

Stressed-Out Faculty May Need a

NEWSTART!



No other group has as great an opportunity to influence the future of the world as teachers, who have the honor and privilege of motivating and preparing the future leaders of society and the church. This is an awesome responsibility!

Teachers are expected to possess exceptional knowledge and skills in the areas they teach; to motivate students to learn the subject matter (sometimes with very limited resources); to work extended hours outside of the traditional nine-to-five day; to persevere despite lack of respect from students and

A study finds that Seventh-day Adventist faculty who regularly practice NEWSTART healthy lifestyle principles have decreased levels of work-related stress.

the public, low salaries, and lack of recognition; and to balance professional roles and personal responsibilities competently (e.g., teaching, advising students, serving on academic committees, scholarly research, publishing, and community service).

Christian educators have the additional responsibility of being spiritual role models for their students. Consequently, their dispositions and characters are continuously being evaluated by students, parents, and constituents.¹

A life filled with pressures such as those described above can lead to excessive stress, and ultimately burnout.² Burnout is defined as emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment.³ It may occur when teachers have not taken the time and effort necessary to insulate themselves from the excessive demands of their profession. Consequently, educators must strive to maintain balance

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(homeostasis) in order to relieve or cope with job-related stress.⁴ With an abundance of literature supporting the relentless pressures that educators face, the authors of this article made the decision to explore potential strategies that might help reduce faculty stress.

For the purpose of this article, stress is defined as “an adaptive response that is a consequence of any action, situation, and/or event that places special demands upon the individual.”⁵

Types of Stressors Faced by Faculty

Literature dealing with stress in academia suggests that faculty must contend with six basic categories of stress: time restraints, inadequate rewards and recognition, lack of influence with administrative leadership or departmental chairs, unpleasant student interaction, conflicts relating to professional identity (acceptance and productivity within the profession), and increasing expectations without additional resources or compensation.⁶

How Faculty Tend to Deal With Stress

Walter Gmelch’s study of faculty from all disciplines found that “. . . 60 percent of the total stress in their lives came from their work.”⁷ His study also suggested that it is the faculty members’ perceptions of their own ability to perform efficiently in different work situations (e.g., low demand, optimum demand, high demand) that will determine their degree of stress.⁸ These perceptions are based on the faculty members’ personal strategies and the filtering systems they use to manage stress (e.g., teaching experience, ability to multitask, support from family and friends). The greater the proficiency of the filtering system, the less stress the teachers were likely to experience.⁹ In other words, when evaluating stressors, if people believe they have the necessary resources to cope, they actually experience less stress.

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Seventh-day Adventists and Stress Management

Selye argues that no specific stress-reduction formula can be applied to everyone.¹⁰ However, for more than 100 years, the Seventh-day Adventist Church has advocated the adoption of specific health principles as a means for living a healthy, wholistic, reduced stress lifestyle.¹¹ These health principles can be summarized using the acronym NEWSTART (Nutrition, Exercise, Water, Sunshine, Temperance, Air, Rest, and Trust in divine power).¹² Studies of various aspects of the Adventist lifestyle have revealed that members who practice the church’s health principles live longer and have a lower risk of chronic diseases (e.g., cancer, heart disease, and lung disease).¹³ Can this regimen also help Adventist teachers and educational administrators to prevent stress and deal with it more effectively?

The NEWSTART Adventist Faculty Study

For many years, Adventists have believed that following the tenets of the NEWSTART lifestyle will help to improve one’s overall health.¹⁴ Do these principles also provide a coping mechanism for stress? This article is based on the primary author’s (Ashley’s) original exploratory study,¹⁵ which examined the association between application of some of the key Seventh-day Adventist healthy lifestyle tenets and faculty stress.

Significance of the Study

Adventists are known for embracing a healthy lifestyle, which is part of the church’s doctrinal beliefs. However, there is a dearth of research assessing the effects of these practices on the stress levels of church members.

