

## Overcoming Mental Stress

Having been employed as an ironworker for 25 years, I began to develop both physical and mental stress. My parents' health declined and eventually they died. Enormous stress forced me to retire on disability.

I started experiencing intense and debilitating physical symptoms. I didn't know why, but I was more nervous than ever. This nervousness brought on difficulty in breathing, an upset stomach and I felt a lot of pain in my side. The thought of meeting people who might notice my condition only increased my symptoms. Eventually, I avoided going out. My life was changing rapidly. Going to church was an ordeal and traveling on buses, trains and planes away from home was out of the question.

I began thinking if this was the way I have to live, maybe life wasn't worth living. These thoughts terrified me no end. How could I end my life when I have a family, a wife and kids; what about them? I felt there was no way out. How would I survive?

Desperate for relief, but undecided about whether to consult a medical doctor or therapist, I scheduled an appointment with both. My family doctor couldn't find anything wrong physically and advised that it was probably my nerves that were causing my symptoms. The psychotherapist confirmed the same thing, recommending therapy sessions and a referral to a psychiatrist so that medication could be prescribed.

Eventually, I began to feel some relief. Then one day a cousin told me about a self-help organization that she had consulted several years before when she started to undergo panic attacks. She asserted, "Of all the doctors I went to and all the medication I took, the one thing that helped me most was Recovery International."

I decided to try it out. I attended several meetings in my neighborhood and heard people describe similar experiences with nervous symptoms. It was incredible to hear how life had changed so dramatically for them once they found Recovery International. They had gotten well even though initially they could not leave their homes, had stayed in bed most of the time, had been hospitalized often, and had even attempted suicide. I thought if they could do it, so could I.

Determined that this was the program for me, I continued to attend meetings regularly, studying and learning what was known as the Recovery International Method. More important than just knowing the method was to practice it. Of course, when you attempt to do something that you fear and hate to do, you most certainly will be uncomfortable. But the Recovery International Method taught us that our health improved proportionately by the amount of discomfort we were willing to bear. We understood that our symptoms are distressing but not dangerous. The things we fear and hate to do are the everyday things that the average person does. Thus, many of us turned what was once a vicious cycle of helplessness and hopelessness into a vitalizing cycle of self-confidence.



Soon after discovering Recovery International, I began to feel better. I undertook leadership training, volunteering my time to do whatever I could to help all those out there suffering needlessly and quietly as I had been. I have since opened three Recovery International groups in Brooklyn and continue to work tirelessly to identify prospective leaders within our groups to open more groups.

As of January, 2002, I became the Area Leader for New York City. My goal is to open as many doors as I can to reach out to both consumers and the professional community along with other volunteer, non-profit mental health organizations. - Anthony Ferrigno