

Live Longer, Feel Better: Stress Management

Part I: Live Longer –

As we explore Stress and its effects it is important and necessary to understand **every body is different.** Every person has a different biology and a different lens from which to see life. People are socialized and taught to believe in certain ways and it is often the interpretation of these beliefs that cause stress. Judgments are personal and can cause great joy and great distress. Yet, every experience and every response will differ for every body.

History: In the early 1900's Dr. Hans Selye, a Canadian endocrinologist was credited as the first to demonstrate the existence of biological stress. "Selye said stress differs from other physical responses in that stress is stressful whether one receives good or bad news, whether the impulse is positive or negative." He defined stress as a psychological (mind-body) event that takes place when our system is overwhelmed by any experience, whether physical, mental, or emotional. It can be long term or sudden, something as simple as a loud noise or a complex as the continuing strain of a difficult relationship. He developed the idea of two "reservoirs" of stress resistance, or alternatively Stress Energy. He called the perceived negative stress "distress" and the perceived positive stress "eustress". Wikipedia.org

Learn more about working with Energy Psychology tomorrow with Diane Hutchinson ARNP and Dr. Kitty Grupp.

What is Stress:

There does not seem to be common generalized description of stress. The DSM VI outlines *Acute Stress Disorder*; 308.3, and lists it under *Anxiety Disorders*. **A.** the person experienced or witnessed a traumatic event which involved a threat of death or serious injury to self or others and invoked intense fear, helplessness, or horror. **B.** after the experience the person shows symptoms of a dissociative disorder.

According to Peter Anselmo and James Brooks, M.D. in their book, Ayurvedic Secrets to Longevity & Total Health, "stressful experiences create structural and chemical changes in the nervous system. Accumulated stress is like a knot in the fabric of the system that impairs the normal functioning and consequently limits mental and physical performance and function.

Dr. Selye, in 1926, explained stress as any event that causes physical, emotional, or psychological strain. However, not all types of stress are harmful or even negative.

- **Eustress:** keeps us vital, can be fun and exciting
- **Acute Stress:** Short-term can be either positive (eustress) or distress invoking the Fight, Flight, or Freeze Response.*
- **Episodic Acute Stress:** An acute stress that seems to run rampant and turn into a way of life, creating a life of relative chaos (e.g. drama junkie)
- **Distress:** the agitation or fatigue that wears the system down but has not yet become chronic.
- **Chronic Stress:** the type of negative stress that seems never ending

Fight or Flight Response: *

"The "fight-or-flight response", also called the "fight-or-flight-or-freeze response", "hyper arousal" or the "acute stress response", was first described by Walter Canon in 1929.

His theory states that animals react to threats with a general discharge of the sympathetic nervous system, priming the animal for fighting or fleeing. This response was later recognized as the first stage of a general adaptation syndrome that regulates stress responses among vertebrates and other organisms". Wikipedia, Encyclopedia

Continued research has discovered during this Fight or Flight Response certain hormones like **adrenalin** and **cortisol** are released, speeding the heart rate, slowing digestion, shunting blood flow to major muscle groups, and changing various other autonomic nervous functions making the body more alert and attentive, giving the body a burst of energy and strength to fight or run away.

These are all necessary responses when faced with a life threatening experience. Problems arise when acute stress becomes chronic.

Chronic Stress:

When faced with long term or chronic stress and an over activated autonomic nervous system, people begin to feel overwhelmed and a cascade of physical and psychological changes begin to occur. The person begins to experience symptoms; like chronic headaches, increased susceptibility to physical illness, and a low frustration tolerance.

With continued exposure to stress some of the following, not in any particular order, can develop:

- Mental Health challenges: Worry, Anxiety, Depression
- Chronic fatigue
- Compassion fatigue
- Compromise Immune System
- Eating disorders: Obesity and/or anorexia
- Diabetes
- Increased blood pressure, increased cholesterol leading to Heart disease
- Hyperthyroidism
- Sexual dysfunction
- Tooth and gum disease
- Hair loss
- Ulcers
- Over time stress can translate into other life threatening disorders, e.g. Cancer

According to studies at the National Institute of Health (NIH) approximately 90% of all illnesses, mental as well as physical, are caused or aggravated by stress.

