



# Demystifying Stress

**We do not have to learn to do anything exotic to reduce stress,  
we just need to balance our lives and avoid excess.**

by Georgianna Donadio, D.C.,  
M.Sc., Ph.D.

**A** statement by the well-known Mind/Body physician, Herb Benson, M.D., says that 60–90% of all visits to the doctor's office is due to stress. We all hear about stress, experience stress, but what exactly is stress? Most of us think of stress as the emotional conflicts we experience in our daily lives, but our emotions are just one category or one type of "event" that can cause us to experience stress. In order for us to survive in our ever-changing environments, our bodies are designed to adapt and it does so through a series of biochemical reactions. These chemical reactions are natural and necessary, but they are the wear and tear of living that we call stress. Reminds me of when I was living in New York City and driving my little stick shift through the

stop and go traffic. Oh, the wear and tear (the stress!) on that clutch.

Some events that cause stress to our bodies may surprise you including:

- Weather
- Excess exertion such as too much exercise or not enough sleep
- Nutrition or the lack of it
- Trauma or injuries are obvious stresses
- Allergies and immune insults
- Infections also cause the stress reaction
- Anything to do with reproduction especially, for women with our monthly cycles, pregnancy, child birth, nursing, etc.

While this does not sound encouraging, there is some good news. If we have a stress response that is short term, like when the phone rings and the school nurse tells you your child has been vomiting, our bodies do just fine. It is the prolonged stress, like

anticipating for two whole weeks a root canal or that pesky "annual office evaluation", that does us in! That is when our digestive system, immune system, cardiovascular and even reproductive system are affected by stress. Couple this with poor eating habits and/or not enough sleep and we are not happy campers.

While excessive or chronic stress is definitely not good for our health, we need stress adaptation for survival, so it is actually a very good thing. How this adaptation takes place is by way of specialized hormones from our adrenal glands, located in our kidneys. They change our heart rate, blood pressure, lung capacity, and a host of other functions, for our survival. However, these hormones, if secreted too much or too often can suppress our immune, digestive and reproductive systems and even damage our cardiovascular system. Chronic stress is one very large reason

why some of us have fertility problems.

So how can we make friends with stress? Good old MODERATION! Remember being told "moderation in all things leads to a healthy body" – well, it is TRUE. We do not have to learn to do anything exotic to reduce stress, we just need to balance our lives and avoid excess. Nevertheless, there is the rub, given modern life. We are all excessing more and moderating less. For a great book on this subject, check out *Why Zebra's Don't Have Ulcers* by Dr. Robert Sapolsky.

It is a very witty and informative book and laughter, as we know, is "our best medicine", it is also a great stress reducer. ▶

*Georgianna Donadio, D.C., M.Sc., Ph.D. is the Founder and Director of The New England School of Whole Health Education, the pioneer of Whole Health Education and a provider of distance learning based patient and healthcare professional education since 1977. For more information, visit [www.wholehealtheducation.org](http://www.wholehealtheducation.org) or call 1-888-354-HEAL (4325).*