



# Why Your Stress is Big Business

by Lydia Dishman

**H**ave you noticed how many products and services are available to help people reduce stress? There are workouts, seminars, therapists and more, whose sole purpose is to help the frazzled masses find inner peace. Even humble laundry detergent is staking a claim with an infusion of tranquility-producing scents. With all that we should be the most relaxed people on the planet. But we aren't.

Consider these numbers:

- 43 percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress.
- 75 to 90 percent of all doctor's office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.
- Stress can play a part in problems such as headaches, high blood pressure, heart problems, diabetes, skin conditions, asthma, or arthritis in addition to depression and anxiety.
- The Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA) declared stress a hazard of the workplace. Stress costs American industry more than \$300 billion annually.

Information provided by Jerome F. Kiffer, MA, Department of Health Psychology and Applied Psychophysiology, The Cleveland Clinic Foundation.

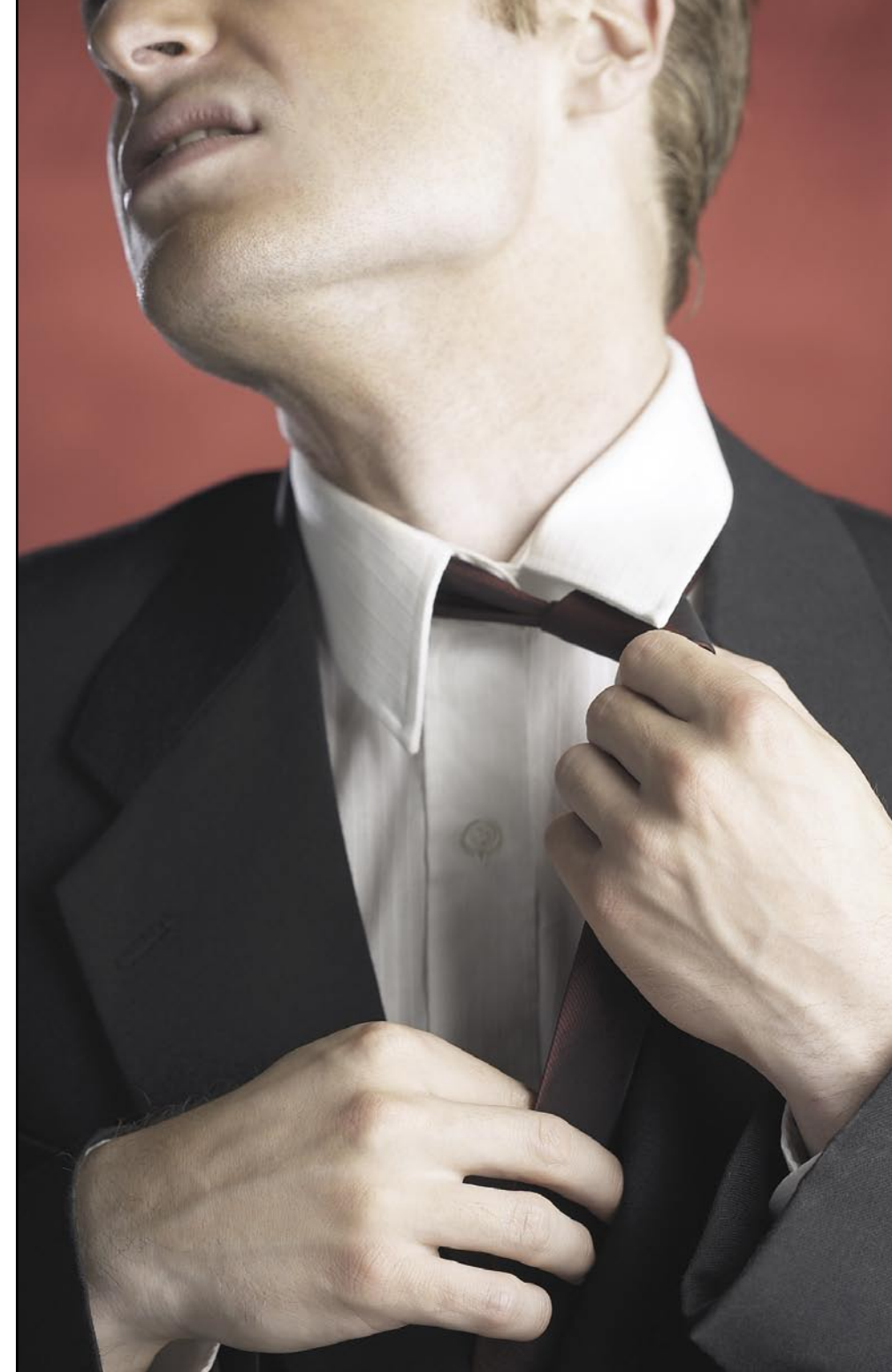
Stress is not only prevalent in daily life, it has become so endemic it is worn as a badge of courage. Surely, you've heard the line, "I work best under pressure."

"The technology age has created an enormous amount of stress," says Kristi

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Reid-Barton, owner of It's Yoga Studio. "We are on call 24/7; we need to know what is going on all the time. It creates stress on the physical and mental body to be alert and awake at all hours." Always doing and going rather than simply taking the time to just "be" takes and emotional and physical toll.

Beth Riley, a psychotherapist who deals mainly with patients with eating disorders says, "There is a direct correlation between stress and attitudes towards food and body image. It seems that the higher the stress, the more people tend to focus on food, eating



behaviors, and body image to escape the stress."

