

Health Wellness

Balancing Mind, Body and Spirit



Detox Your Life

PURGE YOUR LIFE OF ANXIETY, AND YOUR BODY AND MIND WILL THANK YOU. WE ASK THE EXPERTS HOW.

BY TRACI VOGEL

Stress! If just reading that word made your shoulders rise involuntarily to your ears, you may be able to empathize with Lisette Narragon. Twelve years ago, she was working in product marketing at Sun Microsystems. Her fast-paced job made her feel overwhelmed and anxious – and her two sons were fighting recurrent bouts of strep throat and ear infections that weren't responding to antibiotics. Narragon was at her wit's end when she discovered homeopathy.

Homeopathy, an alternative medicine, "focuses on the person rather than the disease," Narragon explains from her practice, Bay Area Homeopathy in Palo Alto. "It concentrates on who you are emotionally, mentally, and physically, and helps improve your ability to adapt to life."

When we're under stress and we try to repress it, anxiety surfaces as physical symptoms. These can be "things such as diarrhea, anxiety, a skin condition that flares up, the flu," says Narragon. "It can be brain fog. The body produces these symptoms in order to try and maintain balance, but we usually suppress those symptoms with

medication." Strong symptoms, says Narragon, are actually "the sign of a healthy person," someone who is responding naturally to stress. Rather than being suppressed, such symptoms should be heeded as warning signs that the body is out of balance.

In homeopathy, Narragon found a way to understand the underlying causes of illness, and a solution for her sons' chronic health problems that didn't involve antibiotics. Because homeopathy treats the mind and body as one, she became more aware of how stress was taking a physical toll on her family and herself. Her story illustrates how stress can turn toxic, both physically and mentally. But if we learn to listen to its warning signs, help us find solutions.

DETOX YOUR MIND

Greg de Vries teaches stress reduction to some of the most stressed-out people around: executives at Silicon Valley Fortune 500 companies. While he can't name names, these are the kind of people who run around all

day as if being chased by a tiger. Operating at that level of adrenaline might have been useful for our cave-dwelling ancestors, says de Vries, but without a proper outlet now, it can have serious health effects.

"There have been a lot of studies on what stress does to the human body," de Vries continues. "You breathe quicker and shallower, your heart beats faster, your body releases certain chemicals, like adrenaline and cortisol. These changes are great when you need them. But the problem is, people walk around every day with extra cortisol and adrenaline, and that's why people are often on the verge of rage – like road rage, for example."

More than 60 percent of visits to physicians in the United States are due to stress-related problems. Most of these problems are poorly treated by drugs, surgery, or other medical procedures, according to Herbert Benson, asso-

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WHERE TO BEGIN

Lisette Narragon, Bay Area Homeopathy, 2672 Bayshore Pkwy., Ste. 810, Palo Alto (650) 494-3199 www.bayareahomeopathy.com

Greg de Vries, greg@mymeditationcoach.com
(408) 884-3750 www.sanjosemeditation.com

Tracy C. Scott, 280 W. Hamilton Ave., Campbell
(408) 838-2568 www.message4health.net

Tamara Vega, A Sense of Home (510) 770-1718
www.asenseofhome.com

ciate professor of medicine at the Harvard Medical School's Benson-Henry Institute for Mind-Body Medicine. Meditation, says Benson, counteracts the effects of stress by invoking what he famously termed the "relaxation response," allowing the body to decrease its metabolism, breathing rate, heart rate, and blood pressure. Regular use of even very basic meditation techniques have been shown to produce real medical benefits for people suffering from anxiety, depression, chronic pain, headache, high blood pressure, insomnia, and infertility.

An additional benefit, de Vries has found, is that meditation allows you to "not constantly be in a reactive mode. So if something that would normally make you upset happens — like if someone cuts you off in traffic — you tend to have a little bit more mental time to make a decision about how you're going to react. Meditation allows us to separate ourselves from our thoughts and emotions, take that extra step back. So someone cut me off in traffic, does that really matter? No. It can help with a lot of emotional issues, if you tend to get angry or resentful."

Other studies have shown that meditation can boost the body's immune system, and that it may increase production of serotonin, a calming neurotransmitter, in the brain.

