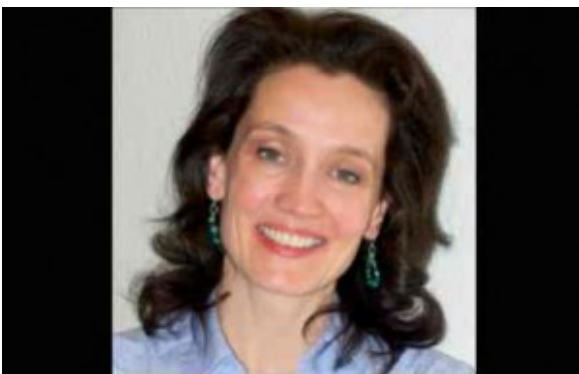


Putting stress in perspective and learning to control it

By Mandy Kendall

I had, shall we say, an interesting day last week. Our puppy got a gastro-intestinal thing and proceeded to have multiple accidents around the house, a water pipe burst and was flooding our living room and then a speaker I had organized to come and present to a group of professionals called to say that his connecting flight had been canceled and he would not make the presentation. So when my phone rang in the middle of this, and I snapped a less than friendly welcome to the caller, I realized that I was perhaps feeling a little stressed.



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We all experience stress in our lives in a variety of ways and on a number of different levels. There's the short term – I'm going to be really late for my appointment if this traffic doesn't move along – type stress. There's the medium term – I can't wait until this project is over and I can relax again – type stress. Then there is the long term chronic – I can't see a way out of this – type of stress.

While the short-lived stress might not seem as bad as the longer lasting versions, the tendency is that we will have

multiple short-term stressful situations that all add up to having about the same impact on us as one big stressful event.

You may have heard people say a little stress is good for you, but research is showing that no stress is particularly good for you and studies are finding the significant impact stress can have on our health.

Columbia University Medical Center equated chronic stress with being as dangerous as smoking five cigarettes a day. During their research they discovered that people who said they felt overwhelmed and anxious were 27 percent more likely to suffer a heart attack than those who said they weren't under any undue stress.

Increasingly stronger correlations are being discovered between stress and sickness. Studies are showing that cortisol, produced when you are under stress, impacts the immune system and causes more inflammation than an actual cold would produce, thereby increasing the symptoms and the duration of the illness.

There is some good news however. Studies of cancer patients found those who underwent stress management programs had a significantly better physical recovery than those who didn't.

So here are a few *Qwik-e* tips on how to help lower those stress levels and improve your overall health.

Listen to your heart – If your heart starts racing, or you can feel your heartbeat in your chest (and you are not physically exerting yourself) chances are you are experiencing something you perceive to be stressful. Try and remove yourself from, or resolve to change the situation. If your heart is not in it, then chances are, if you go ahead and do it any way, it will only lead to you feeling some sort stress.

Don't stress to impress – Life's too short to do things for other people that puts stress in your life. Politely saying no

can be a very liberating and calming experience.

Go to your happy place – Looking at, or thinking about, a place (or person or thing) you love can have a remarkably soothing effect on your body and your mind. The Mayo Clinic reports that a good belly laugh produces happy endorphins in the brain and relaxes muscles, which is very effective for stress relief.

Avoid stress eating – I know it might seem fairly obvious that a junk food fest is not the best remedy for combating stress, but here is why. Stress slows down our digestive systems (supposedly stemming back to when we thought it more beneficial to delay digesting our food and run away from the saber tooth tiger first). This increase in digestion time however leads to increased weight gain. Conversely, healthier foods like nuts and fish (admittedly not exactly what we might crave when we are stressed out) may reduce inflammation and reduce anxiety.

Put it in perspective – Whenever I got in an emotional state growing up my dear old mum used to stop me in my tracks and say, “Is anyone going to die?”. Sometimes things get blown out of proportion and taking a moment to assess what is going on and focusing on what’s really important can really calm things down.

Find your thing – There will be something for all of us that we know just calms us down. It could be talking a walk, watching a movie, chatting with friends, exercising. etc. Whatever your de-stresser is, try to do more of it.

Let it out – When all else fails, sometimes you just need to let off steam. Pick an appropriate place, the more private the better, and let ... *it* ... out.

Until next time.

Mandy Kendall operates Health Connective in South Lake Tahoe,

which aligns wellness seekers with their ideal wellness provider. If you have questions, would like some advice, or would like to request some Qwik-e tips on any health and well-being topic, drop her an email at connect@healthconnective.com or keep an eye out on Lake Tahoe News for regular Qwik-e tips on how to make healthy changes one Quick and Easy step at a time.