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Beating stress before it beats you

One area of health and well being that bears regular attention is **dealing with stress**. Certainly we're reminded frequently of how stressful life can be. This letter covers some recent information that reinforces just how important reducing and handling stress is to your health and happiness.

Life today just seems to get busier and busier. It's so easy to get swept up in all you have to do and to push yourself too hard. But how long can you ignore the effects of stress before it takes a noticeable toll on your health?

Too many people spend much of their time focused on doing things for their family, work, etc. and put their personal welfare last. But ignoring your health can lead to more serious concerns than getting sick. Reducing or eliminating stress from your life is a never-ending task. Can you think of any health therapy that can help you to de-stress faster or more effectively than a massage? Or one more enjoyable? **Make your life the best it can be by including regular massage in your schedule!**



The bad news:

Stress that continues without relief can lead to a condition called distress—a negative stress reaction. Distress can disturb the body's internal balance or equilibrium—leading to physical symptoms including headaches, upset stomach, elevated blood pressure, chest pain, and problems sleeping. Research suggests that stress also can bring on or worsen certain symptoms or diseases.

Under severe stress, when muscles are over-worked, the body shows many weakening symptoms such as soreness, stiffness, and even muscle spasms. Heightened stress responses accumulate lactic acid in the muscle and waste air inside the body. It exhausts the body and de-motivates the mind to remain energized and active.

Stress also becomes harmful when people use alcohol, tobacco, or drugs to try to relieve their stress. Unfortunately, instead of relieving the stress and returning the body to a relaxed state, these substances tend to keep the body in a stressed state and cause more problems. Consider the following facts:

- Forty-three percent of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress.
- Seventy-five to 90% of all doctor's office visits are for stress-related ailments and complaints.
- Stress is linked to six of the leading causes of death: heart disease, cancer, lung ailments, accidents, cirrhosis of the liver, and suicide.

The good news—massage is a great health aid that has been shown to reduce stress and its accompanying physical health threats.

Why Massage is Rejuvenating:

- Massage improves circulation of blood and lymphatic fluids. Increased blood flow brings fresh oxygen to body tissues.
- Increased oxygen flow eliminates waste products from inside the body, and enhances recovery from diseases.
- Therapeutic massage boosts circulatory and immune systems to benefit blood pressure, circulation, muscle tone, digestion, and skin tone. It also improves the performance of the lungs.
- As muscle tone improves, so do the nerves that connect them, including the spinal cord and the brain.
- Therapeutic massage can promote general well being, enhance confidence, and self-assuredness.
- Massage is an excellent relaxant that also increases health and well-being.



Stress Management: see over...

How Stress Makes Us Old: see over.

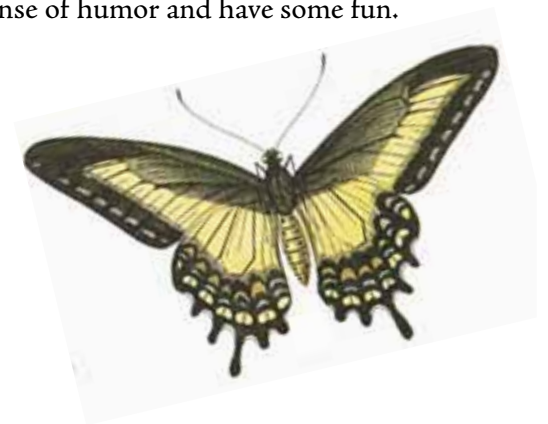


Stress Management

The University of Washington, Department of Orthopedics, lists three components of a successful stress management program: learn how to reduce stress; learn how to accept what you cannot change; and learn how to overcome the harmful effects of stress.

How to reduce stress:

- Identify the causes of stress in your life.
- Simplify your life as much as possible.
- Set short-term and life goals for yourself.
- Do not turn to drugs and alcohol.
- Receive regular bodywork/massage therapy
- Share your thoughts and feelings.
- Manage your time & conserve your energy.
- Become as mentally and physically fit as possible.
- Develop a sense of humor and have some fun.



How Stress Makes Us Old

It's long been suspected that a difficult life can make people look old before their time. New research shows that stress actually does age us prematurely—right down to our DNA. Researchers at the University of California, San Francisco, studied the DNA of 39 women who had spent years caring for their chronically ill children. They specifically examined the women's telomeres, which are pieces of DNA that cap the ends of chromosomes and play a critical role in cell division. Each time a cell divides, the telomeres shorten; they therefore can serve as a marker of a cell's biological age. The women with chronically ill children, the study found, had shorter telomeres than a group of women with healthy kids.

The more stressed the woman, the greater the wear on her DNA. The difference was so dramatic that the researchers estimated that the cells of the highly stressed moms had undergone the equivalent of 10 years of additional aging compared to the low-stress group. "Older" cells, in turn, can be vulnerable to a host of diseases. "If we feel stress, it needs to be taken seriously," Elissa Epel tells *New Scientist*. "It may be embodied at the cellular level."

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