

Handling Stress the Tibb Way

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Overview

Many of us are under a great deal of stress these days. What with financial problems, worrying levels of crime, the threat of unemployment, environmental pollution, climate change concerns, the Rand plummeting... if you are not stressed, you probably don't know how serious things are! Stress is, understandably, generally seen in a negative light. However there is a positive spin to it – without some level of stress, we would achieve very little. Stress keeps us focused on the task ahead. It is what gets us up in the morning, what motivates us to get jobs done, and helps us cope with difficult situations. Good, natural stress is an incentive towards achievement, a spur to success. Indeed, without stress life would be dull, boring and featureless. Even so, stress means different things to different people. For some, it's what dynamic, go-getting, deal-making businessmen (and women) thrive on. Correct – but it also affects virtually everyone: teachers and nurses, factory workers and military personnel, single mothers and harassed housewives, managers and the unemployed. Unfortunately, stress can have a profound impact on our state of health, and on our quality of life. Unrelieved stress can influence the onset of several chronic diseases of lifestyle, and aggravate existing ones. Tibb offers valuable guidance for understanding this disorder, and suggests a number of remedies to counteract it.

What is stress?

When we are aware of a threat to ourselves, our nervous system is alerted immediately. A wide range of body responses, typical of fear, called the “fight or flight” response, is triggered, which lets us react to this threat. This is an automatic reflex, and we have no control over it. It controls our basic processes such as breathing, heart rate and hormone release from glands. The overall effect of the “fight or flight” response is to prepare us to react effectively to the threat, so that we flee the place, see better, think clearer, or prepare to stay and fight.

Our response to stressors is both physical and mental. Our muscles become tense, energy production is boosted, more oxygen is provided for the brain and muscles, emotional tension rises, and our mental faculties become fully aroused. For Tibb, stress reflects an intense interaction between mind and body, between alarm regarding possible danger and our personal response.

What brings on stress?

Changes in personal relationships are the source of much stress. Marriage, birth of a child, adolescence, divorce, job loss, retirement and death of a spouse are powerful stressors. Stress is commonly brought on by regular overworking, a competitive work or social environment, and difficult decisions to be made. External factors such as constant noise, domestic tensions, threats to personal safety, overcrowding, and a daily diet of news about disasters and atrocities can also contribute to unhealthy stress levels.

How stress affects our body

The typical effects of stress are familiar to all, but vary from one person to another. Typically, we feel anxious and fearful. Our breathing becomes deep and rapid, our heart begins to pound, blood pressure rises and our muscles tense up. We clench our teeth, and our mouth dries up. Our hands feel clammy and cold, but our palms become sweaty. Visible trembling of the limbs and evident sweating may occur. Unbeknown to us, secretion of the stress hormone, adrenaline, surges, dilating blood vessels to supply internal organs with energy. Emotional tension rises, leading in some people to crying and nervous laughter, in others to angry outbursts or mood swings, and in yet others to irrational decisions and impulsive behaviour.

Health effects of chronic stress

With time, stress starts to interfere with our ability to live a normal life. Over a longer period of time, stress can actually become dangerous; it starts to inflict damage to both body and mind. The sufferer becomes more anxious, irritable, and sleeps badly. He or she suffers frequent headaches, neck stiffness and back pain, and becomes depressed. Signs such as fatigue, headaches, weight loss (or gain) and elevated heart rate and blood pressure develop. Troublesome symptoms appear – upset stomach, bowel behaviour becomes unsettled, with bouts of constipation and diarrhoea. If unresolved successfully, a racing heart and tightness in the chest may alarm us, as will mental fatigue; our family and friends will worry about our unusual behaviour, such as lack of attention and focus, or outbursts of temper or aggression. Good, sound, uninterrupted sleep becomes a distant fond memory.

