

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

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Stress and Health

Let's face it: Stress is a part of daily life. For many, a jam-packed schedule seems like a normal, essential part of a productive life.

If you're like most people, scheduling time to relax is on the backburner, or perhaps not even near the stove. However, new research shows that finding time to unwind is vital: Stress has a profound effect on physical and psychological well-being.

Your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic warns patients that stress is linked to chronic ailments, such as Alzheimer's disease, heart disease and depression. Your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic has gathered research outlining just how stress affects health — as well as proven ways to relax.



The Chiropractic Lifestyle

Doctors of chiropractic, such as your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic, know that emotional and physical health are inextricably linked. That's why your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic educates patients about the *chiropractic lifestyle*, a mode of living that focuses on disease prevention through healthy choices for body, mind and spirit. Stress reduction is an integral part of this lifestyle.

Banish Low-Back Pain

Low-back pain (LBP) and stress go hand-in-hand; both increase the risk for each other, according to multiple studies.

One analysis in Norway included 1,152 individuals, who ranged in age from 20 to 55. The study participants completed a health questionnaire, interview and stress measurement. Researchers then followed up 12 years later.

Individuals who initially reported earlier episodes of LBP and emotional stress were the most likely to develop a low-back disability. More than 11 percent (131 people) experienced disabling pain 12 years later.

The authors conclude that “persons with emotional distress but no earlier episodes of LBP had no increased risk for low back disability. Emotional distress is a predictor for low back disability in persons with earlier LBP, but not in persons without. To prevent low back disability, emotional distress should be considered and treated in persons with LBP.” (*Spine* 2007;32:269-74.)

Another investigation, which included 2,556 individuals and spanned almost seven years, found that stress at work was a chief risk factor for LBP. On-the-job stressors related to LBP differed for men and women.

“After adjustment for individual and physical risks, including occasional back pain at baseline, the prevalence rate of LBP in men is significantly related to baseline low decision latitude and low social support at work, and nonsignificantly to high job strain, low wage and job satisfaction, feeling stressed at work, and feeling depressed. High job insecurity, feeling stressed at work, and feeling depressed nonsignificantly increase the relative risks for LBP in women.” (*Spine* 2007;32:262-8.)

Of course, your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic can't remove stress in patients' lives; however, eliminating spinal dysfunction associated with stress is a primary function of chiropractic care. A variety of health disorders, including LBP, are associated with a common malady known as *vertebral subluxation*. This condition is characterized by areas of the spine where motion is limited, or spinal bones (vertebrae) are slightly out of place. Using specialized maneuvers, called *chiropractic adjustments*, your doctor at Hickory Chiropractic Clinic corrects vertebral subluxations and accompanying dysfunction.

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Address Alzheimer's Risks

Research shows that emotional factors, such as depression and anxiety, are strongly tied to the likelihood of developing Alzheimer's disease (AD).

In a three-year study including more than 600 seniors, psychological distress dramatically bolstered the odds of developing AD. Subjects completed an initial measurement of distress and anxiety. For the three following years, they completed annual assessments, containing 18 cognitive tests and a clinical classification of AD.

During the three years of follow-up, 55 people developed AD. The analysis, which controlled for age, sex and education levels, documented that subjects with a high level of distress were 2.7 times more likely to develop AD than those not prone to distress (*Neuroepidemiology* 2006;27:143-53).

Engage in Exercise

Daily exercise is a winning stress-busting strategy. Carving out an hour per day for a structured workout will work wonders when it comes to slashing anxiety. However, even a shorter cardiovascular workout, such as a brisk 20-minute power walk, plummets stress levels. The good news is that exercise is cumulative, so small bursts throughout the day add up. For instance, opt for the stairs rather than the elevator — and park on the far side of parking lots.

Workouts, such as yoga, T'ai Chi or Pilates, that incorporate elements of stress reduction may be especially helpful.

Seek and Savor Sleep

Research shows that adequate sleep is essential to optimal health. Missed sleep is linked with a myriad of disorders, including depression, anxiety, cardiovascular disease, cognitive impairment and difficulty losing weight.

If you're having trouble getting enough zzz's, stress may be the primary suspect.

When researchers in Japan surveyed 3,435 workers, anxiety was the culprit in all forms of insomnia. Specifically, more than 12 percent of stressed-out individuals had difficulty falling asleep, 20 percent struggled to sleep through the night — and a startling 32 percent reported poor overall sleep quality. In addition, long-term stress, difficulty initiating sleep and trouble maintaining sleep were linked to illnesses or history of hospitalization (*Sleep Med* 2007;Epub).



Call on a Confidant

Research reveals that relying on at least one supportive co-worker to listen and empathize dramatically reduces work-related stress and improves sleep quality (*Sleep Med* 2007;Epub).

Supportive networks outside of work are just as important. If you feel stress mounting, block out time to connect with someone who's upbeat and caring — even if it's just for a quick phone call.

Promote Productivity

Many individuals are under the false impression that stress bolsters productivity.

However, research shows that, while a small dose of stress may initially spur efficiency, any more than a small amount will decrease productivity.

For instance, when researchers in Australia surveyed 1,523 participants from 10 diverse companies, high stress was one of the top factors that degraded

productivity (*Am J Health Promot* 2006;21:127-36).

Quest for Quality of Life

Slashing stress is essential for optimal quality of life. When researchers from Turkey assessed 4,605 individuals, stress was the No. 1 factor associated with poor quality of life, especially for those with multiple diseases.

“The present study indicates significant adverse effects of chronic diseases and psychological distress on HRQL [health related quality of life] in adults, the effect of psychological distress being the most important.” (*Intern Med J* 2007;37:6-11.)

Contemplate Counseling

If your stress seems to be consuming your life, consider counseling from a licensed professional. Therapy may be a helpful jumpstart to long-term stress reduction. Ask the doctor for a referral to a qualified professional in the community.

Get Started!

As your partners in health, this chiropractic office wants you to enjoy a heightened level of wellness — starting now.

Start by making a list of the top five stressors in your life. For each stressor, identify one action step you can take to reduce or eliminate it.

And, make sure to maintain regular chiropractic checkups to combat the effects of stress on your spine and body.

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