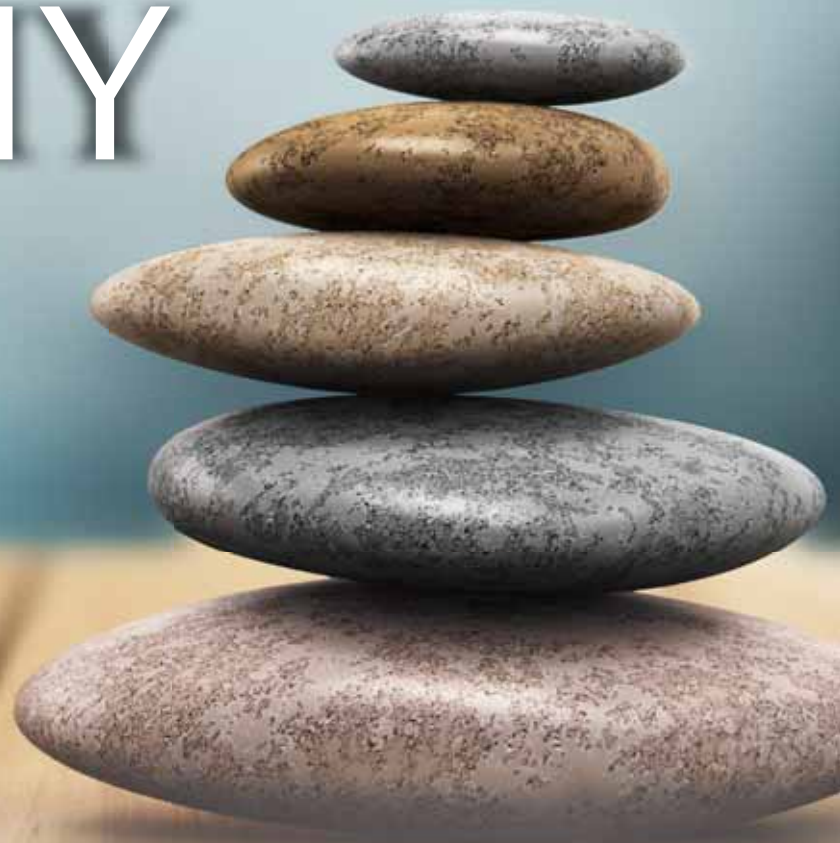


HEALTHY LIVING



Understanding and managing stress

Stress is a burst of energy and chemicals from the brain and adrenals that advises us on what to do in certain situations. In small doses, stress has many advantages. It can help you meet daily challenges and motivates you to reach your goals. It can help you accomplish your tasks more efficiently and even boost memory. But stress is also a vital warning system producing the fight or flight response. When the brain perceives some kind of stress, it starts flooding the body with chemicals like epinephrine (adrenalin), norepinephrine and cortisol. This creates a variety of reactions such as an increase in blood pressure and heart rate. Plus the senses have a laser-like focus so you can avoid physically stressful situations such as jumping away from a moving car preserving your safety.

Stress is key for survival but too much stress can be detrimental. Emotional stress that lingers for weeks or months can weaken the immune system and cause high blood pressure, fatigue, depression, anxiety and even heart disease. Too much epinephrine coming from fear or anger can alter heart rate, blood sugar

metabolism, muscle strength and sweating. Excess cortisol production from high stress can elevate blood pressure, blood sugar and create low bone density. The amino acid derived hormones (ending in '-ine') are derived from tyrosine and tryptophan whereas steroid hormones like cortisol and estradiol end in ('-ol or -iol'). So if you find your blood glucose levels are high in a blood test it may not mean you have diabetes but it could mean your levels of cortisol from stress are elevated, pushing up the glucose level.

The long term activation of the stress-response system can disrupt almost all your body's processes. This puts you at risk of numerous health problems including anxiety, feeling overwhelmed, weakened immune system, depression, digestive problems, headaches, heart disease, sleep problems, weight gain, memory impairment, thinning bones, ageing skin, body aches and personality changes. Your reactions to stress can be affected by genetics and life experiences however stressful events are a fact of life and you can take steps to manage the impact these events have on your

mind, mood and physical wellbeing.

Here are a few considerations-

- See a Naturopath

about a personalised eating programme that covers all the essential ingredients.

- Exercise routinely
- Practice relaxation such as deep breathing, yoga, tai chi, long slow walks in nature, meditation at home or in a trusted group
- Take time for sunshine, beach, mountains, fresh air, change of scenery
- Keep to a healthy daily routine of activities and eating/sleeping
- Take time for hobbies. It's ok to say NO to other things
- Listen or dance to music or play music. Great mindfulness activity
- Bring out a sense of humour
- Put stress in its place by isolating the incident for what it is and reducing emotional attachment. Don't react to your imagined perception.

You can depersonalise stress and seek professional help when needed if things are getting out of hand.

'Notice yourself talk' such as "I can't cope", "I'm too busy", "I'm so tired" or "It's not fair". These may be true but aren't always helpful to repeat and can even make you feel worse. Try saying soothing calming things to yourself to reduce your levels of stress like "Breathe easy" or "Calm down" as you breathe in and slowly out.

The payoff for learning to manage stress is peace of mind and perhaps - a longer, healthier life.



Naturopath, Kim Piper N.D. (Hons) Speciality areas include hormones for men and women, diet and lifestyle rebalancing, gut function, children's ailments and daily wellness protocols. With 30 years experience she is also the author of a best-selling book 'Woman to Woman...managing your hormones safely and naturally'.

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