

# STRESS

## CHRONIC STRESS PUTS YOUR HEALTH AND HAPPIEST AT RISK!

Your body is hard-wired to react to stress in ways meant to protect you against primitive threats from predators and other aggressors. Such threats are rare today, but that doesn't mean that life is free of stress!

You undoubtedly face multiple demands each day, such as taking on a huge workload, paying the bills, and taking care of your family. Your body treats these "minor hassles" as threats and as a result, you may feel as if you're constantly under attack—but you don't have to let stress control your life!

## YOUR STRESS RESPONSE IS NATURAL!

When you encounter a perceived threat, your hypothalamus sets off an alarm system in your body. Through a combination of nerve and hormonal signals, your adrenal glands release a surge of hormones including adrenaline and cortisol.

Adrenaline increases your heart rate, elevates your blood pressure, and boosts energy supplies. Cortisol is the primary stress hormone, and it increases glucose in the bloodstream, alters immune system responses, and suppresses the digestive and reproductive system and growth processes. It also communicates with the brain regions that control mood, motivation, and fear.

## WHEN THE NATURAL RESPONSE GOES WILD!

Your body's stress-response system is usually short-lived. Once the perceived threat has passed, hormone levels return to normal. As adrenaline and cortisol levels drop, your heart rate and blood pressure return to baseline levels, and other systems resume their regular activities.

But when stressors are always present, that fight-or-flight reaction stays turned on!

The long-term activation of the stress-response system and overexposure to stress hormones can disrupt almost all your body's processes.

## STRESS—RELATED HEALTH PROBLEMS:

- Anxiety and depression
- Digestive Problems
- Headaches
- Heart disease
- Sleep problems
- Weight gain
- Memory and concentration impairment

## HOW TO MANAGE STRESS IN A HEALTHY WAY:

- Eat a healthy diet, get regular exercise, and get plenty of sleep
- Relaxation techniques such as yoga and deep breathing, get a massage, or learn to meditate
- Take time for hobbies
- Engage in healthy friendships/relationships
- Have a sense of humor
- Volunteer in your community
- Seek professional counseling when needed