What Causes Stress?

Most people are no longer worried about being attacked or eaten by a hungry carnivore but many worry about the future, about finances, their loved ones and the social climate of their community, country and what's happening in the world. And, since every body is different and every person experiences life and life's events differently; there is no universal prescription for stress. No matter, if you experience it over time Chronic Stress will make you sick; no one is immune.

It is true, all people understand life through their own lens; each through their own biology, life style and belief system; respectfully, Stress is personal.

Part II: Feel Better

What can we do about Stress?

Your body has the ability to tolerate high levels of extrasensory input for short periods of time. It also has the **ability to heal**. Opening up and learning new ways to decrease stress will improve how you feel mentally and physically and it will most likely increase the length of your life.

For me learning how to **ground, center and live in the moment** allowed me to assess situations **calmly** and hopefully **prevent worry**. The following is a partial list of some of the keys to finding balance; decreasing, reducing and managing your stress.

+ Laughter is strong medicine

In his book, Ageless Body, Timeless Mind, Deepak Chopra M.D. and doctor of Ayurvedic medicine talks about the benefits of laughter producing numerous chemicals such as serotonin for the brain and interleukins for the autoimmune system. He reports that in Ayurvedic medicine even mimicking the sounds of laughter can be healing. Like smiles laughter is contagious; enjoy!

Laughing Baby DVD

“Why do Angels Fly? They take themselves lightly.” Laughter lightens your burdens, inspires hopes, connects you to others, it contagious, and keeps you grounded, focused, and alert. Experiencing a good laugh can enhance your relationships and support both physical and emotional health.

“Laughter is good for your health, (About.com , StressManagement, Elizabeth Scott, M.S.)

- **Laughter relaxes the whole body.** A good, hearty laugh relieves physical tension and stress, leaving your muscles relaxed for up to 45 minutes after.
- **Laughter boosts the immune system.** Laughter decreases stress hormones and increases immune cells and infection-fighting antibodies, thus improving your resistance to disease.
- **Laughter triggers the release of endorphins,** the body’s natural feel-good chemicals. Endorphins promote an overall sense of well-being and can even temporarily relieve pain.

- **Laughter protects the heart.** Laughter improves the function of blood vessels and increases blood flow, which can help protect you against a heart attack and other cardiovascular problems.

Laughter and humor can help you stay emotionally and physically healthy;, laughter can makes you feel good.

Create Something

Especially women; our bodies were designed to create other bodies and creating is part of our fabric.

It doesn't matter if you are creating a baby or a work of art, the act of creating fulfills a need. Take a pottery class, learn to knit, the ability to is a gift.

Develop Positive Self Esteem

Carolyn Myss, in her book on Self Esteem said that low self-esteem is at the root of most of our problems. How we see ourselves and how we believe others see us is important. Everyone has expectations and preferences but sometimes these conflict with other people's expectations and preferences. "Children live up to your lowest expectation of them", so do we. If you believe you are worth it, you are. Some people find it helpful to work with a therapist or take a class on developing self-esteem.

Positive Healthy Relationships

Friends are good. Developing a community and a circle of friends inevitably benefits your social life and it benefits your overall health. In the August issue of AARP, there was an article that talked about the benefits of exercise and encouraged everyone to incorporate exercise into their daily routine. And, equally as important was friendships and community. They suggested taking a morning walk then going to the coffee shop for some social interaction. People who interact with others tend to be healthier mentally and physically and they tend to live longer.

People need people, no man lives alone. We can't change ourselves without changing the world and we can't change the world without changing ourselves. "As the micro cosim so the macro cosim".

Connect with your Environment; Home, Job, Community

Learn how your environment impacts you. Is your home a safe place, do you live in constant fear, are you afraid to go out at night? Learning how to keeping yourself, your home and environment safe will help decrease stress. Consider taking a class in First Aid/CPR, self defense, follow the Red Cross safety recommendation, stay informed and get involved. It is true, what you do for yourself you also do for others.