The study’s findings are significant for a number of reasons:

- They provide baseline information on health practices used by faculty at the participating institutions;
- They reveal baseline information on the effectiveness of this model as a means of faculty stress reduction;
- They provide information about health strategies that educators can use to create and maintain a healthy faculty team;
- Being able to reduce the cost of subsidizing health care for employees due to improved health among faculty will benefit school budgets.

Methodology

Ashley’s original study utilized a survey research design. A three-part survey was used to collect the data. This instrument consisted of the Faculty Stress Index (FSI),¹⁶ a validated stress measurement tool; the self-reporting NEWSTART questionnaire, which was designed with the assistance of authoritative informants¹⁷ and a demographic questionnaire. The study sample was drawn from full-time faculty at three of the 14 Adventist institutions of higher

learning in North America: Andrews University (Berrien Springs, Michigan), Oakwood University (Huntsville, Alabama), and Southern Adventist University (Collegedale, Tennessee). Of the 382 surveys administered, 124 (32.4 percent) were returned and subjected to multiple regression analyses to assess the effects of faculty members' practice of the NEWSTART health principles on their stress levels. All variables were coded so that higher scores accurately represent positive practices within the NEWSTART regimen.

Findings of the Research

Statistical analysis revealed that the practice of NEWSTART had a significant effect on two of the five subscales of the FSI: reward and recognition; and time constraints. (Departmental influence, professional identity, and student interaction were the three other subscales in the FSI instrument.)¹⁸ The reward and recognition dimension of stress includes: (1) not feeling valued by academic colleagues and administrators; (2) the effect of salary decreases and lack of pay raises, or not receiving funds for research; and (3) the fear of inadequate retirement benefits.¹⁹ The time constraints category addressed the stress levels produced by the need to incorporate multiple tasks or activities within the teachers' professional lives, such as meetings, clerical work, counseling students, telephone calls, and visitor interruptions.²⁰

Faculty members who practiced NEWSTART health principles reported as much as two-thirds less stress in the areas of reward and recognition (62 percent) and time constraints (66 percent), when compared to their survey counterparts who did not apply the principles.

While the mechanisms by which this health regimen influences the stress categories of reward and recognition, and time constraints among fac-

ulty are unclear, the results were unequivocal. Faculty who practiced the components of the NEWSTART regimen (e.g., eating a balanced diet, exercising regularly, enjoying the sunshine and fresh outdoor air, obtaining adequate amounts of rest, and maintaining an active devotional life) reported lower levels of stress in the areas of reward and recognition needs, and the pressures of time constraints.

How Can Adventist Institutions Apply the Principles Learned From This Study?

While the subjects of this sample were higher education faculty, the authors believe the principles are applicable to teachers at the elementary and secondary levels as well. The time has come for our educational institutions to take a more proactive approach in im-

plementing an Adventist lifestyle by providing practical avenues through which faculty, staff, and students can actively participate in healthful practices.

One Seventh-day Adventist institution²¹ in North America created a health and wellness program for the faculty and staff in 2003. The process was launched with the appointment of a Health and Wellness Committee by the institution's administrator, who is an avid health and wellness supporter. The committee was made up of faculty and staff with experience and training in the health-care field (e.g., nursing, health management). The group was assigned to develop a coordinated program that would encourage faculty and staff to engage in the principles of NEWSTART.

The committee developed a comprehensive health program that would not negatively affect the school's daily



The Eight Basic NEWSTART Principles

routine, while at the same time providing a realistic health regime in which all employees could participate. The program included periodic risk assessments by health professionals at no charge to the participants, as well as monthly nutrition and wellness workshops. Participants were required to engage in at least 30 minutes of physical exercise four times per week (written documentation was required).

All participants were rewarded with discounts in their individual or family health-insurance premiums. Anecdotal data indicate that the results of the program have been very successful: From 2003 to 2011, faculty participants who were interviewed indicated that they had improved overall health, felt better about their jobs, and had a noticeable reduction in their annual health-care costs, which in turn helped to reduce the university's health-care expenditures for these employees.

The administrators at this university have also played a major role in this initiative by providing annual discounted health premiums to employees who successfully complete the program.

