

## Students, Stress, and Health

By Michele Ribeiro and Beth Dyer, Counseling & Psychological Services and Rebecca Sanderson, Student Affairs Research & Evaluation

We commonly think of stress as the mental and physical responses of our bodies to the everyday influences of our environment. Too much stress can be debilitating if we fail to develop good stress management skills. The impact of stress on health, relationships, academics, and multiple other facets of life can be overwhelming without strategies to reduce and manage the stressors in our lives.

Towbes and Cohen (1996) highlighted the following top chronic stressors for college students which included:

- roommate conflict,
- homesickness,
- relationship difficulties,
- writing major papers,
- dieting and weight management,
- money/financial problems,
- long distance relationships,
- juggling school and work,
- time management,
- managing a noisy living environment.

Most of the time we are able to manage moderate and acute stressors without much difficulty; however, if we do not manage these stressors effectively, stress can mount up and create problems which further increase the stress levels. Common reactions to ongoing levels of stress include:

- difficulties sleeping,

- changes in eating habits,
- increased alcohol and other drug use,
- anxiety-related problems,
- difficulty concentrating,
- increased potential for illness because of suppressed immune system,
- depression and isolating behavior
- increased relationship problems,
- difficulty managing emotions,
- headaches,
- decreased academic performance,
- reduced libido,
- burnout.

OSU students report that stress or stress-related difficulties are of primary concern to their health. For example the OSU Counseling and Psychological Services (CAPS) reported that of those students coming in during a two-week period during weeks 6 and 7 of the term, 92% reported wanting to change their coping skills related to emotional stress. Another 51% reported wanting to develop better sleep habits and an additional 48% desired help with concentration.

Likewise, OSU Student Health Services regularly surveys the OSU student population regarding health-related matters. In 2009, results on the National College Health Assessment indicated that nationally, over 50% of students reported that they experienced more than average stress or tremendous stress during the last 12 months. Further, students reported that during that same time period they had a very difficult or traumatic time handling academics (45%), intimate relationships (36%),

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sleep (25%), and other social relationships (25%). Over 25% of students reported that their level of stress had interfered with their academics. This was the single most factor contributing to academic difficulties that was reported by students.

Additionally, students have repeatedly reported via various surveys, that one of the top benefits of working out at Dixon Rec was stress reduction.

Since stress is additive, we need to determine ways in which to reduce stress levels regularly in order not to keep adding to our level of stress.

In order to respond to the levels of stress that students are experiencing, many services have been designed to help students manage stress and live a more balanced and healthy life. Several of these are detailed in subsequent sections of this issue of OSU Perspectives.

## Physical Activity Links to Stress Management

By Tina Clawson, Membership and Assessment, Recreational Sports

The link between exercise and stress is a recurring headline in the national news media (reference at end of article).

However, it is not new or surprising news to the OSU community that physical activity is effective in reducing stress. Repeatedly, OSU students and faculty have identified stress management as one of the top benefits of physical activity with improved physical fitness, and increased energy rounding out the top three.

In Spring of 2008, 92% of 535 students responding to a RecSports survey

reported that they had somewhat or definitely increased or improved their ability to manage stress as a result of participation in RecSports programs and services.



During Fall term 13,092 unique students or 59.3% of the total number

of students enrolled for that term (including e-campus and Cascades Campus students) used RecSports facilities. Students who participated in intramural or recreational programs, but did not use the Dixon RecCenter are not included in this count.

For more information about RecSports opportunities, check out their website:

<http://oregonstate.edu/recsports/>

ABC News "Happiness linked to healthy heart" by Meredith Griffiths, Feb 29, 2010.

The New York Times "Phys Ed: Why exercise makes you less anxious", Nov 18, 2009.

## Mindfulness and the Mind Spa

By Michele Ribeiro, Psychologist, Counseling and Psychological Services

"Serenity is not freedom from the storm, but peace amid the storm"  
—unknown—

Mindfulness has become a popular term that is defined as moment-to-moment awareness or seeing things as they are (Goenka, 2009). Given students' busy lives, they are often taught and even expected to multi-task, perform on auto-pilot (without much thought) and to just do more. This "doing" expectation and attitude clearly leads to stress over time. So the old mantra "just do" can be intermittently replaced by "just be." "Being," allows the mind to quiet down and to restore itself. Through this "being" mode, one can begin to act rather than just react to one's thoughts, feelings and environment.

