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CAN STRESS MAKE YOU SICK?

Most of us shrug off a certain amount of daily stress. Demanding bosses, annoying coworkers, approaching deadlines—it all gets on our nerves, a little at a time. We grumble and groan, but isn't it just part of modern life? All those frustrations are irritating, but they won't hurt us, right?

Wrong. Chronic, everyday emotional stress can take a physical toll.

"The stress in our lives, and the internal distress it causes, can wreak havoc on our bodies," says Alice D. Domar, Ph.D., director of women's health at the Harvard Mind/Body Medical Institute.

WHAT STUDIES SHOW

"When we are stressed," Domar explains, "our hearts over-stimulated. Our hormonal output becomes imbalanced and our immune systems are weakened."

Numerous scientific studies link emotional stress and physical ailments:

- High stress levels may increase the risk for heart disease, asthma, obesity, diabetes and headaches.
- Chronic stress can contribute to depression and anxiety.
- In 2004, scientists published a review in the Psychological Bulletin of more than 300 studies investigating how stress affects the immune system. They found that even a small hike in stress levels (like taking a test) stops the body from fighting off germs.
- Stress is a factor in some gastrointestinal problems, such as heartburn (a.k.a. gastroesophageal reflux disease or GERD) and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS). Here's one thing that stress doesn't do. It doesn't cause ulcers. However, stress may make ulcers worse.

HOW STRESS GETS PHYSICAL

During a nerve-racking situation — say, a run-in with a difficult co-worker — your body goes into Red Alert mode. Your endocrine system produces more stress hormones, such as adrenaline. Your blood pressure, muscle tension and heart rate climb. More cholesterol flows into your bloodstream. The brain releases endorphins, the body's natural painkillers.

After the stressful situation, your body gradually returns to a normal, balanced state. But when stress is chronic, your body stays in the Red Alert mode. Over time, Red Alert mode can take a toll on your body:

- Constant surges in blood pressure and cholesterol damage blood vessels.
- High levels of stress hormones limit your immune system's disease-fighting capability.
- High levels of stress hormones can also cause elevated blood sugar levels especially in people with diabetes.
- Frequent demands for endorphins can make them less effective. This may worsen migraine headaches, backaches and other ailments.

QUICKTAKES



TAKING THE STRESS OUT OF RELATIONSHIPS

We've all experienced a difficult relationship at some point in our lives. Friends, coworkers, and, yes, family members can challenge our patience and stress us out. Don't feel that you have to just put up with difficult people. The following strategies can help keep your stress in check:

- Learn how to keep your cool when a situation heats up.
- Know your boundaries and stick to them.
- Use specific examples of times when you felt you were mistreated.
- Try to see the situation from the other person's perspective.
- Pick your battles.
- Learn to accept that some people won't change. Keep in mind that you can change your reaction to them.

Find What Works For You

How do you stop stress from causing physical harm?

- Different people find success with diverse strategies, including meditation, yoga and social support.
- Being active helps manage stress. Physical activity increases your body's production of feel-good endorphins.
- Enhancing both the amount and quality of your sleep may be beneficial.
- Learn to set boundaries in stressful situations.

You can learn to break the cycle of chronic stress. You'll give your body and mind a chance to return to a balanced, peaceful, healing state.

Don't let stressful situations lead you to make poor food choices. A candy bar or a bag of chips may offer a quick pick-me-up but they're lousy choices in the long run. A balanced, nutritious diet can help you handle stressful situations better.

Luckily, it's summertime. Great, healthy food choices are piled high at farmers' markets and farm stands all across the country.

Resource: <http://www.nlm.nih.gov/health/publications/stress/index.shtml>

Fresh Corn Salad Serves 4

Summertime is salad season. One of the best ways to pump up your veggie intake is to always include a salad of mixed greens with your supper. Make a double batch of this classic dressing to have on hand for tonight's meal and the next couple of nights.

INGREDIENTS

4 ears fresh sweet corn, shucked
 1/2 cup buttermilk
 2 tablespoons fresh lemon juice
 2 tablespoons minced fresh parsley
 2 tablespoons snipped chives or scallion greens
 1 tablespoon chopped fresh basil
 1 clove garlic, minced
 1 green or red bell pepper, diced
 salt to taste
 Freshly ground black pepper to taste

DIRECTIONS

1. Bring a large pot of water to a boil. Add ears of corn and cook for 1 minute. Drain and cool under cold running water.
2. Use a serrated knife to cut the corn kernels from the cobs.
3. In a serving bowl, whisk together buttermilk, lemon juice, fresh herbs and garlic. Add the corn kernels and diced pepper. Stir to coat. Taste and add salt and pepper as needed. Refrigerate for 30 minutes to allow flavors to blend. The salad can be made up to one day in advance.



NUTRITIONAL INFO PER SERVING

105 Calories
 1.3 grams Fat
 0.3 grams Saturated Fat
 4 grams Protein
 23 grams Carbohydrate
 3 grams Fiber
 47 mg Sodium