

STRESS OPTIMAL BODY BALANCE

Is Stress Getting You Down but Making Your Weight Go Up?

How is stress making me fat?

- Stress raises cortisol, the catabolic (breakdown) hormone.
- Over time, if this hormone stays high, it breaks down muscle, dumps sugar in the bloodstream and results in insulin resistance.
- Chronic stress lowers serotonin and makes you hypoglycemic-both of which cause you to crave sugar.
- Chronic stress lowers the anti-aging, libido stimulating, fat burning hormone DHEA. It also affects your body's ability to build muscle-your "metabolic girdle."

What are some signs that stress is affecting your health?

Behavioral/emotional

- Anger and hostility
- Depression
- Nail biting
- Mood swings
- Indecisiveness
- Eating very quickly
- Panic attacks
- Excessive use of stimulants (drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, and sugar)

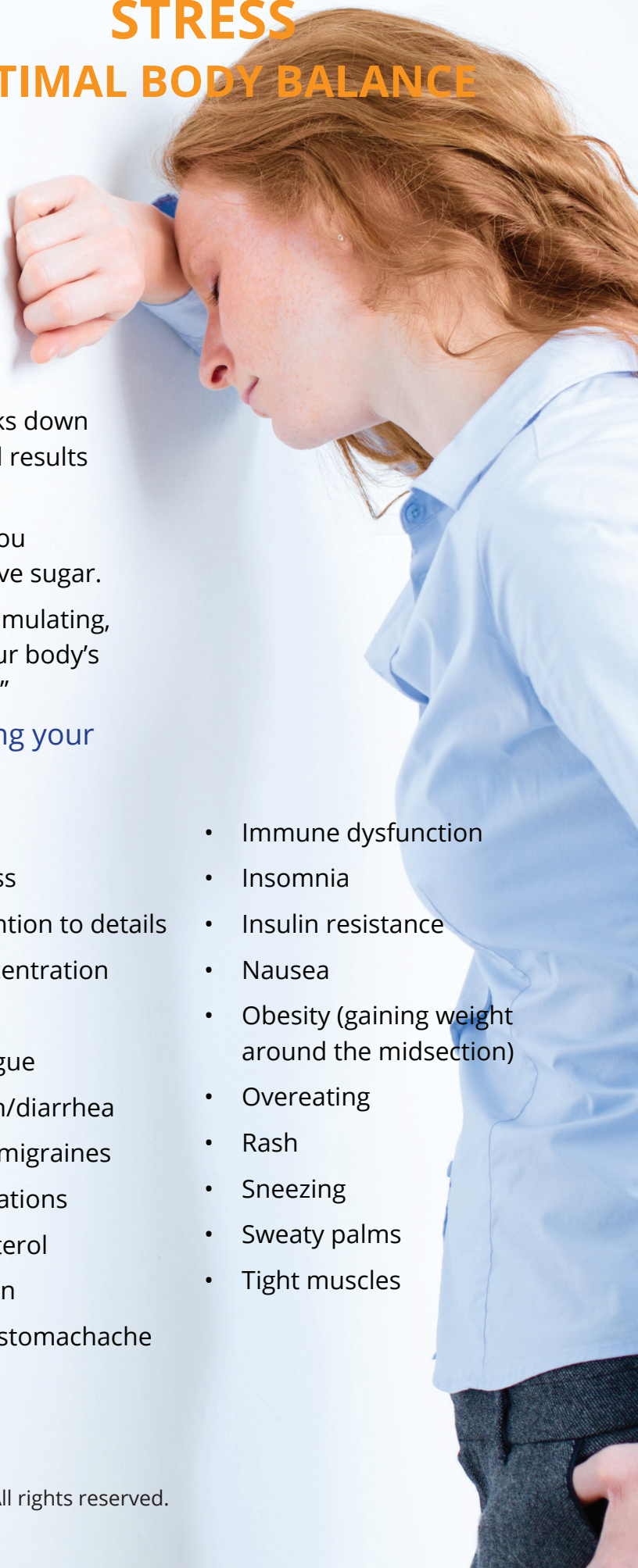
Intellectual

- Forgetfulness
- Lack of attention to details
- Lack of concentration

Physical

- Chronic fatigue
- Constipation/diarrhea
- Headaches/migraines
- Heart palpitations
- High cholesterol
- Hypertension
- Indigestion/stomachache

- Immune dysfunction
- Insomnia
- Insulin resistance
- Nausea
- Obesity (gaining weight around the midsection)
- Overeating
- Rash
- Sneezing
- Sweaty palms
- Tight muscles



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Stress Response: Fight or Flight

