



WITH DR CRIS BEER



TOXIC STRESS... A SILENT KILLER

It's easy to write it off as just an unavoidable part of life, but stress is its own poison and the root cause of many of the illnesses we face

Stress is toxic. So toxic that it poisons your body and mind to the point where you can be totally debilitated. Worst of all, the effects seem to creep up on you and leave you feeling worn out, depressed, anxious and overweight. In short, stress can kill you softly.

It's been estimated that 60 to 80 per cent of all the reasons that people see a GP are due to stress-related conditions. These include fatigue, headaches, an inability to lose weight, mental health issues, insomnia, digestive issues, muscle tension, difficulties conceiving, recurrent infections, and even high blood pressure, heart disease and cancer.

Such health issues can take time to recover from, depending on how long you've been under stress and the type you've been

experiencing. The worse types are repeated stress and chronic stress. So what exactly are these and how do you avoid them?

REPEATED STRESS

This type of stress affects you on a frequent and recurrent basis. Common examples include: bad traffic, paying bills, noise, crowds, sleep disturbance, loneliness, isolation, hunger and danger.

This can be overcome with stress-reduction techniques such as deep breathing, meditation, mindfulness and regular relaxing exercise such as yoga and Pilates. These activities help activate our parasympathetic nervous system – which is literally our “de-stress” nervous system. Practice makes perfect when it comes to winding down, so try incorporating these stress-reducing activities daily.

CHRONIC STRESS

This is by far the worst type of stress as it literally drains your energy, speeds up ageing, lowers mood and steals your health.

It also doesn't just go away. It happens, for example, when we're having relationship troubles, not enjoying our job, are constantly worried about an issue or have suffered an injury or chronic illness. The cause may be obvious or subtle but it has to be present for at least three to four weeks to be classified as “chronic”. When this occurs, the stress hormones adrenaline and cortisol start to rise. Other hormones such as the sex hormones progesterone and testosterone, happy hormone serotonin, and our metabolism-boosting thyroid hormones also start to drop, which can lead to potentially debilitating symptoms (see box, below).

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WHAT CAN YOU DO?

The first thing is to recognise stress producers in your life. Make a list of these from most stressful to least stressful. Work on the top two first. Is there anything about those situations that you can change, even if it involves counselling? Also realise that you can actually be addicted to stress. Learn to recognise when your life has gone from one drama to the next. Is there something in your personality attracting this type of chronic stress? Other techniques include getting a good night's sleep, regular time out from your busy schedule, exercise, laughing daily, reducing caffeine and alcohol, forgiving others, and meditating regularly. The key to managing stress is to recognise when it's ruining your body and mind and to put measures in place to challenge it.



STRESS-RELATED SYMPTOMS OF HORMONE FLUCTUATIONS

HIGH ADRENALINE	HIGH CORTISOL	LOW PROGESTERONE	LOW TESTOSTERONE	LOW THYROID HORMONES	LOW SEROTONIN
Increased blood pressure Racing heartbeat Breathlessness Anxiety Panic attacks Stomach pains Nausea Excessive sweating Dry mouth	Increased blood sugar Increased cholesterol Increased tummy fat Sugar and salt cravings Fluid retention Reduced immunity	Period problems Infertility Mood swings PMS	Reduced sex drive Reduced muscle repair	Slowed metabolism Tiredness Hair loss Dry skin Dry hair	Depression Anxiety Insomnia