | Not Measured     | Not Measured | Inconclusive Results | Decreases      |
| Hypnosis with suggested deep relaxation | Decreases               | Decreases        | Decreases    | Not Measured         | Not Measured   |
| Serlin Cycles                           | Decreases               | Decreases        | Decreases    | Not Measured         | Not Measured   |

Source: Benson, 1974.

(ii) Acupuncture as a Relaxation Response:

Stress leads to psychosomatic disorders, since emotional states are often expressed in bodily reactions.

The common manifestations observed due to distress are depression, anxiety, cardio vascular accidents, muscular aches and pains, insomnia, gastrointestinal ulcers, sexual dysfunction, allergies and mental derangements.

A study was therefore conducted to elicit the scope of Acupuncture as a relaxation response in coping with stress and also to establish its therapeutic efficacy in the management of functional diseases.

Acupuncture does help in tranquillization and psychic elation and allows one to relax. In the science of Acupuncture, liver is the organ associated with depression.

Acupuncture, besides being a drugless, safe, simple, economical and yet effective therapy with hardly any side effects, has demonstrated by its clinical success, a definite place in coping with stress.



Tabular Representation of the Results of Acupuncture in

Stress Related Diseases

| Stress Related Diseases                        | Cure Rate                             | Failure Rate  |
|--|---------------------------------------|---------------|
| a) Depression                                  | 100%                                  | NIL           |
| b) Anxiety                                     | 20%                                   | 80%           |
| c) Backache                                    | 64%                                   | 36%           |
| d) Insomnia                                    | 100%                                  | NIL           |
|  | Getting up in the middle of the night | 100%          |
|  | Difficulty in falling off to sleep    | NIL           |
| e) Epigastric pain and discomfort              | 100%                                  | NIL           |
| f) Sexual dysfunction and functional impotency | 50%                                   | 50%           |
|  |                                       | 50% (Partial) |

Source: Battivala, 1985.

(iii) Exercise

Physical exercise is necessary in order to keep the body healthy, physically and mentally and is the best antidote for stress. It provides recreation and mental relaxation. Exercise

produces physiological changes which may have a direct bearing on emotional factors thereby providing a degree of protection against emotional stress by conditioning the body's stress adaptation mechanism.

Emotional strength is a major by-product of regular exercise. self-confidence naturally develops. But there is more. Data suggest that exercise causes chemical changes in the brain which actually alter thinking.

Exercise eases nervous tension and anxiety by providing outlet for pent-up feelings of aggression and hostility. For executives troubled with tension, pressure and exhaustion, exercise may well be nature's sedative. The advantages of overcoming stress with exercise are almost limitless. One of the best exercise is walking.

#### iv) Walking:

Today after some 2000 years, modern medical researchers are demonstrating that Hippocrates, "the father of medicine" was right..... walking is man's best "medicine"!

Walking is the most "efficient" form of exercise.... and the only one you can safely, follow all the years of your life. 'Sufficient' walking is as important to the circulation of blood as 'sufficient' motion is to a stream of a water. Deprived, of activity, both become stagnant. 'Sufficient' walking helps protect one from the complications of 'atherosclerosis', the

disease of the arteries, that is the greatest cause of heart attacks, of strokes, or sudden death, in executives who should be in their prime.

Walking is a new and vitally important treatment for men who have survived a heart attack. With regular walking, symptoms of diabetes mellitus often disappear, particularly those who develop light or moderate cases of the disease in middle age.

Walking is the only sensible way to lose weight and stay slender for the rest of your life.

Stress and strain can be counter-acted and even prevented by regular vigorous walking; it is nature's antidote. It is by far the best and safest exercise of all.... and the one you can follow all the years of your life.

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