Lynn Victory, a registered dietician who offers nutrition counseling, agrees. "Stress often increases the hand-to-mouth behavior, similar to smoking. It can cause binge eating for people who have the tendency to overeat, which can create health problems such as obesity, hypertension and high blood lipids if the stress is chronic. Under-eaters often restrict food and skip meals when they are stressed. Weight loss, fatigue,

and depression can result if the stress is long-term," she says.

Victory also points out that she has seen an increase in poor eating habits as people try, and fail, to cope with stress. "It is due in part to increasingly hectic work and family schedules and families not sitting down together for meals. Also, stressed people often do not take the time to exercise, plan or cook healthy meals." Stress is that much worse if it keeps you awake at night. Victory says that research shows lack

of sleep alters cortisol levels which in turn can cause people to gain weight.

Contrary to some thinking, you don't have to be a high-level executive to feel stressed out. Venus Gibson, owner of Spa Venus (formerly About Face) says her clientele is "across the board; we even offer a child's massage, with adult supervision, of course."

Think you are immune? Take this simple quiz: How often do you check your email or go to media websites to get the latest news? Does your phone keep your pocket or purse buzzing during the day and into the night? Do you eat or talk on the phone, or both, while driving? If you are living and working in the 21st century, chances are you've answered *yes* to all of these. You may even be smiling. (Note: Smiling is a stress buster.) The good news is that stress is a normal part of living. It is how we cope with it that counts.

Gibson, who has been operating her spa and salon for over 25 years, says that more and more people are now aware of the effects of chronic stress, which helps to explain the sheer numbers of businesses filling the need to help folks from all walks of life manage the daily assault.

Increased awareness is translating to dollars. Greenville is no stranger to the booming business of stress management. Reid-Barton recalls that, when she was getting started in 1978, there were only three certified yoga instructors in the Upstate. Now, she says, it seems there is one on every corner. As home to a growing population and a number of companies both large and small who deal in information technology, high performance automotive research, engineering, sales and production operations, the landscape bears witness to a proliferation of all manner of alternative ways to take a deep breath and let it go.

In Greenville, there are currently no less than 30 places billing themselves as "day spas," offering a varied menu of pampering from pedicures to aromatherapy massage. On any given weekend, seminars can be found that aim to ease stress, or even to re-learn how to breathe. Yoga classes are offered in fitness centers, hospital health programs and in independent locations such as Reid Barton's It's Yoga Studio and at relative newcomer, North Main Yoga.

Brian Delaney, co-owner of North

Main Yoga with his wife Elizabeth, says, "Business is great, a lot more clients are coming and we have a lot of repeat students." Timing was everything for the Delaneys, who came to Greenville just a year and a half ago to open their studio, capitalizing on the trend and filling the demand for more yoga classes. "We have seven instructors and offer several different types of yoga: vinyasa, iyengar, shivananda and another that has elements of ashtanga."

Offering a full range of services is a business model that many of these stress-managing entrepreneurs have latched on to. Kim Harrell, owner and licensed massage therapist at four-year-old Carolina Massage says she saw a need for a holistic approach to treatments, and now employs three massage

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therapists as well as a yoga instructor, a counselor and a fitness coach. "We are a one-stop shop," she says. "We even help people with chronic conditions such as fibromyalgia and cancer deal with their physical stresses. We bridge the gap with traditional medicine." Harrell is pleased to be getting more business through referrals from doctors and chiropractors who, she says, are recognizing the benefits of massage and alternative stress management.

Reid-Barton has noticed that the medical community is catching on, too. She says that a workshop she participated in at St. Francis had around 300 attendees, and her own workshops and classes continue to fill quickly. "Stress management is becoming a big portion of health management."

Vicy Wilkinson, co-owner of Migu, a distributor of massage beds, says that a research team at the University of California at Irvine found that using

the beds (which are more accurately termed "thermal massage devices," as you don't technically spend the night on them) reduced cholesterol and blood pressure and that they may help the body produce more serotonin, the neurotransmitter that regulates moods.

Migu – a Korean word for *beautiful health* – operates a no-pressure-to-buy showroom where people can go and try out the beds for up to thirty minutes at a time. The positive effects are astounding. "We are seeing over 100 people a day," she says, some of whom are business folk on their lunch break. Since opening in July of last year, they are selling beds at a good clip as clients realize the benefits of increased circulation and sense of well being.

While researchers are busy studying clinical trials and their results, Venus Gibson says it's simple. "Any time you touch someone it releases endorphins. They go into the bloodstream and make you feel good." Gibson believes even a facial can be a stress-buster in addition to being great for the skin. She does point out "make sure your massage therapist is nationally certified," and Harrell agrees. "Don't be afraid to ask questions and tell them how you feel, a massage therapist can work with your body but they can't read your mind."

Though the stressors present in daily life are on the rise with technology expanding the business day and shrinking leisure time, there are plenty of options to beat the stress and take time for yourself. But Wilkinson says that even the most awareness is not enough to motivate people to put themselves on the "to-do" list. It is easy to say "later" or "tomorrow," when faced with a deadline or shutting kids around town. And the results on your health could be disastrous.

"The longer we stay stressed, the more vulnerable we are to disease. We are all equal in one way. We all have the same 24 hours to get our to-do list done. Creating a good routine by building time in the day for yourself, whether it is getting a massage or doing yoga, or whatever makes you feel good is not selfish, it is critical." Brian Delaney agrees. "Leaving daily life at the door and not thinking about it for an hour is incredibly healing." Wilkinson adds, "It can save your life." 