

OPTIMAL HEALTH UNIVERSITY™

Presented by Team Chiropractic GTA

How Is Stress Affecting Your Body?

With the frenzied pace of today's society, almost everyone is waging an unremitting battle with emotional stress. As a result, maintaining a high level of anxiety is considered "normal" — and those who work the most hours, engage in the greatest number of activities and function on the least amount of sleep are revered. What's wrong with this picture? A lot, says your doctor at Team Chiropractic GTA Centre. Anxiety not only destroys your peace of mind, but it may also wreak havoc on your physical well being.

As a prevention specialist, your doctor at Team Chiropractic GTA Centre urges patients to consider the long-term toll stress exacts on their bodies and minds.



The Stress/Spine Connection

Everyday, your doctor at Team Chiropractic GTA Centre helps patients whose spines reveal the physical ramifications of stress. Chiropractors understand that the body and mind function in concert, rather than in isolation. Consequently, emotional stress may profoundly influence an individual's physical well being. Specifically, stress may lead to a condition called vertebral subluxation. Vertebral subluxations are regions in the spine where movement is restricted or bones (vertebrae) are out of alignment. Scientific studies indicate that this disorder can spur a plethora of ailments, including headache, back pain and ear infection.

Chiropractors use a holistic approach to combat the effects of stress on the spine. This unique program incorporates nutrition, stress reduction and specialized maneuvers to correct vertebral subluxations. These safe and effective maneuvers are called chiropractic adjustments.

Back Battles

Beyond contributing to vertebral subluxations, anxiety also leads to back and neck pain in other ways. One recent Australian study concluded that, "Psychological factors are dominant in the presentation of chronic low back pain in adults." (*Aust N Z J Surg* 1996;

66:294-7.) Another study pooled data on 138 chiropractic patients. Thirty percent of subjects rated their level of stress as moderate to severe. All together, 50% of participants reported that stress had a "moderate or greater" negative influence on their back pain.

According to a late-breaking report, one way that stress may aggravate back and neck pain is by inhibiting the delivery of cytokines — chemical compounds that trigger healing — to wound sites (*Archives of General Psychiatry* 1999; 56:450-6).

Anxiety Provokes Head Pain

Stress exacerbates several types of headaches — including muscular strain headaches, tension headaches and migraines. As with back and neck pain, the link between stress and headache may lie in the development of vertebral subluxation. A wealth of scientific research reveals that vertebral subluxations aggravate the muscular, skeletal and neurologic factors associated with head pain. That's why chiropractic care, which focuses on correcting vertebral subluxations, is so successful in relieving stress-related headaches, say experts.

This week, take a moment to give somebody special the gift of health.



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Don't Take Stress to Heart

For decades, scientists have acknowledged an association between psychological stress and cardiovascular diseases, such as heart attack and stroke. But, until recently, the underlying mechanism of this relationship alluded investigators. Now ongoing studies suggest that a chemical called homocysteine is the key to this connection. This blood chemical, which plays a causative role in heart disease, skyrockets during times of emotional stress.

Not surprisingly, homocysteine levels plummet when patients supplement their diet with B-complex vitamins and folic acid — nutrients that are depleted by emotional stress and have been shown to protect against cardiovascular disease.

Stress: Brain Drainer?

Cutting-edge scientific experiments in rats indicate that anxiety damages the brain. It seems that newborn rats exposed to high levels of stress exhibit memory and learning impairments later in life. And “stressed-out” rats have increased levels of the same hormones that are elevated in “stressed-out” humans. This finding implies that excessive stress may harm the human brain as well, say scientists.

Baby Blues

Mothers and mothers-to-be should take special measures to alleviate stress.

Emotional strain may cause infertility in women with long menstrual cycles, according to a recent paper in the journal *Fertility and Sterility*. Researchers tracked 393 couples who were attempting to conceive. The couples completed questionnaires detailing their levels of stress. Women with menstrual cycles of 35 days or longer who scored in the top 20% in stress tests were 12 times more likely to miscarry within days of conception, compared with women who had shorter menstrual cycles and lower stress scores, say

researchers (*Fertility and Sterility* 1999; 72:47-53).

Maternal stress during pregnancy may result in low birth-weight infants — a condition linked with several health problems. A possible explanation for this association is inhibited blood flow to the fetus. One trial, which enrolled 100 women, found that 27% of expectant mothers who reported the highest levels of anxiety had restricted arterial blood flow to the fetus that warranted clinical concern, compared with 4% of women with low anxiety levels (*British Medical Journal* 1999; 318: 153-7).

Psychological strain after a newborn arrives can put new moms at risk of postpartum depression. One study found that women who reported fre-



quent stressful encounters — such as conflicts with friends and coworkers, health problems and lack of social support — were more likely to suffer from postpartum depression, compared with women who experienced less stress (*Womens Health* 1999; 29:57-72).

Diabetes Dilemma

Keeping stress in check may stave off diabetes. Investigators followed 57 people with Type 1 diabetes mellitus and 61 individuals with Type 2 diabetes mellitus. The volunteers completed a questionnaire measuring their ability to cope with stressful situations. Subjects who managed stress successfully had superior control over their blood sugar, compared

with more “emotional” participants. (*Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 1999; 40:141-58).

Immune Inhibitor

Slashing stress can cut down on colds, flu, allergy and asthma, according to scientific studies. It seems that psychological strain weakens the immune system, predisposing patients to many common ailments. And ongoing research suggests that stress may induce some forms of cancer associated with immune system dysfunction.

Protect Yourself From Stress With Chiropractic

How can you counteract the physical aftermath of emotional stress? First, re-evaluate your lifestyle and commit to making wellness your top priority. This may mean cutting back on work or other activities — or simply focusing on more productively managing your time. Also, incorporate stress reduction techniques into your daily routine. Zap stress with aerobic exercise, tai chi, yoga and meditation or prayer. And don't forget to visit your chiropractor on a regular basis. Preventive chiropractic checkups will help you learn to manage stress and keep your spine in optimal condition, mitigating the impact of stress on your body.

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