Stress aggravates other ailments

Stress can make existing problems worse. If we become sick during a stressful time it becomes harder to recover. Chronic stress has long been known to increase the risk of some cardio-vascular diseases such as hypertension and coronary heart disease. Stress also seems to increase the risk of other disorders such as diabetes, depression, obesity, Alzheimer's disease and asthma. One reason is that some coping habits adopted by the stressed person, such as overeating, smoking, drinking and drugging, add their own health risks.

Chronic stress can also adversely affect the immune system, by provoking the constant flow of stress hormones. This means that we are less likely to respond to infections and cancer than we otherwise would be.

Tibb and stress

Tibb has always maintained that there is a powerful link between mind and body regarding health and illness, and that undue stress can cause illness. Tibb sees stress and its consequences as a classic example of internal disharmony affecting our body's normal state. As a result of this, there is an imbalance in the qualities of heat and dryness.

You may be stressing if:

- You are anxious or agitated for no good reason
- You are moodier, or more irritable or short tempered than usual
- You can't concentrate or make decisions
- You start drinking, smoking or sleeping more
- Your digestion is disturbed – diarrhoea and/or constipation, maybe swallowing difficulties
- You start getting chest pains, or general aches and pains
- You suffer from frequent coughs and colds or other infections
- Your heart starts racing for no real reason
- Your sex drive diminishes inexplicably
- You are becoming a loner, avoiding family, friends
- You neglect yourself, your responsibilities
- You become deeply pessimistic about life in general

Measures to counteract stress therefore have to reverse this imbalance. Food consumed, for example, has to be cold and moist in quality.

Tibb recognises two basic forms of stress: (a) the immediate, occasional form which affects us briefly, then subsides without damaging our body, and (b) the chronic, enduring form which persists for a considerable time, and can do considerable damage and aggravate other disorders.

We know that stress causes a serious imbalance in our body's basic living processes. For example, wide-ranging disturbances in our hormonal balance develop. As a result, our levels of adrenaline and cortisol, the stress hormones, fluctuate wildly, causing most of our stress-related signs and symptoms. This leads to a fall in the power of Physis, and so our capacity for inner healing.

Tibb sees the need to deal with our stress as the only way to achieve optimum health. An unsatisfactory state of health commonly results from stress these days, which often goes hand-in-hand with a deteriorating lifestyle. Our emotional state has long been recognised as one of the six major Tibb Lifestyle Factors. Apart from stress, an inadequate lifestyle often includes bad food selection and eating practice, poor sleep, little exercise, unsatisfactory breathing practice, and irregular waste elimination.

The way we deal with chronic stress – our so-called coping mechanisms – largely depends on our temperament. In Tibb, this is the person's unique blend of personality, genetic make-up, and physique. As we know too well, some people handle stress better than others!

How can Tibb help a stressed person?

The route to good physical health lies mainly through a prudent lifestyle and good personal habits. This helps maintain humoral balance, resulting in internal harmony between the qualities. In the same way, the route to good emotional health, free from anxiety and unwanted stress, lies in a balance between work and social, domestic and professional, physical and spiritual.

Tibb employs three tactics for dealing with stress-related poor health. First, and most obvious, is to address the person's underlying cause of stress. This may take the form of self-analysis, spiritual activities, or counselling.

Avoid over-exertion and situations which lead to further worry, anger and other negative emotions.

- Try to develop a positive attitude.
- Work, domestic or social problems should be discussed, if the situation allows.
- Jobs done for a favour should be delayed or refused. Saying "no" is an effective stress reliever.
- Avoid being constantly available via the smart-phone, email or social media.
- Postpone unnecessary decisions.
- Take periodic breaks or holidays.

Second, the person should identify and make corrections to an unbalanced lifestyle. Adopting the Tibb Lifestyle Factors will prove beneficial in most stress situations. For example, a better diet will include fruit, grains, nuts and vegetables, supplemented with fermented foods such as yogurt. Heavy meats, such as beef, mutton and pork, should be replaced with poultry and fish, preferably oily fish such as pilchards, sardines and mackerel. So Tibb advises making time for healthy meals.

