

Address Your Stress

Are you stressed out right now? Are you stressed out all the time and fed up with it? Stress affects your body both immediately and over time. Doctors say that suffering from too much long-term stress can make you sick.

Short-term stress begins when you are faced with an immediate threat or stressful situation. A deadline at work or an encounter with an aggressive dog can both produce an acute stress response. Your brain responds to the threat by releasing a number of chemicals that set off a series of reactions in your body that make you alert and ready for action; for example, your heart rate increases to supply your muscles and brain with more blood, and you might feel suddenly stronger.

A few occurrences of short-term stress over time are not enough to harm you, but suffering many incidences of stress can add up in the long term if your body does not fully recover from each stress response. It may be difficult to see the relationship between stress and your health because the long-term effects of stress are subtle. One sign that you have not recuperated from a string of small stresses is tension. Tension can affect your body in the form of headaches or tight muscles. It can also affect your mind, causing irritability or the inability to concentrate.

Stress, if left unchecked, can have a dramatic impact on your body's ability to combat illness. In addition to the immune system, the cardiovascular system (heart and blood vessels), metabolic system (energy producing), and nervous system (brain and nerves) can be affected by long-term stress. Heart disease, cancer, diabetes, and high blood pressure are some of the illnesses that have been linked to long-term stress.

One of the best ways to combat the accumulation of short-term stress effects is moderate exercise on alternate days. Exercise helps your body recover from tension. Sleep is another important stress combatant. Sleep enables your body to repair damaged cells and allows the brain to rest. Avoiding caffeinated drinks also helps to relieve stress--caffeine speeds up your heart rate and makes you feel jittery. Taking a short break from whatever it is that is stressing you out can help you gain perspective on the situation.

Getting a handle on your stress is as important to your overall well-being as maintaining a high-fiber, low-fat diet that includes complex carbohydrates, exercising, and not smoking. All these factors work together to create a healthy lifestyle. It's OK to worry about a test or be nervous about a job interview every once in a while. It's when all of life's many stresses start to accumulate that you could be in trouble.