

# THE BETTER HEALTH NEWS

## STRESS AND DISEASE

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Stress is both a cause of disease and an aggravating factor. Reducing stress can help prevent disease and to help recover from an existing disease. An article appearing in *Postgraduate Medicine* (January, 1991;89(1):159-164) enumerated the kinds of health problems caused by stress. According to the article, stress is a cause of cardiovascular disease and may even be related to sudden death. It can cause platelet aggregation and thrombus formation. Stress can make the airways in asthmatics hyperreactive. Stress makes the immune system less effective, making the prospect of getting a cold or the flu more likely. Stress has been linked to headaches, inflammatory bowel conditions and endocrine problems.

Stress actually decreases the activity of natural killer cells (a type of white blood cell), according to research appearing in *Stress Medicine* (1991;7:53-60). The study looked at the effect daily stress had on the natural killer cells in 92 kibbutz residents. Another study looked at the effect on traumatic stress. Research appearing in *Psychosomatic Medicine* (1997;59:467-476) looked at a total of 159 workers at the crash site and 41 controls were examined within 2 months of the crash and again 6 months after the crash. Subjects were divided according to whether or not they had contact with human

remains. Workers exposed to body parts at the actual crash site, and those who were exposed to remains without expecting to be, exhibited more symptoms of stress than workers who saw bodies and body parts at the morgue and those who did not see human remains. The traumatized group had higher natural killer cell activity at the start of the study and at two months. At the end of six months the levels were comparable to the group that was not traumatized.



Stress can make you more susceptible to the common cold. A study appearing in the *New England Journal of Medicine* (August 29, 1991;325(9):606-612)

looked at 394 subjects who were given nasal drops containing one of five respiratory viruses, and another 26 subjects who were given saline nasal drops. The amount of respiratory infections was directly proportional to the amount of psychological stress the individual was under.

Stress can even affect fertility. A study published in the *Medical Tribune* (December 1, 1994;16) studied 150 couples and found that the stress of a death in the family had a negative effect on the quality of sperm. Stress caused by a divorce or separation also had a negative effect on sperm. Interestingly, stress from work had no effect on sperm.

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## NUTRITION AND STRESS

When thinking of supplements for people under stress, it is common to think of adrenal support, but there are other things that have been researched. Using **ADHS<sup>R</sup>** for overactive adrenals and **ADB5<sup>TM</sup>** for hypoadrenia still makes sense. Perhaps one of the most serious implications of stress may be in conjunction with a magnesium deficiency. Stress increases the need for magnesium. An article appearing in the *Journal of the American College of Nutrition* (1994;13(5):429-446) states that when stress causes the release of catecholamines and corticosteroids, can increase a magnesium deficiency. Stress and magnesium deficiency can lead to vasoconstriction and platelet aggregation. This can increase the risk of damage to the heart, cardiovascular disease, arrhythmias and even sudden cardiac death. Depleted magnesium levels due to stress can play a role in eclampsia in pregnant women. It can also be an aggravating factor in asthma.

Omega-3 fatty acids may be useful in mitigating stress. A prospective cohort study involving nearly 8,000 subjects was published in the *European Journal of Nutrition* (2007; 46(6): 337-46). The authors concluded that there is taking omega-3 fatty acids may be of benefit to a variety of mental disorders including anxiety, depression and stress. Other research appearing in the journal *Hypertension* (November 1, 2004;44(5):732-738) found that DHA supplementation reduced vasoconstriction due to psychological stressors.

Studies have shown that vitamin C may increase tolerance to stress. An animal study appearing in the *Medical Tribune* (September 23,

1999;40(16):4) found that rats given vitamin C, when stressed, produced less corticosterone (a stress hormone in rats) than rats not given vitamin C. The supplemented rats also had higher immune function, larger thymus glands and had their adrenal glands became less enlarged than rats not receiving vitamin C. Older research supported the idea that vitamin C (as sodium ascorbate) can be beneficial to allergy patients—and the mechanism may be through supporting the adrenal glands. A review article appearing in the *American Journal of Digestive Disorders* (September 1947;302-306) states that between one and two grams of sodium ascorbate per day is beneficial to allergy patients. The sodium ascorbate plays a role in adrenal function. One study involving 50 subjects with asthma, whole adrenal gland extract in conjunction with a high salt intake resulted in improvement of symptoms in 42 of the subjects. Sodium ascorbate both supports the adrenal gland and addresses the sodium/potassium imbalance caused by stress.

