

3 steps to

rise above STRESS

Stress seems to be a word that is often thrown around to explain away any number of mental and physical symptoms. To some, it may appear to be a very vague term but its effects are very real. So let's strip away all the misconceptions and get down to the facts about stress and how to deal with it.

WHAT IS STRESS?

When we face a situation that our body feels is dangerous, our brain triggers an alarm which releases a cocktail of chemicals into our blood (adrenaline, noradrenaline and cortisol).

These chemicals are designed to ready ourselves for fighting or for running away. They do this by raising heart rate and quickening breath to get more oxygen to our muscles, and releasing fat and sugar into the blood to give us a burst of energy.

The trouble is that in most modern day stressful situations like a job interview or a relationship break up, the danger does not require us to fight or to run away and so the chemicals keep circulating through our body unused. This is really unhealthy.

Our bodies have not evolved quickly enough with modern life to realise that most situations that we face do not need us to fight or escape. Being late for an important meeting does not put us in some mortal danger. Our bodies are simply overreacting. This is why we see so many stress related disorders in the modern world.

If our body regularly releases these stress chemicals and they remain unused then this leads to a long term build up of stress. Our bodies become frozen in a constant state of emergency, invaded by faulty alarm bells which are constantly misfiring. It can then become a challenge to reset ourselves.

AM I STRESSED?

YES

- Would you describe yourself as easily irritated?* ☐
- Are you emotionally sensitive to criticism?* ☐
- Do you have difficulty getting to sleep or waking up* ☐
- Do you feel the need to drink alcohol, coffee or smoke cigarettes to calm down?* ☐
- Do you suffer from regular bouts of constipation and/or diarrhoea?* ☐
- Do you suffer from a lack of libido with no medical reason?* ☐
- Do you often feel overwhelmed by all that you need to do?* ☐
- Would you describe yourself as impatient?* ☐
- Do you feel like you have to do everything yourself?* ☐
- Do you suffer from regular feelings of anxiety and/or fear?* ☐
- Do you often feel tearful and/or depressed?* ☐
- Do you sometimes have difficulty taking deep breaths?* ☐
- Do you suffer from shaky hands with no medical reason?* ☐
- Do you sometimes have hot flushes and/or unexplained sweating?* ☐
- Do you regularly have a dry mouth or lump in your throat?* ☐
- Do you sometimes have a loss of appetite?* ☐
- Do you make a big deal about everything?* ☐
- Do you have obsessional habits or repetitive tics like nail biting or scratching?* ☐
- Do you sometimes suffer from chest pain and/or heart palpitations?* ☐
- Do you find that you have poor concentration and/or difficulties making decisions?* ☐

1-4 YES RESPONSES - You have relatively healthy stress levels.

5-9 YES RESPONSES - You are stressed, control it before it becomes extreme.

10-14 YES RESPONSES - You are very stressed, time to make some changes.

15-20 YES RESPONSES - Wow, life is hard work for you and those around you. It shouldn't be that way so take action now.

IS STRESS DANGEROUS?

An appropriate level of stress is useful for concentration and focus and to give us that extra push to achieve our goals. It is essential if we are in a genuinely dangerous situation.

However, in most scenarios, our bodies are not responding appropriately to the situation and the build up of chemicals can cause many short and long term health conditions.

Adrenaline raises blood pressure which can damage the heart and kidneys. Cortisol lowers the immune system. The extra rush of fat and sugar into the blood can lead to diabetes and cardiovascular problems. Our hormonal system can become damaged. Stress tires the body and affects sleep, it also affects digestion which in turn impairs our ability to absorb nutrients.

Apart from all the physical effects, stress causes mental, emotional and social problems. Depression, anxiety and obsessive habits can all be stress related. We can become irritable, impatient and tired which can make work and relationships difficult.

YES, STRESS IS DANGEROUS. It is important to do something about it.

STEP 1: **AVOID STRESS**

You can't live your life avoiding challenges and running away from your problems (they'll always catch up). But there are some stressful situations that you can avoid, and if you can, then you should.

If you are consistently stressed at work then maybe you need a change of position. If you know that you find travelling through rush hour stressful then perhaps there are ways to alter your schedule. Avoiding stress is not easy and many times it's not possible without a huge upheaval in your life. Start a journal of all the stressful times in your day and use it to look for things that you can change in your life. Use stress as motivation for making a happier life.

NOISE POLLUTION AND MUSIC THERAPY

Do not underestimate the effect of sound on your stress levels. Studies have shown that those living near noisy main roads suffer from higher stress. Take some time to listen to your environment and try to block out unwanted noises. White noise (air conditioning and computer hum) tends to be the most damaging.

You can also use music and sounds to destress. Walking amongst nature sounds or playing some relaxing music is an instant way to calm down.

