

# People under stress can learn to control it, UCI expert says

**R**unning a marathon or getting married can cause stress; so can pressure on the job or problems at home.

But there's a difference. One is what Dean Shapiro calls "good" stress; the other, he says is "distress."

Stress results in distinct physiological changes, he said.

"When there are too many situations that the individuals cannot control, they have chronic negative stress that seems to be implicated in a variety of men-

tal and physical health problems, ranging from hypertension to anxiety and depression," said Shapiro, an associate professor in the Department of Psychiatry and Human Behavior at UCI Medical Center in Orange.

"Competing in a race or getting married will cause stress in an individual, but generally that's exciting and enjoyable," said Shapiro, who runs a stress-management clinic at the medical center. "With distress, you may have the same physiological changes in your body but it

is painful and uncomfortable."

Shapiro offers two ways to control stress, or at least to ease discomfort when it cannot be controlled.

"First, in self-control strategy, we focus on what a person can control in their life ... including relaxation exercises or by changing thought patterns, imagery or a combination," he said.

During stressful times, it can help to have another, more controlled situation to fall back on, Shapiro said.

"If (people) are having interpersonal stress, they should have some daily habit that gives them peace and quiet," he said.

Individuals who cannot change their environments can learn strategies to help them accept the things they have no control over.

"This would involve keeping a perspective on events as in Robert Eliot's book, 'Is It Worth Dying For?' His two rules are: 'Don't sweat the small stuff, and everything is small stuff.'

"In other words, do not be-

come upset over that which is not important," Shapiro said. "You can tell it's not important if it does not have a five-year significance or if you'd be embarrassed to pray for it"

People seeking relief from stress should get proper professional help. Otherwise, the results might be dangerous.

"In fact, there has been some evidence that the very teaching of relaxation for some people could bring on a panic attack," Shapiro said.

— Marilyn A. Batchelor/The Register

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