The expression tied up in knots points to someone (the self included) experiencing stress. And well it should. Stress derives from a Latin word, *strictus*, which means to draw tight or compress.

Each of us has a different way to convey our feeling of being stressed. We may speak of being on edge, frazzled, jittery, or just plain weary. But we know what it feels like to experience stress.

We also understand the vagaries of life contribute to stress. To live life well we must diffuse the events that cause anxiety—from traffic jams and long queues to illness and death.
We always hope that one place we will find a refuge from commonplace stress is at home. Yet what if part of being at home means being a member of a community that in itself adds to stress? Perhaps communities ought to be concerned about sources of stress within their ranks, as well as in devising ways to alleviate stress.

Some stress in formally assembled communities is no different from that which arises in neighborhoods where the residents can annoy one another with noise, trespassing, unkempt yards, and erratic trash disposal. What is different is that organized community groups have a direct route available for addressing the issues that cause stress.

As it happens, the unified nature of community associations can at times contribute to stress. If a homeowner wants to get a new roof, the decision rests with him alone. The situation changes for a condominium where one roof covers many residences.

Brenda Shirvis, manager at Boca Ciega Point Condominiums in St. Petersburg has been a manager for 24 years. The number one issue that stirs conflict is “money,” she says. How to make expenditures to ensure smooth operations can become contentious, and as such, it can cause anxiety among residents.

“There are some things you can’t help” in the spending category “like insurance,” says Shirvis. Because insurance rates have soared so much recently, premiums are virtually going off the planet, she says. Still, it is a necessary and a non-negotiable cost center.

What helps soften what could be an intense situation when the cost of operations is on the discussion table? It is the rapport residents have developed in other settings.

“It’s a boating community,” says Shirvis of her facility. In addition, there is “a social club and a travel club.”

The result of an active community is interaction and positive encounters. “Everybody knows everybody,” says Shirvis of the 55-and-older community with 19 separate condominium associations. Amenities range from swimming to bocce and horseshoes.

Space also helps diffuse tension, says Shirvis. Except for one three-story building, her facility has all separate villas. It also has immediate access to the Intracoastal Waterway. (Water has been shown to be a natural calmer. The level of atmospheric ionization as one gets closer to the seashore is part of the scientific explanation.)

Managing Stress

In our electronically interconnected world, there are plenty of readily available websites that summarize methods of relieving stress. One we like for concision is www.mystressmanagement.net/stress-relief-techniques.html. Recommendations include deep breathing, laughing, and walking. It’s difficult to keep muscles taut—a physiological reaction to stress—when we are using them to do productive things.

Never forget to laugh, say the stress-relief experts. Reread a funny story or recall a silly joke. Laughter may not be the best medicine, but it persists as a darn good one.
Walking almost always leads to talking, as we meet others or perambulate alongside them. That too, is good. (There is no action the human body engages in that does not involve muscle movement.) One of many such engaging events at Ibis Property Owners Association in West Palm Beach is the annual Fun Run/Walk, the Saturday following Thanksgiving Day, says Edwin J. Latalladi, CPP, CMCA, AMS, the executive director and director of public safety for the entity. The walk brings together individuals of all ages and all fitness levels. By bringing community members together during the walk or more regularly in one of its many placid settings—including a lakeside park and butterfly garden, the community fosters acquaintances and friendships.

Latalladi’s colleague, Nadine Moody, the fitness center director, tells us what exercise means to residents. “Our fitness center offers a complete array of programming and services that can assist in reducing stress,” she says. “We offer iyengar, vinyasa, ashtanga, and hatha yoga classes.”

But Moody explains that any type of fitness class can reduce stress. “From cardiovascular classes such as step, conventional floor aerobic, and zumba classes to strength, pilates, tai chi, and water classes…” there are many choices. Personal trainers and spa treatments are available, too.

Wellness through stress reduction extends to services offered by first responders. “Our public safety officers perform wellness checks to follow up on … medical calls,” says Latalladi. They also check in with residents who have medical conditions or those who have experienced the loss of a family member. “We receive regular feedback from our residents on the positive effects of these efforts,” he explains.

**Too Much of a Good Thing**

From a physiological perspective, stress that interferes with our day-to-day lives represents too much of a good thing. Some stress is good. It provides heightened awareness to surroundings; and it has a biological basis.

