

Stress (part 2) - Is your stress 'out of control?'

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As discussed in previous articles, stress can come in many forms. Whether it is from a chemical, physical or emotional source, the body will react and attempt to deal with it in a similar way.



At one stage in our evolution stress presented itself in physical ways and our bodies knew how to react. We spent our days preparing (hunting, killing and cooking) our food. We expended energy and food was the return. However nowadays the new energy currency is clearly money! ***I work (expend energy) I get paid.***

Interestingly now, food is taken for granted and can be obtained with very little effort or energy. Instead of investing a relative proportion of our income to ensuring that we supply our bodies with quality food and nutrients, we seem far more interested in obtaining the latest gadget to make us even more time efficient.

What is also interesting is how, over the years, we have been 'tricked' into thinking that what appears in those lovely brightly coloured packages, with promises of health and vitality, is actually food..?!

An excellent example is margarine. With promises of low fat and reduced cholesterol we consume large amounts of this modern miracle of science.

Although butter does contain saturated fat, this is not the enemy. The saturated fat in butter contains Butyric acid, an excellent pre-biotic that feeds good gut bacteria. Whereby margarine in contrast is actually made from cheap rancid vegetable oils, that after processing turn grey, due to the Nickel particles that are added as a catalyst to hydrogenation. Ironically they then add colouring and flavourings to offset the grotesque odour and so that it resembles butter..? I think it's just one of those instinctive things to avoid eating anything that is grey; Call me old fashioned!?⁴

Clearly eating this miracle of modern science is easier to spread on your toast in the morning, but will increase the 'stress' placed onto the body as it desperately attempts (unsuccessfully) to process it.

Good nutrition can be summed up in 4 words...

Organic Meat and Veg!

Avoid anything low-fat... Especially low-fat fat!?

Food aside, emotional stress used to be exclusive to high earners, however now, it knows no socio-economic boundaries! This has big implications for the entire populous.

In fact, workers (of lower pay grades) irrespective of lifestyle choices (smoking, alcohol etc.) are now experiencing more stress than their bosses and are ***3 times more likely to die of a heart attack!***¹

How can this be? They can come into work and leave on time, and have fewer key decisions to make..? Stress in the workplace appears to be all about control, or rather... a perception of control!

Note: *The less control people had over their work, the higher their blood pressure during work hours!*¹

Some interesting research was performed on babies where they were played peaceful music when they depressed a handset. The babies seemed to enjoy this process. However, if the music was played randomly, for identical lengths of time, irrespective of when the babies depressed the handset they became agitated (and stressed)!?¹

Talking of stressed babies...

Did you know that this is where the infamous heart rate predictor 220 minus your age originated? 220 is the average heart rate of a stressed fetus. So they decided to decrease it progressively by one each year as you age for safety.

Apparently the Big 3 emotional stressors are:

1. Relationships (divorce, work-related, parental, children etc.)
2. Financial worries
3. Death (in the family)²

Are all of these situations linked to a perceived lack of control?

What is also interesting is the way in which we perceive the choices available to us as individuals.

Clearly we live in a very individualist (all about us) society, along with the U.S. and Australia (coming out as the top 3) relative to countries like China and India, where they adopt a more collective (for the greater good) approach.¹

Note: what is an interesting link is that these are also the Top 3 countries for ~~self-indulgence~~... Oops sorry... obesity!



Our upbringing and culture can influence how and what we observe: *When a picture of a fish tank was placed in front of a group of Americans they only really remembered the large fish in the foreground, however when the same picture was placed in front of a Japanese group they remembered and commented on the background i.e. The smaller fish and the plants.*¹

This small example starts to highlight the very different ways we observe what is important and therefore how we perceive things, which will inevitably affect the choices we make!?

If we take this a little further and look at this from another angle:

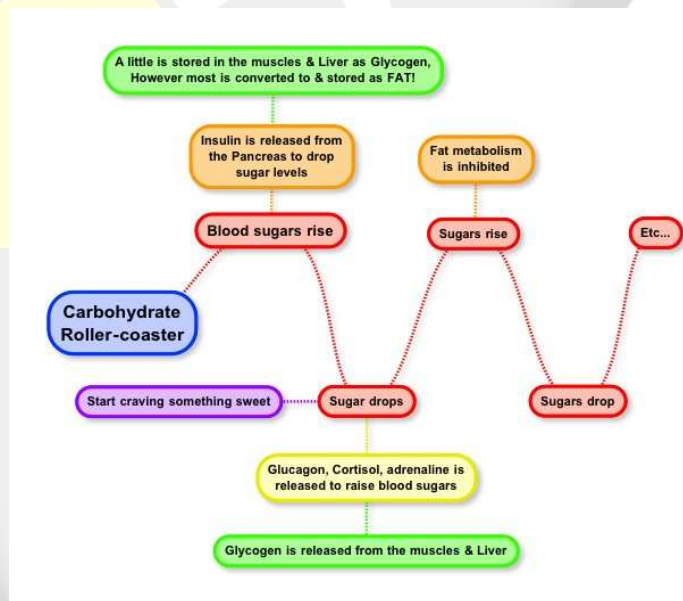
Werner Heisenberg's uncertainty principle states that: ***"The instrument of measurement, as well as the observer of the experiment, influence the outcome."***³

In short this means that dependant on how you measure something and who is actually measuring it (therefore the perception) will actually 'change' the results - not a good thing if you are a devoted follower of research!

Without transcending to spiritual levels, this can have huge implications on our lives and how we can influence situations based upon how we view them and the variety of options and solutions we see available to us at any one time.

Let's put this in a physiological way...

If you eat a starchy, sugary breakfast you get a large insulin spike, followed by a sugar crash, which deprives the brain of glucose (the brain's only fuel source), so your brain struggles to function effectively. The body then releases some more hormones (one of which is cortisol - your stress hormone) to raise your blood sugar levels. So within 2 hours of breakfast you are grumpy (low blood sugar), hungry and stressed² (elevated cortisol) and you've only just got to the office - not the best start you would agree..?!



Being stressed will alter your perception of a situation by narrowing your focus and therefore your ability to see all of the possible solutions available to you. This altered perception can be the difference between seeing an opportunity or a series of barriers.

Elevated cortisol (stress) will also affect your behaviour by inhibiting the production of feel good hormones (testosterone and serotonin). Serotonin is mainly produced in the gut and linked to healthy regular eating patterns. Highlighting one of the many negative effects of restricting your food intake on state of mind.²

Note: Long-term calorie restriction (dieting) will increase 'stress' levels in the body. Making you fatter, less able to make effective decisions and depressed!²

So to summarise...

'Riding' stress will affect your emotional and physical health. It is a false economy that will inevitably catch up with you and demand payback!

We have the ability to create more choice by promoting a balanced (healthy) chemical environment in the body, which will alter our perceptions of 'our' world and the choices available to us.

This can be the missing link in perceiving a situation as either inside or outside of our control, subsequently reducing our negative emotional stress.

Investing the time in yourself to make sensible lifestyle choices (food, drink, sleep and exercise), wherever possible, will make you healthier and subsequently more effective, offsetting any investment in time used to create these positive changes.

This will allow you to 'see the wood for the trees' and create the life (and body) you truly deserve.

Choose to be healthy!

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Jason'.

References and recommended reading:

1. *The Art of Choosing*, Sheena Iyengar
2. *The Cortisol Connection*, Shawn Talbott
3. *Trances People live*, Stephen Wolinsky
4. *Nourishing Traditions*, Sally Fallon

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