

Wellness

REVIEW

Beat Stress Before It Beats You

Is Stress Getting in the Way of Achieving Your Health Goals?

Modern living and stress seem to go hand in hand and it may be no surprise to you that the effects of stress can have a significant impact on mental wellbeing. Nevertheless, you may not know that the effects of stress can impact other body systems potentially hindering the achievement of health goals such as losing weight or improving digestive function, so it is important to understand what the stress response is and how it could affect you.

Fight or Flight – the Ancient Coping Mechanism

The stress response is an evolutionary strategy to cope with immediate dangers, such as an approaching lion! In response to an external threat, the chemical messengers, adrenaline, cortisol and noradrenaline are released from your adrenal glands, which enables you to either stand and fight or flee as fast as you can. In modern times, the feeling of being under constant stress, whether from work, family or financial pressures is interpreted by your body in the same way and can therefore lead you to be in a permanent state of emergency. This is significant as stress may be the underlying reason for a seemingly unrelated bodily imbalance, such as an inability to digest well when you are under pressure.

What is Stress Doing to Your Body?

A chronic state of stress can have widespread negative effects, such as:

- Poor digestion – reduced digestive secretions can lead to bloating, abdominal pain and reflux.
- Irregular blood sugar control – cortisol signals the release of sugars into the bloodstream in anticipation that muscles will need fuel to help you run away. These sugar spikes can lead to weight gain if the sugars are not utilised as muscle fuel and instead converted to fat.
- Hormonal imbalances – lack of libido, menstrual irregularity and fertility issues can all arise when your body switches to making stress hormones in preference to sex hormones.

Breaking the Cycle

It doesn't have to be this way. There are several nutrients and herbs that can help calm an overactive stress response, which may be hindering you from achieving your health goals.

For example, magnesium is essential for the nervous system by supporting the appropriate functioning of your brain's chemical messengers, the 'neurotransmitters'. Magnesium also produces energy, helping you resolve the fatigue that may come with being stressed. In addition, the B vitamins (often taken as a complex) work as a team with magnesium to support your nervous system as well as play a role in energy production themselves.

A class of herbs known as 'adaptogens' may be helpful to increase your body's physical and mental capacity to cope with stress. Traditional adaptogenic herbs include withania, rehmannia and rhodiola. If stress makes you uptight you may also need anxiolytic herbs. These help reduce feelings of anxiety and promote more restful sleep so you can handle the challenges your day has for you more easily. Passionflower, zizyphus, and magnolia are all anxiolytic herbs that have been extensively studied for their mild sedative and calming effects.

Your Practitioner can recommend formulas that contain combinations of these herbs and nutrients depending upon your needs, so you can break the cycle of chronic stress and get back on the path to wellbeing.



A Life Less Stressful

There are a number of lifestyle changes you can employ to help manage your stress and optimise your wellbeing:

- Eat healthy – lean proteins, antioxidant-rich fresh fruits and vegetables and essential fatty acids from oily fish, nuts and seeds, all nourish your neurotransmitters.
- Exercise regularly – a fabulous stress buster, exercise helps burn up excess adrenaline whilst releasing the 'feel good' chemical messengers, the 'endorphins'.
- Get enough sleep (seven to eight hours) – practice good 'sleep hygiene' techniques such as no TV or computer time for at least half an hour before bedtime and avoid caffeine in the afternoons.
- Meditate – particularly helpful if you cannot "switch off" your brain at night. There are numerous techniques available to help calm an overactive mind, such as transcendental meditation, mindfulness and creative visualisation.

Stress is an inevitable part of modern lifestyles, but it needn't get the better of you nor keep you from reaching your health goals. Speak to your Practitioner today about strategies and supplements you can use to regain control over the stress in your life.

Talk to your Practitioner today about helping manage your stress response.