

## Living Fit: It's Stress Related

Many of us can relate to events eliciting acute reactions in our bodies, related to stress. Pressure at work, being late for an appointment or being pulled over by a police officer are a few examples that come immediately to mind. Then there are those chronic situations, long-term stressors inherent in life. Among the most dramatic are: Divorce, death of a loved one, a move, pressure at work and family issues.

In those more acute situations, your stomach jumps into your throat, your heart's pounding, your head's throbbing, your mouth is dry and you're shaking all over. This is the immediate, intense, impact of stress. The "flight or fight response" is a very important part of our physical make-up. We need these responses to escape from impending (acute) danger. The Autonomic Nervous System and endocrine system work hand in hand to bring about this response.

"Chronic" stress may not be felt in such a dramatic way, yet it is the type that causes problems. Many people lose sleep or the desire to eat. Some people sleep and eat too much. Our individual coping mechanisms may differ, but the toll it takes on our bodies over time is much the same. While the nervous response works immediately and quickly, the action of the hormones released during chronic stress linger and can do harm over time.

Up to 75 percent of doctor visits can be attributed to stress related maladies. A study conducted by the University of California – San Francisco in November of 2004\*, showed that stress not only causes anxiety, agitation, irritability, depression, lowered immune response, altered reproductive function, elevated cholesterol levels, elevated triglyceride levels, insulin resistance, fatigue, impaired memory, central obesity, loss of muscle tone and protein wasting, bone mineral loss, impaired injury recovery, increased risk of autoimmune disease and inflammatory conditions, apathy, weakness, reduced libido, weight loss, restless sleep, chronic pain and allergies — but (as if that was not enough) it actually damages our bodies on a physiological level as deep as our DNA.

Telomeres are the protective ends of a DNA molecule, and stress weakens and frays these structures at an accelerated rate, even to the point of cellular death. As these cells die off we age at a much faster rate.

### The Cure

Bodily functions regulated by ANS have been thought to be involuntary, but they are not completely out of our awareness and control. It is believed by some that one's state of mind may affect the functioning of ANS. One remarkable outcome of this study showed that people under extraordinary stress, who did not internalize it, but kept a good, light-hearted attitude, showed NONE of the typical stress-related symptoms.

I've always believed that one is simply born with a certain personality. Some of us are laid back (less susceptible to stress) and some are high strung (more susceptible to stress). Regardless of your personality, there are specific things one can do to alter both one's behavior and attitude. It's our mind that is the enemy so much of the time. The way we view life and our reactions to it can be modified.

Exercise is one tangible way to deal with and release stress. When we exercise, hormones are released into our bloodstream that counteract the harmful stress related hormones. "Catecholamine's, including "B" endorphins, have been shown to increase during physical activity of twenty minutes or more. Chemically similar to opiate compounds, this morphine like substance has been shown to provide an analgesic (pain relieving) effect and promote a sense of euphoria."\*\*

"The therapeutic benefits of regular physical activity is without rival. Study after study has shown that it increases longevity while decreasing morbidity and mortality from a host of diseases. Someone once said that if exercise was a pill, it would be the most powerful medication known to humans. The only problem is that it is difficult to get modern men and women to take that pill every day. Inactivity should be considered a dis-ease state."\*\*\*

Time and time again I have personally witnessed positive changes in our clients

here at 20 Minutes to Fitness® as they become stronger be the week. Not only do their bodies change, but they also stand taller, smile broader, and feel better!

Along with regular exercise, journaling has a remarkable way of letting go of stressful thoughts and processing solutions we otherwise wouldn't ever consider. Somehow writing down the problem seems to make it more manageable. It is also a good way to record our blessings. When we are under stress it's easy to overlook all the wonderful blessings in our lives. Focusing on the good has a miraculous, healing power.

Sleep is another often neglected stress reliever. When one is sleep deprived, one cannot handle even the smallest stressful event, never mind something substantial. While different people require different amounts of rest, the majority of adults should spend between eight to nine hours of sleep at night. As a point of fact, persons who exercise regularly, tend to sleep more soundly at night.

There are many ways to handle and reduce the stress and stress response in our lives. While each one of us will respond differently to stress according to our belief system and lifestyle, as human beings we all have some needs in common. We all have the need for physical activity, human touch, adequate sleep and good wholesome nutrition. When these areas are well taken care of, the stress that comes with life on Earth, is dealt with more efficiently.

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### Resources:

\*[www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/11/29/health/main658210.shtml](http://www.cbsnews.com/stories/2004/11/29/health/main658210.shtml)

\*\*[www.OptimalHealthConcepts.com/ExerciseStress.html](http://www.OptimalHealthConcepts.com/ExerciseStress.html)

\*\*\*[www.health-concerns.com/artciles](http://www.health-concerns.com/artciles)