

QUARTERLY

Balancing Life, Work & Wellness

LifeSolutions™

2009 FALL EDITION

Part of University of Pittsburgh Medical Center

☞ Mind/Body Connection

Turn to Page 2 for three great ways to beat your stress and save your body.

☞ Stress Overload

Too much stress too often could have a negative impact on your physical body.

Welcome!

This quarter's theme is on the mind/body connection. We welcome your feedback at ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com.

DidUknow?

- Some chronic stressors can't be changed. However, support groups, relaxation, meditation, and exercise are all tools you can use to manage your stress, whether the cause is short-term or chronic.
- More than one-third of Americans say they have had an illness that was primarily caused by stress (APA 2005).*
- Quality planting soil from your compost pile could be ready in as little as 2 to 4 months.
- Employees receiving mental health counseling lowered the usage of medical insurance by 31 percent (Group Health Association).*
- LifeSolutions WorkLife Web portal has over 100,000 articles and resources, including information on how stress affects the body and the benefits of composting.
- LifeSolutions specializes in addressing workplace and home-life stress. Contact our National Service Center today to find out more. Call 1-800-647-3327.

*For detailed resources, please contact LifeSolutions.

To use our WorkLife Resource Center, e-mail or call us for your company code:
ask@lifesolutionsforyou.com

1.800.647.3327

www.lifesolutionsforyou.com

LifeSolutions is a confidential workplace benefit available at no cost to you and members of your household.

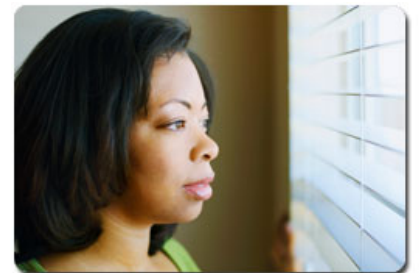
Stress and Your Body

It's pretty much common knowledge that what happens mentally and emotionally has a significant effect physically, and vice versa. So what about *stress*? Physically, stress isn't always a bad thing. Stress hormones help people in emergency situations, allowing their bodies to move into lifesaving action. Problems arise when people are on overload or have to handle too much stress too often. It's then that stress affects people — quite seriously — in ways they might not always be aware of.

Ways People Physically Pay for Stress

Everyone is familiar with signs of stress such as nervousness, anxiety, and depression. Here's a look at what stress can do to people's bodies:

- ◆ **Heart Disease:** Added up, daily stress can lead to heart attacks. The normal stress of everyday life also negatively affects people already prone to heart disease.
- ◆ **Stroke:** Research has found that people who say that they are highly or even moderately stressed on a regular basis have a significantly increased risk of a fatal stroke.
- ◆ **High Blood Pressure:** Stress hormones cause an immediate rise in blood pressure. While this rise may not create problems for everyone, chronic stress and hypertension are a deadly combination.
- ◆ **Lowered Immunity:** Stress hormones compromise a body's immune system so that it is more susceptible to flu, colds, and other infectious diseases.
- ◆ **Digestive Problems:** Stress has been proven to reduce the amount of beneficial bacteria in the digestive system, which can lead to indigestion, diarrhea, constipation, and other problems.
- ◆ **Headaches and Muscle Aches:** Tension and stress are the most common cause of most headaches and muscle aches.
- ◆ **Changes in Sleep Patterns:** Overstressed people often suffer from insomnia, or they feel the need or desire to sleep too much.
- ◆ **Sexual Dysfunction:** Any type of psychological or emotional stress can be the cause of temporary sexual dysfunction in both men and women.
- ◆ **Hormonal Imbalance:** During stressful times, the mind sends emergency messages that upset the body's natural hormonal balance.



In addition, there are many stress-induced behaviors that can cause physical harm, such as overeating or eating the wrong foods, alcohol and substance abuse, and smoking.

Source: *Workplace Benefits, Inc. Reviewed 2008. Stress and your body. Raleigh, NC: Author.*

Help Your Body Beat Stress

Let's face it – stress happens! Stress is a part of living. But left unchecked, stress can have a harmful impact on your body and your overall wellness. So while avoiding stress isn't really possible, you can fine-tune your body to help you combat stress by making some simple but very effective adjustments.

Exercise.

Whether you like it or not, the number one weapon against stress is exercise. Regular exercise — it doesn't matter what it is as long as it's consistent — helps your body deal with stress for a number of reasons:

- ◆ Exercise stimulates nerves that help the brain's ability to accurately sense emotions; a clear mind can avoid misinterpretation and miscommunication, which are high-level stressors.
- ◆ Exercise connects to hormones that control the stress response and it improves a body's ability to tolerate stress and changes.
- ◆ Exercise gets your mind in shape by giving you a positive place to release frustrations and take a break from your worries; it also leaves you with more energy.
- ◆ Exercise can reduce negative thinking and improve your self-image — it changes the way you look and feel.
- ◆ Exercise improves cardiovascular health — your heart is a muscle that can be strengthened like any other muscle.
- ◆ Then there are the "regular" benefits of exercise: lowered blood pressure, improved metabolism, lowered cholesterol, increased lung capacity, and improved ability of the body to transport oxygen and waste. All told, a more efficient body reacts better in stressful situations.

Eat right to fight stress.

Under stress, people physically need more vitamins and minerals, but the foods that have them aren't the ones people grab. Chocolate, ice cream, and other foods rich in fat and calories are what people crave when they're stressed or depressed. Research has shown that these "comfort foods" actually work — they do make people feel and function better in the short term. However, they work against us in the long run.

In stressful situations, try to eat foods high in vitamins and fiber: poultry, fish, beans and legumes, low-fat dairy products, whole grains and cereals, and fruits and vegetables. Don't skip meals. Getting too hungry will only make you reach for the wrong foods when your blood sugar is low. Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and stimulants in medicines and beverages.

Calm your body and mind.

Other ways to physically take control of stress include:

- ◆ **Breathing Techniques:** Breathing slowly and deeply automatically relaxes the body.
- ◆ **Yoga:** Slow exercising such as yoga connects breath, movement, and body control.
- ◆ **Meditation:** Find a quiet place to be alone, wherever you are.
- ◆ **Relaxation Techniques:** Learn how to really relax physically and mentally.
- ◆ **Stretching:** Take time to stretch whenever you find yourself in a tense position.
- ◆ **Walking:** Walk around the building instead of taking a coffee break, or get up 15 minutes early and walk around the block before you leave for work.
- ◆ **Sleeping:** Make sure you get just a little more sleep than you think you need during times of high stress.

Are you having a hard time handling stress? Treat your body right and it can most definitely help you.

Source: Workplace Benefits, Inc. Reviewed 2008. *Stress and your body*. Raleigh, NC: Author.