

PRASIDA AYURVEDA CLINIC

The Good and Bad of Stress

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If you have ever felt that having no stress at all makes you happier and accomplished, then it is time to think twice. You are actually asking for a fully automatic treadmill that can do everything on your behalf while you are on your sofa, relaxing. That is an impossible situation and having to live through stress is for real and one of the important rules of the game of existence.

To get the best in you, to make you competitive, push your abilities to the limits, make you more productive, alert, prepare for challenges and have the endurance of a champion, all you need is the right amount of stress and know how best to manage it without succumbing.

This is a series on stress and its management that can give you guidelines based on the best resources for the topic – Ayurveda, Yoga and modern research.

Our life is a confluence of mind, body and soul that are nourished by good sleep, right food and lifestyle and positive thinking respectively. Stress is something that everyone experiences all life, it is a physical and an emotional reaction to situations, and these reactions can have positive or negative effects.

Ayurveda mentions “*Saadhaka Pitta*” as the driving force to achieve something with a focused effort as a reaction to stress. It makes us gear up for challenges and deal with all things in life in a constructive manner. Stress is a reaction to sudden change in environment that prepares you to either fight or run away when in the face of danger, both require preparedness and call for higher heart rate, muscle tension and a higher blood pressure for a short term, this is essential and known as acute stress or simply good stress.

These reactions to acute stress normalize subsequently when the challenges are met; leaving you with a great sense of achievement that comforts the mind, makes you emotionally satisfied and gives a chance for the body to relax, this is the state of “*Saadhana*” in Ayurvedic terms.

But today’s fast pace of life makes for all the good effects of good stress to fade away when we are bombarded with stressors perpetually without ever giving a chance for the body to relax or mind to feel accomplished. This is the domain of chronic stress or simply “bad stress”, a situation similar to shifting goal posts or that of a carrot and stick where rewards and punishment are continuous but induce behavior that translates to stress, where you have to be alert, apprehensive, have faster heart beats or palpitation, higher blood pressure, tense muscles without an interval or a chance for relaxation as it is already time to take on the next stressor.

So, when stressors are here to stay, things can only get better when we can take stress head on, use it to our advantage, and manage situations in a planned or an organized manner. Yes we need to manage stress because there are risks associated with chronic or bad stress if we don’t. To name some, irritability, high blood pressure, migraine headaches, back pain, poor digestion, ulcers in the stomach, weaker immune system and all that makes you sick more often.

If we don’t learn how to manage stress in a *Sattvik* healthy way then there are risks of getting into a perpetual loop of addiction by trying to de-stress or relieve effects of stress by resorting to illicit stuff, tobacco, smoking, alcohol or similar stimulants. Initially they all seem to reduce stress but soon one realizes that the effects of such stimulants begin to fade sooner than before and call for the next dose or a stronger one in short span of time leaving one addicted for life.

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