Mindfulness has often been misunderstood as a passive activity, but in essence it requires more effort through

the practice of purposeful attending, in a non-judging way. According to Fleishman (1991), the ability to observe the mind and body causes one



to directly understand "the manner in which our thoughts become embodied." Thus, practicing mindfulness meditation helps build skills to tolerate and manage stress, test and general anxiety as well as chronic pain.

The Mind Spa is a tranquil resource on campus that is free to all students, staff and faculty. Since the Mind Spa opened in late November 2008, 1367 student and 438 faculty/staff appointments have been scheduled in the facility with the intent to enhance performance by finding and

practicing ways in which to reduce the effects of stress.

The Mind Spa houses a full body massage chair, a full spectrum therapy light for Seasonal Affective Disorder (SAD), and several mindfulness based programs including audio and biofeedback (e.g. Healing Rhythms). The Mindfulness groups that Counseling and Psychological Services has regularly offered over the past five years, has averaged ten students per group. The small group size provides a supportive environment where the practice of mindfulness can be introduced and explored. To learn more about the Mind Spa or CAPS' Group Therapy program please visit:

<http://oregonstate.edu/dept/counsel/>

Fleishman, P. R. (1991). *Vipassana meditation: Healing the healer*. Dhamma Giri, Igatpuri: Vipassana Research Institute.

Goenka, S. N. (2009). *Vipassana meditation*. Retrieved from [www.dhamma.org](http://www.dhamma.org)

## Oh To Sleep Again . . . Getting a Good Night's Sleep

By Niloofar Bavarian, MPH, Graduate Assistant, Health Promotion, Student Health Services

Throughout the past several decades, the college population has experienced dramatic decreases in the median hours of sleep attained per night (Hicks, et al, 1991), as well as substantial increases in the number of students reporting sleep problems (Hicks, et al, 1992) and dissatisfaction with sleep (Hicks, et al, 2001). This data is particularly concerning given that sleep difficulties can negatively impact student health, wellness, and academic success. OSU students are not immune from sleep difficulties and the subsequent effect sleep difficulties have in the classroom. According to results from the Spring 2008 National College Health Assessment, 21.3% of students reported that difficulties with sleep negatively impacted their academic performance. In light of this data, The Beaver Sleeper Campaign



was created by the Student Health Services (SHS) to improve students' self-efficacy to improve their sleep quality and quantity.

The Beaver Sleeper Campaign is multi-faceted, and includes providing 50-minute workshops to students living in residence halls, providing outreach during special events such as National Sleep Awareness Week, collaborating with groups on campus such as the Peer Health Advocates, and sharing sleep tips throughout campus via advertisements and posters displayed in *The Barometer* and Student Health Services. During Winter term 2010, it is estimated that 373 people (i.e. students, staff, community members) engaged in discussions about sleep with

Beaver Sleeper Campaign staff. Moreover, eight workshops were provided to 152 participants; of the participants completing evaluations, 85% stated that they learned at least one new piece of sleep-related information.

Students learned tips for improved sleep quality and quantity. To take steps towards a better night's sleep, go to the sleep page on the SHS website below:

<http://studenthealth.oregonstate.edu/tips-getting-good-sleep>

Hicks RA, Pellegrini RJ. The changing sleep habits of college students. *Percept Mot Skills*. 1991;72:1106.

Hicks RA, Conti PA, Pellegrini RJ. The incidence of sleep problems among type A and type B college students: changes over a ten-year period (1982-1992). *Percept Mot Skills*. 1992;75:746.

Hicks RA, Fernandez C, Pellegrini RJ. Striking changes in the sleep satisfaction of university students over the last two decades. *Percept Mot Skills*. 2001;93:660.

## POWER UP CHALLENGE

By Kerry Evans, Wellness Coordinator, Recreational Sports

**POWER UP!** That is challenge issued by several OSU departments to members of the OSU community. Participating in the **POWER UP CHALLENGE** was designed to be multidimensional, flexible, and fun!

