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▶ Issue 30

## Wellness News



# April Is Stress Awareness Month!

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**Stress** — just the word may be enough to set your nerves on edge. Everyone feels stressed from time to time. Some people may cope with stress more effectively or recover from stressful events quicker than others. It's important to know your limits when it comes to stress to avoid more serious health effects.

## What is stress?

Stress can be defined as the brain's response to any demand. Many things can trigger this response, including change. Changes can be positive or negative, as well as real or perceived. They may be recurring, short-term, or long-term and may include things like commuting to and from school or work every day, traveling for a yearly vacation, or moving to another home. Changes can be mild and relatively harmless, such as winning a race, watching a scary movie, or riding a rollercoaster. Some changes are major, such as marriage or divorce, serious illness, or a car accident. Other changes are extreme, such as exposure to violence, and can lead to traumatic stress reactions.



Reference: <http://www.nih.gov/>

**You don't get ulcers from what you eat. You get them from what's eating you.**

**-Vicki Baum**

# Stress Effects on Body and Health

## How does stress affect the body?

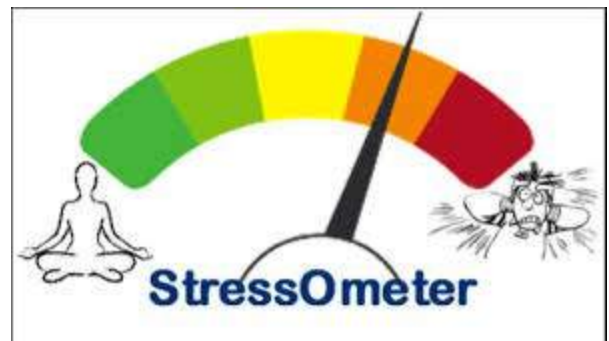
Not all stress is bad. All animals have a stress response, which can be life-saving in some situations. The nerve chemicals and hormones released during such stressful times, prepares the animal to face a threat or flee to safety. When you face a dangerous situation, your pulse quickens, you breathe faster, your muscles tense, your brain uses more oxygen and increases activity—all functions aimed at survival. In the short term, it can even boost the immune system.

However, with chronic stress, those same nerve chemicals that are life-saving in short bursts can suppress functions that aren't needed for immediate survival. Your immunity is lowered and your digestive, excretory, and reproductive systems stop working normally. Once the threat has passed, other body systems act to restore normal functioning. Problems occur if the stress response goes on too long, such as when the source of stress is constant, or if the response continues after the danger has subsided.

## How does stress affect your overall health?

There are at least three different types of stress, all of which carry physical and mental health risks:

- ◆ Routine stress related to the pressures of work, family and other daily responsibilities.
- ◆ Stress brought about by a sudden negative change, such as losing a job, divorce, or illness.
- ◆ Traumatic stress, experienced in an event like a major accident, war, assault, or a natural disaster where one may be seriously hurt or in danger of being killed.



The body responds to each type of stress in similar ways. Different people may feel it in different ways. For example, some people experience mainly digestive symptoms, while others may have headaches, sleeplessness, depressed mood, anger and irritability. People under chronic stress are prone to more frequent and severe viral infections, such as the flu or common cold, and vaccines, such as the flu shot, are less effective for them.

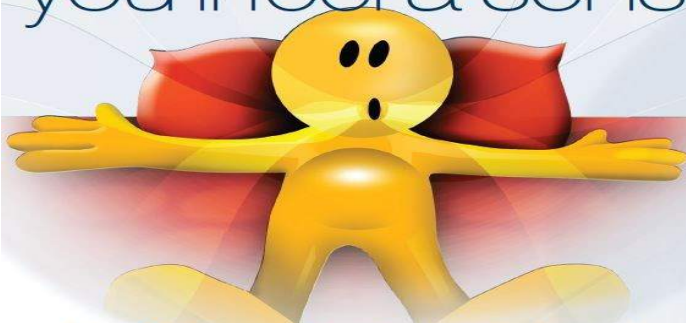
Of all the types of stress, changes in health from routine stress may be hardest to notice at first. Because the source of stress tends to be more constant than in cases of acute or traumatic stress, the body gets no clear signal to return to normal functioning. Over time, continued strain on your body from routine stress may lead to serious health problems, such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, depression, anxiety disorder, and other illnesses.

