

Stress and Longevity



by L. John Mason, Ph.D.

Learn to Control Stress to affect the Body's Natural Response to Aging

Do you want to live forever? Maybe this isn't possible, but you probably do want to live your life with grace, health and happiness. Most people are aware that daily life can be stressful and that this stress can affect your health or, at least, your quality of life. Everyone has different sets of stressors and everyone has their own unique way of responding to these stressors. Though we are all different, it is very important to realize that being a "victim" to our stressors is virtually universal and with awareness can be kept to a minimum. Stress will and *does* affect our body's natural response to aging.

Stress can cause (or exacerbate) symptoms such as: headaches, neck aches, back pain, high blood pressure, stomach symptoms (including pain, poor absorption, diarrhea, and constipation), heart rate, circulation, sexual dysfunction (and satisfaction), levels of panic/anxiety, depression, some forms of arthritis, and, most commonly, sleep disturbance problems. Stress can also play a role in general health or concerns regarding: your energy levels, your skin, your weight, and your levels of performance. The aging process can be accelerated in negative ways by uncontrolled stress.

There are subtle ways that stress can affect your quality of life. Even in mid-life we notice that our energy level seems lower. Or we find that we cannot focus on tasks as well as we would like. These can be less severe than painful major symptoms, but can be stress' way of robbing our enjoyment and reducing our productivity! We do not have to be victims to stress.

Awareness and proper self-care which minimizes the impact of stress can assist you in reducing, if not eliminating, the negative affects of life's stresses. People live longer, healthier, happier lives when stress is lessened. Productivity, creativity, increased energy levels, and enhanced ability to communicate more clearly are all possible positive side-effects from wellness and appropriate stress management.

Even though bad habits can begin in childhood, it is never too late to learn and develop positive coping skills which will enhance your quality of life.

It's important to understand the issues relating to stress. How many of us are stressed out because our children are

growing up and the stress they can cause increases with their independence (and our lack of control over their choices?) How many of us are struggling with aging parents, siblings, spouses in ways that increase our levels of daily stress? This is due to our care and concern and with our lack of control over the issues with these family members.

As we "mature," we lose some of our strength and flexibility. The things that we used to "handle" now seem to get to us. We are not as balanced as we respond to current issues as well as we would like. Things like: the economy, the war on terrorism, the media's influence over our kids, the state of our neighborhoods, all seem to be able to get to us more now than ever before. Levels of change which we once craved and embraced, seem more intimidating as we get older. Fears and anxieties may have a growing negative impact on us for we do not have the energy, strength, or flexibility to adapt as easily as we did when we were younger.

► Ten Tips for Controlling Stress

(Which Affects Longevity and Quality of Life)

1. Stress Management

Practice daily meditation, including moments of appreciation and gratitude. Breathing techniques are helpful, as well as deep relaxations to create awareness and control physical and emotional symptoms of stress. If you begin a practice of daily deep relaxation, remember that it may take 4-6 weeks of regular use to begin to see results. And it may require 8-12 weeks of regular daily use to begin to get the maximum benefits of this program. It takes time to change life-long habits, but it empowers you in ways that you may not have dreamed possible.

2. Exercise

Exercise at least 5 times per week for 30 minutes or more to reduce muscle tensions, improve energy levels, and exercise your heart. (Consider: walking, yoga, jogging, rowing, cross-country skiing, stair climbing, hiking, swimming, etc.)

3. Diet and Nutrition

Do not depend on alcohol or drugs for stress management. Reduce caffeine. Use good supplementation for key trace minerals (like chromium, calcium, iron) and anti-oxidants.

4. Planning

Know your goals and work toward them. Don't forget to make plans for your mental development, your creative and aesthetic needs, your finances, career, social interactions with family and friends, and your spiritual needs. Never stop learning or trying new things.

5. Communication

Learn to really listen! Develop the best skills for finding clarity of your thoughts and feelings, and then discover the best ways to appropriately communicate these thoughts. If you focus on what your partner is saying, and not on your response, you will be better able to answer concerns or objections in a more relaxed and convincing way.

6. Support

No man is an island. We need a community of people—both family and friends, if possible—to support us. Give as much as you get. And remember to let others give to you. (This is difficult, but the greatest gift you can offer!)

7. Spiritual Well-being

Know how to connect with your spirit and then make time to do it. Know what brings you joy and happiness, and pursue these activities. Your quest may take you to a beautiful spot outdoors, to a quiet period of reflection in a garden, to an art museum, or to the park to watch children play. There are many possibilities.


8. Positive Mental Attitude/ Avoid Negativity

Avoid negative people and dwelling on negative thoughts. Take good care of yourself and find the positive in every experience. Learn from mistakes and laugh at these lessons, especially when these get tough.

9. Acceptance

Break from fear and find acceptance for what we all must face. Easier said than done, but when your life includes regular self-care you will find the internal strength and self-love to develop acceptance from deep within. It is amazing what regular stress management can do to assist you in your search for peace and acceptance.

10. Humor

Laugh out loud daily. Create situations where you can find the happiness and humor to smile and laugh. Make a special quest for fun! 

L. John Mason, Ph.D. has coached individuals and consulted for organizations since opening the **Stress Education Center** in Cotati in 1978. His books, **Guide to Stress Reduction and Stress Passages: Surviving Life's Transitions Gracefully**, have sold more than 100,000 copies. The **Stress Education Center's** website at www.dstress.com offers information and stress management products including an on-line stress management course, audio tapes/CD's, and various performance enhancing seminars. For more information see the ad on page 23.

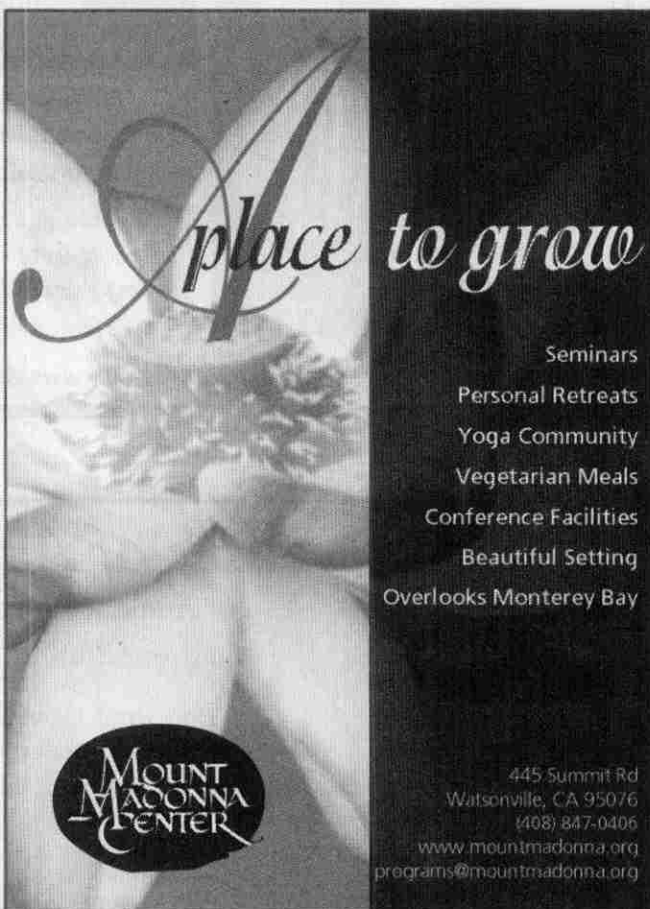
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