Alarm phase

1. The heart beat increases to pump blood to all of the necessary tissues with greater speed
2. As the heart rate increases so does blood pressure
3. Breathing becomes rapid and shallow
4. Adrenaline hormones are released from the adrenal glands
5. Liver releases stored sugar to meet the increased need for energy
6. Pupils dilate and senses become heightened
7. Muscles tense for movement
8. Blood flow is restricted from the digestive tract
9. Blood flow is increased to the brain and major muscles
10. Blood flow is constricted from the extremities
11. Body perspires to cool itself

Adaptation and resistance phase

The adrenals now release corticosteroids that help provide energy and the specific circulatory changes (glucocorticoids help to keep blood sugar stable and mineral corticoids help us retain sodium which helps our body maintain an elevated blood pressure).

Exhaustion Phase

With the unabated production of corticosteroids, organs and organ systems become weak and may cease to function.

Did you know?

- 70-80% of all visits to the doctor are related to stress
- Stress contributes to 50% of all illnesses in the US
- The cost of job stress in the US is estimated at over 200 billion dollars annually, including the cost of absenteeism, lost productivity and insurance claims





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What is stress?

Stress is caused when we react to situations in our internal and external environment. It can cause exhilaration, excitement, distress, or fatigue, and can manifest itself physically, mentally and emotionally. It is not the situations that are stressful; it is our reaction to the situation that causes us stress. Stress is a natural part of life, as it provides a stimulus for action.

When faced with any threat or pressure, the body and mind go on high alert, preparing either to fight off the danger or flee from it. This is the 'fight or flight' response. This response developed over 1000's of years to protect our ancestors and was key for their survival. We still depend on this reflex to survive; however a problem develops when we forget to release the tension. We undergo repeated and continual bombardment of potential stressors, from being startled by a loud noise to being caught in a traffic jam to worrying about bills, constantly triggering our 'fight or flight' reflex, leaving us in a state of constant tension. Over time, we get so used to these reflexes that we do not even notice when they occur.

Physiologically, our 'fight or flight' reflex triggers an automatic chain of events that prepare our mind and body for response. Adrenal hormones, such as adrenaline and other stress hormones flood into the body causing the heart to beat faster, blood pressure to rise, the muscles to tense, vision to become more acute and we become more alert. Sweating increases to cool the body and extra insulin is produced to metabolize energy. All of these changes prepare the mind and body to meet an emergency.

The Consequences

First off, stress is not 'bad'. Extra adrenaline improves performance in competitive events and is responsible for the 'rush' of excitement we feel when we receive good news. But prolonged or overwhelming stress can result in many problems, including:

Lowered immune response

Excess stress compromises our immune system, leaving us vulnerable to everything from colds to cancer and making it difficult to heal. Asthma, arthritis, diabetes, high blood pressure, and intestinal disorders are among the many diseases worsened by stress.

Increased nutritional needs

The body often needs considerably more of certain vitamins and minerals because of the high level of daily physical and/or psychological stress we endure. To make matters worse, our gastrointestinal tract is often adversely affected during times of stress, leading to poor digestion and absorption of nutrients.



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Stress related disorders

Constant triggering of the 'fight or flight' response leads to adrenal fatigue and exhaustion, causing many imbalances in the body. Many common disorders caused by prolonged stress include: headaches, chronic fatigue, neck and back pain, nervous tics, menstrual and fertility problems in women and impotence in men.

Emotional problems

Everyone reacts differently to stress. Some people become withdrawn, others irritable, and still others feel nervous and powerless or out of control. Some have difficulty sleeping; others want to sleep all the time. Many find that things that once gave them pleasure are no longer fun.

Some Common Signs and Symptoms of Excess Stress

- Regularly walking, eating or working in a rushed way.
- Regularly thinking and worrying about the past or future.
- Frequent tension in the body (esp. neck, face, shoulders, back and chest, and stomach) which often goes unnoticed until one slows down, breathes deep and carefully surveys the body.
- Feeling the 'weight of the world' on your shoulders.
- Emotionally 'on edge'.
- Regular tiredness during the day.
- Significant need for outside stimulation to feel good (coffee, sweeteners, food, sex, TV, alcohol, money, accomplishments, etc.)

The Goal

Occasional challenges, both physical and psychological, are not unhealthy for most people. Occasional challenging projects, arguments, difficulties with children, difficulties at work/school, etc. are a normal part of life. These types of stresses are normal and can actually be strengthening. The goal is not necessarily to avoid all stressful events, but to develop the ability to relax during day-to-day activities and during challenging occurrences (such as those mentioned above). Persons who are recovering from an illness should attempt to keep challenging situations to a minimum but not necessarily avoid them totally unless they are extremely weak.

