

Acid Reflux and Stress

Although it has not been proven scientifically, many people believe that stress is a major contributor to acid reflux disease.

Physiologically, stress can cause the digestive system to come to a screeching halt. Food that should be moving along will linger and magnify the effects of acid reflux. Under stress the body sends energy to the muscles, via the blood stream, to help the body cope with a stressful situation. This means that less blood, or energy, is flowing to the digestive system. When digestion is slowed down in this manner, undigested food and gastric juices remain in the stomach much longer enhancing the occurrence of acid reflux.

Stress can also cause people to experience changes in behavior like the immoderate consumption of alcohol and so called "comfort foods". It can also lead to late night binging and excessive smoking. All of which can trigger the symptoms of acid reflux, by producing excessive acid in the stomach and relaxing the Lower Esophageal sphincter or (LES). When the LES is relaxed, stomach acid can splash up from the stomach into the esophagus, causing the pain of heartburn.

The "fight or flight syndrome" caused by stress can cause the body to tense up, delivering most of its energy to the heart, lungs and muscles. This intensifies hyperacidity, as the stomach is robbed of oxygen and enzymes necessary for proper digestion.

About half of the people who suffer from heartburn attribute it to stress. Whether stress is related to unpleasant work situations, emotional disorders, money problems, family strife or social conflicts, there are many things which can be done to restore the needed harmony in one's life.

Whether you suffer from chronic acid reflux and find that stress exacerbates the condition, or you experience occasional acid reflux brought on by bouts of stress, consider the following:

- Take the pressure off yourself – Lining up too many goals to be accomplished in too short a period of time can be very stressful. Do one thing at a time. Learn to relax and learn to say no when others become too demanding. Set your priorities straight and make lists that you can stick to. Go easy on yourself.
- Take your mind off of you – "Loosing your mind" is not the worst thing you can do. Meditation, Tai Chi, Hatha Yoga, Chi Gong and self-hypnotism are all great ways to relieve stress. Focusing on a demanding activity will take your mind off what is causing the stress. Not thinking about yourself can be very beneficial. These arts can also be applied to enhance life with positive improvement.
- Exercise your way to peace of mind - Everyone knows that exercise is essential for good health. Besides the physical benefits it is also an important way to relieve stress. Who has time to think about problems when you're about to win a tennis match! The endorphins produced in your brain while exercising create an opiate-like "good feeling" sensation that can take you far away from the cares of the day. It is important to find a way to make exercise fun, whether it be jogging with your dog or playing ball with your friends.
- "Let it be" – You cannot control everything in life. There will always be planes that are late arrivals or departures. The weather may not cooperate with that family picnic that you planned. Your mother-in-law may show up when least expected and there will always be taxes to pay. It is important to learn to roll with the punches. You can always find something good in an otherwise bad situation, but most importantly don't let it stress you out.
- Maintain an optimistic attitude – Never underestimate the power of positive thinking. Focus on the good things - not the bad things. Be excited about the future and believe that only good is in store for you. Better than projecting the future, concentrate on the present and

demonstrate gratitude in the moment. Being optimistic not only affects others in a positive way, it gives you the balance that you need to be stress free.

- Have a good laugh! – Laughter is the great healer. A good laugh can relieve more stress than anything else. Watch a funny movie, go to a comedy club or go see Hunter Blue perform at Mimi's in New York City. Try to associate with people who make you laugh, or at least don't make you frown. Maintain a good sense of humor at all times. Stress cannot exist where there is laughter.
- Love a dog or a cat - Pet animals are a sure cure for stress. Their pure unaffected love and funny antics can blow that stress away. If you can't muster the obligation of responsibility for a pet, borrow someone else's pet or volunteer to be a care taker when they are out of town. Pets have a tranquilizing affect on us and their power to diminish stress should not be overlooked.
- Talk to a friend – It's very therapeutic when a trusted friend gives advice and thoughtful support. We all need objective guidance at times. Sympathy from friends and relatives has a calming affect and can reduce stress. It's almost as if you are not bearing your problems alone anymore and that kind of encouragement is invaluable.
- Get a massage - There is nothing quite as stress relieving as a good massage. I find that going for acupuncture is very relaxing as well. If you can't manage a massage, indulge in a long hot bath, whirlpool or steam shower.

It has been said that stress is a killer. Thankfully, its reduction is not rocket science and is quite easily accomplished. By reducing the stress in our lives, we can minimize the effect of the acid reflux condition. Of course there are other factors involved with acid reflux, but stress is certainly one of the big ones and should be dealt with in a serious manner. Relax!