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## STRESS LESS

Managing your stress levels is vital to your wellbeing, writes Carolyn Hansen. This is where exercise comes in.

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MOST OF US have heard at one time or another that disease and debilitating illness is stress induced. That means that stress is a primary player in bringing on disease in our bodies.



If we truly want to achieve the balance our body is crying out for through mood swings, depression, weight gain and illness we must address both our physical body and our mental/emotional state.

They are intricately connected and without a doubt doing challenging physical exercise is an important tool to keeping both sides happy and healthy.

But keeping the physical body “tuned up” is only half the battle. Sure you get “feel good” hormones as a bonus when you challenge your body physically but the mind requires its own space and time to heal when the body is quiet and at rest.

Physical activity is what shapes and challenges our body to be stronger, it’s a good thing. Our minds need the same kind of nourishing ... some form of exercise that build its muscles (its resolve) or it will continue to weaken and fall prey to destructive thoughts.

Without attention to our “inner selves” where the controls are we soon give in to stress, destructive feelings and eventually actions such as anger and violence.

It's not hard to see that stress makes us miserable and reduces the quality of our lives and taxes our immune system to the max opening the door to illness and disease.

The immune system is an amazing arsenal of defence, however enough extreme stress has devastating effects on its strength and function.

There are actually a few different kinds of stress that we experience and should take note of.

The kind we experience most often is acute stress. It's those little annoyances and bumps in the road of life that challenge our resolve for peace.

We react to these situations emotionally with anger, anxiety or irritable mood. This type of stress often causes physical symptoms like headaches or back pain.

Short-tempered anger, ceaseless worry, anxiety, high blood pressure and heart disease are all the result of frequent bouts of recurring stress.

Chronic stress is the most draining and dangerous type of stress because it consistently pounds on you from all angles, wearing you down day after day.

The source of chronic stress is usually a condition that you cannot presently see any way out of. It prevents you from feeling whole and content as a human.

Chronic stress if left alone can eventually lead to the worst of health conditions such as heart attack and stroke. Violence and suicide, both destructive actions, are results of chronic stress. Stress weaves its way throughout our whole body and affects all our body systems. Our respiratory, musculoskeletal, cardiovascular, endocrine, gastrointestinal and reproductive systems are all negatively affected by stress.

There are many methods readily available to proactively deal with stress and taking some time out of your week for exercise sessions can help release bottled-up emotions, reduce tension and relieve stress.

The purpose is to consciously induce a feeling of wellbeing and peace, and if you use relaxation like self-hypnosis or meditation techniques your blood pressure, oxygen consumption and the release of stress hormones are all reduced.

This is in stark contrast to the body's stress response which kicks in stress hormones like cortisol ... the "fight or flight" hormone. Using exercise as a form of "moving meditation" is a very effective and time-efficient "stress dissipating" method too.

If you don't already have one, it's time to find some form of relaxation, meditation or exercise technique that works for you. It's only fair to give your mind the same respect you give your body and give it the tools it needs to survive in a world that demands so much.

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