

## PA 32 – Stress Affects Your Health

Have you ever experienced a traumatic event?

If you have you are not alone. A recent survey of Americans found that 9 out of every 10 people have experienced at least one traumatic event in their life.<sup>1</sup> But did you know that such experiences could be affecting your health and well-being? The stress of the traumatic event impacts your brain in a very specific way.<sup>2, 3</sup> Your brain would have activated your sympathetic nervous system and releases hormones that flood your brain and body with adrenalin and cortisol.<sup>2,3</sup> The brain's alarm system- the emotional limbic part of your brain - is responsible for this and it also turns off your logical rational thinking part of your brain - the prefrontal cortex!<sup>2,3</sup>

You will likely experience this by feeling emotional, either sad or angry or frightened. And you will not be able to think clearly. You may snap or scream or cry, or lash out in anger. The problem is that it does not end here. A traumatic event can actually change the way your brain responds from that day onwards. After a traumatic experience, anything that even vaguely reminds your brain about what happened will again cause very specific changes in your brain.<sup>4, 5</sup> Your brain's alarm system can become hyper-vigilant!<sup>6</sup>

The brain doesn't forget.<sup>6</sup> This means that anything even vaguely similar to that traumatic event will trigger another emotional storm in your brain. Over time this can impact your brain and body in many ways. Because of these changes to the brain, you can end up with a variety of health problems, such as anxiety, depression and even post-traumatic stress disorder.<sup>3, 7-9</sup> It may trigger bipolar disorder and is known to influence schizophrenia.<sup>10</sup>

But it's not just mental health problems that can occur due to traumatic experiences. The changes that happen in the brain also impact the rest of your body. You may end up with high blood pressure, increased heart rate and high breathing rates.<sup>6</sup> This puts extra stress on your cardiovascular system.<sup>6</sup><sup>19</sup> Your immune system may also be affected and you can end up with higher levels of inflammation.<sup>17</sup> There are a whole host of health problems that are linked with high inflammation and a weakened immune system!!

You may also end up with difficulty focusing and paying attention.<sup>2</sup> A host of digestive system problems<sup>6</sup> are also linked to these stress induced changes that occur in the brain due to traumatic experiences! And your muscles can get stiff, tight and sore.<sup>6,18</sup> Stress also turns off your small muscles close to your spine and skull<sup>11</sup> making it harder for your brain to know accurately what is going on in and around you.<sup>12</sup>

If you think your health concerns are the result of your traumatic experiences it's important you seek help from experienced health care providers. You may need help from several different health care providers depending on what sorts of symptoms you have. We are all so different and stressful events can affect us in different ways.

If you have ended up with mental health problems it's important to seek professional advice from a trained mental health practitioner. They can help you in many ways. They can help you by reframing your experiences and calming your brain down so it stops being so over reactive. Exercising is also



known to be helpful. It helps pump out all the cortisol and Adrenalin from your body and can help limber up your stiff sore muscles. Even as little as a short walk every day will help. Mindfulness meditation and yoga can also be very helpful. Both can help you be more present in your body and your mind, which is key to calming down your brains over-reactive alarm system. Eating healthy natural foods is also very helpful. Your brain and body are already stressed so do not need the additional burden of having to deal with artificial chemicals in processed foods.

It's also a great idea to regularly see your family chiropractor. Your chiropractor can activate the small muscles closest to your spine and skull which will help your brain know more accurately what is going on inside your body and the world around you. Chiropractic care also provides you with safe touch that can be very healing. And we know chiropractic adjustments can change processing in the part of your brain called the prefrontal cortex.<sup>13-16</sup> You want this part of your brain working as well as it can. As this part of your brain helps you think clearly and rationally and is connected to your calming and healing nervous system, the parasympathetic nervous system. This is probably why so many people who see chiropractors report that it makes them feel well, relax easier and cope better.

So, if you suspect your current health concerns could be due traumatic events from your past do seek help from trained health care providers, exercise regularly, do yoga and mindfulness meditation and regularly go see your family chiropractor so you can relax easier, feel better, be more resilient and function at your best!

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