

## What happens when you become habitually tense?

**Uncontrolled stress leads to all kinds of health problems. Chronic fatigue, insomnia, IBS, ulcers, high blood pressure, asthma, migraine, to name but a few.**



When you are “stressed”, your body is activating the “fight or flight” reflex. Primitive man needed this mechanism to survive. This has very positive effects when immediate action is required. The effects of perceiving danger result in the adrenal glands producing about 40 hormones, most importantly adrenalin and cortisol. The adrenalin gives you that boost of energy that enables the muscles to work very effectively and the brain to be on ‘high alert’. However there are some less pleasant side effects.

Physical symptoms include;

- Shallow breathing,
- Pale skin,
- Urge to go to the loo,
- Wobbly legs,
- Very narrow focus of attention,
- Rapid heartbeat,
- Dry mouth,
- Sweaty palms
- and I’m sure you could add your own experiences to that list!

The effect of adrenalin is very useful when a sabre-tooth tiger is about to attack you, but not so useful if you are sitting in a traffic jam and late for a meeting!

If we become **habitually** stressed, or addicted to stress, then the adrenalin and cortisol that keeps us going when we are living life in the fast lane begin to have a detrimental effect on our bodies.

- The immune system is suppressed, increasing the risk of infections.
- The body's rate of repair is slowed down.
- The metabolism is slowed
- Vital nutrients are robbed by the surfeit of stress hormones.
- You might get headaches, back aches, dizziness, heartburn, dry mouth, and when you eventually have to rest, feel completely exhausted. You are likely to feel irritable, grumpy and possibly depressed.
- The brain tends to operate in a very black and white, do or die style of thinking – everything feels like a drama.

### **Mind-body Connections**

The brain has another 'primitive' reaction that has ensured the survival of the human race. Psychologists call it '**pattern matching**.' In other words, the primitive part of our brain will look for matches with previous memories when we are experiencing something new, and you will feel the same emotion as that previous event evoked, before having even thought about it consciously. Thinking about our ancestors, if primitive man walks down that path where the tiger had attacked him, he will notice feeling scared, sweaty palms etc, whereas before the attack it was a pleasant place to be. In today's world, this means you might get nervous before an interview, find yourself feeling uneasy with someone because they remind you of someone you have bad memories of, or develop a phobia around flying, spiders etc.

This pattern recognising ability is also a wonderful survival technique, it helps us learn and recognise safe or harmful situations rapidly. However we need to develop flexibility of response and consider the implications of this ability;

- The memories we create through worrying – the "what ifs" – tend to be treated as real experiences when we are anticipating what is really a neutral event. "Nothing is good or bad unless we think it so" (Hamlet). Have you ever noticed how different it feels when you are looking forward to something and expecting pleasure instead of pain or shame? It can feel so much better just feeling calm and confident.
- Your body cannot tell the difference between real experiences and imagined ones, so when you are worrying about something that *might* happen, then your fears are really **False Evidence Appearing Real**, and your body picks up on the *imagined danger* and responds accordingly.

If you do not feed your body the vital nutrients it needs, then the wonderful orchestra of hormones and neurotransmitters cannot play out their overtures to allow you to develop your ability to be happy and relaxed, calm and confident, and able to face the challenges life presents to you.

Good sleep and recognition of your natural needs for a balance between work, rest and play also enhances the body's healing and repair processes. Sleep allows you to dream out the unfinished business of the day each night so that you can face a new day with a fresh outlook.

**Listen to your body and take care of yourself, you are worth it!**



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