Stress, said a wise man, is the common cold of the psyche. How true!

Only, while the common cold strikes twice—or at the most, thrice—a year, stress has become a constant presence in our minds and bodies.

How deeply stress has penetrated our psyches is evident when you consider this image. Imagine yourself standing eyeball to red eyeball with a giant Rottweiller dog.

Psychology tells us that in life-and-death moments like these, the body prepares for a “fight or flight” response. In just about thirty seconds of panic, look what happens to your body. Your palms tingle. Your hair stands on end. Your temples start to sweat. You break out in gooseflesh. Your spine shivers. Your eyes dilate. Your heartbeat quickens. Your blood pressure rises. Your stomach turns an angry red, and digestion switches off. Your bladder loosens. A prominent nerve stands out on your forehead. The blood drains from your face. Your body releases dozens of emergency chemicals to deal with the situation.
From Stress to Bliss

Written by Shubra Krishan
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Now imagine something even more frightening. Imagine your mind trapped in this situation for a whole waking day. Hour after hour, day after day, year after year throughout your lifetime. The fight-or-flight reaction developed as a sudden response to a life-threatening situation, not a constant state of mind—and body. But unfortunately, that is just what is happening in the modern world.

How Ayurveda Looks at Stress

Ayurveda, the 5000-year-old system of healing that originated in India, advocates some very common-sense ways of dealing with stress. To treat stress, an Ayurvedic physician, known as a vaidya (literal translation: one who knows), will first try to get to the root cause of your stress. This he will do by asking you questions about your diet, sleep habits, and general lifestyle. Vaidyas are trained in pulse diagnosis—just one minute of silently holding your wrist and they can glean a wealth of information about the inside story of your body, and mind.

Ayurveda believes that every individual is a unique combination of three doshas or body types: Vata, Pitta and Kapha. Though vaidyas recommend stress-busting measures based on your individual body-type, there are some general guidelines that will benefit just anyone, irrespective of body type.

Start Your Day Right

Even if you are terribly rushed, don’t miss breakfast. Make it a habit to eat a stewed apple every morning. Here’s how to stew it: Skin and quarter an apple. Then stab a clove into each section, and lightly cook the apple in cinnamon-flavored water. Discard the cloves and eat the apple. Cooked this way, an apple a day can keep Mr. Stress away, say vaidyas.

Don’t Go Hungry

As always, thin is in, and stout is out. But in your zeal to shed weight, don’t go empty-stomach. A hungry body leads to all sorts of problems: disturbed digestion, restless sleep, mental fatigue. In fact, eating your meals on time is a must, say Ayurvedic textbooks. Stress does slow down the digestive fires, but if you persist in your efforts to keep to regular mealtimes, your system will be back on track. Lunch, say vaidyas, should be the main meal of the day, for that is when the body’s digestive fires are at their peak.

Work Toward a Good Night’s Sleep

Sleeping on time every night is perhaps the biggest favor you can do yourself, say Ayurvedic physicians. When you give yourself eight full hours of rest and rejuvenation, you set the body’s natural clock in harmony, regulating digestion and allowing the heart and the mind to function at full efficiency. If you are a late sleeper, try shifting your bedtime half an hour earlier each night, until you begin sleeping before 10:00 pm. Shift gears into calming activities as bedtime draws near; avoid violent or excessively stimulating entertainment. Instead, listen to some soothing music or try a relaxing warm bath to lull your senses. One good indication that you are getting your full quota of rest: you should feel hungry enough to want a good breakfast.

Heal Your Heart

Ayurveda believes that humans actually have two hearts: the physical heart that works as a pump, and the emotional heart that feels joy and sorrow. For holistic heart health, it is very important to look after both hearts. If you are upset or unhappy for some reason, chew on a juicy pear and feel your heart lift. Add cracked black pepper to your daily diet. Black pepper is a bioavailability-enhancer and stimulates the free flow of oxygen to the brain, thus helping your heart stay calm, too.

Reconnect with Yourself

Spend just twenty minutes, twice a day, to snap your connection with the outside world and tune in to yourself. This is a major part of holistic healing the Ayurveda way. Transcendental meditation in particular, the relaxation technique introduced by Maharishi Mahesh Yogi, has been found to be extremely effective in healing stress and leading people to realize their full physical, mental, and spiritual potential. Do whatever works for you, but yes, do find a few minutes to get in touch with yourself. Within days, you will find yourself going from stress to bliss.

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