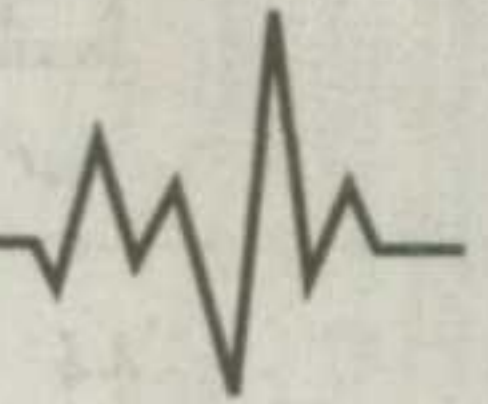


Best the stress

Identifying and handling stress is key to good health



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 According to the American Psychological Association, 54 percent of Americans report that they are concerned with the level of stress they deal with on a daily basis. What's more, one in four workers have taken a mental health day off to cope with stress. It may be something that people can't completely avoid, but it's better for overall health if they can identify the stress, teach themselves to remain composed, and combat it.

"Under pressure, feeling trumps thinking - we cannot think when we're swamped with feeling," explains Kimberly McKenna, a family systems specialist, coach and director of the Center for Family Leadership at the Oceanside Institute. "People need to teach themselves to identify it and react to it in

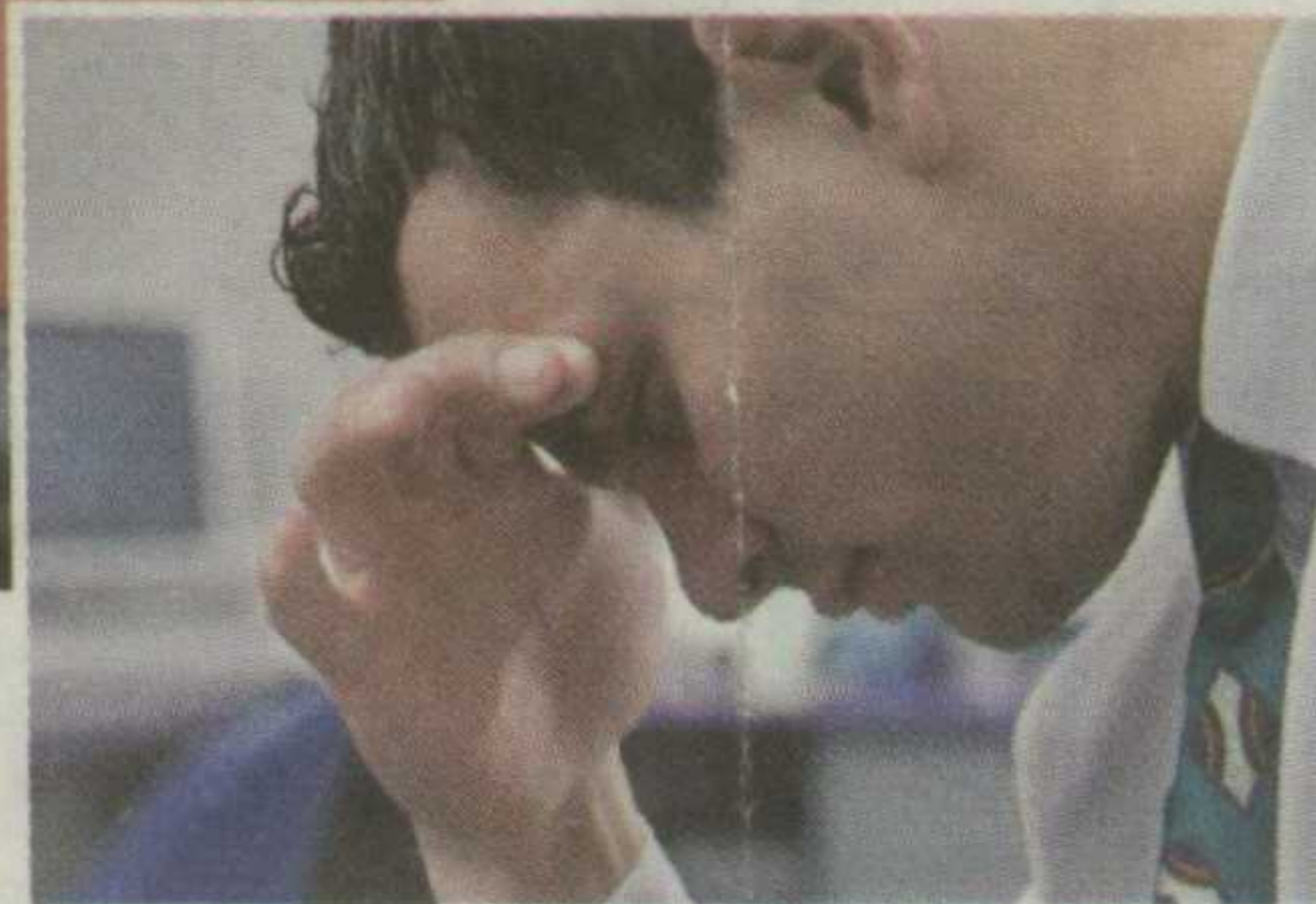
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 an appropriate way."

When people are under stress, there is a transformation in their behavior. Their thinking becomes rigid, they feel hopeless and often look for immediate relief, and many turn to food or drugs for that relief. Identifiable stress signals in others often come across in the form of criticism, increased sensitivity, being defensive, impatience, being dramatic and pointless arguments.

"Emotional stress is contagious," says McKenna. "But one calm, composed person can change a whole system of connected people."

Staying composed under stress is the best route to take. Just how do you do it? "Always separate facts from feelings," says McKenna. Other things people can do to work on their composure include:

- Keep their focus on the big picture and the long term
- Think through problems in a clear-headed, open-minded way
- Gather as many facts as possible in order to see a situation accurately and realistically
- Identify their convictions, principles and beliefs that apply to the situation
- Allow others to have strong feelings without chastising them or trying to change them
- Choose a response or action based on your best thinking



"It's important that people have a balance between work, life and health, and that they take care of themselves in all those areas," adds McKenna. "Regaining your composure automatically mitigates feelings and symptoms of stress."

The healthy route for individuals to take is to learn to identify their stressors: the people, times and situations that bring them stress. Then, when they are feeling stressed, they have to find ways to work through it, like doing yoga, breathing exercises, taking a break, going for a walk or phoning a friend for a relaxing conversation.

To learn more about Kimberly McKenna, visit her Web site at <http://www.evilstepmom.org>.

Courtesy of Newsworthy stories