

Massage the Stress Away and Live a Longer Life

By Joanne Laurent

Stress is everywhere these days. We worry about the economy, our jobs, the political

climate, and the high cost of medical care. It seems that everywhere we turn, something or someone is begging us to be very afraid. It has been well documented that stress is a major cause of serious illness. It has been equally well documented that massage relieves stress and can reduce or reverse the body's biochemical responses to it.

What are some of the effects of stress?

Stress has been associated with a multitude of disabling and deadly diseases. A significant number of stress-related diseases involve inflammatory processes inside the body. Left unchecked, stress and inflammation can cause diabetes, heart disease, arthritis, adrenal fatigue, autoimmune disease, cancer and Alzheimer's to name a few. After demonstrating a relationship between inflammation and stress, a study of the prefrontal cortex in rats suggested that neurodegenerative pathologies were related to stress.¹ Another study revealed that "... sustained stress itself damages the hippocampus..."² which is an area of the brain that controls memory. A study seeking answers to the longevity of approximately 2,000 centenarians who reached the age 100 to 119, said that finding effective ways to manage stress was an important element of overall healthy living habits.³

How can I eliminate stress?

You can't. But you can protect yourself by taking measures that will eliminate or reduce the negative effect that stress has on your body. Exercise and a healthy diet are crucial elements in keeping your body from crumbling under the weight of stress—but sometimes the stress is just too severe to go it alone. A massage can do wonders to alleviate the harmful physiological reactions that are caused by nervous tension, constant worry, physical trauma and overworked muscles. According to health advocate, Loren Stein, "Therapeutic massage slows down the heart and relaxes the body."⁴

Massage is often considered a luxury and, therefore, one of the first things to go when financial woes abound. Well Being Journal cited a report that stress-related illness accounts for two-thirds of all doctor visits and 80-90 percent of diseases.⁵ How much money would you save if you eliminated disease by reducing the biochemical reactions in your body that are caused by stress? If we consider that a weekly or monthly massage can prevent costly medical intervention by keeping our body's response to stress manageable, can we really afford to **not** get a massage?

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³ New England Centenarian Study (an ongoing study at Boston University)

Centenarians Provide Model For Aging Gracefully

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⁴ Loren Stein, Lifestyle and wellness

Managing Stress

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⁵ Susan Smith Jones, PhD

More Joy & Less Stress in Seven Easy Steps

Well Being Journal, March/April 2009; 18; 12-14