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I know individuals that have exhausted thousands of dollars and several years in therapy and stress relief management techniques. My counsel ... save yourself a lot of time and money and get a llama (take two ... they're small) ... you will never have a therapist as proficient or effectual as these little creatures.

How do you see your future with the llamas and the llama industry?

For the members of Monastic Fleece, the monastery, the Miniature Llamas are God's answer to so many years of prayer. The llamas are the future of Monastic Fleece and the monastery. Other than our spiritual life and responsibilities, the llamas will impart not only an income for the monastery, they will reach out and bestow an opportunity for us in providing a true meaning, sense of joy, and peaceful heart to all those who they come in contact with. Evangelization if you will ... but to us ... a simple channel that God has in providing for all our needs.

For the llama industry ... I see a positive future. A future built on friendships, a melodious touch in the hearts, and a stable and impervious financial investment. God did not put these little creatures into our lives to cause suffering and pain. He put them into our lives to impart the missing link between God and man ... a true ardor ... a true joy ... and just a few (amazing) side benefits along the way!

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For more information on the Monastery visit their website at www.monasticfleece.com or email them at shepherds@monasticfleece.com. Thanks so much for visiting with us and we wish you the best in your miniature llama venture!



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Stressed Out! You're Not Alone...

And Neither Are The Alpacas & Llamas!

by Cathy Spalding

One dictionary defines stress as an action: "to place emphasis on; to accent." Another describes stress as being "any deviation from the accustomed environment." Dr. Hans Selye, renowned for his work on the subject, described stress as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it." Synonyms for the word "stress" include consideration, priority value, seriousness, anxiety, imperativeness, nervous strain, tense and tautness. Do any of those descriptive words feel familiar to your mind and body? They certainly do for me. Without a doubt, neither you or I... or the alpacas and llamas... are alone! A familiar discussion of humans and stress can lay a

foundation for understanding how it is our camelids might react to stress.

The forward movement of time has just moved us through yet another fast paced holiday season. Lurking amidst the genuine excitement and joy can be a number of stress triggers both obvious and subtle. The obvious may be financial considerations, traffic, shopping in crowded malls or perhaps the feeling of inviting more visitors and/or visiting more different places in a few short weeks than we may have experienced over the entire previous 11 months. The more subtle and less obvious can include the rearrangement of our living environment. Our favorite mantel clock, oriental wood carving,

rocking chair – those personal items we enjoy viewing and experiencing in our daily lives – are necessarily moved aside to make room for holiday decorations. This disruption of the habitual and comfortable norm in our daily environment can make a significant, yet often quietly unnoticed, contribution to stress levels.

While we all could freely acknowledge that the holiday season can bring on notable stress, what might be some ongoing stress triggers during what would seem our more "normal" times of the year? Some triggers are obvious such as moving, divorce, loss of work, death,

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Learning to understand camelid behavior and our relationship to these amazing animals is the solid foundation upon which to build training, care and herd management skills. You will gain a “toolbox” filled with information, insights, management and training ideas adaptable to your own personal style with your llamas and alpacas.



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weddings or serious illness. To a lesser degree there are situations such as waiting in long lines, co-worker issues, dental appointments, project deadlines and the flat tire. What might be some of the more subtle stress triggers? There are many. It could be the addition of a new puppy, shift in the weather or changes in diet. Some feel stress when on vacation or when a partner takes an unexpected day off.

We are all familiar with stress in humans. Dr. Hans Selye – known as the



Alpacas at their social best!

“father of stress” – first wrote about the idea of a stress syndrome in the British journal, *Nature*, in 1936. It described the process through which the body confronts stress. He explained that the body passes through three universal stages of coping. There is initially an “alarm reaction” wherein the body prepares itself for “fight or flight.” As this higher level/condition of excitement in the body cannot be ongoingly sustained, a second stage begins by building adaptation and resistance to the stress. If the particular stress continues over a longer period of time, the body will enter the third stage of exhaustion and eventual breakdown. Chronic stress changes chemical blood levels in the body that can have a very significant effect upon the ability of the immune system to appropriately function at healthy levels. Not all stress is detrimental to the body. Dr. Selye’s definition of stress being the nonspecific response of the body to any demand includes situations such as the body response to a good physical workout. A stimulus that may be pleasurable to one individual could be very stressful for

another. For me, a ride on one of those colossal roller coasters comes to mind!

