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Healthy matters to keep in mind.

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Stage Fright: Dealing With the Spotlight

If you are like most people, the thought of speaking before an audience is frightening. So common is the dread of public speaking that, according to numerous polls conducted over the years, it is listed as the number one fear in America—ahead of heights, financial ruin and even death! Mark Twain said it best when he noted: “There are two types of speakers. Those that are nervous and those that are liars.”

Fortunately, it is possible to tame the dread of public speaking because it has mostly to do with managing our own fears.

Taming Stage Fright

Get prepared. When combating any kind of performance anxiety, it is critical to be prepared in advance. Professional

speakers say there is no substitute for being totally, thoroughly and utterly prepared for your presentation. Not only do you need to have a command of your subject, but you need to know your audience as well. Be sure your remarks are tailored to the age, skill set or culture of your audience.

Preparation also counts when it comes to logistics. Be sure you know how to work any audio-visual equipment, where the dimmers are for lights, what the room set-up will be, the time allotted for the presentation, etc.

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Upcoming Articles

October 2008

Coping with Work Stress: Do You Know What's Really Stressing You Out?

November 2008

Grief: Surviving the Feelings and Healing the Heart



Tips for Relaxation

The following strategies can help you manage the physical symptoms of stage fright:

- Take slow, deep breaths prior to your talk. Deep breathing calms both mind and body.
- For a full-body calm, try progressive muscle relaxation. Sit or lay down. One by one, isolate the large muscle groups of your body, gently tense them, and then release.
- Avoid caffeine, spicy and gassy foods.
- Get plenty of sleep the night before.
- Start your talk with a joke or humorous remark. This can relax you and make the audience more receptive to your message.

Practice. The second-most important tip for taming stage fright is practice. Most of us will only speak a few times a year—if at all—yet professional speakers say they will rehearse their speeches again and again. If you will be giving a presentation, be sure you rehearse it well. The old adage is true: practice really does make perfect.

If you want to improve your public speaking skills over the long term, consider joining Toastmasters International, the Five

O’Clock Club or other organizations that provide forums for professionals seeking to hone their public speaking skills.

Use the adrenaline rush. Some speakers find that channeling their adrenaline rush—the so-called “fight or flight” reflex—can help them to energize their presentation. In other words, accept that some anxiety will be present, acknowledge it, and then use it rather than trying to push it away.

Take a moment to feel the sensation of adrenaline—the racing heart, sweaty palms—and say to yourself: “This is exciting! Let’s go!” This may not be possible every time you present, but if you are prepared, have practiced, and keep a realistic perspective, you may find yourself exhibiting an energy you never knew you had.

For some people, being in the spotlight feels intolerable. It may get in the way of your work, or keep you up at night. If stage fright is holding you back from the life you want, seek



support. Asking for help is never a sign of weakness or failure, especially in situations too difficult to handle alone. UBH is here to help. Call or log on anytime for help with any of life’s challenges.

What is Stage Fright?

Stage fright is a bodily response rooted in the “fight or flight” reflex we all feel under stress. The same hormones flood your stomach, and you may feel “butterflies” in your stomach, sweat profusely, and breathe shallowly or more rapidly. No doubt these sensations can be unsettling. Understanding their cause can help you gain power over them.

What causes these symptoms? The reasons vary with the individual, but they are generally related to a fear of:



- Failure
- Being judged
- Looking silly
- Losing control
- Freezing up
- Exposing our ignorance

Most people are afraid that one or more of these consequences will occur in front of their audience, while the spotlight is on them. If your stage fright is severe, consider speaking with a professional counselor, who can help you figure out what particular fears may be holding you back.

No matter what the reasons for your stage fright, it can be overcome. Remember that you’re not alone.

Resources

United Behavioral Health

Ask your HR representative for your access code and toll-free number.

www.liveandworkwell.com

Use the search phrase “relaxation 101” to learn techniques for deep breathing and progressive muscle relaxation.

Visit the “Stress & Anxiety Resource Center” for help with understanding more about stress and anxiety and the different options for controlling them.

The information and therapeutic approaches in this article are provided for educational purposes only and are not meant to be used in place of professional clinical consultations for individual health needs. Certain treatments may not be covered in some benefit plans. Check your health plan regarding your coverage of services.