



Stress & Health

by award-winning author / stress-relief expert **Susie Mantell**

Q: Dear Susie, What Does Stress Do To People, and How Can I Tell If It's Doing It To Me? I Never Sleep!

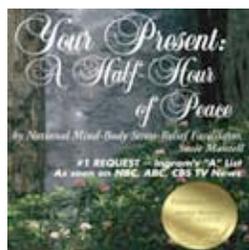
A: **Simply put, stress is a signal that something needs to change.** It's the body-mind's innate response to internal and external factors that disrupt normal functioning or disturb emotional, cognitive or physical well-being.

Perhaps you've heard stories of a 5' 2" mother suddenly lifting a car to save her baby. That is the "Fight or Flight" response of the central nervous system that occurs whenever stress, fear, anger or pain are present. In this case, it is working for her, but that is not always the case. In this automatic reaction, pulse quickens and blood flow to the large muscle groups increases. It is as if we are literally preparing to do battle or run for our lives! Respiration quickens and becomes more shallow, and stress hormones release to help us do what we must.

When these resources are summoned unnecessarily and habitually due to excessive stress levels, our body sends an "emergency" signal that sets in motion a mechanism that can tax our intricate systems. Many experience sleeplessness or fatigue, depression and back pain due to stress. Irritability, nightmares and absence of laughter in our day can indicate stress, too. A racing heartbeat, sweaty palms and over/under eating are more signs that someone may be manifesting the stress in their lives physically.

First, the obvious: Each of us must assume responsibility for lifestyle choices, including mindful nutrition, moderate (if any) use of caffeine and alcohol, deep restful sleep, healthy, meaningful relationships and regular, pleasurable recreation and exercise. Meditation and other relaxation techniques may not necessarily provide a cure, but they are a powerful, drug-free complement to professional health care. Symptoms can often be substantially diminished, thereby greatly enriching the quality of life!

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