



Drain Away Stress with Free Motion

By Angela Williams Duea

When stress takes over the body, muscles tighten, teeth clench, and the heart pounds. Adrenalin floods through tissues, sending the body the fight-or-flight signal. Long-term exposure to stressors causes a constant state of body tension and emotional exhaustion, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC). Without a release, our bodies can react with headaches, chronic fatigue, ulcers, high blood pressure, insomnia, and a host of other health problems.

Stress is a fact of life, and is all-pervasive in our society. Surveys by Northwestern National Life found that one-fourth of employees view their jobs as the number one stressor in their lives. Everyday events such as a misbehaving child or rush hour traffic add to chronic stressors such as job troubles, economic worries, family problems, or health issues.

Learning how to deal with stress in ways that leaves one pain-free and relaxed will increase satisfaction with life and comfort in the way the body feels. By practicing freedom of movement, one can relieve the symptoms of stress as well as training the body and mind to work in new, freer patterns. Many methods of releasing tension, such as massage, Yoga, and aerobics, involve challenging one's muscles. Other approaches, such as the *Trager*® Approach, meditation, and *Mentastics*® melt away stress through easy, freer range of motion and mindfulness of the body's signals.

To retrain the body in new patterns of movement and freedom, the first step is to learn to become fully aware of the body's sensations. Though someone with a painful shoulder can pinpoint where the pain is and describe the pain itself, they may not be aware of the more subtle sensations such as the pull of gravity on the arm and the momentum of movement in a muscle. One can

train the mind to focus on all the sensory signals, rather than just the pain signals.

Next, the sufferer should move the painful area gently and lightly, within the range of no resistance. If one experiences pain or muscle fatigue, he or she should reduce movement by half, while imagining feeling light as a feather or filled with helium. Maintain awareness of every sensation related to the movement. Enjoy the lightness and freedom in the small, gentle actions. Many people find it helpful to work with a professional familiar with these concepts to help pinpoint resistance and blockages, and to keep them aware of their body's signals.

The practitioner may swing arms gently like a pendulum, stand with feet apart and rock slowly, or twist the torso from side to side. In all these movements, it is key to perceive all of the body's signals – the sensations of gravity, the weight of one's hands, and the centripetal swoop of the pendulum. Remaining mindful of these sensations, and repeating the movements over time, will release the mind's hold on the body. In this way, any holding patterns in muscles can be loosened, freeing one's body from pain and tension.

Stress is a fact of life, but stress-related pain and tension doesn't have to be. Anyone can retrain the mind and body to release stiffness and reset muscles to a neutral, relaxed state. By teaching the mind a new approach to stress, and learning new ways of movement, one can help the body find wholeness, and experience a new level of serenity. "I was willing to accept an increasing amount of pain as part of aging, stress, and nature," says Diana Ellis, a *Trager* client. "Now I see each day as an opportunity to feel better and grow stronger."

To locate a practitioner, go to the *Trager*® website www.trager-us.org or call the United States *Trager*® Association at 440-834-0308.