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Study on the Importance of Physical Education in Fighting Stress and a Sedentary Lifestyle among Students at the University of Bucharest

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Abstract

It is widely accepted that stress and lack of exercise – these scourges of the modern era – increasingly affect more people, regardless of age, education, occupation, so these aspects of life have lately become a concern and research topic of great interest.

In the present study we aim at identifying the extent to which young people, students at the University of Bucharest, are affected by these "diseases" and to establish a relationship between participation in physical education classes and the perceived stress and lifestyle of these socio-professional categories.

The findings of our research come to strengthen other research conclusions on the same topic, namely that sports practiced in an organized way, led by a specialist in a pleasant environment, with efficient means, adapted to the particularities of the subjects' age, is an extremely useful "weapon" in fighting stress and a sedentary lifestyle.

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1. General considerations

The spectre of stress and a sedentary lifestyle – considered to be the "diseases of the century" – is spreading, unfortunately, more and more in a category of people who should be characterized by dynamism, a zest for life, exuberance. In reality, these scourges are a challenge for young people who, in their wish to properly adjust to the requirements of "the Century of Speed" fail to manage efficiently their low free time budget and to give themselves at least a few moments dedicated to sporting activities, whose positive influence on the body's

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systems and functions, as well as on the mind, are well known. The literature describes several types of stress, such as: physical, psychological, biological, cybernetic and sociometric. There are many definitions and meanings of the term stress. Paul Popescu Neveanu (1978), for instance, identifies the following meanings:

- stress is a situation or stimulus that puts the body in a state of tension;
- stress is the very special tension due to which the body mobilizes all its defensive resources in order to be able to face physical or psychological aggression.

It is a well known fact that, whatever the type of stress we are dealing with (physical, mental, chemical), it will affect all the systems and organs in the body, generating disorders, with mental activity as the "super integrator".

There are also several definitions of psychological stress, among which we mention here that of Golu (1981), according to whom it is a state of tension, tension and discomfort caused by agents with the negative significance of frustration or by the repression of motivational states (needs, desires, aspirations), due to the difficulty or impossibility of solving problems.

It is generally accepted among experts that a certain amount of stress is essential for life and can be our ally if we know how to manage it. If, however, the level of stress in our lives exceeds normal rates, it can become a (mental and physical) health issue. Regarding physical health, the effects of stress factors can include: poor physical condition, low general motility indicators, inappropriate operation of the main body systems, low parameters of physiological indices indicating a state of exhaustion, incorrect posture. Regarding mental health, there is frustration, low mobilization of energy, poor self-esteem, negative thoughts, anxiety, depression, lack of strong motivation etc.

From a biological perspective, it was demonstrated that the body's reaction to the action of stress factors is the release of hormones such as adrenaline, noradrenalin, cortisol, that are designed to prepare the body to handle unusual situations by increasing heart rate, blood pressure, muscle tone, stimulating the body to cope with these challenges. However, this ability decreases the body's reaction over time, thus creating the premises for installation of diseases.

It is recognized that from a medical perspective, physical activity is not the best way to combat stress, but it is also known and accepted that it can improve its symptoms.

Appropriately developed exercise programs can help people under stress use up excess energy, release frustration, they can contribute to reducing anxiety, depression, distrust, loneliness, and the lack of interest in everything around (Grigore, 2007).

Clinical and experimental studies have shown that physical training of a moderate intensity, whether of a long or short duration, can produce a significant decrease of anxiety, the effect persisting possibly for a period of 4-6 hours. Another positive influence of moderate exercise is the reduction of phobic syndromes. It is believed that physical effort is involved in reducing anxiety as it competes with the perception of the symptoms of anxiety and helps subjects modify their outlook on the professional or social difficulties they have to face (inducing a euphoric effect).

Another gain generated by physical activity in relation with the reduction of depression is that it removes inactivity and the state of apathy, boosting self-confidence.

Exercise acts on the central nervous system by inducing a state of wellness. It was noted that this phenomenon occurs in about 70% of the long-distance runners. This feeling of relaxation was documented not only by the athletes' reports, but also by electrophysiological measurements that have demonstrated a decrease in spinal activity and synchronization between the two brain hemispheres. It was shown that an increase in body temperature also plays an important role in acquiring this state of wellness and relaxation.

The other element of interest for us, sedentary lifestyle, is manifested first by a reduction in the amount of movement at work, as well as in various everyday activities, which translates into a significant reduction in the volume and intensity of exercise. Experiments have shown (Scribgrub, 2013) that the absence or significant

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