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Stress and digestive health!

Stress has become a by-word for life in the 21st century. We all experience it from time to time, but increasingly many of us are suffering from chronic stress - stress that takes its toll on the body relentlessly, every day. How does one know if chronic stress is a feature of our lives? Consider these symptoms; do they ring a bell?

Excessive fatigue

Nervousness

Confusion

dizzy on standing

PMS

Intolerance to alcohol

Spasms in upper back, neck and shoulders

Indigestion

Palpitations

Infections

Weakness

Difficulty concentrating

Poor memory

Insomnia

Sweet cravings

Muscle pain

Alternating constipation and diarrhoea

Excessive hunger

Allergies

Most chronic illness e.g. asthma, colitis,


Rheumatoid Arthritis, M.E.

Quite a litany!

The trouble is if we are chronically stressed we are usually running so fast through each and every day that we pay little attention to the signs of stress our bodies are experiencing! Just stop for a moment as you read this and return to the list above. How many of these indicators of stress have you been ignoring?

Prolonged stress has a significant effect on digestive health. When the body experiences stress over a long period, the nervous system finds it increasingly difficult to 'turn off' the activity of the day, and allow sufficient rest overnight. The blood supply to the organs of digestion is increasingly diminished making repair difficult and digestion weak. In time, the bacterial eco-system in our digestive tract (so vital for nutrient absorption) becomes unbalanced and wind, pain and constipation and/or diarrhoea are more common. A visit to your doctor at this point will often produce the diagnosis 'IBS'. Bloating, indigestion pain and a general sense of over-fullness becomes our 'normal' everyday experience.

Stress has significant effects on the adrenal glands also. We have two adrenal glands, sitting at the top of the kidneys, one above each. Amongst the many processes the adrenal glands are responsible for is the production of adrenaline. This hormone is the one that becomes over produced in chronic stress. In time, the adrenals become fatigued; adrenaline production is



Stress and ...



affected and the long-term result is the litany of symptoms listed above! So what can be done to correct the effects of stress? Try the following but do remember you may well need professional help if you have suffered chronic stress for a considerable time:

1. It is vitally important to realise the role diet plays in maintaining health and alleviating the effects of stress on the body. Eat little and often from slow-release carbohydrates like oats and brown rice. Avoid eating wheat (bread and pasta) more than four times a week (this includes toast for breakfast and sandwiches for lunch!). Avoid sugar (sweets, cakes, biscuits etc) and other stimulants such as tea, coffee, chocolate and alcohol. Eat lean white meat, fish, lots of vegetables and snack on fruit, seeds and nuts. Drink herbal and fruit teas and lots of spring or mineral water (not from the tap-too much fluoride and chlorine!)
2. Learn to rest!! Eight hours sleep is not a luxury, but a must!
3. Learn to play and have fun! So many of us have allowed work to cram out hobbies, 'time out' and the joy of simply being at play!
4. Don't forget exercise though not to the point of exhaustion. If you are tired after exercise it is too much! Do whatever feels good!
5. Try and get some hours in sunlight most days, particularly in the winter months.

