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## Humor, healthy eating, control of finances all help battle stress, experts say

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**THE STATE JOURNAL-REGISTER**

Posted Apr 07, 2010 @ 11:30 PM

Positive thinking is one way to relieve stress, but doing it is much harder than saying it, a St. John's Hospital nurse said Wednesday during a health-awareness forum at the University of Illinois Springfield.

Diana Weyhenmeyer, a community outreach educator, suggested that overstressed people look for humor in their lives.

"I don't know anything better to combat stress than laughter," she said. "Build fun into your life. If you don't have fun and you don't have joy, life goes by very quickly."

Thanking God for the day can be a good way to wake up with a positive outlook, and having a calm conversation rather than "venting" to dissipate anger can reduce stress, she said.

Carving time out to eat — and only eat — rather than eating on the run or while doing something else, is another way to battle stress, she said.

She suggested eating at least five servings of fruits and vegetables each day, snacking wisely and selecting "super foods," such as blueberries, broccoli, fish and whole grains.

Some stress can be good, because adrenaline created by the body helps a person complete a difficult or scary task, Weyhenmeyer said.

"But prolonged stress, over a long period of time, is unhealthy," she said.

Another speaker at the two-day Health Awareness Week event, which continues today at UIS, outlined ways of promoting "financial wellness."

R. Gene Taylor, president and chief executive officer of the Sangamon Schools Credit Union, said people should pay attention to their credit history to make sure credit reports don't contain mistakes and to ensure they receive the lowest interest rates when borrowing money.

He also recommended that people obtain their credit score — known as their FICO score — at least five or six months before borrowing to make a major purchase. That way, consumers can take action to increase their score, if needed, before requesting the loan.

Taylor said his credit union, like many lenders, often sees consumers with medical debt who have been pursued by collection agencies — sometimes even when those consumers have health insurance.

Lenders tend not to be as concerned about a customer's medical debt as other types of debt, he said. That's because health-care providers are aggressive about collecting what they are owed, and health insurance often leaves policyholders with significant out-of-pocket costs, he said.

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### To check your credit history

Free reports from all three major credit-reporting agencies are available at [www.annualcreditreport.com](http://www.annualcreditreport.com) or by calling (877) 322-8228.

### To check your FICO score

FICO scores are available online, for a fee of \$15.95, at [www.myfico.com](http://www.myfico.com) from the Fair Isaac Corp.

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