Stress in Alpacas and Llamas

How does stress and the stress syndrome relate to our alpacas and llamas? They are prey animals and will react behaviorally in the fright-flight sequence of fright, flight, fight, freeze and faint. The fright-flight sequence follows the stages Dr. Selye’s stress syndrome.



This alpaca clearly displays signs of stress in her face.

Alpacas and llamas are social within their herd and seem to enjoy routine – even rely upon it. Within a herd there are typically ones who are constantly on the look out and act as guards. They are always the first – and in many cases the only ones – who will sound the alarm call. Some are really great moms. They will look after all the herd crias often times paying special attention to the young ones of less attentive mothers. There are the wise ones, the leaders, the followers, the elders, the middle aged, the young, the vocal, the quiet, the shy and the aggressive... all fitting together in some understood “family” dance within the herd. As with our human families, some relationships are not always easy to bear. Alpacas and llamas have individual likes and dislikes including individual herd mates. Herd specific dynamics as well as our human management can work to create a chronically stressful situation for an animal. Chronic stress and the resulting suppression of an animal’s immune system results in much higher vulnerability to disease and infection, even death. Over the years, there have been many cases of gastric ulcers in alpacas and llamas. A number have resulted in death. Veterinarians report the cause as most often due to stress.

What might bring about stress in the lives of our alpacas and llamas? It is important to recognize chronic stress which is long term and ongoing as opposed to acute stress which is short term. Chronic stress could include being the recipient of abuse from another herd member, a very young alpaca or llama losing its mother whether by accident or design, an ongoing unsanitary environment or continual changes in herd dynamics.

Herd dynamics can be a strong source of chronic stress when remaining in a more constant state of flux with ones coming and going through purchases, sales and various breeding arrangements. Did one’s mother, offspring or best buddy suddenly vanish through a sale? Did another simply disappear for an outside breeding? How might the herd dynamics shift in their absence only to shift once again with their return? If they had a job within the herd – as look out/guard, for example – has another necessarily filled that position? Will it shift back to the way it had previously been or have things changed enough in their absence to alter their relationship within their own herd environment? Have new animals joined the herd? Did they join during the absence of other herd members? What about pasture groupings? Which animals seem to group together? Is one animal always with some and never with certain others? Is this a consideration as we move around and arrange our animals in various paddocks and pastures?

Sources of stress for alpacas and llamas are varied. Varied, too, is the individual behavioral response expressed as the result of a particular stress. Acute stress can occur out of situations such as the birth, illness or death of a herd mate, stud testing of females, performing an in-the-field necropsy, travel, veterinary and herd care tasks, training, shearing, weaning, shows, thunder storms and extreme weather changes.

Can we eliminate stress in the lives of our alpacas and llamas? It would not seem any more possible to do that for them than it seems to be to eliminate it within our own lives. It is, however, important to recognize the possibility of stress in any given

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instance. We can then do our best to mitigate it. There are a number of behavioral cues displayed by alpacas and llamas indicating they are feeling stress. The most easily observed are excessive humming, irregular breathing, tense muscle wrinkles about the face and self imposed isolation from the herd. Less recognized cues include sweating, clamped tail, stomping feet, grinding teeth, burping, holding the neck very stiff and tight, drooling, standing out of balance and a tight or drooping lip. As do humans, alpacas and llamas differ from individual to individual in their ability to manage stress. It is important to consider each individual personality. As examples, some alpacas truly seem to enjoy the show environment while others appear unable to adapt no matter how many times they do it. Not all llamas enjoy packing or have the personality to serve as a guardian/sentinel for other animals. Recognizing and understanding the behavioral cues expressed by our alpacas and llamas is essential information to our ability to



Notice the facial tension and taut lip displayed by this llama.

mitigate and maximize stress in their environment. If we recognize it, we can act upon it. It is a critical piece of the whole in our overall herd management for the long-term health of our animals.

A statement by Dr. Hans Selye gave me pause: "Stress leaves an indelible scar, and the organism pays for its survival after a stressful situation by becoming a little older." After some thought, I feel to add "and perhaps a little wiser, too."

LLAMAZING WISDOM



"Adopting the right attitude can convert a negative stress into a positive one."

— Dr. Hans Selye (1907-1982)