

How stress affects digestion



by Norma Hope
Certified Biofeedback
Practitioner

Our Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) was primarily created for our ancestors, the cave people, to get 'pumped up' for fight or flight when a saber toothed tiger showed up.

Medical studies, in our society, clearly indicate that over stimulation of the stress response (SNS) is causing 97% of all health problems and yet the saber toothed tiger is extinct. Most of this stress affects digestion in a huge way.

The good news is stress held in the body is reversible and one of the most effective ways I've found to release stress is through EPR (Electro-Physiological Reactivity) Biofeedback Stress Management.

Our Sympathetic Nervous System is NOT supposed to kick in when there is congested traffic on the way to work or a difference of opinion over dinner. But stress has a way of piling up during the day, creating a domino effect that seriously affects your digestive system. There is no tiger, just our own multi-colored, striped triggers that go off over and over again.

Stress produces automatic responses in the body when there is a threat, real or imagined. As the fight or flight response kicks in (SNS), all the energy normally used for digestive processes and immune health in the gut gets kidnapped and redirected to survival instead. Really, who cares about that sandwich getting digested when there is a tiger coming at you!

The Autonomic Nervous System in the brain has two parts: the Sympathetic Nervous System (fight or flight) and the Parasympathetic Nervous System (eat, sleep and heal). When one is turned on, the other is turned off and vice versa. One interrupts digestion and the other is truly required for digestion.

The Enteric Nervous System is a separate entity known as the '2nd brain' of the body - THE GUT. It is located in the lining of our entire digestive tract, esophagus, stomach, small intestine and large intestine (colon). The digestive system's transit time (from the time you put food into your mouth to the time it is eliminated in a bowel movement) should be 18-24 hours. Your digestive system (if it were laid out in a straight line) is a minimum of 34 feet in length! That's the height of a three story building; it's a very intricate system.

When you are stressed, whether you admit to that stress or not, it is the Enteric Nervous System that sends out the fight or flight signal to the Sympathetic Nervous System and Central Nervous System. That is what makes you



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belly tight when stressed. Digestion stops; all movement stops in that moment due to the nerve signals.

And it is in the gut (your 2nd brain) that your mood is regulated. Recent medical studies relating to depression, indicate serotonin production actually takes place in the gut which is why colon hydrotherapy can be euphoric. The gut feelings come from your gut not your head. The gut has over 100 million neurons plus neurotransmitters and proteins.

Stress can be the cause for you not losing weight or even gaining. When stressed, the secretion of cortisol and insulin dramatically increase, both of which promote fat storage. I had always thought if you were running around like a crazy person, you would lose weight - NOT so.

When the Sympathetic Nervous System is turned on, digestion is not happening. Stress responses get triggered more and more as the last stress event wasn't really resolved, just disconnected from and this explains chronic

symptoms like constipation, diarrhea and even depression and anxiety. Those are recurrences, not new ones or they wouldn't be chronic.

The Parasympathetic Nervous System is that relaxed state of being that we need so much more of - the being present, the showing up, that sweet, relaxed place. Digestion can only happen fully when the body is in parasympathetic state.

With Irritable Bowel Syndrome, studies state the cause of diarrhea can be too much serotonin (your gut is where 95% of serotonin is housed) and for constipation, it is not enough. And again, it is stress that causes the imbalance because it interrupts or accelerates the digestion of the foods that would normally give us this balance.

It is also about what you put in your mouth. Eating on the run or mindless eating (not being present) will only hurt you now or later. It is important to realize the millions of things going on in your body which you may be interrupting or stopping if you are not relaxed when you eat. If you are busy then drink a smoothie.

Also, chew your food as if your life depended on it because it really, really does. More chewing creates an alkaline condition in the body, improves elimination, stimulates the release of hormones which strengthen our immune system, promotes clearer thinking due to an increase in oxygen intake and reduces the quantity we eat.

Stress also interrupts or irritates the natural peristalsis (wave like actions initiated in the muscles), in the lining of a healthy digestive tract (your colon). It is this action that starts when you begin to chew food so if you are on the run, the system is clenched, not free flowing anymore.

If you are having any of the following symptoms, be aware that the tiger already has you in its teeth: aching joints/muscles, acid reflux, acne, allergies, arthritis, anxiety, bad breath, cold or flu, cramping, bloating, body odor, constipation or diarrhea, depression, difficulty losing weight, edema, eye problems, fatigue, fibromyalgia, gas, heartburn, headaches, hemorrhoids, hopeless despair, irritable bowel syndrome, insomnia, low energy or chronic fatigue, low self esteem, low sex drive, nausea, poor memory, PMS symptoms, menopause symptoms, salt cravings, skin rashes, water retention and more.

I know all about how stress affects our health because I have lived it. That is why all the therapies I do focus on releasing the constant stress inside the body, although Biofeedback is specific for stress reduction.

EPR (Electro-Physiological Reactivity) Biofeedback Stress Management and Muscular Re-education Therapy consists of complex computer software which measures the individual clients reactants from inside the body, emotionally and physically plus mind and spirit - what is reactive, what is out of balance, what needs tuning or awareness. It is relaxing and the best stress tool out there.

Biofeedback technology is not new. Quite simply, biofeedback is any technique which takes a measurement of the body and provides a result. This technology is

involved in EEG, ECG and is utilized also in the CAT scan, the MRI, TENS and ultrasound devices.

A biofeedback session involves you relaxing in a reclining chair, with comfortable sensor bands on your forehead, wrists and ankles connecting you to a computer which is sending the needed frequencies to your whole being via those bands. It reads the stress reactivity on an individual basis and then does the balancing work. You just relax.

Jessica is a 28-year-old client who came to me with depression and constipation. During the first biofeedback session, her belly (intestines) started rumbling and making all kinds of noise. She kept apologizing but I explained that noise is great (as things were starting to move in her belly) and then we both started laughing when it got even louder. Laughter loosens us up, shame shuts us down. She said she felt a calmness in her centre when the session ended. The next day she called to say she woke up that morning feeling hopeful (instead of hopeless despair she usually felt), she had a bowel movement and she also had the energy to go for a walk for the first time in a long time.

So just stop for a minute, right now. Take a breath and take a digestive inventory of your day. I hope you feel nourished, calm and joyful because that is life without stress for the body, 'minds' and soul. And if not, take several more huge breaths.

Norma Hope is a Certified Colon Hydrotherapist, Lymph Therapist, Biofeedback Practitioner, NeuroAcoustic Sound Therapist, Microcurrent Therapist, Thought Field Therapist and more... Call 780-477-1100 or go to www.lifesynergyinc.com

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