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Stress

Stress is our reaction to our external environment as well as our inner thoughts and feelings. Stress in essence is our body's natural response to dangers, the "fight or flight" mechanism -- the body's preparedness to do battle or flee from danger. This response involves a complex biochemical/hormonal process.

Our brain and pituitary gland respond to stress by releasing adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH). This stimulates our adrenals to increase production of the hormones epinephrine, norepinephrine, and cortisol. Other hormones that affect metabolism and water balance may also be released. Epinephrine and norepinephrine, known as the adrenalines or catecholamines, are the main stimuli to the stress response. They stimulate the heart, increase blood pressure and heart rate, and constrict certain blood vessels to increase blood flow to the muscles and brain and to decrease it to the digestive tract and internal organs, preparing us for the "battle" with the "danger," wherever it is. Adrenaline also raises blood sugar, as it stimulates the liver to produce and release more glucose (and cholesterol) into the blood so our cells will have the energy we need. All of this results in an increased rate of metabolism. Stress experienced around the time of eating thus diverts the energy needed for efficient digestion.

Imagine a deer grazing peacefully in the forest. He's in what we call *parasympathetic dominance*. In other words, the body is in a relaxed state. His digestive tract is open and ready to go through the process of digestion, absorption, assimilation, metabolism and elimination. After his meal he can lie down and sleep. But suddenly a lion comes out of the forest and the deer's body switches to *sympathetic dominance*. It is no longer time to relax and digest. Blood leaves the intestinal track and carries oxygen and nutrients to the extremities in order to fight or flight. Later the deer is out of danger and he calms down and returns to *parasympathetic dominance*. But unlike the simple deer, the human mental and emotional makeup is far more complex and much more difficult to turn off. The body's biochemical/hormonal mechanism does not know the difference between reality and thought. Therefore, if you're still thinking about it, your body is still reacting to it! You don't believe it?

Let's do an experiment:

Close your eyes and imagine that you're in your kitchen. Imagine taking a juicy lemon and cut a big slice. Smell the lemon spray as it hits your nasal passage. Now take a big bite. What happened? Did you notice your salivary glands secrete as you puckered your mouth? The body's biochemical response does not know the difference between reality and thought.

There are many different types of stress:

- **Physical stress**-exercise, hard labor, birth
- **Chemical stress**-environmental pollution, such as exposure to pesticides and cleaning solvents, and the personal use of chemicals, such as drugs, alcohol, caffeine, and nicotine
- **Mental stress**-high responsibility, long hours, perfectionism, anxiety, and worry.
- **Emotional stress**-anger, fear, frustration, sadness, betrayal, bereavement.
- **Nutritional stress**-vitamin and mineral deficiencies, protein or fat excesses or deficiencies, food allergies.
- **Traumatic stress**-infection, injury, burns, surgery, extreme temperatures
- **Psycho-spiritual stress**-relationship, financial or career pressures; issues of life goals, spiritual alignment, and general state of happiness

Stress can generate many symptoms and diseases, mediated by changes in immune function, hormonal response, and biochemical reactions, which then influence body functions in our digestive tract, and our cardiovascular, neurological, or musculoskeletal systems. A wide variety of problems such as headache, backache, and infection, even heart disease or cancer in the long-term may result.

There is also a weakening of the adrenal response with chronic stress, whether the stress is from regular sugar intake (adrenaline helps rebalance blood sugar), intake of stimulants such as caffeine, alcohol or drugs, or from other physical or emotional demands. When the adrenals do not respond, we may experience depression, hopelessness, or even death, which can result from the serious diseases that arise with a severely weakened immune system. That is why it is so important to avoid the vicious cycle of trying to meet high demands by pushing ourselves with poor nourishment, poor sleep and lack of fun. Here are some of the diseases that can be derived from stress:

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| Fatigue | Indigestion | Infections |
| Irritability | Diarrhea | Eczema |
| Headaches | Constipation | Psoriasis |
| Muscle tension | Peptic ulcer | Allergies |
| Neck and back pains | Loss of appetite | Nutritional |
| deficiencies | | |
| High blood pressure | Anorexia nervosa | Premenstrual |
| symptoms | | |
| Diabetes | Weight changes | Sexual problems |
| Arthritis | Insomnia | Psychological |
| problems | | |
| Cancer | Depression | |

Now that you understand a little more about stress and how it affects our lives, here are some things that you can do to prevent or eliminate stress. Poor food choices can over tax the body and cause anxiety and stress. I would recommend that you eliminate or drastically reduce the following from your diet.

- Coffee, black tea and chocolate – Limit your intake of caffeine. Caffeine contributes to nervousness and can disrupt sleep patterns.
- Alcohol - Stresses the liver and adrenals
- Cow's Milk /Ice Cream – Eliminate dairy products from your diet for three weeks. Then reintroduce them slowly – and watch for returning symptoms of your “nervous” condition.
- Avoid processed foods such as white flour/wheat, added salt, sugar, beef, soft drinks, fried foods, artificial sweeteners, heavy spices, chocolate and preservatives.

Eating a healthy diet of fresh whole foods and the intake of vitamin, mineral and herbal nutrition can be very helpful. Learning to relax and to use imagery is fundamental to self-healing and is part of almost all relaxation and stress-reduction techniques. Guided imagery (hypnosis) assists in clarifying attitudes, emotions, behavior, and lifestyle patterns that result in stress, anxiety, and increased weight. Meditation, tai chi, and yoga all are excellent and important to a balanced lifestyle. Exercise is very important in relieving stress. When we exercise the body releases endorphins and other neurochemicals designed to calm and energize the body.

For those individuals who are suffering from anxiety or depression there are serious chemical imbalances in the brain that cause these symptoms. Very often one can rebalance these disturbances by changing the body chemistry through diet and natural remedies. At the Center for Natural Health we use very affective bio-chemical assessments (usually done through blood analysis) that determine these specific imbalances. After, the individual assessment has been made we then design a natural protocol that will help to rebalance the chemistry and assist the body in alleviating these symptoms. For further information on these tests or other nutritional assessments please call our office or visit our website.