

THE BETTER HEALTH NEWS

STRESS

**STRESS AND
COMFORT FOOD**

2

ADRENAL SUPPORT

4

**TAKE A FREE
HEALTH
QUESTIONNAIRE**

5

**EXERCISE IMPROVES
MOOD, REDUCES
STRESS &
INCREASES BRAIN
POWER**

6

KEEP STRESS UNDER CONTROL TO ENSURE GOOD HEALTH

Bringing stress under control, both nutritionally and with technique can improve a variety of health problems—including severe ones like cancer and AIDS. An article appearing in the *Medical Tribune* (February 10, 1994;28) stated that stress reduction can even help with AIDS and cancer. A study of 800 AIDS patients found that a pessimistic view about health had dire consequences. Those who

(October 27, 1997;157:2213-2223) looked at 121 men and 15 women with coronary artery disease and ischemia during mental stress testing or ambulatory EKG monitoring. Statistically the stress management group fared better than the

controls and the exercise group,

Patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) respond to stress management, according to research appearing in the journal *Digestion* (1991;50:36-42). More than 60% of the subjects receiving the stress management had fewer episodes of irritable bowel and the symptoms



felt pessimistic about being HIV positive became sick sooner and died earlier than patients with a more positive attitude.

Another study appearing in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* (April 6, 2005;293 (13):1626-1634) found that a combination of exercise and stress management was beneficial to patients with ischemic heart disease. Other research appearing in the *Archives of Internal Medicine*

during those episodes were less severe.

Other health problems that respond to stress reduction include chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, depression, eczema, allergies and asthma. The hormonal changes of stress affect white blood cell activity and immunity. No matter what the health problem, bringing stress under control will improve it.

STRESS AND COMFORT FOOD

Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco have found a feedback system in rats that may explain the craving of so called "comfort foods" in people who are under stress. A steroid hormone, called corticosterone, is produced in rats as a response to stress. The human equivalent of this hormone is cortisol.

The hormone causes rats to engage in pleasure seeking behavior 24 hours after stress. This behavior causes the rats to crave high calorie food. In the rats' case, the food was sugar and lard. The hormone's effect on people is likely to make them crave chocolate or greasy burgers.

The research also explains why some people get abdominal obesity. Chronic stress caused the rats to gain weight around the abdomen. The fat cells actually work to curb the stress. The researchers suspect that the metabolic signal to inhibit the stress system comes directly from fat deposits.

The finding offers an explanation into how chronic stress can be inhibited, or curbed.

The body's acute response to stress, like a single event such as being cut off in traffic, diminishes through an inhibitory feedback mechanism of the adrenal stress system. Chronic stress, which is a series of negative events, worrying, frustration occurring over a period of weeks or months, does damage to the body. It creates depression, obesity, a tendency

towards type II diabetes, Metabolic Syndrome (high cholesterol with high LDL, low HDL, high triglycerides and high blood pressure), cardiovascular problems and a loss of brain tissue.

"Our studies suggest that comfort food applies the brakes on a key element of chronic stress," says study co-author Norman Pecoraro, PhD, "And it could explain, why solace is often sought in such foods by people with stress, anxiety or depression." The mechanism may also explain bulimia and night time binge eating.

This may be part of a survival mechanism. In the animal kingdom, it's eat or be eaten, and constant, or chronic, stress may make the animal prefer to eat high-energy foods for fuel to help with survival. Under the model that the research team has proposed, corticosterone (or in humans, cortisol) would prompt vigilance to threats and also send a signal to the brain of a chronically stressed animal to seek high-energy food. If it were successful in finding such food, stress and its attendant feelings would end.

If there is war, food shortage, disease, or other threats to survival, the need for high calorie food is great. In a society where people do not face these dire conditions, stress comes in the form of job deadlines, fights with the spouse, rush hour traffic, or financial worries. But the stressed out office worker seeks the same solution as the person or animal who's survival is being

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threatened—food. The choice to eat chocolate or a greasy burger may well come from chronic stress.

