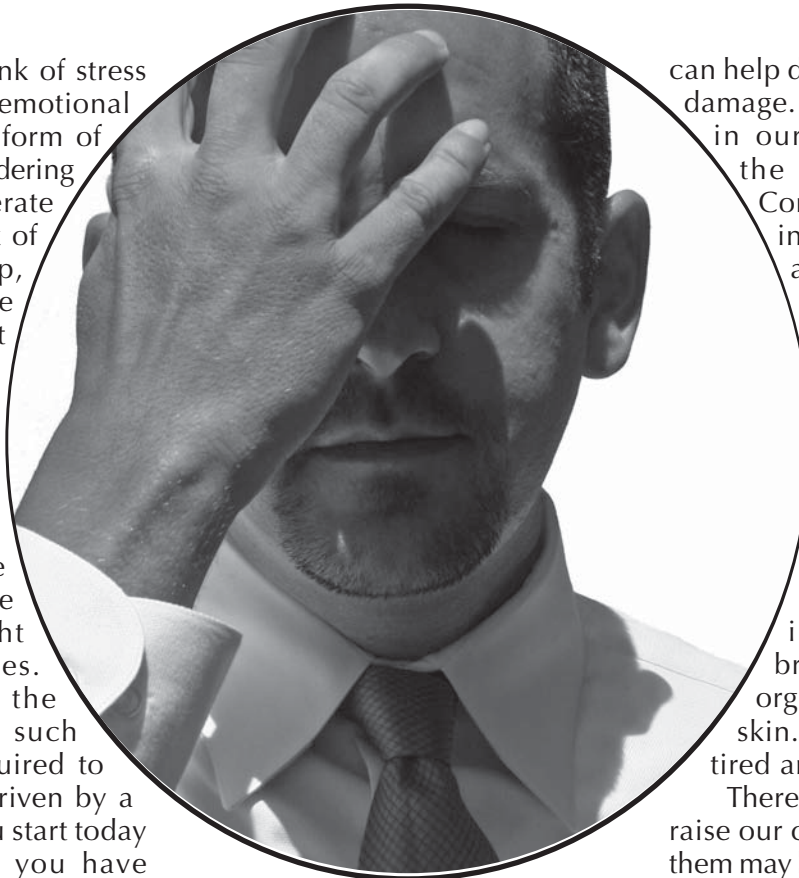


# Stressed Out and Don't Know It?

**M**any people think of stress in terms of an emotional state. Another form of stress we should be considering is stressors that accelerate the aging process. Lack of exercise, lack of sleep, overexposure to the sun and sugar and fat consumption are a few of the reasons some of us look and feel better or worse than others. All of these factors are under our control, yet many of us lack the understanding or desire to address what might take years off our lives. If you're looking for the quick fix, there is no such thing. You may be required to adapt a new lifestyle driven by a healthier mindset. If you start today addressing areas that you have neglected, over time you will feel and see the difference.

An understanding of what happens when the body is in a state of stress is helpful. Any of the above stresses will promote free radical




damage and accelerate aging. Whenever there is infection or trauma created in the body, free radicals will be created. Vitamins C and E, beta-carotene, and green and white teas are antioxidants that

can help defend against free radical damage. As we age, the hormones in our bodies decrease with the exception of cortisol. Cortisol is one hormone that increases as we get older and during periods of stressful demands on the body. Cortisol is essential for healthy physiological functioning, but when it is present for long periods of time, it affects the body adversely. Increased levels of cortisol can decrease muscle mass, destroy the immune system, shrink brain cells and other vital organs and cause thinning of skin. In turn, we look and feel tired and run down.


There are many factors that can raise our cortisol levels, and one of them may be very familiar to many of us! Many people's favorite morning pick me up is coffee. You should know before you reach for your second or third cup of coffee, that caffeine raises cortisol and insulin levels. When too much insulin is released it has an adverse effect on the immune system, brain cells, sugar metabolism, and can cause weight gain. Caffeine also acts as a diuretic, depleting the body of fluid and minerals, particularly calcium and zinc. In addition, it can stimulate elevations in heart rate and blood pressure and can lower digestive system efficiency. If you must have a morning beverage, try substituting a decaf green or white tea or a naturally decaffeinated red tea for all the benefits of the antioxidants found in them.

Another factor mentioned above

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that can dramatically increase stress levels is lack of sleep. Studies are showing that less than 8 hours of sleep a night can contribute to weight gain by disrupting the hormones that control your eating habits and metabolism. Deprived sleep interferes with carbohydrate metabolism which leads to weight gain. Many times sleep is disrupted because of all the other stressors we don't address in our lives.

The quantity and quality of sleep are both important. Recommendations for adults fall between 7 and 8 hours a night. Avoid stimulants in the evening, including caffeine, sodas or chocolate. Try a chamomile tea, known for its benefits of being a sleep aid. Avoid exercise and a heavy meal before bedtime. Realize that the "night cap" to calm you down has a price. Alcohol may help you get to sleep but it will cause you to wake up throughout the night. To improve your sleep, do something for yourself every day to reduce the risk of stress. Include some type of exercise, yoga or Pilates to reduce the risk of depression and stress in your life.

Sun exposure is another factor to consider. When we walk outside in the sun we immediately begin to trigger free radical damage formation in our skin causing premature skin aging, skin cancer and other skin changes. Approximately 90% of the symptoms of premature skin aging occur from ultraviolet rays, UVA or UVB prolonged exposure. UVB affects the outer layer of skin, the epidermis, and is the primary agent responsible for sunburns. Studies are showing that UVA is a major contributor to skin damage and penetrates deeper into the skin. UV radiation causes collagen to break down at a higher rate than with aging. Sunlight damages collagen fibers and causes the accumulation of abnormal elastin. The rebuilding process that occurs from sunlight results in disorganized collagen fibers, known as solar scars. When the skin repeats this poor rebuilding

process over and over from constant over exposure to the sun, wrinkles develop. Any sunscreen you choose should include Mexoryl, which is known to protect skin from wrinkle-causing UVA rays. Some sunscreens only protect against UVB rays.

Even your diet can be a factor in what increases or decreases stress in your life. Simple carbohydrates cause a burst of sugar to be released in your body. This burst causes many stresses to the body. Sugar will promote a sharp spike in insulin levels and over time this may result in accelerated aging, increased risk of heart disease, many forms of cancer, memory loss, mental deterioration and more. If you do choose to eat refined sugars you should combine them with good fats, fiber, and protein to slow absorption. Realize that eating sugar causes your body to crave more sugar. That may be the addiction you think you have. Read the contents on your labels. Don't concentrate on the carbohydrate number; look at the grams of sugar listed on the label.

According to diet surveys conducted by the USDA, the average American consumes 20 teaspoons of added sugar each day. Here is an eye-opening example: the USDA conducted a survey on average teenage boys and found they consume 868 cans of soda per year! A 12 ounce can has 9-12 teaspoons of sugar. This is how teens get 15 of their 34 teaspoons of sugar each day.

The bottom line is, in this day and age, we have to become more knowledgeable about our health and how we lead our lives. We are constantly bombarded with stressors to the body by just being alive. We are living in a time when many people are not taking care of their emotional as well as physical stressors. We all need to invest some time every day to take care of ourselves, improve our health and reduce stress to live longer and healthier lives.

*Submitted by Carolyn Phillips, founder of Fit Behavior with locations in Avon and Rocky Hill. For more information, contact Carolyn at [www.fitbehavior.com](http://www.fitbehavior.com) or (860) 529-9867. See ad on pg 17.*

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