The DVD you are about to see, [Playing for Change](#), puts into context how small the world has become; whether we believe it or not we live in a global community, your neighbor can live next door or a continent over.

View DVD “Somebody To Lean On”

Questions?

Color Can Help!

What colors make you feel good? Notice what colors you like, what colors you are drawn to and the colors you resist? What colors do you wear? Color has the potential to impact and communicate your mood. Outcomes of research complete in the late 1980’s; [Natural Health](#), demonstrated that color can impact a person’s sense of calm. The color of the room you live in or work in may be causing you stress. As part of a research study some people were asked to wait in a room painted red; others were asked to wait in a powder blue room. The individuals having spent time in the red room were more excitable and had increased levels of anxiety. The individual asked to wait in the powder blue room were much calmer.

Sound

Unexpected loud sounds; noise; bangs and booms can cause an acute stress reaction. Studies have shown that certain kinds of loud music can overload the senses. Music can also invoke a sense of well being, it can be energizing, and therapeutic. However, if your goal is to be calm, listening to more peaceful, melodic music can be helpful.

Yummy Smells

Olfactory senses are as primitive as the human body. Humans like other primates used to identify each other by scent. Smells can elicit attraction and arousal and smells can be repelling.

The smell of fresh baked bread is often a favorite. Some dental clinics have begun their day by baking a loaf of fresh bread. The smell fills the office making it smell more like a bakery than a dental office. The result is the patients enjoy the smell and they relax more.

Perfume is big business but restricted at some employment sites. Working in an environment with repelling odors or bad smells can be stressful. Talk to your employer, start your own traditions try burning a candle, using essential oils or odor eliminating sprays.

+ Creating a Routine:

According to the *Yoga Journal* keeping a day timer, to a schedule or routine can help some people decrease stress. Knowing what's going to happen next or not being worried about forgetting important dates can be helpful in reducing stress.

+ Nutrician and Diet:

Obesity causes tremendous stress on the body; negative social pressure, low self esteem, crash dieting, eating disorders and yet, more people worry about their weight than ever before.

“NHANES Data on the Prevalence of Overweight and Obesity Among Adults: United States, 2003–2004 Since the mid-seventies, the prevalence of overweight and obesity has increased sharply for both adults and children. Data from two NHANES surveys show that among adults aged 20–74 years the prevalence of obesity increased from 15.0% (in the 1976–1980 survey) to 32.9% (in the 2003–2004 survey).”

“ASD & CDC Research Statistics on obesity in the United States In 1962, research statistics showed that the percentage of obesity in America’s population was at 13%. By 1980 it has risen to 15% -- by 1994 to 23% - - and by the year 2000 the obesity progression in America had reached an unprecedented 31%!”

Learning how to eating healthier, nutritious foods that promotes good health and proper weight will help reduce stress. **Before going on any diet, talk to your doctor about the “right” diet for you.**

+ Hypnosis

It has been said that “all Hypnosis is self hypnosis”; the benefits of hypnosis is directed toward the patient but the therapist benefits also. In Miracles on Demand, Charles Tebbetts reports that 20 minutes of hypnosis can be as beneficial as 2 hours of sleep.

Guided imagery

Usually with another person, tape, or CD, using mindful images and thoughts, the person is guided into state of relaxation.

Exercise

Exercise is one of the most important disciplines to develop when wanting to lessen stress. Studies have shown that moderate exercise will help build muscle tone, increase the metabolism, endurance, and decrease weight. "Exercise affects the biology in the brain in the same way that anti-depressant drugs do improving mood and sense of well being," Andrea Dunn, Ph.D., Exercise **Psychologist at the Cooper Institute** Start by talking to your doctor about the right exercise for you; consider walking, starting a practice of gentle stretching, Yoga, Ti Chi; everyone can learn to exercise and exercise will, over time improve your health.