Research appearing in the *Journal of International Sports Nutrition* (2008; 5: 11) shows that phosphatidylserine may reduce stress hormone levels. The study was a small, double-blind crossover design study that found that supplementation with phosphatidylserine supplementation for 10 days reduced exercise induced stress and reduced mean peak cortisol concentrations from moderately intensive exercise. **Phosphatidylserine** from Biotics Research contains 100 mg of phosphatidylserine as well as a 300 mg blend of phosphatidyl-inositol, soy phospholipids, phosphatidylcholine, phosphatidylethanolamine and glycerides.

## ADHD AND L-CARNITINE

A 16-week study appearing in *the Journal of Child and Adolescent Psychopharmacology* (2007; 17(6): 791-802) involved 112 children with ADHD and supplementation with acetyl-L-carnitine. The children were given either a placebo or the supplement; dosage was based on the child's weight. Acetyl L-carnitine was found to be beneficial for the subjects with the inattentive type of ADHD, but was not beneficial for the children with the combined type of ADHD.

Another small study appearing in *Prostaglandins, Leukotrienes and Essential Fatty Acids* (2002;67(1):33-38) involving 24 boys who received L-

carnitine at a dosage of 100mg/kg of body weight. The boys were divided into two groups, one receiving the supplement. They were evaluated using the Child Behavior Checklist. The supplementation with L-carnitine reduced inattentiveness and aggressive behavior.

Both of these were small, pilot studies. They do, however, show some promise. L-carnitine promotes energy production by enhancing fat oxidation in the cell mitochondria. Biotics Research has L-Carnitine in both powder and capsule form.



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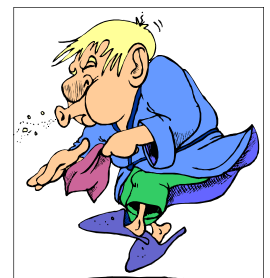
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## STRESS MAKES COLDS AND FLU WORSE

According to research appearing in *Psychosomatic Medicine* (March 1999;61:175-180), stress may make the symptoms of a cold or the flu worse. The study involved 55 subjects who were injected with Influenza A virus. Prior to being injected, the subjects filled out a questionnaire about their stress levels. They were then quarantined and observed. Researchers measured mucus production, checked the severity of their symptoms and measured interleukin-6 levels (interleukin-6 is a protein produced by the body involved with immune response). The subjects who reported the highest levels of stress had more severe

symptoms, more mucus production and higher interleukin-6 levels.

Also, research published in the journal, *Epidemiology* (May 2001;11: 345-349) showed a survey of more than 1,100 staff and students at a Spanish university that focused on various types of stress. Individuals who believed they were under stress were more likely to catch a cold than those who did not. An even higher instance of colds was found in pessimists—people with a negative outlook on life.



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## STRESS REDUCTION HELPS DIABETES

According to research appearing in the January, 2002 issue of *Diabetes Care*, stress management can help to lower blood sugar levels in type II (adult onset) diabetics. The HbA1c test measures the average blood sugar levels over a period of time. Stress reduction techniques like

breathing exercises, visualization, progressive muscle relaxation and instruction on how to cope with stress lowered HbA1c levels by an average of 0.5%. Nearly 1/3 of the subjects had a reduction of 1%.

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## HEART DISEASE PATIENTS BENEFIT FROM STRESS REDUCTION

A five-year study published in the January 15, 2002 issue of the *American Journal of Cardiology* shows that heart patients may benefit from stress management. One group of 94 subjects were men with heart disease who went through training that taught them ways to control negative thoughts and emotions and other stress

reducing techniques including muscle relaxation. During the course of the study, the men receiving the training in stress-reduction were less likely to need a heart procedure (like bypass or angioplasty); they also had lower doctors' costs and lower hospitalization costs over the five-year period of the study.

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## REGAINING HEALTH BY REDUCING STRESS

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 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. In other research appearing in the *Archives of Internal Medicine* (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. The subjects were given an exercise program or a stress management program. The program lasted 16 weeks. Subjects were monitored for 38 weeks after the study. During the follow-up period 21% of the subjects had at least one cardiac event. Statistically the stress management group fared better than the controls and the exercise group, with a relative risk of 0.26 for

a cardiac event (when compared to the control group). The relative risk in the exercise group was lower than that of the control group, but not nearly as good as the stress-reduction group.

Patients with irritable bowel syndrome (IBS) respond to stress management. Research appearing in the journal *Digestion* (1991;50:36-42) divided a group of 35 patients with IBS, giving one group traditional therapy and the other stress management. The stress management included sessions explaining the symptoms with relation to stress, breathing exercises and relaxation techniques. More than 60% of those receiving the stress management had fewer episodes of irritable bowel and the symptoms during those episodes were less severe. Other research appearing in *The American Journal of Gastroenterology* (1994;89(8):1219-1225) found a connection between psychological stress and the severity of the mucosal abnormalities and the symptoms in ulcerative colitis patients.

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.