STEP 2: **REDUCE YOUR STRESS**

Here are some proven ways to turn down the tension in your life:

ACUPUNCTURE & CHINESE MEDICINE

Chinese medicine sees all health disorders in terms of a disturbance in the QI energy flow through your body. Chinese Medical theory differentiates different types of stress (fear related, anger related etc) and knows which particular organs are being affected by the stress.

For example, stress that comes from a fear of failure or a fear of emotional pain will first affect the QI flow through the kidneys. Other types of stress affect different organs, but all stress will eventually also affect the Liver which is the main organ that governs emotions and the free flow of QI.

Therefore a Chinese Medical Doctor will first find out which type(s) of stress you are suffering from and then improve the QI flow and tonify those affected organs (including the Liver). This will help to:

- 1. Reduce stress levels and therefore the health dangers related to stress.**
- 2. Strengthen those organs so that they are better able to cope with any new stress.**

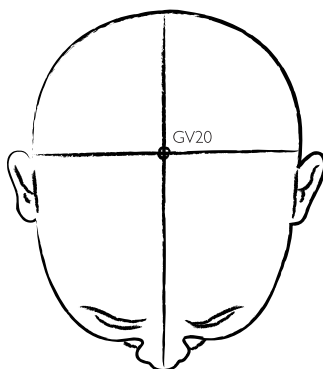
Typically, the Doctor will use both acupuncture and Chinese herbal medicine. Sometimes you may have special press balls or medicated seeds placed on your ear for you to press at particularly sensitive times to relieve stress.

OUR CLINIC HAS FULLY QUALIFIED CHINESE MEDICAL DOCTORS WITH MANY YEARS OF CLINICAL EXPERIENCE TREATING STRESS. COME IN AND SPEAK TO A DOCTOR FOR FREE OR BOOK AN ACUPUNCTURE APPOINTMENT. CALL 08700 100 023.

PUSH YOUR STRESS POINT

An acupuncture point that is regularly used to calm stress is GV20. It is located right at the top of your head.

Imagine a line going from the tip of your nose along the middle of your head to the back of your neck. Then imagine a line joining the highest points of both of your ears. Where the 2 lines meet is GV20. Try applying pressure to this point for 10 seconds (don't forget to keep breathing). If you are stressed it may feel particularly tender. This is a great point to centre and calm emotions.



MASSAGE

The ancient practice of massage is an incredible tool for relieving stress. The touch of another person is very powerful at calming the body. When this is combined with movements that relieve built up tension in muscles, it is even more beneficial.

Oriental massage like Tuina and Thai, use the same theories as Chinese Medicine and can be used to unblock the flow of QI and tonify your affected organs.

Massage is not a luxury, it is essential for good health.

*TO BOOK AN ANTI-STRESS MASSAGE
CALL 08700 100 023*

EXERCISE

It stands to reason that if your body is filled with stress chemicals designed to make you run or fight, then you must make use of them.

Exercise is ESSENTIAL to manage stress levels but overexercise can cause exhaustion which can lead to more stress.

Try to spend between 3 and 5 hours per week (no longer than 80 minutes a day) when you are moderately out of breath. Swimming and walking are both good stress relieving exercises.



MEDITATION

Often misunderstood as something that requires years of training, the fact is that you can start meditating right now and it is so good for stress relief. The act of meditation is to clear and quiet your mind but isn't it impossible to 'think about not thinking'?

Western society is heavily influenced by Descartes' famous phrase 'I think therefore I am'. The belief that your identity is the same as your mind makes meditation impossible. Your mind is just a tool, in the same way as your legs, eyes and ears. You are NOT your mind, you are a combination of all your body parts and your life energy. This may make you feel uncomfortable as it challenges your concept of identity, but imagine how much happier you could be if you could free yourself from your mind and use it only when you want to.

MEDITATION TECHNIQUE - BECOME AN OBSERVER

- Find a quiet place and time when you know that you will not be disturbed, preferably outside (unplug and switch off all phones - just knowing that they could ring stops you from relaxing).
- Give yourself permission to relax and take time for yourself.
- Sit upright, hands on knees and close your eyes. Breathe deeply into your stomach. Count 20 breaths.
- Continue to breathe and relax.
- Whenever you experience a thought or emotion, you should mentally step back and simply observe the thought/emotion. Do not judge it or indulge it, do not question it and do not try to make it go away. Just observe it. You will find that it begins to disappear.
- The thought/emotion will probably be quickly replaced by another one and you should step back again and observe.
- After a while you may experience a quiet moment with no thoughts and no emotions, just you and the moment. In the East this is often called 'no mind'. Even if it lasts for only a few seconds, you have achieved a meditative state. The more you practice, the longer these periods of quiet will last and eventually you may reach a point where you can effortlessly enter this state of calm.

You can use this technique in your day to day life. For example, if you are on a busy train and you are late for a meeting and you start to feel anger, frustration and stress rising, then mentally take a step back and observe these emotions without judgement and you will find yourself relaxing. Do not indulge negative emotions.

