

## Minding your Mind's Business: The Effects of Stress

Stress is at the root of most, if not all illness and the chaotic mind is at the core of all human suffering. In today's society, individuals are consumed by the overexertion of daily living, including stress accrued from work, school, and/or family demands. Workdays are longer, leisure time is shorter, family time consists of rushing across town to drop the kids off at school; our laptop, cell phone and blackberry have replaced our best friends. People's thoughts are clouded, lives are overrun with things to do, and this manifests in an unhealthy and unproductive approach to living. Stress, as a result of our fast-paced lifestyle, contributes to physical and psychological distress and illness.

Research shows that psychological stress is linked to several health indicators, such as immune responsiveness, hypertension, gastrointestinal disorders, chronic pain, and cancer, to name a few. Stress is also linked to psychological disorders such as depression and anxiety which can be exacerbated with increased stress in one's life. There is a correlation between stress and the physical and psychological affect on health. The questions we must ask ourselves are: How can we reduce stress? How can we improve the quality of our lives including our psychological and physical health?

**Listen to your body.** We need to be vigilant of the fact that stress creates a pattern on the brain and body that over time breaks down our immune system and healthy body functions. People become sensitized to stress and its ill affects on the body. Instead of keeping busy and thinking that productivity and success comes from living frantically, STOP. Listen to your body, take a break from the cycle that the brain and body have created to sustain your chaotic life pattern. That is not to say that we need to stop working and being successful, however, we need to listen to our body and honour what it is telling us. STOP the cycle by going for a walk, taking mini-breaks throughout the day, meeting a friend for lunch, or doing something that you truly enjoy. Create new and healthy patterns for the brain and body.

**Listen to what you tell yourself.** We ultimately have direct control over our mind and how it perceives, interprets and in turn, responds to everyday experiences. Speak kindly to yourself, stay positive, and know that stress is more a creation of your mind and body than anything else. How do you speak to yourself? What do you tell yourself on a daily basis? Remember, words have power.

**Pay attention to how you spend your time.** Don't let stress conduct your life; choose through intention how you wish to spend your hour, your day, your lifetime. Each moment counts. Make sure that how you spend your time is in line with your values, goals, and aspirations. Each day ask yourself, "Am I honouring myself by spending my time this way?"

**Find a healthy balance in your life.** Balance is a subjective experience and varies from person to person. Some people require a lot of alone time to gain energy

while others require social time as a means to recharge their batteries. Finding a healthy balance means listening to your body and honouring what it is telling you.

Psychological stress is something we all need to tend to. We can do so by paying attention and listening to our body; staying positive and listening to the way we speak to ourselves; spending our time in a manner that sustains and supports our needs and desires; and finding a healthy balance in our lives for work, leisure, health and happiness. Take the time to reflect, evaluate and change your life so that the song in your heart may be more in tune with the melody in your mind.

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