

THE IMPORTANCE OF DEFUSING DISTRESS

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Stress has been named as the cause or a complicating factor for up to 90% of all diseases.

Given the current state of healthcare, it is vital that we focus our efforts on managing and defusing our stress.

Stress is the body's response to any demand made upon it that requires us to adapt. This may be **positive stress (eustress)** which leaves us feeling stimulated, productive, energetic, optimistic and in control, or **negative stress (distress)** which we try to avoid or suffer through. Distress leads us into the "general adaptation syndrome":

1. Alarm phase (fight or flight), where our sense of control is challenged;
2. Resistance or vigilance phase (elevated responses to help adapt), where we fight to hold on to control;
3. Exhaustion phase (resources have been depleted), where we can no longer cope, leading to disease.

The **causes** of distress can be physical, emotional, psychological or environmental.

- **Physical & environmental:** poor eating habits (caffeine, sugar, white flour, dehydration), skipping meals, smoking, drug & alcohol abuse, lack of sleep, lack of or excessive exercise, chronic pain, chronic illness, overwork, surgery, lack of relaxation, over exertion, prescriptions, toxins, allergies and infections.
- **Emotional & psychological:** stressful relationships, employment instability, job loss, emotional trauma, loss or death, negative attitudes, financial pressures, fear, no-win situations, relocation.



Our response to stress is managed physically by our adrenals, the glands on top of the kidneys. They secrete the hormones adrenaline, which orchestrates the fight or flight response; cortisol, which mobilizes energy for longer term survival; DHEA, which supports mood, immune function and sex hormones; and aldosterone for blood pressure regulation.

There is a wide range of **symptoms** due to stress.

Physical:

- fatigue, difficulty getting up in the morning, unrefreshing sleep, increased effort to do everyday task, lull in the afternoon, second wind in the evening
- Salt cravings, increased appetite, carbohydrate cravings, decreased metabolism, insulin resistance, low blood sugar, decreased metabolism, increased weight
- low or high blood pressure, postural dizziness, increased cholesterol and arterial plaques
- indigestion, ulcers
- menstrual irregularities, PMS, decreased libido, impotence
- suppressed thyroid function, cracked nails, hair loss, dry skin, delayed wound healing
- muscle loss, muscle pain, bone loss, headaches
- suppressed immune function, frequent infections, allergies, autoimmune disease
- decreased clearance of toxins, including heavy metals

Mental, emotional and behavioral:

- difficulty relaxing, insomnia,
- difficulty concentrating, decreased memory
- apathy, anxiety, depression, irritability,
- overcompensating
- denial (ignoring symptoms)
- avoidance of work, friends and responsibilities
- poor personal hygiene,
- issues with punctuality

Added to these symptoms are the negative effects of our unhealthy coping mechanisms, like using alcohol, drugs, cigarettes, excessive food, gambling and sexual promiscuity. We may also use denial, choosing not to acknowledge our issues, or repression, which buries the issues in the subconscious, away from the conscious awareness. Or our body may cope by converting our stress into physical symptoms (conversion and somatization).

We will always have some form of stress, so our goal is not to completely eliminate stress, but to reduce unnecessary stress and chose healthy strategies to reduce our body's physiologic response to stressors.



There is a great deal of information out there about the typical mind-body approaches to stress, so why aren't we doing better with our stress and health?

Much of what is necessary for the typical approach to stress involves clear thinking and a willingness to change behavior. However, the affects of stress on the brain and energetic system can confound and confuse these areas.

There are several physical issues that can affect brain function that can occur due to stress.

- The production of adrenaline for the fight or flight response causes blood to be diverted from the brain's frontal thinking centers to the hind brain reflex survival response. This makes it difficult to think of new ways to cope.
- Elevated levels of cortisol affect normal memory function, preventing the creation of new memories and limiting access to existing ones. It also affects the immune system, allowing overgrowth of systemic yeast and formation of food allergies – both of which can produce brain fog. Lastly cortisol decreases the ability to clear toxins from the body, which can contribute to heavy metal toxicity (another cause of brain fog).



Stress also effects how energy flows through the body, which can also disrupt our ability to think clearly. Any of the body's subtle energy systems can be affected but here are some more common effects:

- The energetic connection between the forebrain and hind brain can be scrambled, leading to confusion, difficulty taking in new information, overwhelm, excessive anger and difficulty retaining new information.
- The energetic connection between the front and back of the body can be disconnected, leaving you feeling weak and tired.
- The crossing of energy between the left and right hemispheres of the brain may be disrupted, leading to exhaustion, apathy and feeling off-balance.
- Stress can cause over activity of the triple warmer meridian. This meridian works in conjunction with the hypothalamus to govern the immune system, the emergency response to threat (fight or flight) and the ability to form physiological and behavioral habits for managing stress. An overactive triple warmer can leave you feeling anxious, overwhelmed, exhausted and depressed.
- The flow of energy between the left & right, front & back, and top & bottom of the body can become disorganized, leading to lower energy, reduced comprehension, confusion with left and right, transposing words, and getting lost.
- If the body's polarity becomes reversed (South pole at head/North pole at feet) you can feel ungrounded and fatigued, with memory loss, depression and anxiety.
- Stress can lead to the creation of beliefs that support survival, which are initially helpful but eventually produce subconscious sabotage programs which can block our ability to achieve our goals.

Learning tools that correct these energetic imbalances allows for better mental clarity, clearer decision making, improved coping and more optimal self-care. With optimal energy flow, it is easier to assess your stressors and follow the traditional mind-body approach to stress management. Tools for self-care can provide a wonderful supportive bridge for defusing day-to-day stress, while working on deeper issues with an experienced professional, as it can be difficult to be in the problem state and perform the helper role at the same time.