THEREFORE, as part of the process of promoting health and vitality and preventing & healing from illness we teach techniques, including breathing & stretching techniques, meditation, and exercise, that gradually move us towards a daily life that is less stressful and more enjoyable and fulfilling.



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Avoiding a Meltdown at Work

The following is a list of suggestions for coping with stress at work. Select a few at a time and try them for 3-5 days. Ultimately, you will pick what is best for you, so try them all on for size!

- Start the day with breakfast.
- Avoid drinking coffee all day. Try juice, herbal tea or decaffeinated Earl Grey tea, or warm water with freshly grated ginger and lemon.
- Find some time during the day to meditate. Twenty to thirty minutes twice a day is optimal, but 5-10 minutes is a good start!
- Leave for work 10 minutes early to avoid the stress of the early morning rush.
- Try to always take a lunch break and relax, even if brief. Walk outside, meditate in your car, or enjoy a peaceful lunch with a friend or alone.
- Go for a 15 minute walk during a break, at lunch or after work (outside if possible). Take a co-worker, friend, or family member with you or enjoy the peace alone.
- Become aware of your breathing, as it affects and reflects your stress level. Use the phone ringing as a cue to take a deep, cleansing breath, and/or practice deep breathing for a couple minutes a few times a day.
- Get up and move every hour. Use this time as an opportunity to walk over and communicate in person with a co-worker instead of by phone or e-mail, or get a drink of water.
- Become aware of your body. Are you holding your tension in your neck, back, shoulders? Is your jaw clenched, your face tight? If so, try a few gentle stretches at your desk.
- Give your eyes a break. With your palms facing your eyes, gently place them over the eyes blocking out all light. Hold for two to three minutes. If you still see light with the palms over the eyes, repeat for a few more minutes.
- When you are reading, blink several times each line. It will seem awkward at first (FYI - children do this naturally).
- Use humor to communicate. Put your informal messages on something humorous like a cartoon.
- Make your office a pleasant, relaxing environment. Put up pictures of places and people you enjoy, add a plant or two, post your favorite comics, put up some prints - make your office YOUR office.
- Try to avoid people who are "negaholics".
- Give yourself praise.
- Use affirmations throughout your day.
- Take the long way home and enjoy the scenery.
- Try some of the following relaxation exercises.

Relaxation Exercises

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

- Sit with your hands held loosely in your lap and both feet flat on the floor.
- Loosen any constrictive clothing.
- Tense and relax each major muscle group in the body, starting with your toes and feet holding the tension for 15 seconds and relaxing, progressively relaxing your legs, buttocks, stomach, back, shoulders, neck, face and jaw.
- Notice the difference in feeling between tensed and relaxed muscles.

Deep Breathing

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position; loosen any constrictive clothing.
- Breathe deeply from your abdomen, count to four and exhale slowly.
- As you inhale, imagine a soothing, calming strength coming into your body.
- Imagine and feel the anxiety and tension flowing out with each exhalation.
- Do this for five minutes twice a day, or whenever you feel tense.

Visualization

- Sit or lie in a comfortable position; loosen any constrictive clothing.
- Close your eyes and visualize being on a beach, listening to the waves coming in and feeling the sun and breezes on your body.
- Make the sounds and sensations as vivid as possible.
- Feel for a few minutes the pleasure and peaceful reaction this induces.

The Relaxation Response

- Sit quietly in a comfortable position and close your eyes.
- Deeply relax all your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep them relaxed.
- Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing. As you breathe out, say the word "ONE" silently to yourself. For example, breathe in...out, "ONE"; in...out, "ONE", etc. Breathe easily and naturally.
- Continue for 10-20 minutes. You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed and later with your eyes opened. Do not stand up for a few minutes.
- Do not worry about whether you are successful in achieving a deep level of relaxation. Maintain a passive attitude and permit relaxation to occur at its own pace. When distracting thoughts occur, just let them pass and do not dwell on them and return to repeating "ONE". With practice the technique should come with little effort, however, wait two hours after any meal, since the digestive processes seem to interfere with the elicitation of the Relaxation Response.

The Quieting Exercise

- Sit comfortably.
- Suggest to yourself that you have an alert mind and a calm body.
- Breathe in and slightly tighten and raise your tongue, jaw and shoulders.
- As you exhale, start a relaxation wave going down your body by letting your tongue, jaw, arms and shoulders go loose.
- Look for sensations of flowing, heaviness, and warmth going down your body

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Six Lessons for a Happy Life

These six keys for experiencing more happiness in your life were adapted from an interview with Christophe Andre, a French author, self proclaimed pessimist and expert on happiness.

