

Lifestyle Medicine

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How we manage stress is the most important gift you can give to yourself and your children. The more stress we hold on to, the less chemistry we have for pleasure, including relationships, food, playfulness and sleep.

Ongoing stress keeps the body in fight and flight and away from the rest and digest state. This may exacerbate or trigger inflammation. Therefore, using lifestyle medicine will help modulate the stress hormone, cortisol, even whilst you are going through a difficult time. If you perceive lifestyle medicine as a prescription for everyday life and practice this preventatively, it will set you up for resilience for when you most need it.

I know you have heard many times that we can't choose the stress in life. What we can do though is empower ourselves to choose how we respond to the roller coaster ride of life.

You may ask what difference does this make? The answer is, it will make you a happier and more contented person and you will attract similar people into your life. There is a well-known saying "Smile, and the world smiles with you; cry, and you cry alone".

We have a region in the brain called the hypothalamus which is located at the base of the brain and acts like an antenna to stress. The brain does not differentiate between types of stress, such as a real life threat or negative self-talk.

From procrastinating about work, to being stuck in a traffic jam, to dealing with grief, the reaction is the same.

The stress hormone, cortisol, is released into

our blood stream and our body gets into the mode of "fight or flight". This signals to the body that we are in danger, and the body gets ready to run away or fight off the situation. Oxygen is moved into our muscles and heart and away from our digestive system, ready for action.

This is an autonomic reaction. In other words, we have no control over this. If this continues over a long period of time, we will eventually become exhausted, and this may lead to a state of disease and/or depression.

This mechanism of stress releases glucose and oxygen into the blood stream to help us move quickly. This takes precedence over most other hormones in the body including sex hormones and insulin.



Insulin helps to reduce glucose levels in the blood and cortisol switches on the opposite effect by releasing more glucose in the blood stream.

Therefore, we have elevated glucose in the blood stream and possibly more than we can cope with. This could lead to a prediabetic state, elevated cholesterol and triglycerides, otherwise known as metabolic syndrome.

Now, I do not think a metabolic syndrome state is just in response to how we deal with stress. I also think it has a physiological impact on our body, which in turn creates unhealthy food choices.

Being in a constant state of fight or flight can lead us to crave quick processed foods, high in calories and low in nutrients. This provides us with a quick burst of energy and can drive up more glucose, challenging insulin even more. This leads to long term storage of fat, inflammation, excess hunger, weight gain and empty carb cravings. Not a desirable state for anyone to be in.

Long term stress is a chronic modern-day disease, with such subtleties we do not feel it's happening until we are in such an uncomfortable state, we have no idea how we got there.

Suddenly, from responding to a real-life stress that may have happened a few years ago, we are on a present day of auto pilot and just getting through the day on caffeine, processed foods, alcohol and little sleep.

So, what can we do about this? If we trick the body into thinking all is fine, we can modulate our cortisol levels and stop the debilitating cascade of ill-health this has on our bodies.

However, please do not wait for a feeling of despair and debilitation to start this. Educating our mind and body creates a rock steady feeling of safety.

By incorporating breath work, yoga and mindfulness in your everyday life, we tell the hypothalamus all is well. This will keep your hormones balanced, neurotransmitters in check and your gut, known as the second brain, functioning well.

Lifestyle medicine is being kind and providing ourselves with the highest intention of love. Even if you may not feel like this right now, everyday actions, will in time, change the way you feel and lead to a steady flow of happiness.

You may already have heard of the techniques I am about to suggest, although, now you have read the explanation, this may encourage you to use them:

For acute stress:

- Breathe in through the nose three times in short sharp breaths and then a long sigh out through the mouth. Try this 5 times in a row.

For insomnia:

- Yoga Nidra is a lovely body to mind flow. All that is required is that you lay down, shut your eyes and open your mind to the possibility of relaxation and deep sleep. You can find videos on YouTube and in-

formation on most lifestyle apps. I challenge you to get to the end of the Nidra without falling asleep.

Everyday practice:

- Practicing mindfulness allows you to hear self-negative thoughts and behaviour. Rather than reacting to them, be curious about them. Create a journal and write things down and make sure you end your journal with a positive intent.
- Walking in nature, if you live near a park or the countryside.
- Light fragrant candles.
- Bathing in lavender and frankincense.
- Nurturing your plants, garden, baskets or vegetable patch.
- Cold water swimming or intermittent cold and hot showers at home.

If you would like extra support, flower remedies are a lovely energetic medicine that can be added to your daily water. These may consist of:

- Rescue Remedy, a well-known flower remedy consisting of a variety of essences.
- Star of Bethlehem, for acute stress and grief.
- Gentian, to enable optimism and overcome setbacks.
- Impatiens, to allow for patience and tolerance, especially if you are feeling irritable and frustrated.

If you would like to take advantage of a flower remedy questionnaire and find out which flower remedies are the right ones for you. Please seek support by contacting us at <https://www.instagram.com/melissacohnnutrition/>

You can follow us at melissacohnnutrition

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