



Fight Stress Sleep More

by Charlotte Meschede

How does one define stress? There is no question that most of us respond positively to a certain amount of 'controlled' stress. Studies have supported this fact as it keeps the mind and body alert and awake.

The most important thing is to learn how to cope with excessive amounts of continuous stress. Research was conducted by James A. McCubbin, a psycho-physiologist at the University of Kentucky, School of Medicine. He found that young men in the early stages of hypertensive disease showed diminished levels of opioids, which are calming chemicals the brain produces in response to stress. McCubbin's work suggests that there's a natural mechanism in the brain that helps us stay cool when we are challenged by stressful events. It is when this mechanism breaks down that stress becomes dangerous. The question is:

If confession is good for the body, then apparently so is having a healthy regard for one's self.

How do we gain control of our innate anti-stress mechanisms and how do we train our brains to stay cool under fire? There are hundreds of clinics and health spas around the world that attempt to do just this, but the biggest challenge is to train an individual how to control this on his own, without having to spend fortunes on specialised centres that do it for you. Generally, a mixed strategy appears to be the most successful way of doing this – a combination of a positive attitude, diet, supplements, exercise, and sleep seems to produce the best results.

Positive Attitude

Maintaining a positive attitude is loosely thrown around as being crucial to stress management, but we all know that this is easier said than done. I have found that the most important factor in being positive is to be open and honest, with not only the people

around you, but most importantly, yourself. It has been known for many years that people with secretive, closed-in personalities are more prone to hypertension, ulcers and even cancer. In a scientific study, Pennebaker, a psychologist at the Southern Methodist University, and his colleagues, another psychologist Janice Kiecolt-Glaser and the immunologist, Ronald Glaser of Ohio State University, asked for 25 students to spend 25 minutes a day for four consecutive days writing about past traumatic experiences. When the four days of self-revelation were over, the researchers found that the ability of the students' immune systems to respond to challenges was significantly improved and the number of visits they made to the student health centre in the ensuing months declined markedly. The conclusion, according to Dr Pennebaker, was: "Confession is good for the soul but it is even better for the body!"

Researchers Jonathan Brown of University of Washington and Kevin McGill of Southern Methodist University found that among a group of 370 teenagers and college students, those with a low self-esteem had a high rate of stress-related illnesses and were likely to get sick even when things were going well. People who like themselves, on the other hand, had a much lower incidence of stress-linked diseases and seemed to thrive both physically and psychologically. The message is clear: if you want to feel better and live longer, learn to like yourself. Forgive yourself your faults and failings and identify your virtues.

Diet and Supplementation

The effect of stress on the body is two-fold. Firstly, there is the immediate response to an emergency, in which the body enters

a “flight or fight” response. This is usually a spontaneous stressful event, in which adrenalin and cortisol are released by the adrenal glands, blood sugar levels go up, pupils dilate to let in more light and we ‘huff’ and ‘puff’ to take in more oxygen. This allows us to respond in a way that is appropriate to the situation – i.e. someone is chasing you, or you are in a dangerous situation and need to get out fast. The second area of stress is anxiety, in which the person appears to be constantly ‘on-edge’. A state of anxiety will cause blood sugar levels to rise and so management of anxiety must include eating foods that will help to keep blood sugar levels constant. Taking supplements that contain chromium does help the body to utilise insulin more efficiently and keep blood sugar levels more regular (AIM GlucoChrom).

Eating to support a healthy body will in itself create less stress as a healthy body is obviously less prone to disease. It is often not the stress itself that causes damage to the body but what we do to alleviate the stress that creates the dysfunction in the body. Most of the time people will resort to “unhealthy” practices in order to dispel stress. Anxiety is, apart from clinical depression, the most common cause of addiction to alcohol, cannabis and tranquilizers as it is frequently not the stress itself that causes the damage to the body, but what we do to alleviate that stress.

Fighting fatigue is paramount if you want to manage your work load and eliminate the stress of not being able to keep up. I have found that supplementing with ATP (Adenosine-5-triphosphate), which is the naturally occurring energy molecule in the body, helps keep the executive on top of his/her game both mentally and physically (AIM Peak Endurance). In addition to this, the herb, ginkgo biloba, has been shown to have beneficial effects on the flow of blood to small arteries and capillaries (AIM GingkoSense). This reportedly benefits many circulatory-related disorders from varicose veins to short-term memory loss.

Sleep

Sleep is as essential to life as food. We need it every day and yet, most of us, especially those of us experiencing high levels of stress, are deficient in it. Alarming, 47% of people have difficulty in falling asleep or staying asleep. Sleep both rejuvenates the body and the mind. During the first 3 hours of sleep, the body goes into rapid repair mode. This is one of the reasons why, if you are injured or sick, nothing is better than a good night’s sleep. Many of our body’s daily rhythms are finely tuned mechanisms which depend on certain hormonal patterns, body chemicals

and nutrients. At night, the levels of the stress hormone, cortisol, should decrease, but if you have a diet that is high in stimulants such as sugar, caffeine and alcohol, your ability to go to sleep and/or to sleep through the night will be impaired. If cortisol levels are high at night, the release of growth hormone is suppressed. Growth hormone is essential for the daily repair of tissue and for the renewal of new tissue. This effectively speeds up the rate at which your body ages. One of the neurotransmitters (nerve cells) that is responsible for inducing sleep is melatonin. This is produced naturally by the body by the pineal gland, which is situated in the centre of the brain. This gland is light-sensitive and must therefore receive adequate exposure to natural light in order for it to function efficiently. Melatonin is very similar to serotonin (another brain chemical) and is made from the amino acid tryptophan (present in LeafGreens). Without enough melatonin in the body it is difficult to get to sleep and to stay asleep. Foods that are high in tryptophan include chicken, cheese, nuts, tuna, tofu, eggs and milk.

Deficiency of minerals such as calcium and magnesium (AIM CalciAIM) can trigger or exacerbate sleep difficulties because they work together to calm the body and help relax nerves and muscles. Also ensure that you are eating plenty of magnesium-rich foods such as seeds, nuts, green vegetables, whole-grains and fish. Unfortunately many people resort to medicinal sedatives in order to help them sleep. These are usually addictive and as your tolerance level increases, larger and larger doses will be needed to produce the same effect. They also have a wide range of side effects such as dry mouth, day-time drowsiness, memory problems, confusion, depression and many more. Herbs such as passion flower (AIM Composure) are well known in their ability to calm the body and induce sleep. Animal studies have shown that using passionflower lengthened the duration of sleep.

