

Members Quarterly

Fall 2014 Edition

Ask the Expert

High Stress, Low Energy and Bad Eating Habits: A Deadly Combo

Manage stress, nurture energy and increase productivity



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Q: Most of us are overworked and experiencing high levels of stress and low energy levels. What practices and foods would you suggest to help us handle all this?

A: In today's world we are living in what I refer to as chronic chaos. We juggle career demands, family and household responsibilities, community alliances and a need for social connections as well adequate rest and relaxation. Managing stress is a vital component to ensuring great overall health and well-being. Research shows that over 40% of all North Americans suffer from adverse stress-related health disorders and this is related to our leading causes of death including heart disease and cancer. It is also a major contributor to workplace absenteeism and decreased productivity. In order to manage our stress load and nurture our well-being, there are some very basic essentials and 'makes-sense' sustainable lifestyle habits to incorporate which are covered below.

The Basics for Managing Stress and Nurturing Energy

Mindful thinking: Our thoughts create our experience. Consciously witnessing and reprogramming negative or limiting thinking to thoughts congruent with goals and objectives positively impact our - neurological and neurovascular systems.

Better breathing: Our breath rate has immense impact upon our stress and energy levels. It is essential for us to be mindful of our breathing consciously inhaling long and deeply and exhaling slowly and completely.

Increased hydration: Drinking 1 glass of purified water per hour enhances energy levels, brain functioning, clarity, digestion, toxin release and so much more.

Blood sugar and hormonal stability: Maintaining balanced blood sugar levels enables the adrenals to function more effectively and assist in stabilizing hormones.

Mindful thinking:

Most of us are oblivious to our negative self-image, our destructive self-talk and sabotaging behaviour. With over 80,000 thoughts per day, approximately 98% are the same thoughts running repeatedly and most of these are negative. This wreaks havoc on both our minds and our bodies. Numerous sages inform us of the power of our thoughts. The law of attraction! Buddha tells us: "We are what we think".

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Better breathing:

Improving our breathing habits has been proven to enhance our sleep, reduce stress levels, improve our thinking and boost our energy. There are numerous options available to assist in developing improved breathing techniques. Yoga practice, Qi gong and Energy Medicine are popular choices. Other options include magazine articles, books, CDs and videos teaching proper technique including Apps that regularly remind us to breathe consciously.

Increased hydration:

Staying hydrated with clean filtered water is a familiar concept to most yet practiced by so few. Find a system that works for you such as investing in a high quality environmentally safe bottle, covering it in 6 or 8 elastics and removing one for each bottle drank aiming to get them all off by the day's end. Flavour the water with nouveau options such as rose or orange essence, mint chlorophyll, Angostura bitters or the more familiar flavor boosts from a splash of juice to cucumber, celery or mint. People are often more likely to consume higher amounts of water with a taste they enjoy.

Balanced blood sugar and hormonal levels:

When we live in a constant state of stress, our adrenals become depleted and disrupt our hormonal balance. Chronic stress affects two very important hormones – DHEA and cortisol, two of our most abundant hormones produced by the adrenals.

DHEA is responsible for our cellular health and plays a major role in the production of the adrenal hormones estrogen, progesterone and testosterone. Cortisol well known as our fight, flight or freeze hormone. It has the ability to increase blood glucose levels by assuming control of the body's metabolic systems during high stress scenarios in order to protect us from harm. Living with chronic stress however keeps cortisol levels in overdrive causing excess production. This raises insulin levels, blood pressure, cravings for sugar, fat deposits and brain damage. In addition, it depletes the immune system.

Adding to the challenge, as cortisol levels rise, serotonin (our 'feel good' hormone) plummets typically triggering carbohydrate cravings to re-boost the serotonin. Serotonin is formed in the brain from the amino acid tryptophan after we eat carbohydrates. While some carbohydrate intake is needed for normal serotonin production, high levels of chronic stress typically trigger cravings for starches such as bread, potatoes and sugary foods. This may lead to excessive intake spiking blood sugar levels. The foods that lead to the highest serotonin production (starches and sugars) should be eaten in moderation in order to control hormonal and blood sugar levels as well as body weight and diabetes risk. Stress management is crucial in reducing these carbohydrate cravings.

Maintaining balance of these hormones is an essential component in nurturing our well-being. When balanced, we are healthier physically, mentally and emotionally enabling more peaceful and productive daily living.

Here are some suggestions to assist you in sustaining balance:

- Consume nutrient dense foods ensuring an appropriate amount of protein, quality carbs, essential fatty acids and adequate fibre aligned with your individual health, lifestyle and personal objectives.
- Avoid severe calorically restrictive diets and consumption of nutrient-void processed foods including the numerous packaged low fat/trans fat and artificially sweetened foods.
- Avoid the warrior attitude 'all or nothing' approach to physical training. Choose regular shorter workouts

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at a challenging level of intensity interspersed with enjoyable recreational activities. While exercise can be beneficial with stress management, an excess can add to the problem.

- Ensure adequate sleep – ideally seven to eight hours that is deep and restorative. Sleep deprivation raises cortisol levels.
- Stay well hydrated with purified water, herbal teas and chlorophyll rich beverages. Avoid caffeine and alcohol or keep it to a minimum.
- Nurture an alkaline state. Stress, poor diet, sleep deprivation, excess external stimulation and sedentary lifestyles are acidifying! Maintaining a slightly alkaline state helps reduce cortisol production.

While we know stress is a reality in our lives, these strategies provide coping skills to better manage the demands of our busy pace. If you still experience a constant state of overwhelm or are plagued with lingering health issues, consult with a professional health care provider for diet and lifestyle support. We are intended to thrive and joyfully embrace our lives with vibrant health. Be sure to reach out for additional resources if you need them – you'll be amazed with the results!

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