

The Insidious Aftermath of Chronic Stress

Your Physique Isn't Your Diet and Exercises Fault

Sub-There are Other Forces at Work

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Is Your Stress Stressing You Out

The Invisible Ailment

Keywords:

For better or for worse we only get 24 hours in a day.

Fitting in work, family, sleep, exercise, shopping, errands, leisure—it can get pretty stressful, even downright terrifying.

And when these emotions build up... your body will pay the price.

When it comes to weight loss everyone assumes the usual suspects: diet and exercise. Sure, those are important, but what if there are other factors at work?

Stress Isn't Just In Your Head

Those feelings of anxiety, stress, and overall overwhelmedness aren't just emotions you feel.

Pretend you are sitting in a quiet room on your laptop reading this blog. Suddenly, a saber tooth tiger comes flying through the window next to the chair you're sitting in.

You immediately jump up to either start swinging or run like crazy.

Your heart is racing, your breath is shallow and quick, your muscles are tense, your blood pressure is up to make sure your brain has enough blood to think, you're jittery and really on edge. Do you fight, or run away?

This is the classic fight or flight response your body goes through when confronted with danger. The fight or flight response is mediated by adrenalin and other hormones classified as catecholamines as well as the hormone **cortisol**.

Cortisol Isn't Your Enemy...

Cortisol maintains the fight or flight response by causing blood sugar (glucose) to be released into the blood for quick energy. It also curbs your “non-essential” functions, directly affecting the gut, immune system, and reproductive system.

That's why, after a couple arduous work weeks, you more easily fall prey to that bad cold going around the office.

Mood, fear, motivation, all of these too can be influenced by rushes of stress hormone.

Under normal conditions, cortisol release is self-limiting and circadian, based on need. It peaks in the morning upon awakening, wanes in the late afternoon and slowly rises again to spike in the morning the following day.

... But Chronic Stress Is!

“The mother of excess is not joy but joylessness.” -Nietzsche

Chronic levels of cortisol (extended stress) throws a glitch into your usually balanced system. In centuries preceding, humans were able to tackle one problem at a time, assessing danger, damage, solution, and when the threat had moved on, they did too.

Today, in the world of multitasking, smartphone notifications, and the ever-growing pressure to “do it all” our bodies rarely get a break from the stress. And all of this constant stress takes a toll on many different areas of your body.

High cortisol causes:

- degeneration of the hippocampus—the area for **memory**;
- the hypothalamus—the part of your brain responsible for **chronic fatigue syndrome, fibromyalgia, depression, and post-traumatic stress disorder**;
- the prefrontal cortex—the area for **executive decision making**;
- and the amygdala—the part of your brain responsible for **emotional stability**.

Don't Stress Over Stress

But the place you may have noticed it most tangible is on the scale. Remember how cortisol raises your blood sugar levels and prepares you for a fight/flight situation?

Right about now you're probably thinking, *Great, thanks Doc. Not only do I have to deal with stress, but I also have to worry about stress making me fat.* Stick with me for a second. Yes, stress can weaken your body and cause you to pack on the pounds, but it's not a foregone conclusion.

The key to managing your stress levels is changing your process. It took one thing added to another added to another to tip the scale on your stress levels. You can use that same process in reverse to tip the scales back (both the stress scales and the weight scales!)

The idea is to make incremental changes that compound to produce big results. Think 1% improvement each day, not 100% improvement in one day. Incorporate these changes and you'll not only feel better, you'll look better too and all areas of your life will improve.

A Plan to Manage Stress

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Each Morning...

Stretch, whether you like particula yoga routine, meditation, or light exercise, get your body gently moving before you start the day.

Journal your thoughts about the day, your to-do, your worries, your emotions. It sounds strange but when they're down on paper it's easier to mentally break them down into pieces you can manage and process.

Breathing exercises like the 4-7-8 breath. Slowly fill your lungs with a deep breath for four seconds. Hold it in for seven, noticing how your body feels, arms, legs, stomach, head. Then let it out, evenly for eight seconds. Repeat 9-10 times. You'll increase the oxygen in your bloodstream and feel energized to start your day.

At Work...

Learn how you work. Does time blocking make you most productive? Or devoting entire days to one project at a time? Develop a routine that minimizes stress and maximizes production.

Prioritize. Make a list of the top three things you need to get done today. Start at the top and work down. A giant, impossible to accomplish to-do list doesn't make you feel better. It makes you feel worse. Be honest with yourself about what you can get done, then be sure to get it done.

Use the Pomodoro technique. This is a simple way to pace yourself and get things done with minimal stress. It's simple and effective. Set a timer for 25 minutes. Work on one task. When the timer stops, stand up, stretch, move around for a few minutes, take some deep breaths, then start with another 25 minutes. Do this each day and you'll maximize your work and keep stress at bay.

In the evening...

Prep for the next day. One of the greatest stressors is uncertainty, so take steps to minimize it.

- Take advantage of meal planning so you're not scrambling every morning and at lunch to find healthy food.
- Set out your clothes so you can wake up and go.
- Set your alarm for one time and actually get up at that time so you don't confuse your sleep cycle.

Take time to wind down. Go back to your journal. How did the day turn out? Put all your racing thoughts to bed separately from yourself. They can wait. It's time to recharge. Develop a "pre-sleep" routine that includes avoiding screen time, diffusing good smells, and stretching and deep breathing. This will quiet your mind and body and ensure you get the sleep you need.

It's the Things You Don't See that Get You

Stress is stressful. You don't need a medical degree to understand that one! The hard thing about stress is that it feels invisible. You know it's there, but you can't seem to track it down and deal with it because it comes from so many sources.

But good health is holistic— how you handle your day affects the results you see in the mirror and feel in your body. When you combine good habits day after day it has a cumulative effect and the results don't just affect how you look, they affect how you feel as well.

Rome wasn't built in a day and neither are good habits and great health. Give yourself grace to know that it took time to get to the place you're in and it will take time to bring yourself back. Make more good choices than bad ones, implement routines, systems, and processes, and take back control of your life.

You aren't just meant to live, you're meant to live well. Let's get started with that today.

Ready to Start Your Day in a Peak State?

I've created a cheat sheet to help you enjoy greater energy, get more done, and start your day right (while losing weight and keeping it off!) Plus when I release new resources, you'll be the first to know. Are you ready?

[**Get my Peak State Quickstart Guide for free!**](#)