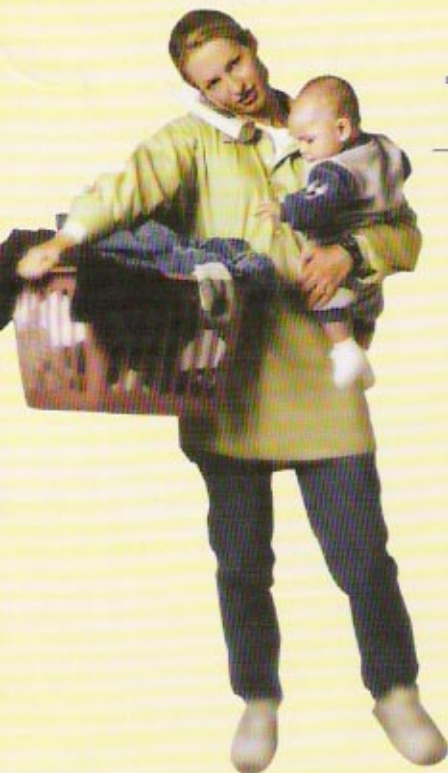


# Take Charge of Your Stress

## Vicious cycles that take a toll



nia, depression, ulcers, rheumatoid arthritis, headache, hypoglycemia, asthma, hypertension and heart disease.

The bad news is we all have to face stress. Even a positive experience like a new job, marriage or moving house can be a stress-triggering event. The good news is, it's relatively easy to neutralize stress before it takes a toll. The key to zapping stress is to maintain a healthy balance, both mentally and physically, making it difficult for stress to upset your equilibrium.

### The Chemistry of Stress

A long time ago, for primitive man, stress triggered a 'fight or flee' mechanism - perhaps when confronted by a wild animal or enemy. For early man, stress was episodic and served a valuable function. By the time the encounter was over, the entire stress response hormones had been fully utilized and the body could return to normal.

Today, however, you may be sitting at a desk or driving your car when the stress mechanism is triggered. The modern response is not to fight or flee, but to gnash your teeth, grip the steering wheel, scream, yell or just suppress it. Our bodies are in a constant state of 'emergency alert,' and the results can be devastating when so much of our stress response is in vain.

### Consider the consequences of stress

#### • Blood pressure rises

Depending on how many stressful situations you encounter, it may stay elevated, damaging the sensitive tubules of your kidneys. Kidney function can become compromised, which raises your blood pressure even more, contributing

to further kidney damage, blood pressure rises, and so on and so on.

#### • Glucose is dumped into your bloodstream

If this glucose remains unused, your body has to produce an enormous amount of insulin to cope with it. Eventually, this could result in hypoglycemia or even diabetes.

#### • Fat is dumped into your blood

Most of this goes unused, so it just clogs your arteries, leading to cardiovascular disease.

#### • The adrenal glands

Produce or contribute to the production of about 150 hormones, all vital to your health. When they are stressed, they become exhausted. Once the adrenal buffer is gone, you become a prime candidate for asthma, allergy, fibromyalgia, chronic fatigue syndrome and other autoimmune disorders.

#### • And drinking caffeine doesn't help

The stress hormone cortisol becomes elevated, which can set you up for countless health problems including: poor quality of sleep, impaired immunity and age-related deterioration.

### How do you live in the 21st century and not let stress affect your health?

First of all, you need a plan to help you deal with tough issues. Establish a daily routine that includes plenty of quality sleep, exercise and a stress-reducing or relaxation technique. Keep in mind that even though it's impossible not to have some stress in your life, you can strengthen and nourish yourself on a daily basis so you're better prepared to deal with most challenges. *M*

**S**usan is a full-time legal secretary, recent divorcee, and the mother of two young children. She has a long and demanding work schedule and equally hectic weekends — giving her little time for relaxation or rest. During the week she usually falls into bed, exhausted, by 9 p.m. and she still can't get to sleep; there's so much on her mind. As a result of this pattern of stress and fatigue, Susan develops an ulcer and is also diagnosed with hypertension. The worse part of this tale is that Susan is just another statistic of our 24/7 society.

Every day, one million Americans are absent from work because of stress-related disorders. Experts agree that stress is a factor in most diseases, and a major factor in disorders such as anxiety, insom-



## 15 Stress Busters TO NOURISH BODY, MIND AND SOUL

### Daytime

- 1) Get proper nutritional support to help stop free radical damage, and eat a balanced diet.
- 2) Exercise! It lowers stress hormones and gives you more energy. Choose an activity you enjoy and is appropriate for your biological age and condition.
- 3) Laughter is real medicine. It's a tension tamer and your body produces endorphins ("feel good" chemicals) when you laugh. Rent a funny movie or play charades.
- 4) Just learn to "let go." Next time you're in a traffic jam, instead of getting worked up about something you really have no control over, use the time to visualize something pleasant.

- 6) Avoid stimulants such as tobacco, caffeine, and sugar, as well as alcohol or drugs.
- 7) Get outside! A little sunlight every day will enhance your body's natural rhythms and provide you with vitamin D.
- 8) Take regular breaks at work. Get up and stretch, roll your neck and make sure you drink at least 8-10 glasses of water a day.

### Night time

- 9) Wind down earlier in the evening. It's difficult to fall asleep after working late or watching a suspenseful movie. Relax with an inspirational book, soft music and a cup of herbal tea.
- 10) A warm bath helps increase circulation to the skin and relaxes the muscles. Add a few drops of pine needle essence, oil of eucalyptus, or soothing lavender oil.

- 11) Go to bed earlier. Research shows that the hours of sleep before 2 a.m. are more rejuvenating than all the hours after.
- 13) Don't eat just before bed. Your digestive system won't get the break it needs and you won't be your best in the morning.
- 14) Cut back on caffeine. If you do consume caffeine, be moderate (one cup per day) or try an Herbal Coffee substitute, such as Oasis A.M. (see page 30)
- 15) Blue is the most relaxing color you could choose for a bedroom. Try it and you may sleep better.

