



Stress Less

A good laugh and a long sleep are the best cures in the doctor's book – Irish proverb

The following scenario is probably familiar: You drag your complaining body through the day and crash into bed after what feels like hours spent doing a lot, but seeming to have accomplished little. You're beset with aches and pains, feel sapped of energy, your digestion is not up to speed, you snap at everyone, you get heart palpitations and your hair is falling out. You look and feel like the weight of the world is on your shoulders. Life's too busy, too rushed, too everything! You feel like you've got one nerve left, and it's wearing thin ... The doctor's verdict: Stress. Hmm, you think to yourself, they always say that when they don't really know what's wrong with you. Isn't stress a normal part of life? Can it really cause ill health? And what, at the end of the (very long) day, can be done about it?

WHAT IS STRESS?

Stress itself is not dangerous, and is, indeed, a normal part of life. Our Stone Age ancestors faced life-or-death situations every day. The biological response to stress, the so-called fight-or-flight response, was of critical importance. It prepared us to defend ourselves against a threat (fight) or run away from it (flight).

During the stress response:

- ◆ Heart rate increases so that muscles can receive extra blood needed to escape or fight.
- ◆ Blood vessels close to the skin constrict, so that if you are injured, you won't lose too much blood.

- ◆ Pupils dilate so you can see better.
- ◆ Blood sugar increases for extra energy.
- ◆ Processes the body considers unimportant to survival are suppressed (notably growth hormones) and slowed (including the digestive and reproductive systems). The immune system is inhibited.

This automatic response occurs whether it is called for (e.g. a mugging) or not (e.g. spending hours in traffic). After the crisis has passed, things should level off, but with constant activation the stress response continues: your stress hormones and heart rate stay high and those processes that were suppressed remain low. It becomes harder and harder to stop this response. The result is chronic ill health. If stress is not managed, you can look forward to anxiety, irritability,

weight problems, heart disease, weakened immunity, thinning hair and lacklustre skin. And that's just to begin with!

But there is hope ...

NATURAL WAYS TO HELP YOU COPE

While it is near impossible to live a completely stress-free life, there are some things that can help you to cope better and buffer yourself from its negative effects.

1. TAKE CONTROL OF YOUR ATTITUDE AND ENVIRONMENT

Get organized. Cutting down on things to do in the mornings means starting your day in a peaceful way, so give it a try! Some people swear by making lunches and selecting clothes for work and school the night before. Try turning your home and office into an oasis of calm by decluttering and redecorating. It's amazing how much calmer you feel when you don't have to fight through piles of "stuff".

2. DIET AND SUPPLEMENTS

What you eat is vital. Your body needs proper nutrition and balanced blood sugar to cope with stress. Always eat breakfast – it really is the most important meal of the day! After several hours of fasting, you need fuel to function properly. Yoghurt with fruit, wholegrain muesli (e.g. Vital Toasted Multigrain Muesli) with low-fat milk, or wholewheat toast with cottage cheese or egg all make an excellent start to the day. Not hungry first thing in the morning? Try a meal replacement shake such as Vital Bio-Meal.

Supplements can be your little helpers in the fight against stress. When you are stressed you need and use more B vitamins. Taking a vitamin B complex (e.g. Vital Maxi B) boosts your energy and feeds your nervous system, enabling you to cope better. Essential fatty acids are needed for proper brain function and have been shown to assist in the treatment of depression and anxiety disorders.

3. EXERCISE

You may not feel like it, or even think you have the time, but exercise really helps in managing stress. A short walk every day, perhaps during your lunch break, can help. Try yoga, which is ideal for stress management due to its focus on breathing exercises and relaxation.

4. RELAXATION

Strangely, relaxation is something most of us need to work at. Look out for CDs of relaxation music and exercises, and spend a few moments each day consciously trying to relax. There are so many therapies out there that can really help you deal with the effects of stress. Such as reflexology, aromatherapy, hypnotherapy, homeopathy, phytotherapy, or chiropractic.

5. AROMATHERAPY

Essential oils have powerful effects on the nervous system. Some are relaxing and antidepressant, while others energize and stimulate. Burgess & Finch Lavender essential oil is outstanding for stress, insomnia, anxiety and low mood. To help you sleep, put five drops in your bath before bed or two to three drops on your pillow.

6. BACH™ ORIGINAL FLOWER REMEDIES

Developed by Dr Edward Bach in the 1930s, the 38 flower remedies help you to rediscover your positive side. This is a natural, non-addictive system of treating everyday negative emotions. Keep a bottle of Bach™ Rescue Remedy on hand, as you can take it whenever you feel stress, shock, grief, anxiety or panic.

7. HERBAL MEDICINE

Herbal medicine has many applications for stress and its side-effects. Chamomile tea (e.g. Vital Chamomile Tea) has soothing properties, while Panax ginseng (e.g. Vital Ginseng) is an adaptogen: it helps the body adapt to stress and supports normal body and mind function.

8. A PROBLEM SHARED ...

... is a problem halved, so speak to a counselor, pastor, therapist or a friend, or even write in a journal. This puts things in perspective and helps you sort through the chaos. Consider psychotherapy or counseling to help you learn to manage stress, anger and negative emotions.

9. SLEEP

Stress can cause insomnia, but the less sleep you have, the more stressed you will feel. Allow yourself an hour before bedtime to unwind. Have a warm bath using relaxing essential oils and do something restful. Try Herbtyme Stress & Insomnia, which contains Passionflower, a herb that helps to relax you and enables easier sleep, and sip on Vital Dreamland Tea to ease your way into slumberland.

10. HAVE FUN

Here's a simple strategy for dealing with stress: Turn up the volume on a favorite CD and proceed to dance around the living room while singing at the top of your voice. Sounds like fun? It is, and before you know it you'll be feeling energized and much more cheerful! If singing isn't your thing, why not find something you do enjoy. Try to do something enjoyable every day, be it a creative pursuit like art, writing or gardening, or pure relaxation, like reading or meditation. Think of your spirit as a child, and do "childish" things like hula hoop, watching children's movies, or modeling with clay. In this way, you will learn to take things a little less seriously and start to leave your stress behind.

Excerpted from Vital Club Magazine Issue 3-2008



Please Note

This advice is aimed at helping you cope with stress more effectively and does not replace your doctor's advice. If you have been prescribed medication, do not stop taking this without prior consultation. Stress can place heavy strain on the whole body, so it is important to get regular check-ups, and ensure that your heart rate, blood pressure, blood sugar and cholesterol are healthy. Also if you are pregnant or breastfeeding, have hypertension, diabetes or other prediagnosed medical conditions, certain supplements may not be suitable. Check with your pharmacist or doctor if you are unsure. Feelings of depressed mood, decreased interest or pleasure, weight changes, sleep disturbances, fatigue, feelings of worthlessness or guilt can be indicators of depression. If you or a loved one is displaying these symptoms, consult your doctor immediately.

Switch off at night

If thinking about your day is keeping you awake at night, two quick sprays of Rescue Night on your tongue can help calm those repetitive, unwanted thoughts so you enjoy your usual good night's sleep. With the natural flower essences discovered by Dr. Bach, in a bottle to keep on your bedside table, Rescue Night will be there to switch off your day when you switch off the light.

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Peace of mind for peaceful sleep