Massage and body work

In my opinion, there are few things more relaxing than a therapeutic message. Message can benefit everyone; seniors, children, and victims of abuse has reported positive results. The following is a list of the most commonly known benefits of Massage;

12 Delightful Benefits Of Massage, Get a Massage That’s Relaxing and Beneficial By Rose Alexander Published July 27, 2007

1. Massage relieves pain.

Check with your doctor if you have chronic pain or discomfort about possible benefits of massage.

2. Massage eases tension.

Breath:

Bodies like to breathe. Learn how to breathe effectively and efficiently. This might sound silly because everyone is born knowing how to breathe but the quality of your breath can affect your overall health and quality of life. Did you know that shallow breathing can cause the body to experience anxiety and possibly

panic? And, that 40 seconds of deep diaphragmatic or “belly breathe” can alleviate the panic. Take a class; yoga, meditation or work with a respiratory therapist to learn the fundamentals.

Why Meditation?

There are no potential side effects to meditation, every one is capable of meditating, Meditation is free, there is no special equipment needed, and you can meditate anywhere. Learning about meditation and how to meditate can be as personal as the practice. Finding the right practice for you is important. If you are not comfortable with the principles, don't like the instructor you are not going to do it. I encourage everyone to find there own version. It doesn't matter if anyone else agrees with you it only matter that you do it. There are Eastern, Western, Spiritual, secular, and adaptations. There are eating, laying down meditations, sitting in a chair, in lotus position on the floor, there is a walking meditation and there are as many books, tapes, CD's, classes as there are teachers to help you find the right practice for you. .

With just 15 or 20 minutes a day you will change your life. “People start looking more rested and relaxed.” They will present calmer with more clarity. Start with what works for you.

Here is a summary of research findings cited by [Lorin Roche.com](http://Lorin.Roche.com) from the [Mind Body Medical Institute](http://MindBodyMedicalInstitute.com) at Harvard Medical School (They recently changed the name to **Benson-Henry Institute for Mind-Body Medicine**. *BHIMBM?*)

“Mind/Body Medical Institute clinical findings include the following references if you are interested in reading more.

Chronic pain patients reduce their physician visits by 36%.

The Clinical Journal of Pain, Volume 2, pages 305-310, 1991

There is approximately a 50% reduction in visits to a HMO after a relaxation-response based intervention which resulted in estimated significant cost savings.

Behavioral Medicine, Volume 16, pages 165-173, 1990

Eighty percent of hypertensive patients have lowered blood pressure and decreased medications - 16% are able to discontinue all of their medications. These results lasted at least three years.

Journal of Cardiopulmonary Rehabilitation, Volume 9, pages 316-324, 1989

Open heart surgery patients have fewer post-operative complications.

Behavioral Medicine, Volume 5, pages 111-117, 1989

One-hundred percent of insomnia patients reported improved sleep and 91% either eliminated or reduced sleeping medication use.

The American Journal of Medicine, Volume 100, pages 212-216, 1996

Infertile women have a 42% conception rate, a 38% take-home baby rate, and decreased levels of depression, anxiety, and anger.

Journal of American Medical Women's Association. Volume 54, pages 196-8, 1999

Women with severe PMS have a 57% reduction in physical and psychological symptoms.

Obstetrics and Gynecology, Volume 75, pages 649-655, April, 1990

High school students exposed to a relaxation response-based curriculum had significantly increased their self-esteem.

The Journal of Research and Development in Education, Volume 27, pages 226-231, 1994

Inner city middle school students improved grade score, work habits and cooperation and decreased absences.

Journal of Research and Development in Education, Volume 33, pages 156-165, Spring 2000

Greater Orderliness of Brain Functioning

EEG coherence increases between and within the cerebral hemispheres during meditation. EEG coherence is quantitative index of the degree of long-range spatial ordering of the brain waves. In a new meditator, the EEG coherence increased during the period of meditation. In a person who had been meditating for 2 years, spreading of coherence occurred even before meditation began, spreading of coherence to high and lower frequencies about half way through the meditation period, and continuing high coherence even into the eyes-opened period after meditation.

Psychosomatic Medicine 46: 267-276, 1984.

