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ITS NOT "ALL IN YOUR HEAD"!

STRESS!!! Yes, we all have it at one or more times in our lives. Some of us seem to live under a constant stress-cloud. Stress can be defined as "any perceived physical or psychological change that disrupts an organism's metabolic balance". In other words stress can be just about anything; exams, deadlines at work, separation or divorce, moving, a vacation, driving to work, lack of sleep, anxiety about health, allergies, and pain. The list is endless.

So what happens to our body's when we are experiencing stress? To put it very simply, stress signals the body to go into "fight and flight" mode, the kind of reaction that a caveman would have when being attacked by a wild beast. The immediate effect of this is that our adrenal glands (found on top of each kidney) pump out adrenalin (epinephrine) and cortisol. This *stress response* results in stimulation of organs that are important for action such as the muscles, while taking blood away from the skin and upper part of the digestive tract (it may not surprise you to hear that the lower part, the colon, actually gets stimulated!). There is an increase in alertness, glucose (simple sugar) and lipids (fats) are released into the blood from storage areas to provide energy, the pupils dilate and the heart rate is increased. Now these responses were really important to our caveman because they increased his chance of survival, and a little burst of cortisol and adrenalin can be a good thing for us too. But, the problem comes when the stress response is activated continuously!

Organ systems deteriorate as they constantly attempt to re-establish the internal balance that has been disturbed by the stress response. In addition, a continual excess of cortisol (the body's natural cortisone) can promote the breakdown of nerve cells and loss of bone density. Eventually, the body can go from being in a constant "wired" state, to absolute exhaustion, where even the act of getting out of bed in the morning can be a trial. At this stage the adrenal glands are no longer functioning efficiently, and very often thyroid function is compromised too, along with many other organ systems. Research increasingly points to the critical role that stress can play in obesity, diabetes, thyroid dysfunction, osteoporosis, hypertension, heart disease, gastric ulcers, cancer, gastrointestinal disorders and many disorders of the immune system among others. Chronic stress has been shown to affect behaviour, and has been linked to psychiatric illnesses such as depression and anxiety.

So, what can we do about it? Well, the easy thing is to recommend that you remove yourself from the object of stress. But of course this is not always possible or preferable. An important step is to investigate one of the many ways that you can adjust your ability to manage the stress. This could be anything from journaling and massage, to practicing yoga, meditation, tai chi or any of the many different options that are available to us in Guelph. Exercise is a wonderful stress-reliever; even walking for 40 minutes a day can greatly

improve your sense of well-being. The key thing is make some time for you.

Your Naturopath will be able to determine how well you are coping with the stress, and might recommend lifestyle and dietary changes, supplements, herbal remedies, homeopathy and/or acupuncture protocols that will help to support any organs that have already been affected, and increase your resistance to further stress. To find out more about stress and how to help yourself improve your overall health, please call me at The Guelph Naturopathic Healthcare Clinic, 827-9605.