

Vail Daily



Vail health: Nine ways to de-stress

Overdosing on "fight or flight" can lead to health problems

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VAIL, Colorado — What happens to our bodies when we're under stress?

When you encounter something stressful, your brain signals the adrenal glands, which release hormones such as cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenaline. These stress hormones race through your bloodstream to different parts of your body, preparing you to fight or flee.

Your breath quickens as your lungs take in extra oxygen. Glucose and fats are released from storage sites into your bloodstream. This supplies energy your body needs to fend off the threat and your sight and hearing become sharper, to make you more alert. Your heart beats faster, sometimes up to five times as quickly as normal. As your heart starts pounding, blood pressure rises. Certain blood vessels constrict, which helps direct blood flow to your brain and muscles, and away from other organs. Your muscles tighten. This prepares you to spring into action.

If you continue to experience stress without any coping mechanism it can effect your over all health.

Do you often feel tired and stressed? One of the most common problems I hear from patients is that they feel fatigued, anxious and depressed. And they often have trouble sleeping even though they are exhausted.

Most of them share a common underlying condition: adrenal burnout. It's the result of racing through life with a constantly aroused sympathetic ("fight or flight") nervous system. In the heightened nervous state of adrenal burnout, the body overproduces adrenaline, cortisol and other stress hormones. Eventually, this causes the adrenal glands, the front line in the stress reaction, to show wear and tear and become depleted. This frequently leads to an impairment in the thyroid gland, which can cause a further decline in energy level and mood and is one of the reasons why so many people have thyroid glands that don't work well.

Stress over long periods can increase your risk for heart disease, boost blood pressure, trigger gastrointestinal problems, affect sleep, cause anxiety and lower your immune system. It also can cause weight gain, diabetes, fatigue and thyroid problems.

Sometimes the simple things are the best ways for coping with stress. Some suggestions include:

- Spend time with people who are optimistic and make you laugh.
- Turn off the news.
- Quit looking at the stock market numbers. They will continue to go up and down throughout history.
- Spring is in the air. Smell the roses. Buy some flowers.
- Exercise at least one hour five times per week.
- Eat healthy. We burn more protein under stress. Make sure you're eating protein with each meal and five to 12 veggies per day. Eliminate the caffeine, sugar and alcohol.
- Breath. A simple breathing exercise is to sit in a chair with your feet on the ground, close your eyes and breathe in to the count of seven, hold the breath to the count of four and breathe out to the count of eight.

Repeat this four times in a row. Do these exercises twice a day.

- Get at least 8 hours of sleep per day. Naps may be necessary.
- Remember this too will pass so try to relax.

Dr. Deborah Wiancek is a naturopathic doctor at The Riverwalk Natural Health Clinic in Edwards who specializes in natural medicine. For any questions please call 970-026-7606 or e-mail her at Wiancek@healthref.com.

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