

STRESS: Five Things you NEED to Know about Self-Care

By Sue Singleton, Med. Int., MHT, CST, EOLMTT

Imagine a caveman running for his life, being chased by a carnivorous dinosaur...luckily he makes it safely into his cave and is spared. His hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal (HPA) axis triggered the “fight or flight response” which is a complex series of neurochemical responses that in the crisis moment, saved his life with a boost of cortisone, adrenaline and other chemicals. Safe in the cave, he relaxes, and all systems “normalize” within him.



In our modern world, the neurochemical responses haven't changed. The stressor or crisis might be running for your life, or getting married, divorced, meeting tight deadlines at work, juggling too many responsibilities, financial strains, caregiving of young or elderly family members, etc. Other stresses include getting a viral or bacterial infection, having even minor surgery, dental or otherwise, minor or major accidents or injuries, being annoyed/resentful, anxious/worried, grieving/mourning, feeling guilty/remorseful, etc. What is different, is that most people do not take the time to relax like the caveman.

Without recovery time, cortisol levels may become chronically high, and lead to maladaptive endocrine (glandular) system responses, heart disease, weight gain, diabetes, high blood pressure, sexual dysfunction, arthritis, depression, sleep disturbances, and even sudden death from cardiac arrest.

If you consistently put yourself last, you are not a hero, you are a martyr. You are more likely to “go down” and not be of help to anyone at all.

What You NEED to Know:

1. Self-care may very well save your life. Performing Yoga, Tai Chi, Chi Kung, and receiving regular Massage or Bodywork are wonderful ongoing self-care choices that normalize the neurochemistry in your body.
2. It is NOT selfish to practice self-care. It shows you care enough about the people you love that you would like to be around for awhile. Engaging in a hobby like jewelry-making, scrap booking, bird watching, fishing, golf, flower arranging will not only reduce your stress, but also improve your health.
3. Self-care is easier than you think. Taking 15 minutes twice daily to relax/daydream or meditate, or walk outside during lunch, actually boosts your efficiency and productivity.
4. Self-care includes what you eat and drink. Minimize dairy, avoid sugar, artificial sweeteners and processed foods to create healthy changes in your body. If you eat well most of the time, and then “treat” yourself occasionally to something that is not at the top of the healthiest list, your body can handle it.
5. Breathing properly is a major component of stress-reduction and self-care. Do 3 minutes of deep breathing in which your exhalations are like big sighs just twice daily can dramatically improve how you feel.



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