Other practical lifestyle measures involve increasing physical activity. Walking or other activities of similar intensity can help reduce stress by boosting the release of endorphins, our body's natural mood-booster. By committing to a brisk daily walk or similar, a more realistic and positive attitude to life will emerge.

Tibb's guidelines in chronic stress

Lifestyle changes

- Relaxation – meditation and breathing exercises
- Food – avoid hard meats, eat more fruit and vegetables
- Physical activity – try taking regular exercise, Yoga
- Sleep – go for better sleep hygiene

Behavioural changes

- Try to set realistic goals
- Work on priorities and managing time better
- Try to deal with own problems, not others'
- Try to avoid multi-tasking

Personal habit changes

- Resist alcohol, smoking, drugs as coping tactics
- Bring family and friends into the picture

Other lifestyle improvements include measures on sleep hygiene, combined breathing and meditation exercises, and restraint on smoking, drinking and other excesses. In many stressed people these actually make the problem worse.

Finally, the person's Physis should be helped with one or more stress-relieving therapies. Boosting Physis is one of the mainstays of Tibb practice. By actively helping to restore inner harmony, it helps people recuperate from illness, repair bodily damage, and maintain good health.

Tibb's stress-reducing techniques

- **Acupuncture** is an ancient healing art in which finger pressure on key points on our skin stimulates our inner healing powers. Acupressure helps to relieve tension, reduce pain, and even promote spiritual health. It is a very effective self-treatment for relieving stress-related headaches, insomnia and anxiety. It also boosts the immune system.
- The age-old use of **herbal remedies**, especially herbal teas, is another option which offers relief from stress. Amongst these are valerian, liquorice, almonds and *gingko biloba*. Combinations of herbs, such as Tibb's "Stress-Away", have also been shown to help in relieving stress. The individual herbs contained in this and other products have been shown over the centuries to relieve the symptoms of stress, and restore the person's inner harmony.
- Tibb recommends **aromatherapy**, where, for example, essential oils such as geranium, jasmine and lavender are added to the stress-prone person's hot bath. Regular body massage, especially with selected essential oils, will definitely help; not only does it assist Physis, but it provides "quality time" for the person to mentally resolve problems. Other relaxation techniques, if available, should be considered.
- **Body massage**, with or without essential oils is well worth considering for stress reduction. It is known to reduce stress on both physical and mental planes. It is particularly effective in alleviating anxiety and improving sleep quality. A regular massage can also improve immunity, and so aid Physis.

Final points

Not all stress is bad for us. In fact, most people benefit from some stress when facing up to challenges. But chronic stress can cause a range of symptoms, and so affect our overall health and well-being. If not dealt with properly, chronic stress overwhelms Physis, especially its immune component, and can bring on several chronic diseases and aggravate other existing disorders. However, Tibb offers a range of actions on how to manage it. Tibb sees lifestyle improvement, especially in relaxation and physical activity, as the natural and effective way to reduce most stress.

Improving sleep quality also helps, as does the use of stress relieving herbal remedies and teas. Other Tibb

recommended techniques such as acupuncture, aromatherapy and massage are beneficial. The bonus from effective stress relief is a marked decrease in the risk of disorders of the heart, circulation and brain

Further Reading

Tibb and Stress: <http://www.tibb.co.za/healing-with-tibb.pdf>

Stress and physical activity: <http://www.health24.com/Mental-Health/Stress/News/Staying-active-reduces-stress-20131021>

Acupuncture: http://www.acupuncture.com/articles/immune_system_boosting.htm

Body massage: <http://www.massagetherapy.com/learnmore/benefits.php>

Tibb and Lifestyle: http://www.tibb.co.za/articles/Tibb_and_Lifestyle.pdf

Tibb and Physis: http://www.tibb.co.za/articles/Tibb_and_Physis%20.pdf

Tibb and herbal therapy: <http://www.livescience.com/16975-herbal-supplements-stress-reduction.html>