



Holding a bundle of love like this baby can be a great stress reducer for many, says Dr. McClure.

“we have met the enemy!”

By Mark W. McClure, MD

As the cartoon character Pogo once said, “We have met the enemy and he is us!” That seems like an especially relevant comment when I think about the connection between our health and the environment in which we live. As some of us light up our cigarettes, open up a six-pack of beer, and settle in for another night of TV drama, you could make the case that we often are our own worst enemies.

While this is a urology practice, we embrace holistic medicine and the concept that body, mind, soul, and environment are an inter-connected, dynamic web (I’m proud to be a member of the American Board of Holistic Medicine, as well as being board-certified in urology). One common approach to health and healing is reductionist thinking, which says: “If we fix this one problem, all will be well.” For the patient with a broken leg, that approach to treatment works very well. The holistic mindset is quite different. It views the body—and the environment within which the body functions—as a magnificent symphony. Every player has a vital role. If one player slips off key or out of tune, the conductor goes to work to restore harmony and balance to the whole system.

By design, our bodies yearn for and reach for homeostasis—for balance in all parts of ourselves. Water is a good example of the need for balance. Your body and mine are made up mostly of water—85 percent of your brain, 80 percent of your blood, and 70 percent of your muscle is water. Every cell in your body needs water to live. Water helps remove dangerous toxins that your body takes in from the air you breathe, the food you eat, and the chemicals used in the various products you use on your skin and hair. It helps clean up your internal environment.

And our body signals us when it needs more water. With insufficient water, you are likely to experience constipation, dry skin, and an increased incidence of urinary tract infections as well as recurring headaches. We pay a price when the system is out of balance—in this instance, simply by not taking in six to eight glasses of water each day, we profoundly affect our internal environment.

THE IMPACT OF STRESS

Stress is another environmental issue that affects everyone I know, including me. Stress is mediated through the adrenal glands, which are located adjacent to the kidneys. Several hormones important in the body’s reactions to stress are made in the adrenal glands. What is true is that acute stress has a beneficial effect—it enhances immune function. But most people are under such a constant heavy load of stress that it has become their familiar norm. Learning to understand our individual stress load and how we deal with stress is critical to achieving good health (see box). We all need time off to replenish our whole selves. We also need the understanding, and the commitment and desire, to manage the stress that is simply part of the experience of being alive.

Stress manifests in many ways. As a urologist, I see many patients who have pelvic pain. Many have seen other specialists—gynecologists, general surgeons, gastroenterologists—seeking relief from what is generally ill-defined discomfort. What I find in many instances is that these patients tense up their pelvic muscles so that it’s much like a Charlie horse, leading to lactic acid production and ultimately to pain. This becomes a feed-forward cycle: as they tense these muscles, it induces pain, which causes them to tense up even more.

I teach them that there are many ways to relax these muscles and reduce stress, such as yoga, deep breathing, exercise, and above all, listening to their bodies. When they use their minds this way, they get better. They learn to relax, to let go of or at least diminish the stress in their lives. **llll**

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A DOZEN WAYS TO EASE STRESS

Perhaps a majority of patients have excessive, unrelenting stress as a common underlying cause of their health problems. That is why, without exception, I encourage my patients to understand the nature and extent of the stress in their lives, and to know they can take charge of doing something about it!

While stress is manageable, it takes focus and energy to do the job until stress management itself becomes a lifestyle choice. The reward comes as you move to a stronger sense of well-being and greater health in all parts of your life. Trust me, managing stress is worth the time and commitment it takes to do so. Here are a dozen proven, highly effective ways to take control of the stress in your life:

1. Eliminate caffeine. Don’t just cut back; eliminate this harmful, stress-inducing drug from your life.
2. Avoid violent movies, books, and TV programs and go on a “news fast” by not reading the paper, listening to the radio, or watching the news on TV. Do this for a week, then work to extend the time. I’ve been on a news fast for 10 years. It’s fantastic!
3. Exercise regularly. See our web page, www.urolmd.com, for suggestions of how to begin.
4. Associate with calm people.
5. Practice yoga and meditation daily.
6. Learn biofeedback and guided visualization techniques.
7. Try natural relaxants such as the herbs kava kava, chamomile, and passionflower.
8. Try using Bach flower remedies such as rescue formula or dandelion, or try taking flower essences such as elm, lavender or yarrow (available in health food stores).
9. Get at least seven hours of deep sleep daily. Take valerian, skullcap, or kava kava individually or in combination if insomnia is a problem.
10. Practice forgiveness and understanding, starting with yourself. Release all grudges. Rectify existing relationship problems.
11. Beautify your environment. Plant flowers. Appreciate nature.
12. Slow down and smell the roses! Tell others you love them.
13. Let’s make this a baker’s dozen: Practice random acts of kindness and senseless acts of joy!

You’ll find many more stress management ideas on our web site, www.urolmd.com. Click on the link that says Stress Reduction.