Broader Comprehension and Improved Ability to Focus

Field independence has been associated with a greater ability to assimilate and structure experience, greater organization of mind and cognitive clarity, improved memory, greater creative expression, and a stable internal frame of reference. The results show that practice of meditation techniques develop greater field independence. This improvement in meditators is remarkable because it was previously thought that these basic perceptual abilities do not improve beyond early adulthood. Perceptual Motor Skills 39: 1031-1034, 1974, and 62: 731-738, 1986.

Increased Creativity

This study used the Torrance Test of Creative Thinking to measure figural and verbal creativity in a control group and in a group that subsequently learned meditation. On the post test five months later, the meditation group scored significantly higher on figural originality and flexibility and on verbal fluency. Journal of Creative Behavior, 13: 169-190, 1979, and Dissertations Abstracts International, 38: 3372-3373, 1978.

Deeper Level of Relaxation

A comprehensive statistical "meta-analysis" was conducted that compared the findings of 31 physiological studies on meditation and on resting with eyes closed. (A meta-analysis is the preferred scientific procedure for drawing definitive conclusions from large bodies of research). The study evaluated three key indicators of relaxation and found that meditation provides a far deeper state of relaxation than does simple eyes-closed rest. The research showed that breath rate and plasma lactate decrease, the basal skin resistance increases, significantly more during meditation than during eyes-closed rest. Interestingly, immediately prior to the meditation sessions, meditating subjects had lower levels of breath rate, plasma lactate, spontaneous skin conductance, and heart rate than did the controls. This deeper level of relaxation before starting the practice suggests that reduced physiological stress through meditation is cumulative. American Psychologist, 42: 879-881, 1987.

Improved Perception and Memory

College students instructed in meditation displayed significant improvements in performance over a two-week period on a perceptual and short-term memory test involving the identification of familiar letter sequences presented rapidly. They were compared with subjects randomly assigned to a routine of twice-daily rest with eyes closed, and with subjects who made no change in their daily routine. *Memory and Cognition*, 10: 207-215, 1982.

Development of Intelligence

University students who regularly practiced meditation increased significantly in intelligences over a two-year period, compared to control subjects. The finding corroborates the results of two other studies showing increased IQ in meditation students. *Personality and Individual Differences*, 12:1105-1116, 1991, and *Perceptual and Motor Skills*, 62: 731-738, 1986.

Natural Change in Breathing

Subjects were measured for changes in breathing rate during the practice of meditation. Breath rate fell from 14 breaths per minute to about 11 breaths per minute, indicating meditation produces a state of rest and relaxation. The change in breath rate is natural, effortless, and comfortable. *American Journal of Physiology*, 22: 795-799, 1971.

Decrease in Stress Hormone

Plasma cortisol is a stress hormone. The study shows that plasma cortisol decreased during meditation, whereas it did not change significantly in controlled subjects during ordinary relaxation. *Hormones and Behavior*, 10: 54-60, 1978.

Lower Blood Pressure

In a clinical experiment with elderly African American (mean age 66) dwelling in an inner-city

community, meditation was compared with the most widely used method of producing physiological relaxation. Subjects who had moderately elevated blood pressure levels were randomly assigned meditation, Progressive Muscle Relaxation (PMR), or usual care. Over a three-month interval, systolic and diastolic blood pressure dropped by 10.6 and 5.9 mm Hg, respectively, in the meditation group, and 4.0 and 2.1 mm Hg in the PMR group, with virtually no change in the usual care group. A second random assignment study with the elderly conducted at Harvard found similar blood pressure changes produced by meditation over three-months (11 mm Hg for systolic blood pressure). *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*, 57: 950-964, 1989.

Reversal of Aging Process

Biological age measures how old a person is physiologically. As a group, long-term meditators who had been practicing meditation for more than five years were physiologically twelve years younger than their chronological age, as measured by reduction of blood pressure, and better near-point vision and auditory discrimination. Short-term meditators were physiologically five years younger than their chronological age. The study controlled for the effects of diet and exercise. *International Journal of Neuroscience*, 16: 53-58, 1982.

