STRESS AND THE SINGLE PARENT

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**Stress – the Basics**

Simply stated, stress is the body’s response to a real or perceived threat. When the brain interprets something as a threat – whether it be the pain of an injury, an attack from a wild animal, or a simple verbal ‘attack’ from a boss or a spouse – it activates a physical response in the body preparing it to attack or run - the so-called ‘fight-or-flight’ response. This response has many short- and long-term effects on the body.

Though stress is the most obvious in sudden, acute events, many milder but longer-term stressors – such as poor diet or lack of sleep – can create a state of unnatural chronic stress in the body.

Everyone experiences stress at one time or another, and each person’s ability to manage different stresses is unique.

**The Origins of Stress**

There are many potential sources of stress beyond simple physical threats in the modern world – some short-term, others very chronic. Some examples:

 \_**Mental, emotional, and spiritual stressors** – constant worries, relationship discord, crises of faith, and many other such factors contribute to overall stress.

 \_**Nutrient-poor diet** – a diet lacking in important nutrients places a constant stress on the body as it lacks full vitality.

 \_**Blood sugar imbalance** – there is a very intricate interaction between blood sugar regulation and stress.

 \_**Excessive amounts of caffeine, alcohol, or other toxins** – stimulants, depressants, and other drugs disrupt the body’s ability to maintain healthy balance.

 \_**Inflammation** – inflammation means the immune system is in a state of high alert constantly. This state takes a broad toll on the body.

 \_**Physical strain/injury** -- very hard labor or exercise, as well as any injuries or illness, place a physical stress upon the body which it must repair.

 \_**Lack of sleep** – sleep is the body’s repair time. Inadequate sleep places a profound stress upon the body as it’s unable to ‘keep up’ with proper repair and rejuvenation.

**Chronic Stress and Adrenal Fatigue**

The stress response is designed to be a short-term state. When the body maintains a stressed state for a pro-longed period, it results in imbalances and damage to the body. Since the stress response involves so many parts and pathways in the body, many different symptoms may result. Eventually the body becomes unable to continue creating the stress response, leading to exhaustion of any numerous body systems.

**Stress Recovery**

By making lifestyle changes, we aim for rebalance and recovery – rebalancing hormones and neurotransmitters that have become imbalanced and promoting recovery of systems damaged by that imbalance. Our steps to recover ensure the body is getting the tools it needs to repair and rebalance, increasing the body’s repair mechanisms while eliminating factors that can exacerbate stress by increasing glycemic load (blood sugar) and inflammation.

**Stress and Blood Sugar**

The body responds to stress by releasing *cortisol*, a hormone that helps prepare the body for a crisis. Cortisol in-creases the amount of sugar in the bloodstream, providing a quick burst of energy much like the ‘sugar rush’ you experience when eating too much candy or drinking a soda.

When this system is activated frequently or is in an ‘always on’ state, all that extra sugar in the bloodstream can cause health issues. Blood sugar levels can become erratic as the body tries to compensate, leading to ‘crashes’ and fatigue, or disturbed sleep patterns; and eventually your body can become resistant to insulin (the hormone that allows your body to utilize sugar from the blood stream), leading to obesity or even diabetes.

At the same time, when you eat foods that contain a lot of sugar or starch it drives up blood sugar levels, impact-ing your stress hormones.

It’s important to understand that your sugar levels and your stress levels are very closely connected. **The main hormones that regulate stress are the same ones that regulate blood sugar levels.** If either of these systems is out of balance, the other will be as well.

**Balancing Blood Sugar**

Let’s focus on getting blood sugar levels on track. Our standard American diet has made us accustomed to eating far too much sugar and refined carbs, so this can be a huge factor in adrenal stress! Fortunately, we can combat this by balancing blood sugar levels.

**Ways to Control Blood Sugar**

Eat a balanced breakfast within one hour of waking up in the morning

Eat every 3-4 hours

Avoid refined carbs, simple sugars and processed foods

Avoid artificial sweeteners

Eat foods with protein, fiber, and healthy fats at every meal

Be mindful of portions when choosing starchy vegetables, grains, or fruit

Hydrate well

Exercise regularly

Take a 10-minute walk after a meal

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