Fit Tip

Stress: Why You Have It and How It Hurts Your Health

Modern life is full of pressures, fears, and frustration. Racing against deadlines, sitting in traffic, and arguing with your spouse all make your body react as if you were facing a physical threat. In this day in age, instead of protecting you, it could be making you more vulnerable to life-threatening health problems. Fortunately, you can develop skills to avoid some stressors and limit the effects of others.

How stress effects your body:

- **Digestive system.** For most, it is common to have a stomachache or diarrhea when you are stressed. This occurs because stress hormones slow down the release of stomach acid and the emptying of the stomach. The same hormones stimulate the colon and cause the contents to pass through more quickly. Chronic stress can lead to continuously high levels of cortisol– which can increase appetite and cause weight gain.
- **Immune system.** Chronic stress tends to dampen your immune system, making you more susceptible to colds and other infections. In chronic stress, the continuously elevated levels of cortisol suppresses the immune response.
- **Nervous system.** Chronic stress can produce constant feelings of anxiety, helplessness, and impending doom.
- **Cardiovascular system.** High levels of cortisol can also raise your heart rate and increase your blood pressure and blood lipid (cholesterol and triglyceride) levels.
- **Other systems.** Stress worsens many skin conditions (i.e. psoriasis, eczema, hives and acne) and can trigger asthma attacks.

Remember, everyone reacts differently to stress!

Techniques to reduce the effects of stress:

- Look after your body with diet and exercise
- Learn to relax with deep breathing or meditation
- Shift your outlook by looking at situations from a more positive angle
- Get help if you keep falling into the same pattern

www.mayoclinic.com