Reduced Need for Medical Care

A study of health insurance statistics on over 2,000 people practicing meditation over a five-year period found that meditators consistently had less than half the hospitalization than did other groups with comparable age, gender, profession, and insurance terms. The difference between the meditation and non-meditation groups increased in older-age brackets. In addition, the meditators had fewer incidents of illness in seventeen medical treatment categories, including 87% less hospitalization for heart disease and 55% less for cancer. The meditators consistently had more than 50% fewer doctor visits than did other groups. *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 49: 493-507, 1987.

Cholesterol

A longitudinal study showed that cholesterol levels significantly decreased through meditation in hypercholesterolemic patients, compared to matched controls, over an eleven-month period. *Journal of Human Stress*, 5: 24-27, 1979.

Increased Self-Actualization

Self-actualization refers to realizing more of one's inner potential, expressed in every area of life. A statistical meta-analysis of 42 independent studies indicated the effect of meditation on increasing self-actualization is markedly greater than that of other forms of relaxation. This analysis statistically controlled the length of treatment and quality of research design. *Journal of Social Behavior and Personality*, 6: 189-248, 1991.

Increased Strength of Self-Concept

One month after beginning meditation, subjects experienced an improved self-concept in comparison to before learning meditation. Meditation participants developed a more strongly defined self-concept and also came to perceive their "actual self" as significantly closer to their "ideal self." No similar changes were observed for matched controls. *Journal of Psychology*, 4: 206-218, 1976.

Decreased Cigarette, Alcohol, and Drug Abuse

A statistical meta-analysis of 198 independent treatment outcomes found that meditation produced a significantly larger reduction in tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug use than either standard substance abuse treatments (including counseling, pharmacological treatments, relaxation training, and Twelve-Step programs) or prevention programs (such as programs to counteract peer-pressure and promote personal development). This meta-analysis controlled for strength of study design and included both heavy and casual users. Whereas, the effects of conventional programs typically decrease sharply by three months, effects of meditation on total abstinence from tobacco, alcohol, and illicit drug ranged from 50% to 89% over a 18 to 22 month period of study. *Alcoholism Treatment Quarterly*, 11: 13-87, and *International Journal of the Addictions*, 26: 293-325, 1991.

Increased Productivity

In this study subjects practicing meditation showed significant improvements at work, compared with members of a control group. Job performance and job satisfaction increased while desire to change jobs decreased. People at every level of the organization benefited from practicing meditation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 17: 362-368, 1974.

Improved Relations at Work

This study found significant improvements in relations with supervisors and co-workers after an average of eleven months practicing meditation, in comparison to control subjects. And while meditators reported that they felt less anxiety about promotion (shown by reduced climb orientation), their fellow employees saw them as moving ahead quickly. People at every level of the organization benefited from practicing meditation. *Academy of Management Journal*, 17: 362-368, 1974.

Increased Relaxation and Decreased Stress

This three-month study of managers and employees who regularly practiced meditation in a Fortune 100 manufacturing company (Puritan-Bennett Corporation) and a smaller distribution-sales company in Philadelphia showed that meditation practitioners displayed more relaxed physiological functioning, greater reduction in anxiety, and reduced tension on the job, when compared to control subjects with similar job positions in the same companies. *Anxiety, Stress and Coping International Journal*, 6: 245-262, 1993.

Improved Health and More Positive Health Habits

In two companies that introduced meditation, managers and employees who regularly practiced meditation improved significantly in overall physical health, mental well-being, and vitality when compared to control subjects with similar jobs in the same companies. Meditation practitioners also reported significant reductions in health problems such as headaches and

backaches, improved quality of sleep, and a significant reduction in the use of hard liquor and cigarettes, compared to personnel in the control groups. Anxiety, Stress and Coping International Journal, 6: 245-262, 1993.”

Part III

Let's Practice

This presentation was compiled from numerous resources, books, journals, magazine, personal experience, my education, the internet, Wikipedia, health news, etc.

Namaste'

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