



APRIL: Stress & Hormones

Chronic stress can have serious health consequences, including weight gain, high blood pressure, heart disease, cancer, and a weakened immune system. Stress can also be responsible for mental and hormonal related illnesses. We encounter various stressors on a daily basis, ranging from hitting every red light on the way to work, giving a presentation at work, thinking about everything that needs to be accomplished in a given week, the unknowns of the future, a family member who is seriously ill, accumulated debt, a diet consisting of sugary and fatty foods and the list goes on and on....

STRESS & Hormones

When one is never able to turn off or lower their stress levels it means that they are living in a constantly invasive hormonal state around the clock. Consistently high levels of stress can lead to stubborn belly fat, elevated blood pressure, migraines, a heart attack, and another detrimental health issues.

The body is designed to release cortisol, a stress hormone, in reaction to any stressful situation in order to meet the evolutionary response of fight or flight. Cortisol levels should only be elevated for short periods of time in response to acute stress. Sadly, the majority of people's lives are extremely stressful turning the acute stress into chronic. When the stress becomes chronic, the immune system becomes desensitized to cortisol, which then triggers an inflammatory response. This increased inflammation within the body is often the foundational cause to most diseases such as diabetes, heart disease, cancer, autoimmune diseases, infertility, obesity, dementia and other emotional diagnosis.

Because our lives do not exist within a bubble, stress is inevitable. Therefore, it is important to find ways to respond to and manage stress in a healthy way. For some, it is natural to return back to homeostasis after a stressful event easier than others. However, regardless of one's natural ability to return to a calm state, anyone can benefit from improving internal communications within the body to combat stress.

Creating an awareness of the situations or things in life that are causing stress, or knowing what to do when experiencing certain situations can keep these stressors acute instead of allowing them to develop into chronic stress. Below are a three steps toward stress reduction:

1. **Take Inventory:** Take time right now to evaluate daily life and find the things causing stress, and write them all down.
2. **De-clutter:** Brainstorm practical ways to remove or lessen those stressful elements identified in the "Stress Inventory"
3. **Refresh and Change:** Commit to 2-3 stress-reducing activities such as:
 - a. Regular physical activity, meditation during work breaks, yoga, spending time in nature, scheduling time to have fun, enjoying music, aromatherapy, acupuncture, or simply laughing while watching a humorous moving or reading a humorous book.

It is okay to say "No," in order to schedule in purposeful breaks in the day. Relief some pressure by not multitasking. Instead focus on one thing at a time. People who focus on an individual task are reported to be more productive and have a great sense of satisfaction than their multi-tasking counterparts. Seek ways to restore balance in exercise routines, food intake, sleep schedule, spiritual health, work-life and family/social time. Remember stress

can wreak and havoc on one's health and well being, so take the time NOW to make a change and reap the benefits of a longer and more satisfying life!

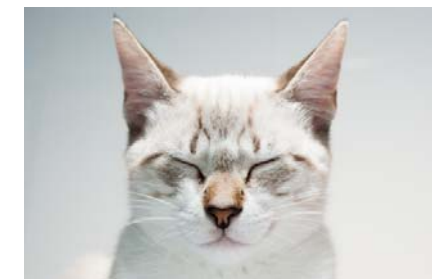
Health Tips:



- **Breathing:** Take a moment and pay attention to your breath. Is it short and fast? Or just in your chest and not a deep full belly breath? How you breathe affects the entire body. If it is short, fast, or only in the chest you are sending the message to the brain that you are in a state of “fight-or-flight”, causing an increase in blood pressure, heart rate and more tension throughout the entire body. Slowing down and breathing deeply is one of the best ways to reverse these effects and lower stress. Taking a deep long inhale allows the lungs to expand and grow stronger, fresh oxygen to flow throughout the body, and the autonomic

nervous system to switch from the sympathetic to the parasympathetic system. Belly breathing is one of the easiest and most effective forms of breathing exercises. Begin in a seated position or lying flat, put one hand on the belly and the other on the chest. Take a deep inhale in, allowing your belly to push up your hand first and then your chest should expand second. Hold the breath, and then exhale slowly letting first the chest to fall and then the belly. Do this 3-10 times inhaling to the count of four, hold at the top for four seconds and then exhale slowly for a count of four. ¹

- **Laughter:** Did you know that laughter is extremely medicinal in nature? Laughter strengthens the immune system, diminishes pain, boosts your mood and brings friends together building community. A good joke, having fun with a friend or watching a comedy can bring the mind and body back into balance by drawing one mentally and emotionally away from a stressful state. Even if the stress or anxiety is only lifted for a moment, one will still gain the benefits of feeling more focused and alert. This is because the act of laughing relaxes the entire body, releases endorphins, and burns calories, which boosts the immune system and overall decreases the long-term damage stress can have on the body. Most importantly, laughter brings people together either by laughing at old memories or while creating new ones! When laughing in unison most disagreements and forms of resentments are resolved, deeply felt emotions arise, and positive feelings are triggered leaving everyone feeling fresh and rejuvenated.²



- **Meditation:** Meditation is something that has been used all through history to increase a sense of calm, physical relaxation, which improves psychological balance, boosting the immune system and enhancing overall well-being. It is a mind and body practice that is attained through four basic elements. The first is finding a quiet location with few distractions, moving your body into a comfortable position (sitting, standing, walking or laying down), setting a focus of attention, as well as an open attitude of letting go and receiving. Many studies have shown that it may help reduce blood pressure, irritable bowel syndrome and anxiety or stress flare-ups.³ One

significant aspect that sets meditation apart from other stress reducing activities is that it is generally safe for everyone even those with physical limitations,⁴ as well as being simple, and can be performed most places without cost or equipment.

