

Your internal space by Claire Riendeau, N.D., N.M.D.

Poor mood, depression, fatigue and poor health have become epidemic in America. There are millions of American men, women and children that suffer. What drives most, if not all health problems? Day-to-day stress is considered a precipitating factor.

There are many sources of stress such as chronic pain and infections but this article will focus on the most basic stressor in our day, mental/emotional stress.

It affects every one of us. It can include everything from past trauma, to being unfulfilled by your job or marriage, to raising children, to living in a state of fear, anxiety or worry, to meeting deadlines and commitments or simply fighting the traffic on your way to work. Stress is all around us.

So you think, no big deal. We are all living like this to some degree or another. Well just because it is common does not make it normal. On a physiological level, our bodies were not designed to cope with this onslaught day in and day out.

When you can't remove yourself from the mental/emotional stressor, or be okay with it upon internalization of the event, *chronic* stress develops and you open yourself to reduced immune function. The cascade of physiological events can go like this... you experience a stressful moment which you internalize. This produces a fight or flight response in turn activating your adrenal glands to produce extra cortisol. This pushes the body into a sympathetically charged state. This change in electrical charge which affects the heart and nervous systems ultimately affect the immune and hormonal systems as well, resulting in abnormal physiology. As seen in *Time* magazine recently, these changes create a state of allergy and inflammation and they in turn are linked to heart disease, cancer, autoimmune disease and degenerative disease. So the longer you are in a state of internalized stress, the more compromised your health becomes. Many people live their lives in this state, and when their "get up and go has got up and gone" they have another Starbucks, and the catabolic cascade starts over again.

Few health practitioners address this very important aspect of health. To attain health, and maintain it, one must address the stress that we deal with every day. One of the simplest things you can do for yourself is deep breathing exercises. The technique is profoundly simple. Breathe deeply, fully and slowly. Breathe through your right nostril while blocking your left (by pushing the left nostril closed with your finger), breathe out through the left nostril, breathe in through the left nostril and out through the right. This is one cycle, repeat. Use this breath for 10 minutes twice a day and the results will be evident.

If you are headed for an important event and are feeling rather sluggish, this will ensure the flooding of new oxygen to your brain and a revived state. Not only that, it will switch the sympathetically charged system back toward a parasympathetic state, which is conducive to rest, relaxation, repair, rebuilding and healing.

Another option is meditation. Take 10 minutes upon awakening, sit up in bed, close your eyes and let your mind/body/spirit connect. The tranquility can carry through your day. Relaxation tapes and CDs, yoga, Tai Chi, and prayer are other options. The possibilities are numerous.

Restoring a sense of well-being and relaxation is necessary for optimum health and for the process of self-healing. Although often times there is not a way to get away from all of the significant sources of stress in our lives, we can control the way we respond to it. So next time you become stressed, remember to become empowered by some of these tools. Be the author of your "internal space" and keep stress in check.