The school's Health and Wellness Committee continues to seek creative ways to increase participation, such as special prizes for attendance and participation in health fairs or sponsored programs, increasing health-care premium discounts, and providing workshops on topics of interest. This is just one example of a growing number of Adventist academic institutions that are recognizing the importance of taking the initiative to implement their own health and wellness programs.

Why Faculty Members Need to Get Involved in NEWSTART

Living a longer, healthier life is an important goal for every faculty member and administrator in Adventist schools. Ellen G. White contends that the taxing nature of teachers' responsibilities requires them to make a

Due to the length limitations of this article, an in-depth discussion of NEWSTART has not been provided. However, a great deal of information is available to explain each concept (see suggestions at the conclusion of this article). The following illustrations provide a short description of each of the NEWSTART principles:

- *Nutrition* – Taking time to understand what constitutes a balanced and nutritious diet and implementing this plan on a consistent basis.
- *Exercise* – Implementing a regular program that ideally includes exercising for at least 30 minutes three or four times per week.
- *Water* – Drinking a generous amount of water each day (six to eight glasses).
- *Sunshine* – Ensuring that the body receives a moderate amount of sunshine (at least 15 minutes per day).
- *Temperance* – Abstaining from substances/behaviors that are harmful to one's health (e.g., alcohol, tobacco, illicit drugs), and moderate use of anything that is considered beneficial to health (e.g., eating, work, rest).
- *Air* – Ensuring that one is constantly exposed to an abundant supply of fresh, pure air (oxygen).
- *Rest* – Obtaining adequate rest and sleep each day (six to seven hours minimum), and taking time to rest from secular work one day per week (Sabbath).
- *Trust in Divine Power* – Maintaining a daily personal relationship with God and trusting in His ability to provide help in coping with life's challenges.²²

special effort "to preserve vigor and freshness."²³ Thus, when educators are dealing with academic-related stressors, if they cannot avoid the stressors, they should do everything possible to control them. Vernon Foster suggests that people can realize a six-year increase in life expectancy as well as a reduction in their health-care costs by simply following the NEWSTART lifestyle regime.²⁴

The study revealed that knowledge and belief in the NEWSTART health principles do not necessarily equate to integration by Adventist educators. The purpose of this article is not just to help Adventist teachers understand key faculty stressors, but more importantly, to encourage them to put their beliefs into practice by adopting attitudes and

habits that positively affect their body, mind, and soul. Here are some key principles that can be used as motivation to kick start a NEWSTART healthy lifestyle regime.

1. *Don't Feel Guilty About Spending Time on Yourself*—Educators sacrifice countless hours outside of the traditional work day to ensure that their work responsibilities are completed. Keep in mind that you are a valuable component of the body of Christ (1 Corinthians 12:28). Therefore, investing time to recharge your physical, mental, and spiritual batteries is vital in order for you to function optimally on the job. Even Jesus, the Master Teacher, often took time to re-energize Himself after a long day of toil and labor (Matthew 14:13, 23; John 6:15).

2. *Recommit Yourself Each Day*—When planning your daily list of tasks, make

NEWSTART implementation a top priority.

3. *Always Be Conscious of Your Inactivity* – It can be easy to sit or stand in the same position for extended periods of time. Make a concerted effort to stretch and walk around intermittently. Rather than sitting through your entire lunch break, go for a short walk after eating.

4. *Turn Off Your Television and Limit Computer Time* – Television and the Internet are the biggest obstacles to lifestyle adjustment success. Practice temperance by limiting television and computer time, using the hours gained to refresh your body and soul.

5. *Get Other Faculty Involved* – Put health and wellness topics on the agenda for discussion in faculty meetings as part of team building and self-nurture. Discuss creative ways that teachers and staff can encourage one another to maintain a healthy lifestyle (e.g., taking time to walk with a partner before or after school). Join a fitness club or mutual activity that you all enjoy. The fact that you are doing it as a group will serve as a motivating influence for you to continue your participation. Don't forget to celebrate and reward yourselves for individual and group achievements (e.g., weight-loss and fitness goals).

6. *Get Regular Health Check-ups* – Visit your doctor and dentist periodically to ensure that you are maintaining optimum health.