Exercise of the Month

Walk away the stress!

It is generally understood that walking is an excellent form of exercise for burning calories, and maintaining a healthy heart. But did you know that your evening dog walk could also significantly reduce your stress? April is both National Stress Awareness Month and the American Heart Association's National Walking Day! National Walking Day in 2018 falls on April 3rd, which makes it an excellent time to set a walking goal for your self.



Studies have shown that walking reduces many of the symptoms that accompany stress such as decreasing fatigue, improving alertness and concentration, and enhancing overall cognitive function. Furthermore, scientists have found a significant decrease in tension within the body, elevation and stabilization in people's moods, better sleep, and improved self-esteem after just five minutes of aerobic activity.⁵ The various hormones released when the body is in a state of stress can be decreased or reversed through the endorphins that are released during exercise. Endorphins are one of the many various chemicals known as neurotransmitters in the brain that send electrical signals to the nervous system. These endorphins can act as natural painkillers by reducing one's perception of pain, as well as feeling less of the negative effects of stress.⁶

Ready To Start Walking? It is important to first evaluate your physical state. Is hitting 2,000 steps a day a challenge, or are you already currently running 3 miles a day? What would be a realistic new walking goal for you based off of how much you are moving each day? Next, assess how best to incorporate a walking routine into your life. Maybe it's waking up half an hour earlier to go for a brisk morning walk, getting outside during your lunch break with a co-worker, or setting time aside in the evening to meet up with a friend for a walk around the neighborhood.

Below are a few tips for getting your walking more:

1. Keep walking shoes in your car at all times. You never know when you'll have a chance to get out of your car and go for a quick walk, hit the gym or meet up with a friend for a walk instead of coffee!
2. Walk! Don't sit during your child's activities. While you are waiting at dance or soccer practice go for a walk around the area instead of sitting in the car or bleachers.
3. Invest in an activity/fitness device. A Fitbit, Apple Watch or simple pedometer can be helpful in tracking and motivating you to reach a daily step goal.
4. Park further away. Parking further away or only once when doing errands can force you to walk through the parking lot to at least one store if not multiple stores.
5. Walk for part or all of your commute. Many people will walk to the bus stop and part of the way to their office and back if it is reasonable.
6. Take work meetings outside. Take long phone conversations on the go or walk in place in your cubicle.
7. Walk with a co-worker during lunch.
8. Pick a friend to meet with once a week for a walking date.
9. Hold a walking challenge at work or with a few friends.

Whatever you do, ensuring that your walking routine works with your lifestyle and ability ensures a great likelihood of success in maintaining a new, healthy, walking habit!

Recipe of the Month

Wild Blueberry & Lavender Smoothie

Relax with a Wild Blueberry & Lavender Smoothie for some tasty stress relief! Blueberries are packed with antioxidants and vitamin C. When our bodies are under high amounts of stress the cells need vitamin C and antioxidants to help repair and protect them from free radicals. Lavender is known as the calming and relaxing herb and has been used for centuries for insomnia, anxiety, depression and a natural stress relief.

The therapeutic properties found in lavender influence particular neurotransmitters in the autonomic nervous system in such a way that decreases the sympathetic nervous system (SNS) and increases the activity of the parasympathetic nervous system (PNS). Allowing the body to decrease or hopefully turn off its “fight or flight” state, and instead focus on rest and recovery.⁷ Strive to choose healthy food options each day! Choosing healthy foods can positively impact your mood, help relieve tension, stabilize blood sugar and send your stress packing!

This vegan, gluten free & paleo recipe only takes 5 minutes to whip up and then ENJOY!

Ingredients⁸

Serves 2

Produce

- 1/2 Avocado
- 1/2 Banana
- 1 Cup Frozen Blueberries
- 1 tbsp Lavender (fresh)
- 1/4 cup Swiss chard (red)

Canned Goods

- 1 cup Coconut milk

Baking & Spices

- 1 tsp Vanilla extract, pure

Frozen

- 1/2 cup Ice



Put all the ingredients in the blender and blend on high until fully mixed and you have a yummy, thick, creamy, and stress relieving smoothie!

¹ www.webmd.com

² www.helpguide.org/articles/metnal-health/laughter

³ www.mayoclinic.org

⁴ Still speak with your health provider first though if you have any previous serious health conditions.

⁵ adaa.org/understanding-anxiety

⁶ www.medicinenet.com

⁷ www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/pmc3612440

⁸ www.emilykylenuitrition.com

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