

IS STRESS MAKING YOU SICK?

STRESS is an integral part of all of our lives. It is the one condition we all share. In small doses stress can help us perform better, run faster or get out of a dangerous situation, but medical research shows that how we deal with stress has a direct impact on ones emotional and physical wellbeing. It affects our longevity and quality of life. Not only has it been linked to several diseases including cancer and heart disease, it effects ones relationships, energy, productivity, appearance, self esteem and weight.

We are living in stressful times, War, poverty, economic uncertainty, global warming and terrorism can make us feel powerless and overwhelmed. These are enormous problems that we as individuals cannot control. As we have less and less control over our *external* environment it more important than ever to get control of the things we can. These include the way we think, the way we behave and our Lifestyle Choices

STRESS is our body's *reaction* to an event. It is meant to be a temporary state of "high alert" that we turn on in times of real or anticipated danger. The "stress response" is meant to give us the extra energy we need to deal with a situation. Hormones produced by the body such as adrenaline and cortisol help to mediate this stress response. These hormones suppress bodily functions that are not urgently needed such as digestion while enhancing those functions that help us cope such as increased heart rate. This is known as the "fight or flight" response that we inherited from our ancestors. Its purpose was to secure the energy we needed to either fight or run from a life threatening situation. So the stress reaction can be a good thing when it protects us from danger but most of our stressful situations today are not life threatening.

Studies show that at least 75% of all visits to the doctor are for stress related problems. . Look at some of the ways stress physically alters our body's state.

- Acceleration of heart rate
- Increase in blood pressure
- Increase in breathing rate
- Change in blood clotting factors
- Decrease in gastro-intestinal function
- Lower immune reaction – increase risk for infection
- Muscle tension
- Increase in blood sugar and cholesterol
- Decrease in blood flow to skin
- Decrease in blood flow to kidneys

With all these physiological changes to our body it's no wonder that the stress reaction is making us sick. Stress becomes a serious problem when there is too much, it occurs too often or it lasts too long. An international famous father of stress theory, Dr. Hans Seyle found through his study of stress reactions that the body's supply of stress hormones eventually becomes exhausted and this leads to illness.

How do you know when you are experiencing too much stress? Stress shows up in four ways; physical, mental, emotional and behavioral. As people learn to recognize their own signs and symptoms they can start to analyze what is triggering their stress and learn some coping techniques.

City Centre Health and Fitness, 399 Main St. Penticton, offers Lifestyle Change and Medical Weight Loss Programs that deal with Stress Management techniques. Contact Kirby at 250-487-1481