

## **Managing Stress to Strengthen the Immune System**

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*Did the question ever cross your mind as to why some people virtually always come down with whatever potpourri of illness is within the current season? The flip question would be why (to our amazement) do some folks rarely ever become sick or burdened with colds, the flu, or viruses? We all know some family and friends who fall into both categories, so let's explore what separates the two, and what we can learn from both groups to maintain and nurture the homeostasis within.*

*Stress, and the ability to know our proper level for optimal health, is a key predicator that determines how our immune system handles foreign invasions in various forms. As a normal part of life, stress can be positive or negative, depending on how you respond to it, and to what extent the subtle bio-chemical changes impact the body on a cellular level. Part of the biological process of stress is the release of cortisol, adrenaline, and stress related hormones.*

*The main systems involved are the sympathetic nervous system, and the HPA axis, or the hypothalamic-pituitary-adrenal combination, according to medical author Dr. Peter Panzarino. As a result of the complex cause and effect of stress in relation to the brain and the above-mentioned glands, the stress hormone cortisol, a corticosteroid is released. This our natural and needed response to stress, however if the cortisol level remain unnecessarily high, muscles break down, the immune system is suppressed, and other metabolic changes occur. Medically, corticosteroids are utilized for a host of illnesses such as asthma and inflammatory bowel disease that result from overactive immune systems.*

*The down side of this natural mechanism is when stress is relentless, uncontrollable, and chronic, resulting in this feedback loop failing to chemically turn off. These devastating consequences are hypertension, cardiovascular disease, diabetes, headaches and ulcers to name a few. Due to excessive corticosteroid release affecting this equilibrium, the beneficial immune potential of T-cells are suppressed. This allows the body to be vulnerable to opportunistic germs and infections.*

*An available and wonderful antidote to chronic or acute stress is an hour of therapeutic massage. The cumulative benefits of regular, relaxing massage has a powerful and calming effect on the para-sympathetic and sympathetic nervous systems. Massage enhances the immune system and relieves stress by increasing the lymph flow, and increasing blood circulation to flush out waste products and accumulated stress hormones. Particular stroking and kneading of the muscles by the massage therapist relieves muscle tension and stimulates the body's natural pain killers - the endorphins to help break that cycle of pain resulting in a general sense of well-being. Scientific studies from Dr. Tiffany Field, Ph.D. at the Touch Research Institute - the first research facility in the world solely devoted to the study of touch, has shown massage effectively reduces the cortisol levels in the blood.*

*On the emotional and psychological level, regular massage allows you to let go, and be in the PRESENT for yourself, giving a measure of control to your life. Massage therapy is the best PRESENT to give yourself to promote wellness and aid any healing process in your body.*

*Feel free to visit the Associated Bodywork and Massage Therapist Website to find a certified massage therapist in your area. They should all have you fill out a medical intake form and ask questions as to any possible contraindications in regard to the massage. Breathe, relax, and float away, knowing you are in good hands to begin the caring journey of safe and nurturing touch.*

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