In a society where people eat too much junk food and there is a problem with adult onset diabetes, obesity, and heart disease, we need a better way to address chronic stress. In a civilized society, overeating merely manifests as the physiologic problems of stress. Better solutions would be exercise, deep-breathing, yoga, meditation, or even a good hot bath. These can stimulate neurochemicals that activate regions of the brain that stimulate pleasure. Relaxation techniques may work by reducing the psychological drives on stress output, which can be the root causes of stress. On a practical note, this may mean that adrenal support, may be a useful strategy to help people with weight loss and food craving issues.

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ADRENAL SUPPORT

Traditional Western medicine does not recognize functional problems with the adrenal gland, unless Addison's disease (adrenal failure) is present. This is pretty amazing since medicine recognizes that the thyroid can function at various levels, including borderline hypothyroidism. Traditional Western medicine has taken the view that the adrenals are either working, or they are not. Those of us working in natural health care, look at it differently.

There are a few studies that show a connection between the adrenals and disease. One study, appearing in *Biological Psychiatry*, (1996;40:89-97) looked at the connection to the size of the adrenal glands and depression. Adrenal gland volume, as determined by MRI, was significantly larger, by 38%, in 35 adult major depressives during their illness than in matched controls. There appears to be significant adrenal hypertrophy in major depression. There was a significantly increased baseline cortisol level, by about 22%, in the depressive patients, suggesting mild adreno-cortical hyperactivity which was consistent with the overall severity of their depression. Another study, appearing in *Academy of Emergency Medicine*, (July 2001;8(7):761-764) looked at cortisol levels. Cortisol levels

were measured in acutely ill patients with either sepsis or myocardial infarction; 43% of the 30 subjects had serum cortisol levels of <15 mcg/dl, implicating adrenal hypofunction. A study appearing in *Experimental and Clinical Endocrinology & Diabetes*, (1997;105:39-45) looked at the increase in cortisol levels during exercise in patients with eczema and compared it to normal subjects. Exercise increased cortisol levels in both groups. The increase was less pronounced in the group with eczema, compared to the control group (indicating possible adrenal hypofunction in the test group).

In natural health care, adrenal support is a mainstay for treatment of many chronic conditions, including allergies, asthma, fatigue and even back pain. We have the concept of adrenal hyperfunction (Selye's resistance phase) and adrenal hypofunction (Selye's exhaustion phase). In hyperfunction the individual is responding to the stress and handling it. He or she may feel keyed up. The person may have cold, clammy hands, rapid pulse, reduced appetite, and trouble falling asleep.

In adrenal hypofunction, the individual begins to have a variety of symptoms including fatigue, digestive problems, obesity, depression, dizziness, fainting, allergies and many other problems.

**It is easier to
build strong
children than to
repair broken
men.**

*Frederick
Douglass*

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EXERCISE IMPROVES MOOD, REDUCES STRESS & INCREASES BRAIN POWER

Research appearing in the November, 1999 issue of the *Annals of Behavioral Medicine* demonstrates the value that exercise has for reducing stress. The subjects of the study were 135 college students. The study found that those who exercised regularly coped with stress better and had 37% fewer physical symptoms than those who did not exercise regularly. Sedentary students had 21% more anxiety than the students who exercised regularly.

Exercise can also improve the mood of depressed individuals, according to research appearing in the *Journal of Sports Medicine and Physical Fitness* (December 2001;41;539-545). Eighty volunteers took a mood test prior to an

aerobics class. 52 of the subjects were determined to be in a depressed mood. The questionnaire was given again, after the class. Participating in the class reduced fatigue, tension and feelings of anger.

Exercise even improves brain power, according to a report presented at the annual meeting of the Society of Psychophysiological Research in Montreal, Canada October 18, 2001. The study looked at the thinking ability of 20 subjects between the ages of 18 and 24 after running for a half-hour. After the exercise the subjects were connected to an EEG. They were given computer tests before and after the exercise. The brain wave measurements showed that the decision making process was faster after the exercise.