



“It’s not the load that breaks you down, it’s the way you carry it.”—Lou Holtz

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Stress: causes, treatments

A topic we can all relate to...and what YOU can do!

By Dr. Brooke Azie-Rentz

Stress (noun)—a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances.

As I sit here writing this article that is 2 weeks late, dealing with new hires, family in town, ailing family out of town, young children and where to send them to school, etc., I define stress as something a little more realistic, something that I can feel right now! Stress can be positive or negative. It can push us to achieve things beyond our wildest dreams, or it can cause a strong person to end up sobbing in the corner, exhausted, not knowing if they can go on. In this month’s newsletter, we talk about the negative side of stress.

There are 10 significant health issues that have been directly related to stress: heart disease, asthma, obesity, diabetes, headaches, depression/anxiety, GI issues, accelerated aging, Alzheimer’s disease and premature death. Stress is the cause for these diseases. For example, stress causes us to partake in habits such as smoking or drinking to “de-stress”, which in turn leads to diseases such as asthma, high cholesterol, high blood pressure, obesity... which in turn makes us depressed...then we don’t sleep well and are too tired to exercise... which leads to heart disease, obesity and diabetes... basically a vicious downward spiral. The choices

we make when we are stressed can have a direct impact on our health, yet **cortisol**, the hormone produced when we are under stress, can have detrimental effects all on its own.

Cortisol is made by your adrenals in response to all different kinds of stress. It is the hormone that allows us to pull all-nighters, juggle 10 balls in the air, train for a marathon and heal from a broken leg... sometimes all at the same time. But if we never give our bodies a chance to return to a normal, non stressed state, the negative side effects of cortisol excess and eventual exhaustion can be debilitating, even deadly. Cortisol is known to increase your heart rate and blood pressure (BP), makes you more sensitive to insulin, and is even your natural alarm clock that wakes you up in the morning. If you have too much cortisol, your BP will go up, you start craving sugar, and you wake up at all times of the night, if you can sleep at all. And don’t get me started on the need for 8 hours of sleep per night! So you can see, cortisol can be helpful and positive at stressful times in our life, but when we don’t deal with stress, the long term effects of cortisol on our bodies has serious detrimental effects.

Your ability to tolerate stress depends on many factors, including the quality of your relationships, your general outlook on life, your emotional intelligence and awareness, your genetics, or predisposition

to certain diseases. Here are a couple of pointers to minimize the effects of stress on your health:

- **Set aside relaxation time.** Relaxation techniques such as yoga, meditation, and deep breathing activate the body’s relaxation response, a state of restfulness that is the opposite of the stress response.
- **Exercise regularly.** Physical activity plays a key role in reducing and preventing the effects of stress. Nothing beats aerobic exercise for releasing pent-up stress and tension. Dr. Brooke recommends a cathartic release to stress including punching bags, breaking plates, screaming, and dancing.
- **Eat a healthy diet.** Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress. Start your day with a healthy breakfast, reduce your caffeine and sugar intake, and cut back on alcohol and nicotine.
- **Get plenty of sleep.** Feeling tired can increase stress by causing you to think irrationally. Keep your cool by getting a good night’s sleep.

Here at AIM we offer all kinds of things to help you deal with stress including massage, acupuncture, IV therapy, and supplementation. We are here to help you find the balance in life and be the healthiest you can be.

Chinese Medicine's Take on Cortisol and Vitamin B6

By Debbie Yu, LAc

Acupuncture and Chinese medicine constitutes a whole medicine, but can often be difficult to understand due to language (*qi*, *blood*, *yin*, *yang*, *zang-fu*, *meridians*, etc). There are more similarities between Eastern and Western medicine than you may think. Continue reading for a correlation between cortisol and "Liver qi stagnation" and the pathologies stress can create.

Stress triggers the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal axis (HPA axis), a complex neuro-endocrine system in the body, which in the end, stimulates the adrenal cortex to produce cortisol, a stress hormone.

Vitamin B6 is a water-soluble vitamin, in that the body cannot store it. Three examples of B6 functions are: 1. Making hemoglobin (the oxygen carrying protein of red blood cells), 2. Maintaining normal nerve function, and 3. Properly absorbing magnesium for tear production.

Chronic stress leads to chronic high levels of cortisol. This can deplete vitamin B6 (just one example). Deficiency of B6 can lead to an anemia similar to iron-deficiency anemia, poor cognitive function, depression, neuropathy, visual problems, and dry eyes.

These three examples of B6 functions above are related to the Chinese medicine concepts of *Liver blood* and *Liver yin*. *Blood* and *yin* are nourishing by nature. Furthermore, the *Liver* "opens to the eyes," allowing the *blood* to nourish the eyes, and "dominates the tendons," ensuring adequate flow and nutrients to the extremities.

In Traditional Chinese Medicine, stress causes the *Liver qi* to stagnate. Chronic *Liver qi* stagnation can deplete the *Liver blood* and *yin*. *Liver blood* and *yin* deficiency lead to dry eyes, blurry vision, limited flexibility, numbness or spasms in extremities. General *blood* deficient signs and symptoms include pale complexion, pale conjunctiva, pale nails, dry skin, insomnia, and fatigue.

Foods that nourish the blood are foods that are high in protein. These include various fish and meats, beans and seeds. Foods that nourish the *yin* are usually fatty or high in moisture. Asparagus, avocado, and bananas are some of the best vegetables for *yin*. These examples are all good sources of vitamin B6.

It is best to simultaneously nourish the *Liver blood* (supplement Vitamin B6) and soothe the *Liver qi* to prevent further depletion of the *blood*. Soothing Liver qi means to reduce chronic stress and encourage homeostasis (in this case, of the natural rhythm of cortisol).

The amount of cortisol in the blood undergoes a diurnal variation. In people with normal levels, cortisol should peak around 8am and should gradually decrease

and be lowest around midnight to 4am. In people with Cushing's syndrome or with chronic fatigue, cortisol levels can be flattened or lowest in the morning and highest at night.

This also correlates with Chinese Medicine's concept on *yin* and *yang*. The *yang* is highest during the first half of the day. As the day progresses the yang declines and the *yin* increases and is what grounds us at night to sleep. If a person has stress due to *Liver qi* stagnation, not only do they have a relative excess of *yang*, but also they will often wake during the "*Liver* time," between 1 and 3am.

So depending on the person, and the time of day, the cortisol level may need to rise or lower. Acupuncture has been studied with numerous chemicals and hormones, and has been shown countless times that it has a strong regulatory or modulating effect. Acupuncture can help the body find it's homeostasis.

Debbie Yu currently accepts new acupuncture patients on Mondays, Wednesdays, Fridays, and selected Saturdays. You can view this article in its entirety, with sources, on our blog!