SLEEP

Stress can cause sleep disturbance which in turn leads to more stress. Break this cycle by dedicating yourself to getting a good night's sleep.

Your stress glands recharge between 11pm and 1am so you need to be

asleep during this time. This means switching off all computers, television and bright lights at 10pm and getting into bed. Turn down the room temperature to below 21 degrees and block out ALL the light. Give yourself permission to forget all worries until tomorrow.

TAI CHI

Another way of meditating is to perform an activity that requires total concentration, thus removing you from your worries and pulling you into the present moment. The Chinese use Tai Chi for this, it is excellent for physical, mental and emotional health. Chinalife runs classes in Tai Chi in London, give us a call to join in.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

In Chinese Medical theory, your Qi flow can be affected by others. Ever notice how some people's company can be draining and others can be invigorating? Sometimes spending time with people that have a positive effect on you, is all that is necessary to destress.

Sharing your problems is a good way of relieving stress. Just hearing yourself say how you are feeling out loud can help to externalise the issue. If you keep it bottled up there is a tendency for it to become more overwhelming. Find someone with whom you feel comfortable to talk about your stress.

TUNE OUT

In a world of mobile phones, emails and wireless we are constantly contactable. This may at first be comforting but it actually contributes to stress, disturbing any moment of quiet.

If you are committed to de-stressing then try to dedicate an hour a day by yourself for your cultivation (exercise, meditation, going for a walk). During this time, switch off all communication and just be with yourself and in the moment. Just having the potential of someone calling you, puts your body in a state of readiness which stops relaxation.

DIET

When we get stressed we tend to make poor nutritional choices which can increase our stress. Avoid emotional eating, which is almost guaranteed to be unhealthy. Stick to the following rules and feel the difference.

1. REDUCE ALCOHOL & COFFEE - They trigger the release of stress chemicals.
2. CUT DOWN ON SUGAR & SALT - They can exhaust the adrenal glands and increase your blood pressure.
3. EAT FOODS WITH L-TRYPTOPHAN - A necessary amino acid to help your mood. Seeds & nuts, tofu, cottage cheese, yogurt, fish and turkey are all excellent sources.
4. EAT WHOLE GRAINS, CEREALS & PULSES - They are not only healthy but help to deliver the L-Tryptophan to your brain.
5. INCREASE FIBRE - Especially if your stress is affecting your digestion.
6. GREEN VEGETABLES ARE KING - Include with every lunch and dinner.
7. STAY AWAY FROM ANIMAL FAT - Too much meat and deep fried food lowers your body's energy to deal with stress.

DRINK A FEW CUPS OF QUALITY TEA EVERY DAY

Tea is a healthy, delicious and excellent drink for reducing stress. Theanine is a mood enhancing amino acid which is almost only found in tea. It is able to cross the blood-brain barrier to reduce mental and physical stress by triggering the release of dopamine. It also helps to boost your immune system.

Tea richest in Theanine include shade grown Green tea such as Matcha or early picked Greens such as Jade Sword.



WHITE TEA AND MEDITATION

The flavour of white tea is very delicate and subtle. The Chinese tend to use White tea for meditation because this delicate flavour commands attention. In order to really taste the tea you must focus on the cup which draws your mind away from your day to day concerns.

STEP 3: **CONTROL YOUR BODY'S RESPONSE**

If you can't walk away from a situation that is causing you stress then you must try to stop your body from overreacting. In most scenarios you are not in any mortal danger and you must stay aware of this. One technique that you can use is the BECOME AN OBSERVER method described above. You can also use a mantra.

People are often put off by the word 'mantra', but having a personal and meaningful phrase for yourself can be very effective at reminding your body of something (it doesn't need to be religious). Studies have shown that mantras are effective at reducing stress. Mantras are free, portable, reusable, invisible, personal, instantly available and non-toxic.

The word 'mantra' means 'to free from the mind' and that is exactly what you need to do with stress relief. Stress is your mind (a place that knows your darkest fears) telling your body that you are in danger. Therefore in order to free yourself from this overreaction you must quiet your mind. It's like pushing a pause button to bring you back to the present. It is also called a 'RAPID FOCUS TOOL' by those that feel uneasy with the word 'mantra'.

Take some time to find your mantra and say it to yourself at times of relaxation and meditation so that your body associates it with a feeling of calm. Your mantra will then become a cue for your body to relax whenever you think it over. Some people like to keep their mantra a secret, making it a private internal conversation that can not be affected by anyone else. Here are some examples:

'Within myself at peace' 'I give myself permission to relax' 'There is no real danger'

When you find yourself in a stressful situation try repeating the words in your head (or out loud) as you breath out and see how you feel.

FOR MORE PERSONALISED ADVICE ABOUT YOUR STRESS, COME IN TO OUR CLINIC AND ASK FOR
A CONSULTATION

TEL: 08700 100 023