

Too Little Sleep and Too Much Stress Can Harm You – Even Kill You

By

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Hazardous Parents often have trouble sleeping at night – and for good reason. They know that at any moment there might be a crisis of some kind – they can't turn off their brain to sleep because they have one ear on the alert for any noise in the hallway; they have worries about a problem in the classroom; their child or youth may have an upcoming court appearance for yet another criminal charge; they have to worry about getting enough time off work to attend all the therapy sessions their child requires; yet another caregiver has quit without notice; their child had a late night rage that left the parents physically exhausted but emotionally wound up..... I could go on.... If you are a Hazardous Parent you know all the reasons you can't sleep.

Sleep deprivation, as scientists are discovering, isn't just about being tired the next day – there are significant long term health consequences. In the led by Katrina Ackerman (check out <http://www.aasnbet.org/articles.aspx?id=3196>) researchers found that chronic lack of sleep results in a spike in white blood cells, particularly those called granulocytes, released in response to immune system threat. In other words it hits and harms the immune system just as hard as stress does.

In addition to wrecking your immune system, chronic lack of sleep also raises your stroke risk – even in people who are generally considered too young and healthy to have a stroke. In fact, research shows that people who cut back their sleep to less than six hours of sleep a night are at 4.5 % greater risk of having a stroke than people who slept 7 to 8 hours a night. The exact cause of this isn't yet known but it appears as if chronic lack of sleep causes inflammation, elevates the blood pressure and the heart rate, and affects the glucose levels, all of which lead to a high risk of stroke.

So – all of this brings us right around to how well you manage your stress – because it’s the stress that keeps you awake.

We already know that chronic and unrelenting stress can lead to cancer, heart disease, allergies, and susceptibility to colds and flu. What’s new is that researchers led by Sheldon Chohen at Carnegie Mellon have worked out the link between stress and a ruined immune system.

They found that cortisol, the stress hormone releases whenever we feel fear, worry, or anxiety. Cortisol is supposed to give us a hit of energy so that we can run from or fight with, some kind of threat. It was never supposed to be filling our brains day in and day out so when our systems are constantly washed in cortisol, the body loses its ability to regulate inflammation.

Cortisol also has a secondary function of controlling the body’s inflammatory response to immune system triggers. But over time, with constant exposure to stress and therefore cortisol, tissues become less sensitive to cortisol, releasing less of their anti-inflammatory substances.

The Carnegie Mellon researchers exposed healthy adults to cold viruses, isolating and monitoring for five days afterwards. People who’d recently been under stress showed increased resistance to cortisol. In a second test, the researchers found that participants had higher numbers of cytokines, which trigger inflammation.

So what does it all mean to you? It means that when you are under chronic and intolerable stress from living with your extremely acting out child or youth, you are going to get sick more often from colds and flus and you are going to be at risk for cancer and other diseases.

You can’t change your stress triggers but you can change how you manage the cortisol once it’s released. In a new study, EFT was shown to reduce cortisol levels faster than other methods. Here it is:

*Dawson Church, PhD, Foundation for Epigenetic Medicine
Garret Yount, PhD, California Pacific Medical Center (CPMC) Research Institute
Audrey Brooks, PhD, Psychology Department, University of Arizona at Tucson
Journal of Nervous and Mental Disease, (October 2012, in press).*

“This study examined the changes in cortisol levels and psychological distress symptoms of 83 non-clinical subjects receiving a single hour long intervention. Subjects were randomly assigned to either an EFT group, a psychotherapy group receiving a supportive interview (SI), or a no treatment (NT) group. Salivary cortisol assays were performed immediately before, and thirty minutes after the

intervention. Psychological distress symptoms were assessed using the SA-45. The EFT group showed statistically significant improvements in anxiety (-58.34%, $p < 0.05$), depression (-49.33%, $p < 0.002$), the overall severity of symptoms, (-50.5%, $p < 0.001$), and symptom breadth (-41.93%, $p < 0.001$). The EFT group experienced a significant decrease in cortisol (-24.39%, SE 2.62) compared to the decrease observed in the SI (-14.25%, SE 2.61) and NT (-14.44%, SE 2.67) groups ($p < 0.03$). The decrease in cortisol levels in the EFT group mirrored the observed improvement in psychological distress."

You don't have to be harmed and perhaps have years cut off your life by the chronic stress that comes with Hazardous Parenting. Using EFT, biofeedback, and other methods I can help you learn to manage stress effectively and heal the damage already done.

Remember, you're entitled to a better day!