

Wellness Nutritional Component

The Academy and Instructors are charged with developing wellness and nutritional materials for the Physical Fitness Training Program. **Nutrition, Weight Control** and **Stress Management** are covered in this **Wellness Nutritional Component**.

I. Nutrition – Food provides the energy and nutrients you need to be healthy. Nutrients include proteins, carbohydrates, fats, vitamins, minerals and water. Learning to eat nutritiously is not hard. The key is to:

- A. Eat a variety of foods, including vegetables, fruits and whole-grain products;
- B. Eat lean meats, poultry, fish, beans and low-fat dairy products;
- C. Drink lots of water; and
- D. Go easy on the salt, sugar, alcohol, saturated fat and Trans fat. Saturated fats are usually fats that come from animals. Look for Trans fat on the labels of processed foods, margarines and shortenings.

E. Additional handouts on Nutrition are attached and listed below:

- 1. **Nutrition Basics: You Are What You Eat**
- 2. **Reading Food Labels: Nutrition Facts Explained**
- 3. **The Food Pyramid: An Option for Better Eating**
- 4. **Carbohydrates, Proteins and Fats**
- 5. **Vitamins, Minerals and Water**

II. Weight Control – If you are overweight, you are not alone. Sixty-six percent of adults in the U.S. are overweight or obese. Achieving a healthy weight can help you control your cholesterol, blood pressure and blood sugar. It might also help you prevent weight-related diseases, such as heart disease, diabetes, arthritis and some cancers.

Eating too much or not being physically active enough will make you overweight. To maintain your weight, the calories you eat must equal the energy you burn. To lose weight, you must use more calories than you eat. A weight-control strategy might include:

- A. Choosing low-fat, low-calorie foods;
- B. Eating smaller portions;
- C. Drinking water instead of sugary drinks; and
- D. Being physically active.

E. Additional handouts on weight control are attached and listed below:

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1. **Weight Loss Basics: Counting Calories**
2. **Body Mass Index Discussion**
3. **Losing Weight Safely**
4. **8 Sneaky Things that can Make you Fat**
5. **America's Obesity Problem**

III. Stress Management – Stress is the "wear and tear" our bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment; it has physical and emotional effects on us and can create positive or negative feelings. As a positive influence, stress can help compel us to action; it can result in a new awareness and an exciting new perspective. As a negative influence, it can result in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger, and depression, which in turn can lead to health problems such as headaches, upset stomach, rashes, insomnia, ulcers, high blood pressure, heart disease, and stroke. With the death of a loved one, the birth of a child, a job promotion, or a new relationship, we experience stress as we readjust our lives. In so adjusting to different circumstances, stress will help or hinder us depending on how we react to it.

Everyone experiences stress from time to time, so it is perfectly normal. However, normal doesn't necessarily mean healthy. Nor is it inevitable! Believe it or not, you can learn how to largely eliminate stress. I don't mean eliminate the pressures in your life; those will probably persist. The way I think of it, pressure is what is happening to you, but stress is how you react to those pressures. So, you can keep the pressure and get rid of the stress.

A good example of this comes from the study of stress in executives. Several studies have shown that low and middle level executives show many stress symptoms, like ulcers, high blood pressure, tension, burnout and so on. Top executives, however, as a group show much fewer stress signs. There are exceptions in both directions, of course. Why do big wigs show fewer signs of stress? There may be many reasons, like more control over their lives, but it is hard to believe they don't have pressures. So why don't they get as stressed out? Probably the main reason is that they are either naturally stress resistant or have learned how to handle the pressure without letting it eat them up. It's like the old saying, "If you can't stand the heat, get out of the kitchen".

Fortunately, **stress management** is largely a learnable skill. Most people can learn how to take the heat in their lives. Before we talk about how, let's consider what stress is in more detail. The way I think of it, stress is a "false alarm". What I mean is that it is the erroneous activation of the "danger alarm" system of the brain. I visualize it as a big red fire alarm inside the head. This is a system we are all born with and it is a good thing to have. However, the biological purpose of this system is to help prepare us for dealing with real, physical danger. When the danger alarm is turned on, it produces a physiological response called the "fight or flight" reaction, which helps us to fight the danger or flee it.

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When you are in real, immediate physical danger, it is appropriate to feel afraid. Getting your body charged up with adrenaline may well help to keep you alive. However, most of the time when we feel stressed, there is no immediate danger, so it is a false alarm. The fire alarm is sounding, but there is no fire!

So how do you learn how to manage stress? Learn how to turn off the stress alarm system through various relaxation method, and learn how NOT turn the stress alarm system on in the first place. These two methods are discussed below:

- A. Learn How to Turn Off the Stress Alarm System Through Various Relaxation Methods** – Relaxation methods work on the idea that you can't be relaxed and uptight at the same time. Basically, anything you do that is the opposite of what the danger alarm system does will tend to shut it off. Some examples include:
- 1. Deep Breathing** – Taking deep, slow breaths rather than the shallow, fast breathing we feel when we are stressed. This really works physiologically to help shut off the danger alarm.
 - 2. Muscular Relaxation** – Tensing and relaxing various muscle groups can work wonders. Try your neck and shoulders, your shoulder blades, your forehead and eyes, tensing these groups for a few seconds, then relaxing them. You can also combine this with deep breathing by inhaling while you tense, then exhaling when you relax the muscles. There are more sophisticated versions of these muscular methods, like the shower of relaxation and progressive relaxation.
 - 3. Visualization** – Imagine a very peaceful scene, like lying on the beach, out in a fishing boat on a lake, in a mountain cabin or whatever. It can be a real place or you can make it up. Try to invoke all your senses as you imagine being in this very peaceful, relaxing place. What do you see? What sounds are there? What sensations of touch, temperature or smell? For example, you might imagine the sun on your skin, the cool breeze on your forehead, the salt tang of the ocean, the grit of the sand.
- B. Learn How to NOT Turn the Stress Alarm System On in the First Place** – **It is better to learn how to avoid getting stressed out** in the first place. So how do you do that? Well, the clue is in the visualization method. Thinking peaceful thoughts makes you feel relaxed. In imagining a peaceful place, you have also distracted yourself from whatever thoughts you were having before. This points out the basic premise of cognitive/behavioral psychology, which our feelings and behaviors are largely caused by our own thoughts. This is oversimplified, because there are many feedback loops that make the connection between thoughts,

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feelings and behaviors sort of like a chicken and egg problem. But the simple version of the cognitive theory is that peaceful thoughts cause relaxation and stressful thoughts cause stress.

C. Additional handouts on Stress Management are attached and listed below:

- 1. Six Myths About Stress**
- 2. Simple Steps for Managing Stress**
- 3. Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR)**
- 4. Unhealthy Responses to Stress**
- 5. Combat Stress with Visualization**