1. Accept that there will be unpleasant things in life. All the time, every day, you'll face hindrances: You'll be too late or make a mistake or say something stupid. It's the rent you pay to live in the house of life. It's part of life. There's no point in being disappointed when things don't go your way.
2. Open your eyes and look around. There are more opportunities for happiness than you think, certainly for someone living in America. Embrace the moments. Try to remember the. Enjoy them.
3. Take time out. The ability to pause, mentally as well as in your actions, is important. Taking breaks is a prerequisite for experiencing happiness.
4. Pay attention to your family and friends. Social ties are important for happiness. Don't let a day go by without thinking of, or seeing, someone you love.
5. Try to get in touch with nature every day. Take a walk in the park and spend a few minutes looking at nature.
6. Express your gratitude and respect for the good things you experience. Being thankful makes you happy and increases the change of social connection.





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Testing for Stress

Salivary adrenal function testing This simple saliva test allows us to determine to what extent adrenal fatigue is compromising your weight loss efforts. It involves taking four saliva samples at specific times during a single day and sending the samples into a lab. Your results will be sent to you along with recommendations to help restore optimal adrenal function.

“Fun Cards” Activity

Get 7 note cards and label them:

- 15 minutes
- 30 minutes
- 60 minutes
- 3 hours
- 6 hours
- Day
- Weekend

Think about different activities you enjoy doing or have always wanted to try that would fit into each time category. Fill up each card with ideas. For example: reading would work for 15 minutes, a bubble bath for 30 minutes, rock climbing for 3 hours, etc.

When find yourself with 15 minutes in between meetings at work, pull out your 15 minute card and use one of your ideas. If you have an unplanned weekend coming up, use your card to turn it into something special.

It sounds silly, but you have to plan your fun and relaxation just like you have to plan for balanced eating. Otherwise it may never happen. These cards can help you with that planning. This activity will also get you thinking about things you’ve always wanted to try or activities you used to enjoy doing but stopped taking the time to do.



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Supplementation for Stress

There are many botanicals that have shown to be very effective in assisting the body during the various phases of the stress response. If stress is particularly high, or if you are suffering from adrenal fatigue, supplementation can often provide the support you need to more effectively deal with your current stressors as well as speed the healing process. For some, supplementation is the only way they can get themselves back on track and lose weight.

Selecting the appropriate herb or product first and foremost depends upon what stage of adrenal fatigue a person is in.

In the initial stages of adrenal fatigue, most people benefit from taking one or more adaptogenic herbs, often referred to as 'adaptogens'. Adaptogens exert a normalizing effect on the body, allowing a person to simultaneously increase healthy functions that are impaired by stress while decreasing unhealthy responses that are triggered by stress.

Scientists often use the term "homeostasis" to describe your body's ability to maintain proper function within certain parameters, including temperature, respiratory rate, and blood chemistry within tightly controlled limits. Thus, adaptogens simply enhance the body's ability to maintain homeostasis and counter the effects of stress. They do this by delivering minute shocks of mild stress that condition your body to respond to more major stressors in a favorable way. (22)

Many adaptogenic herbs have been shown to help the body modulate the effects of stress, including Rhodiola, Siberian ginseng, Schizandra berry, Ashwagandha root and licorice root. These herbs are usually found in combination with vitamin blends to support overall adrenal health. It is important to look for products that contain standardized levels of herbal compounds to increase the probability of finding a quality product.

Here are some typical protocols used for the different stages of adrenal stress; for more specific recommendations or if you have questions on which products would be best for you, please contact us.

Stage 1 – Acute adrenal fatigue

If [adrenal testing](#) indicates you are in Stage 1 adrenal fatigue, your body is compensating as best it can with all the stress in your life. Unfortunately, the high cortisol levels that accompany this stage often make people gain weight. Depending upon how your body adapts to stress the following are options for supplemental support:

If you feel tired and weak due to stress and need to enhance your stamina and energy, [Adreset](#) may be a good option; take 1-2 capsules twice daily.

If you feel anxious, forgetful or are having trouble sleeping, [AdreneVive](#) may be a better option; take 2 capsules 1-2 times daily.

Stage 2 and 3 – mild to high adrenal fatigue

If [adrenal testing](#) indicates you are in Stage 2 or 3 adrenal fatigue, your body is no longer able to keep running optimally because of the stress placed upon it. At this point, you have to make the necessary dietary and lifestyle changes to reverse this process; supplements can help.

If you are feeling tired and run down, [Adren-All](#) or [Adapten-All](#) may help; take 1-2 capsules twice daily.