7. *Start TODAY* – Make a conscious decision to begin implementing the principles of NEWSTART *today!*

For more detailed information on NEWSTART and other healthy lifestyle resources, please consult the following Websites and resources:

<http://www.newstart.com/>
<http://www.drnedley.com/>
<http://creationhealthbreakthrough.com/>
<http://www.floridahospital.com/AboutUs/Mission/CreationHealth.aspx> ✍



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bama. He conducted the original NEWSTART and faculty stress research as his dissertation project and is an avid believer in applying the principles of NEWSTART to daily living. Dr. Ashley's social work practice background includes program management and administration. His area of specialization is health and wellness with special focus on student and faculty stress, student behavior, and course management issues. He has authored several publications on faculty stress and has conducted professional workshops and consultation on classroom management techniques and faculty stress reduction.



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NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 1903), pp. 244, 245.
2. Roland Vandenberghe and A. Michael Huberman, *Understanding and Preventing Teacher Burnout* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), pp. 15, 16.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 15.
4. Walter H. Gmelch, *Coping With Faculty*

Stress (Newbury Park, Calif.: Sage Publications, 1993), p. 73.

5. Earl Smith, *A Comparative Study of Occupational Stress in African American and White University Faculty* (Lewiston, N.Y.: Edwin Mellon Press, 1993), p. 23.

6. Ann Edworthy, *Managing Stress* (Buckingham, U.K.: Cromwell Press, 2000), pp. 41-47; Gmelch, *Coping With Faculty Stress*, op cit., pp. 26, 27.

7. Gmelch, *Coping With Faculty Stress*, op cit., p. 20.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 42.

9. *Ibid.*, p. 43.

10. Hans Selye, *Selye's Guide to Stress Research* (New York: Van Nostrand Reinhold Company, 1980), p. 21.

11. David Nieman, *Adventist Healthstyle* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Publ. Assn., 1992), p. 36.

12. The acronym was developed by the Weimar Institute of Health and Education, a private institution operated by Seventh-day Adventist laypersons; see also Vernon Foster, *NEW START!* (Weimar, Calif.: Weimar Institute, 1990), p. 25.

13. Roland Phillips, J.W. Kuzma, W. Lawrence Beeson, and Terry Lotz, "Influence of Selection Versus Lifestyle on Risk of Fatal Cancer and Cardiovascular Disease Among Seventh-day Adventists," *American Journal of Epidemiology* 112:2 (August 1980), pp. 296-314; Gary E. Fraser and David J. Shavlik, "Ten Years of Life," *Archives of Internal Medicine* 161:13 (July 9, 2001): 1645-1652.

14. Ministerial Association, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, *Seventh-day Adventists Believe: A Biblical Exposition of Fundamental Doctrines* (Boise, Idaho: Pacific Press Publ. Assn., 2005), pp. 313-317.

15. O. George Ashley, *Faculty Stress & Health Practices: Stress Among Higher Education Seventh-day Adventist Faculty Who Practice NEWSTART Health Principles*. Ph.D. dissertation (Ann Arbor, Mich.: UMI Dissertation Services, 2004), p. 3.

16. Gmelch, *Coping With Faculty Stress*, op cit., pp. 21-23.

17. The authoritative informants that assisted in the development of the questionnaire were: (a) Malcolm Cort, Ph.D. (co-author), a Seventh-day Adventist sociologist who is a professor at Athens State University in Athens, Alabama, and an adjunct professor at Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama; and (b) Everton Macintosh, Ph.D., Seventh-day Adventist psychologist and professor at Alabama A & M University in Normal, Alabama.

18. Ashley, *Faculty Stress & Health Practices: Stress Among Higher Education Seventh-day Adventist Faculty Who Practice NEWSTART Health Principles*, op cit., p. 94.

19. Gmelch, *Coping With Faculty Stress*, op cit., p. 33.

20. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

21. The institution has requested to remain anonymous.

22. Foster, *NEW START!* op cit., p. 25.

23. White, *Education*, p. 277.

24. Foster, *NEW START!* op cit., p. 22.