

IN DISTRESS? START DE-STRESSING

Stress can do more harm than you think and even trigger the onset of diabetes. Henry Lew, psychologist, National Healthcare Group Polyclinics, shows you how to avoid getting worked up with some simple relaxation techniques.

There is evidence that stress can trigger the onset of diabetes and also worsen the condition. Job stress has been associated with an increased risk for glycolipid metabolic dysfunction, leading to coronary artery disease.

When you are stressed, the hypothalamus secretes corticotropin, which releases adrenocorticotropin. This travels to the adrenal cortex and activates the secretion of cortisol. Cortisol affects a wide range of processes, including the breaking down of carbohydrates and lipids. Stress tends to raise lipids instead of breaking them down. Furthermore, due to a relative or absolute lack of insulin in diabetes, an increase in blood glucose due to stress cannot be adequately metabolised. Hence, stress is a potential contributor to chronic hyperglycaemia in diabetes.

Stress may also result in undesirable reaction that is detrimental to one's health, such as increased smoking of cigarettes, higher consumption of alcohol and overeating. All of these can increase the risk of morbidity and mortality from arterial disease and diabetes.

Fortunately, research suggests that in addition to medication, managing stress does help to improve lipid profiles and reduce the risk of cardiovascular disease in diabetes patients.

Here are some possible ways to better manage stress:

- Be aware of your own reactions to stress
- Recognise and accept your limitations
- Talk with people you trust about your worries or problems
- Set realistic goals
- Get enough sleep
- Maintain a healthy diet
- Exercise regularly

In addition, you might want to practise the following relaxation technique by Dr Herbert Benson from Harvard Medical School:

- Pick a focus word, short phrase, or prayer that is firmly rooted in your belief system, such as "one," "peace," "The Lord is my shepherd," "Hail, Mary, full of grace," or "shalom"
- Sit quietly in a comfortable position
- Close your eyes
- Relax your muscles, progressing from your feet to your calves, thighs, abdomen, shoulders, head, and neck
- Breathe slowly and naturally, and while doing it, say your focus word, sound, phrase, or prayer silently as you exhale
- Assume a passive attitude. Don't worry about how well you're doing. When other thoughts come to mind, simply say to yourself, "Oh, well," and gently return to your repetition
- Continue for 10 to 20 minutes
- Do not stand up immediately. Continue sitting quietly for a minute or so, allowing other thoughts to return. Then open your eyes and sit for another minute before rising
- Practise the technique once or twice daily. Good times to do so are before breakfast and before dinner.

Managing stress is just like another form of exercise requiring constant practice. The more we do it the better we become, emotionally and physically.

References:

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4. http://www.mbmi.org/basics/whatis_response_elicitation.asp

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