Called the fight-or-flight response, stress results ultimately from release of the neurohormone adrenalin. A chemical transmitter, adrenalin, elicits a cascade of changes in the body. Taken in the whole, the changes put a person in a good position to either flee from a risky situation or fight. For example, blood is directed away from the digestive system toward skeletal muscles, bringing those muscles the extra oxygen they need to give their best.

But in the modern world, it is rarely immediate threats to life that cause adrenalin to begin flowing and more often just the negatives of daily life. In communities, there are all sorts of interactions that can accumulate in a negative way.

One community manager’s take on what contributes to the negativity may surprise you at first glance, but with a closer look, it makes perfect sense. “I believe that apathy is a major source of stress within a community with regard to finding enthusiastic candidates to serve on the board of directors and committees, or within an existing board or committee,” says David Streep, CAM, CMCA,

---

**Asphalt maintenance dollars fading away?**

**Asphalt Restoration Technology has the solution for you!**

Did you know that choosing the wrong asphalt maintenance program can cost you thousands of dollars?

Don’t waste your maintenance dollars on sealcoating! Invest in your asphalt by using Pavement Dressing Conditioner (PDC) asphalt rejuvenator!

**PDC, the true rejuvenator!**

Just ask our newest customers:

- Seatowers - St. Pete
- Edgewater - Gulf Harbor - Fort Myers Beach
- Venice Golf and Country Club - Venice

**Asphalt Restoration Technology, Inc.**

1-800-254-4732

"Florida’s Full Service Asphalt Contractors Since 1993"
a community association manager in Orlando.

Dedicated members of the community risk burnout because they take on repeated service, explains Streep. The complexity is compounded at some Sunshine State communities because of the “diverse range of cultural and ethnic populations that have very different traditions and sensibilities,” he says.

Diversity is a beautiful thing, but it can ignite communication problems, which lead to genuine misunderstandings. And misunderstanding contributes in turn to stress.

Transparency and communication are key parts of any strategy for promoting harmony among community members, says Streep. “Focusing on the day-to-day little goals along the journey will establish these elements firmly in place, reducing the stress factor dramatically,” he explains.

With the basic methods of reducing tension in place, Streep recommends further that everyone keep moving. “I would say my hobby of ballroom, swing, and Latin dancing reduces my stress,” he explains.

Not every community will have the space required to organize stress-defusing exercise opportunities that keep everyone feeling restored and calm. But all communities can use their creativity to develop alternatives. “Many YMCAs, health and fitness centers, senior centers, and churches offer a variety of programs and have the necessary equipment and facilities designed for such a purpose,” says Streep.

**Easy Does It**

The best way to avoid getting an unintentional knot in a rope or a pendant chain or the like is to take a slow, deliberate approach when handling and storing them. Slow-and-steady is not always a simple course in the modern world. But every deep breath taken, pause for nature made, and friendly chat contributes to less stress—and fewer feelings of an isolated and deprived self.

At the same time, the issues that affect all communities must be handled in an expeditious and appropriate manner, so that they do not mushroom into larger concerns that contribute to worries. For instance, there are those circumstances a community cannot control, such as members falling ill or passing away. And retaining reserves of energy and stamina to meet such trials is easier if smaller issues never arise.

Communities where members meet their obligations to maintain private spaces, pay dues on time, consolidate trash appropriately, and so on will be filled with members who have more resilience when they require it to confront a large problem. Maintaining high standards helps alleviate neighborhood conflicts, says Latalladi.

Consistent enforcement of regulations, routine communication, and clarity in expectations are part of what keep communities on track and stress free. In total, they promote a positive community environment. And it is much more difficult for the negative to take hold when the interactions among residents are positive.

Finally, never forget to laugh, say the stress-relief experts. Reread a funny story or recall a silly joke. Laughter may not be the best medicine, but it persists as a darn good one.

---

**Knowing your goals. And the most effective way to meet them.**

At Reserve Advisors, we understand that no two reserve studies are ever the same. Which is why we always start at the same place—with you. We begin with a blank slate and then build a reserve study based on your special requirements.

**Let us be your partner for the future.**

For your no-cost proposal, please call Matt Kuisle at (800) 980-9881 or visit reserveadvisors.com