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Kaiser
Permanente
Health
Educator
Elvira Garay
gives
employees
the latest
information
about stress
and ways to
cope with it.

*Photo by
Michael D.
White*

Metro Employees Learn About Combating Stress at TCU-Hosted Class

(April 15, 2010) There are two steps in dealing with stress, according to Kaiser Permanente Health Educator Elvira Garay.

The first is knowing its symptoms and learning how to define it, while the second is knowing that once you've identified it, you have to learn to manage it or potentially face a chronic illness that could lead to an early death.

That's the message she conveyed to a roomful of Metro employees at a recent Transportation Communications Union (TCU)-sponsored stress management class at the Gateway building.

The dictionary definition of stress describes "a physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation," but Garay simplified it, saying stress is "anything that becomes a threat to an otherwise stable life."

Yoga Instructor Jillian Szafranski encourages employees, even those who've never tried yoga, to check out the class she teaches in the Gateway Building. The first class is free with a flyer, and then \$9 per session. Click [here](#) or on image to download flyer.



When Garay asked employees to provide their own definition of stress, it took them several minutes to respond with one woman responding that, "I think stress is anything that makes me nervous."

In dealing with stress, Garay said, it's important to know the difference between "short term" indicators like long lines at the grocery store and traffic, and "long term" stress like chronic conditions and job loss.

Stress attacks the central, adrenal and cardiovascular systems, and wreaks havoc on the immune system, and the fight-or-flight hormones necessary to survive are released suddenly throughout the body, she explained.

"If you don't release that energy at some point, your risk of heart disease is going through the roof because all these changes are happening," she said. "You have an increased heart rate, increased blood pressure. Most of us cannot walk around with an accelerated heart rate, and blood pressure for a long period of time."

Ineffective ways of dealing with stress exacerbate chronic conditions, Garay added. "We're eating, drinking, and smoking our stress."



PacifiCare Rep Steven Zahigian distributes information to employees who attended the TCU sponsored stress class.

*Photo by
Michael D. White*

She talked employees through a deep breathing exercise and gave them a mini quiz to help determine their stress levels and was joined by yoga instructor Jillian Szafranski, who invited employees to a yoga class taught twice a week during lunch at the Gateway building.

The class provides stress relief for employees regardless of their physical background, said Szafranski. In fact, she noted that 95 percent of her students had never attended a yoga class before.

Garay concluded the class by encouraging employees to look for ways to reduce stress levels like exercise and deep breathing, and noted that Kaiser provides classes for everyone including nonmembers.

"You are in control over how you respond to stressors in your life at work or at home," she said.

--from Laura Kloth

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