

Stress: Recognising & Coping with Stress

Over the last few decades we have seen increased demands on women in society. Women of all ages have multiple roles to play, and the stresses of everyday life have increased dramatically as women seek to balance the demands of families, careers and life in general.



These concerns and worries are well recognised activators of stress but there are other major causes of stress activation, such as inflammation, high oestrogen levels, nutrient insufficiencies, toxins (both internal and external), pain, thyroid hormone imbalance and low androgen levels.

STRESS RESPONSE

Believe it or not, stress does have a purpose and small amounts of stress can motivate you and give you the energy that you need to perform a task or activity. When you face a stressful event your body goes through a process in response to this stress.

The way that stress affects you depends on your coping mechanisms and level of sensitivity to stress. You may notice that the way stress affects you changes depending on how long you have been exposed to stress or how severe the stress is. For example, at first you may feel very irritable and anxious. After being stressed for a while you may feel more predominantly depressed or exhausted.

COPING WITH STRESS

Everyone has a different level of stress that they can cope with. If you have positive coping mechanisms such as good time management skills, regular exercise, healthy diet etc. you can cope with more, if you have poor coping mechanisms (smoking, lack of exercise, poor diet, poor time management skills etc.), you will cope with less.

It's important to let your Health Practitioner know how you cope with stress. They may be able to make recommendations or provide you with supplements that allow you to rely less on poor coping mechanisms and develop more positive coping skills.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

Management of your stress will vary depending on how long you have been stressed for, how severe the stress is and how the stress is affecting you physically and emotionally. Your Health Practitioner will gather all this information and recommend a treatment program which may include some of the following stress management techniques:

- Exercise
- Yoga
- Meditation
- Nutritional Support

Stress depletes magnesium, which is a vital mineral for the maintenance of normal healthy neuromuscular function. Magnesium deficiency is an integral part of anxiety and neurosis, which can result in loss of concentration, disorientation, abstract thinking and memory loss.*

Magnesium and B6 are required for the relief of anxiety-related premenstrual symptoms.**

B-complex vitamins are another nutritional support for coping with stress, being involved with many processes of homeostasis and in particular with energy production. All physiological responses need energy, and one of the effects of the raised cortisol levels characteristic of the early, reactive adrenal responses is an increasing insulin resistance and subsequent fatigue. This can be offset by the insulin-sensitising actions of the B vitamins, magnesium, taurine, selenium and especially chromium.

A healthy diet that has plenty of variety is necessary to make sure that you get the nutrients that are essential for helping you cope with and recover from stress. It may be recommended that you limit or avoid caffeine,

alcohol and refined carbohydrates (sugars and white bread/pasta/rice) as these substances can amplify your stress response. It is also important to get enough protein to balance nervous function and reduce cravings for sweets and carbohydrates. Lots of studies show that a diet high in fish or fish oil is also beneficial for stress, mood and nervous system health. There are also specific nutrients that are particularly important for maintaining a tolerance to stress. Your doctor or naturopath would be able to recommend a number of supplements.

TOXICITY

Everyday you are exposed to a wide range of toxic substances- in the foods you eat, the air you breathe, the water you drink and from the materials that surround you. Your body can produce chemicals inside you that have a toxic effect. Toxins put an extra strain on your nervous system and interfere with the normal processes that keep your healthy and feeling good. Your doctor or naturopath may recommend a detoxification program. Detoxification is a way of reducing the amount of toxins that you are exposed to and helping your body to improve the way that it processes and eliminates toxins.

So as women take on more and more roles and expose themselves to more stress, there are numerous tools and techniques available to ensure the effects of stress on their lives is minimised.

Call in today for a *Wellness Assessment* and take the first step towards a happier, healthier stress free life.

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* Galland L. Magnesium, stress and neuropsychiatric disorders. *Magnes Trace Elem* 1991-92;10(2-4):287-301.

** De Souza MC et al. A synergistic effect of daily supplement for 1 month of 200mg magnesium plus 50mg vitamin B6 for the relief of anxiety-related premenstrual symptoms: a randomised, double blind, crossover study. *J Womens Health Gen Med* 2000;9(2):131-9.

[†] Conditions Apply. SASI-61019