

# Clinical Roundup

## How Do You Treat Stress in Your Practice?

### Part 1

#### Neuro Emotional Technique

Hans Selye, MD, PhD, DSc (1907–1982), one of the first scientists to study stress, defined stress as: “[t]he non-specific response of the body to any demand for change.”<sup>1</sup> Dr. Selye found that the same physiologic and behavioral reactions occur, regardless of the cause of the stress—which can be physical, mental/emotional, or chemical in nature. Furthermore, stress can be the result of both real and imagined threats.<sup>2</sup> Regardless of the reality of a threat, the physiologic and behavioral responses are identical. These reactions, which include autonomic, endocrine, and behavioral responses, if prolonged, may prove to be harmful, even deadly.<sup>3</sup>

With these facts in mind, I liken our ability to cope with stress to a cup of water—with the water representing stress (see Figure 1). Everyone’s cup is unique, just as is an individual’s ability to cope with varying amounts of stress. When one’s cup is only half full, one is fairly resilient. But when one’s cup is nearing maximum capacity, bodily systems start to break down and illness results. When this occurs, we have two choices: (1) reduce the amount of stress; or (2) get a “bigger cup.”

I take a multipronged approach toward treating stress—and, by the way, I treat all my patients for stress. I work with people first to identify the causes of the stress in their lives, whether these causes are physical, mental/emotional, chemical, or other sources. Then we work to either reduce the amount of stress or to lessen its destructive impact, while, at the same time, helping patients become more resilient, giving them a “bigger cup.”

However, there is one significant hurdle to overcome when considering stress—many of us do not realize its cause. Phobias are good examples of this: Patients with phobias commonly have no recollection of any events that might have caused their phobias.<sup>4</sup> The same may be said about anxiety or depression. People often do not really know why they are feeling this way. What is worse is that people may think they know what is causing their feelings, but, in actuality are frequently wide of the mark. This may be because a stress reaction can be a nonconscious learned automatic behavior.<sup>5</sup> If one does not know its cause, then remedying it is nearly impossible.

One of the techniques I use to treat stress is the Neuro Emotional Technique® (NET), which has been shown to be effective for reducing stress and its sequelae.<sup>4,6–11</sup> The beauty of techniques such as NET, and other similar tech-



Figure 1. The ability to cope with stress can be represented by a cup. Some stress is represented by the cup on the left, and a dangerous level of stress is represented by the cup on the right.

niques (e.g., PSYCH-K®), is that the cause of the stress can be identified through kinesiology-style manual muscle testing.<sup>12,13</sup> If the stress has mental/emotional roots originating from painful events that occurred earlier in life and are long-forgotten, then, by using muscle testing, these events can be explored and resolved in a safe, therapeutic environment.<sup>14</sup> This is done by recalling the specific event and fully feeling the emotion or emotions associated with the event until resolution is reached. Following a clearing, the urge to perform the automatic behavior is lessened, allowing patients to make better, more-conscious choices. I have used this approach for many years, and with it, I have seen countless patients gain relief, reclaim control, and return to good health and well-being.

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## Sleep, Exercise, and Diet

Stress cannot always be avoided in modern life. Therefore, it is critical to give the body the ability to mount an effective and efficient defense against stress. The most important defensive

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Sleep allows the organs to regroup and refresh. It provides the body with a period of time when there are few external

energy demands and the cells of each organ are able to return to homeostasis, a state at which the physiologic and biochemical reactions of the body are at rest and are not striving to correct imbalances.

Exercise induces several groups of cells to perform a primary purpose for each group—that is, the pumping of blood from the heart to the organs and muscles, the delivery of oxygen along with the transport of waste to the lungs, the movement of air in and out of the lungs, and the contraction and movement of muscle fibers. Exercise helps the body retain memory of what the critical processes are, and, with regular exercise the body will be able to defend itself better against the influences of stress-related hormones and cellular destruction.

Finally, raw fruits and vegetables offer some of the most powerful defenses against stress in the form of vital vitamins, antioxidants, and other nutrients. Raw foods are natural sources of energy and sustenance and can therefore be assimilated better. Better assimilation leads to more-effective utilization for the multitude of biologic events necessary for a successful defense against stress.

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## Building Resilience

Our approach to Hans Selye's (MD, PhD, DSc; 1907–1982) coined term *stress*<sup>1</sup> affirms the multidimensional layers/impact of stress on the human body and psyche. Patients coming to the OSU Center for Integrative Medicine (CIM) present for a variety of reasons, including consultation or treatment utilizing integrative approaches to mental illness, medical conditions, primary care, and proactive strategies for health. Patients may manifest a primary stress disorder somatically, while others may recognize stress as secondary to a medical condition.<sup>2</sup>

Physicians and complementary providers at the CIM are knowledgeable in recognizing primary and concomitant stress disorders, and in determining integrative strategies that address stress, based upon etiology and as part of a comprehensive whole-person treatment plan. Recommendations include: relaxing before sleep; a hot bath with lavender oil or magnesium salts; inhaling the aroma of essential lavender oil<sup>3</sup>; melatonin for inducing sleep onset; and valerian root, lemon balm, and passion flower to improve latency of sleep. Patients under extreme stress are advised to take a supplement with a well-balanced form of vitamin B-complex.<sup>4</sup>

In an attempt to meet patients' need for low-cost, community-based stress reduction, physicians and providers are now able to refer patients to receive a low-dose (a less—