DETOX YOUR BODY

Anyone who's ever had a massage will not be surprised to hear that it, too, stimulates production of soothing neurotransmitters. According to Tracy C. Scott, a licensed massage therapist based in Campbell, massage "calms you down — your breath rate slows, your heart rate slows down, the massage can relax your muscles." Like meditation, massage activates your relaxation response. "Most people sleep better the first night after a massage, and the effect may even carry over into other nights," says Scott. "You've gotten much more deeply relaxed. The mind is not as sped up or tied up."

In a stressed-out lifestyle, taking time out for regular massage can act as a kind of reset button, allowing the body to purge itself of muscle tension and metabolic waste, and improve circulation. Regular massage sessions "can have a cumulative effect," says Scott. "It's not going to remove all the stress in your life, of course, but it can certainly help you deal with it better. I recommend once a month if their budget or schedule allows for that — or if that won't work, then quarterly."

Another benefit of regular bodywork, says Scott, is that "it gets you reconnected with your own body. It's easy for us to get disconnected from ourselves physically when we get busy and stressed. Getting bodywork really does reintegrate your mind with your body, as far as what's going on, how you're feeling. Then when

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you do get into extreme stress you're better equipped to deal with it."

DETOX YOUR ENVIRONMENT

If you can't find your massage therapist's phone number — or even your phone — anxiety may be taking another form in your life: clutter. Disorganization can be both a symptom and a cause of stress. Tamah Vega, a professional organizer and owner of A Sense of Home in Fremont, says the cycle can be toxic.

"People become so overwhelmed just thinking about it, they have difficulty making the necessary decisions to move forward," Vega says. "In some cases, they no longer find enjoyment in their home environments. Nothing is comfortable. It can get harder to move around their space, or find what they need to perform basic tasks like bill paying, cooking, or getting dressed." Conversely, she adds, "Having a peaceful environment leads us to feelings of peacefulness."

So just how do you create a peaceful environment? Think about objects around your house that might be causing you stress, Vega suggests. Put away belongings that you no longer use, "especially

anything that makes you feel sad, angry, or frustrated," she says, such as photos of an ex, a gift you don't like, or any item with negative memories or associations. Bills and paperwork should be filed, and hooks, baskets, or drawers should be used to "capture keys, jackets, mail, and bags that normally get dumped as you walk in the door." Get a charging station for your gadgets and put it in your kitchen, entryway, or home office — that way, you'll always know where your BlackBerry is, and it'll be ready to go when you need it.

One room that gadgets have no place in, believes Vega, is the bedroom. If you must have electronics in the room, they should be housed in a cabinet or covered by a curtain when not in use. And don't store exercise equipment in your bedroom. "If you're not actually using it, it's a frustrating reminder of what you should be doing," Vega says. The bedroom should be an uncluttered, comfortable space.

A stress-free mind, a stress-free body, and a stress-free home: Take a deep breath, lower those shoulders, and envision it. All three are within your reach. **TMV**

Western Ballet



Artistic Director: Alexi Zubiria
Executive Director: Lori Henderson
 lorihenderson1@verizon.net
 info@westernballet.org

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Having contributed to the dance community for over 33 years, Western Ballet has enjoyed the reputation, joys, and rewards of providing the education dancer's need to obtain, perfect and nurture a professional career in dance. Western Ballet provides an atmosphere of care and dedication for all levels of dancer from the absolute beginner to the professional dancers. Our students range in age from age 4 to 95. Our prestigious faculty is dedicated to nurturing all levels of dancers in a caring and healthy environment that not only challenges the students, but also improves confidence, concentration, and overall strength and coordination. Western Ballet also provides one of the strongest and most popular adult programs in the Bay Area. With a student base of over 600 in our adult program, Western Ballet provides training at all levels for the adult dancer. So whether you are putting on a pair of ballet slippers for the first time or keeping up your technique for stage, we have the instructors, classes, and convenience to meet your needs. Ballet will help you improve your strength, balance, posture, and grace.

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914 N. Rengstorff Ave., Unit A, Mountain View
 (650) 968-4455