

Stress hormones & your health

When you are under stress, your body has a physical and chemical reaction that helps it respond to trouble. It releases hormones, including adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones speed up your heart rate, make you sweat, send sugar into your blood and give you a burst of energy.

This stress response has helped humans survive over time. It's not always a bad thing. Without some stress, our bodies would not learn how to adapt to challenges. But, these hormones are meant to be released in short bursts only, to help a person get out of immediate danger.

The problem arises when someone is stressed *all the time*. Being under stress every day means these stress hormones are never fully turned off. This constant flood of stress hormones can be harmful to your health.

Cortisol and adrenaline can shut off body functions that are not essential to survival at that moment. Those functions include your immune system, reproductive system and digestion.

In addition, having high levels of stress hormones for a long time can raise your risk of heart disease, digestive problems, depression, anxiety, sleep problems and weight gain.

There is good news. Researchers are finding that certain activities can help lower your stress hormone levels. They include:



GETTING EXERCISE. Although you may not feel like walking or swimming when you're stressed, exercise lowers stress levels. And, it boosts serotonin, which is a hormone that helps you feel calm and happy.



LISTENING TO MUSIC. Have a favorite relaxing song list on your phone or computer that you can use to feel calmer.



GETTING A MASSAGE. This can also help your body produce more serotonin, which can improve your mood.



FINDING SOMETHING FUNNY. Laughing and humor can lower cortisol levels. Laugh with a friend or family member, or read a humorous book.



DANCING. People who dance regularly may have lower cortisol levels.



DRAWING, COLORING OR PAINTING. In fact, any activity in which you create something can work.

Other activities that help reduce stress include getting adequate sleep, avoiding excess coffee and eating a healthy diet.

If you feel overwhelmed by stress, talk with your doctor. There are therapies that can help you. Remember, lowering stress can help you enjoy life more and take better care of yourself.

Sources: American Heart Association, American Institute of Stress, American Psychological Association, National Institute of Mental Health