

From bad stress to good

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Have you ever missed the alarm clock and awakened late the morning of a big meeting?

Did you throw on makeup and clothes, speed to work while fighting traffic, whip into Starbucks for your coffee fix, spill it on yourself while lunging back into traffic, and then arrive late for your meeting only to find out that you're supposed to make a presentation that you didn't even know about? Were you stressed? Or were you able to go with the flow and laugh it off?

Quick, answer this question with your first thought... On a scale of 1-5, with 1 being low and 5 being high, my stress level is usually a ___.

If you said 1 or 2, congratulations for having your stress under control. More likely, you're at the opposite end of the scale. Life is stressful, especially for high achievers.

I know you're thinking, "What's the big deal... doesn't everyone have stress?" You may be shocked to learn that half of business people will die from stress-related illnesses and heart attacks, strokes, even cancer. That's partly because stress hijacks healthy habits, keeping you from doing the things that you know you should to be healthy. It's also partly due to what stress does to our bodies.

Let's look at some recent information regarding stress, and then we'll examine how you can avoid this. It is almost entirely avoidable, if you know how.

• We now know why stress causes heart attacks. In addition to stress increasing your blood pressure for prolonged periods,



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causing damage, stress also leads to higher levels of platelets, the cells that form clots to stop bleeding. These clots cause heart attacks and strokes (brain attacks).

• Depression is correlated with low levels of serotonin, and these low levels of serotonin are correlated with a greater risk of heart attacks. Serotonin is a brain chemical that is referred to as the body's "happiness drug." People taking antidepressants that help make more serotonin should be at less risk for heart disease, but they were actually at higher risk of dying from it. Researchers surmised that the risk was caused by platelets clumping together. Thus, the stress of depression caused this.

• Dana Reeve, widow of actor Christopher Reeve, recently succumbed to lung cancer. Her death raised awareness of the growth of lung cancer among non-smoking women, and that this disease takes twice as many non-smoking women as non-smoking men. Doctors speculate that estrogen makes women more vulnerable to secondhand smoke, which may have happened with Reeve. Estrogen also appears to exacerbate stress www.witi.com/health/2005/pain.php, and for Reeve, it was speculated that the stress of caring for her paralyzed husband may have simply made her body more vulnerable.

From these data points we can surmise that eliminating stress is an imperative for health. What does this mean to you?

Please take a few moments to reflect on these questions:

- Do I have stress?
- How does it impact me?
- How do I deal with my stress?
- Is there a better way for me to deal with it?

The great news is that you can avoid most health risks simply by how you handle your stress. The key is in how you respond to it. Are you able to learn to love your stress by turning bad stress into good? If so, it won't have the same ill effects on you.

Could boosting your levels of serotonin impact how you deal with your stress? What you eat can be a major factor. Proteins, fresh fruits and vegetables, grains, vitamins B and C, and magnesium, are important in making these brain chemicals that help your body handle stress. Avoid overloading your body with fats, refined sugars, and caffeine that can throw it way out of balance. Keeping your body constantly in overdrive lowers your serotonin, but getting enough sleep rebuilds it, as does eating turkey, bananas, walnuts, avocados, and tomatoes.

I'm going out on a limb here to postulate that happy people are healthier people, but it's not such a stretch as research points in that direction. By nature, I'm an optimistic and happy person. So how come I have heart disease? At the time it happened, I was dealing with something stressful at work. I let it get under my skin and it made me vulnerable. Don't let this happen to you. Turning bad stress into good will help you live a long, healthy life. Learn to love your stress and become the happy, healthy woman you were meant to be. www.saveherlife.com



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Mellanie True Hills www.mellaniehills.com, author of *A Woman's Guide To Saving Her Own Life: The HEART Program For Health and Longevity* www.saveherlife.com, is a heart disease survivor; nearly dying in emergency heart surgery. Using her second chance, she coaches individuals on creating healthy lifestyles and works with organizations to create healthy, productive workplaces. She is also the founder and CEO of the American Foundation for

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"A Woman's Guide to Saving Her Own Life" is her story and a workbook designed to guide readers through the process of making permanent and life-saving changes. It is a winner of the Readers Preference Editor's Choice Award for 2005 and was listed in *Publisher's Weekly* as a nominee for the Quills Award Debut Author of the Year.

Dear Johns Creek Herald Readers,

Our new "Health" section of the Johns Creek Herald begins with this issue. We expect it to grow and evolve over time. Our aim is to provide weekly "common sense"/high-utility relevant health news and advice, much of which we expect to come from your local medical professionals.

We welcome submissions from the medical community, and we especially welcome ideas, comments and suggestions from you, our readers, about what you are interested in. Caron Cooper is editing the section and can be reached by email at Health@northfulton.com. If you wish to speak with Caron, her number is 770-442-3278 extension 123. For advertising information about these pages, call 770-442-3278 extension 106.

— Ray Appen, Publisher



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Samantha B. Benson, MD Born in Elberton, Georgia. Attended North Georgia College in Dahlonega, GA, graduating summa cum laude. Graduated first in her class from Emory University School of Medicine where she also completed her residency training. Stayed on another year with Emory as Chief Resident in internal medicine. After graduating, spent 3 years in private practice in the Alpharetta and Suwanee area. Opened Internal Medicine Associates of Johns Creek in February of 2005.

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Erica L. Peters, MD Dr. Peters was born in Findlay, Ohio, and grew up in Greenville, South Carolina. She attended The University of Georgia, where she graduated with highest honors with a degree in microbiology. She received her doctorate degree from Medical College of Georgia in 1997, and completed residency training at University Hospital in Cincinnati, Ohio. After serving on faculty at the University of Cincinnati School of Medicine for a year following residency, Dr. Peters relocated to the Atlanta area with her husband Dr. David Seidel and children Lily and Benjamin.



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