For 19 weeks students, faculty and staff were encouraged to set and pursue their own health and wellness goals. Individuals participated as often or as little as they wanted in presentations, individual consultations, health coaching, and wellness events. Additionally, through an application process, two teams of eight were selected as featured challengers and received the added benefits of blood lipid tests,

counseling, support groups, fitness classes, nutrition appointments and personal training. In return, these challengers posted blogs and became the public face of the challenge.

Over 200 faculty, staff and students have registered for the **CHALLENGE**, the blogs have had over 10,000 hits and the **CHALLENGE** is not yet over! If you have not been following the **CHALLENGE**, now is the time to start.

The blogs tell a story about how commitment to wellness, support, and use of available wellness resources can really change lives and improve overall health. For more information about the **CHALLENGE** and to read how it has

changed lives go to the following website:

<http://blogs.oregonstate.edu/powerup/>

The **POWER UP CHALLENGE** was a collaborative effort among the following OSU departments:

- Recreational Sports
- Student Health Services
- Counseling and Psychological Services
- College of Health and Human Sciences
- ASOSU
- University Advancement
- University Marketing
- OSU Housing and Dining Services.

For further information, please contact Rebecca Sanderson at the Student Affairs Research and Evaluation Office.

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## Striving to Make the Healthy Choice the Easy Choice

By Tara Sanders, Registered Dietician, UHDS

Fueled by current economic conditions, environmental sustainability and social responsibility efforts, there is a

national trend of returning to food basics. The demand for local, fresh food is increasing and students and faculty are looking for wholesome, natural ingredients in prepared foods.



vegetarian options are important. In March 2010, UHDS surveyed customers and identified these healthy options as priorities: more fruits and vegetables, whole grains, vegan and vegetarian options.

UHDS strives to make the healthy choice the easiest choice by providing options, information and services that promote health. In all of UHDS dining centers customers can find a bounty of fresh fruits and vegetables, whole grains, lean meat and vegetable protein sources, and low-fat, calcium rich food options.

UHDS is committed to supporting the local economy and environment by purchasing a range of local produce, bread, meat and dairy products. Vegan and vegetarian options are available in each restaurant to meet the needs of those who practice vegan, vegetarian and semi-vegetarian diets. Nutrition, ingredient and allergy information are available on web-based UHDS menus and UHDS employs a full time dietitian to



assist those with special dietary considerations.

It is the mission of UHDS to create environments that support personal and academic success. Personal health and well-being are the foundation for success; therefore, UHDS is in the business of encouraging healthful, balanced dining choices.

For further information about healthy choices in OSU's dining services, consult the following UHDS website:

<http://oregonstate.edu/uahds/dining/menus/>



According to a 2010 National Association of College and University Food Services (NACUFS) survey, quality foods being served in dining centers is a driving consideration for prospective students when considering where to attend college. Over 1/3 of those surveyed are looking for foods that are natural, seasonal, organic and have "functional" health promoting benefits.

In a 2008 NACUFS Benchmarking

Survey, 84% of OSU University Housing and Dining Services (UHDS) residents state that a variety of healthy choices and nutritional content is important and 51% indicate vegan and



## "Live well. Learn well. Be well."

Many thanks to the Student Affairs Health and Wellness Alignment (i.e., Recreational Sports, Student Health Services, and Counseling and Psychological Services) and the OSU Dining Services for writing about ways in which students and others are increasing their

abilities to manage stress and increase wellness. Because wellness is multidimensional and interdependent it takes the focused efforts of many to support the OSU community in efforts to be well. These units deal daily with the effects of too much stress and un-

healthy lifestyles. To learn more about the Student Affairs Health and Wellness Alignment visit:

<http://oregonstate.edu/recsports/live-well-learn-well-be-well>

For further information, please contact Rebecca Sanderson at the Student Affairs Research and Evaluation Office.

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### OSU Perspective:

#### What is it?

The **OSU Perspective** was developed to provide assessment and other information about our students and programs. We hope that by making this information available to OSU faculty and staff, we can stimulate conversation that helps keep students and student learning at our core.

The **Perspective** is published both in print and on the web: <http://oregonstate.edu/studentaffairs/assessment/osuperspective.html>

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