## Tips to Cope with Stress:

- Seek help from a qualified mental health care provider if you are overwhelmed, feel you cannot cope, have suicidal thoughts, or are using drugs or alcohol to cope.
- Recognize signs of your body's response to stress, such as difficulty sleeping, increased alcohol and other substance use, being easily angered, feeling depressed, and having low energy.
- Set priorities-decide what must get done and what can wait, and learn to say no to new tasks if they are putting you into overload.
- Note what you have accomplished at the end of the day, not what you have been unable to do.
- Avoid dwelling on problems. If you can't do this on your own, seek help from a qualified mental health professional who can guide you.
- Exercise regularly-just 30 minutes per day of gentle walking can help boost mood and reduce stress.
- Schedule regular times for healthy and relaxing activities.
- Explore stress coping programs, which may incorporate meditation, yoga, tai chi, or other gentle exercises.

## Let Go of Stress with Your Breath! Provided by: [www.stresscheck.co.uk/](http://www.stresscheck.co.uk/)

In just a few abdominal breaths, you'll feel a sense of wellbeing...



**Step 1:** Straighten the front of the body. You may sit up, or lie down facing up. Get comfortable. Relax any tension that you may feel at the moment: belly, shoulders, jaw, and face. Keep the shoulders open.

**Step 2:** Bring the awareness to your breath and notice if you are naturally breathing into your belly, or your chest, or both. Don't control it. Just observe.

**Step 3:** Deliberately draw the air into the bottom of your lungs on the inhale. Let the abdomen expand and extend out. Then, on the exhale, let the abdominal pressure release and, with minimal effort, slowly pull the belly in. The chest remains still the whole time.

You may place your hand on the belly to feel the rhythmic movement of the abdomen.



**Feeling Under Pressure?  
Try a Relaxed Breathing Exercise**



# Zen Blended Calm Chamomile Banana Smoothie

Provided by: **Kathey Patalsky, Vegan Food Blogger and Author**

**Calming Effects.** This smoothie has a plethora of calming ingredients including: chamomile tea and flower garnish, bananas, vanilla, yogurt, coconut water ice cubes, cinnamon, and soy milk. The chamomile really infuses this entire smoothie with a sweet soothing aroma, accented by warm cinnamon and luscious vanilla undertones. The key ingredient in this smoothie is the pile of bananas you will be using. Gentle on the tummy and sweet to your taste buds. Be sure and use ripe bananas. Organic ingredients always preferred. Here's the recipe....

## Ingredients: (Vegan, serves two)

- 1/4 cup deeply steeped whole-blossom chamomile tea
- 1/4 cup soy milk
- 1/4 cup raw cashews
- 2 frozen sliced organic bananas (small-medium sized)
- 1 raw ripe banana (small-medium sized)
- 6 ounces Vanilla Soy Yogurt  
*\*I used the Whole Soy and Co. brand*
- 1 cup ice (coconut water ice cubes preferred)
- 1 dash cinnamon
- 1 tsp maple syrup



## Instructions:

1. Steep chamomile tea for at least 2-5 minutes. Stick in the fridge to cool for ten minutes.
2. Add all ingredients to blender.
3. Blend until smooth.
4. Garnish with whole dried chamomile flowers from a cut open tea bag, or loose tea.

**Inhale the sweet smell of chamomile, drink, sip, zen out.**

**Tip:** When freezing bananas, always slice thin so that they blend easily.

This recipe has room for change. If you are not vegan and do not like soy products, use low fat dairy yogurt and/or milk.



## Employee Wellness Program

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**Mission:** To improve the health and well-being of our employees. Healthier teachers and staff can not only have a positive impact on their family and community, but they can also serve as role models for our students.

**Vision:** To create an environment within our school district where health and wellness plays a vital role in the lives of our employees.

[Click here to check out your Employee Wellness Share](#)

## UNPLUG from Stress



Technology has some wonderful benefits. It can also increase our stress levels when we develop an unhealthy attachment to it.

### Take a break from technology

Taking a short hiatus from the television, computer, and cell phone will give you insight on what your senses respond to best. Here are some "unplugging" tips:

- ◆ Try tuning into relaxing music instead of talk radio during your commute. Or try riding in silence for 10 minutes.
- ◆ Stuck in a long line at the grocery store? Instead of talking on your cell phone, take a moment to people watch. Pay attention to what you hear and see.
- ◆ Instead of checking e-mail while waiting for a meeting to begin, take a few deep breaths, look out the window, or sip some aromatic tea.
- ◆ While waiting for an appointment, resist the urge to text and give yourself a hand massage instead.

### **Remember**

Technology has a power-off button. And the wisest of us know when to use it.

