

Let's talk about Stress!

Stress... yikes! Just hearing or reading the word elicits an immediate, internal response! We can all relate to it, mostly in a negative sense, of “something” that is undesirable and overwhelming. We are highly sensitive beings, constantly monitoring the input pouring in through our five senses, as being pleasant and calming, or annoying, painful and alarming. Our brain, nervous system and hormones constantly respond to the effect of the incoming information, even when we are asleep. Stress responses, in short bursts, are normal reactions that enhance our ability to manage intense situations. We are designed to maintain an equilibrium between responding appropriately to a heightened state of urgency or intensity, and then relax when it's over.

Emotional, physical and psychological factors that cause injury, pain, a sense of loss or danger, lead to multiple chemical reactions in the body, particularly the nervous system, brain and hormones. Adrenaline, released from the adrenal glands, increases the heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate and blood sugar – all designed to get oxygenated blood to muscles, to either “fight” the offending situation, or take “flight” and get away as quickly as possible. This is known as a Sympathetic Nervous System Response. Once the threat has been overcome or removed, the calming effect of the Parasympathetic Response settles the body back into equilibrium again.

Chronic stress leads to abnormal levels of hormones being secreted into the bloodstream for prolonged periods, mainly cortisol from the adrenal glands, which can adversely affect brain function, particularly memory and sleep. High levels of cortisol also affect two important parts of the brain that control all other hormones in the body – the hippocampus and the hypothalamus, which in turn affects our “Master gland” - the pituitary gland. The pituitary gland controls the thyroid gland, the adrenal gland and kidneys, the sexual glands and many other regulating mechanisms that control healthy metabolism.

Stress can have many long-term effects on the body and one's sense of wellbeing. It affects mood and energy levels, lowers immunity to infection, accelerates the aging process and inflammation in the body, increases the risk of stroke and heart-attack, stomach ulcers, osteoporosis, and can lead to unhealthy lifestyle behaviour such as poor diet, increased alcohol and medication consumption and cigarette smoking. In addition many stress-affected people find themselves gaining weight, particularly around the middle, despite trying to cut back on calories and increasing exercise – which are helpful counter-measures, but may not be enough to offset the hormonal changes affecting the body's metabolism.

Stress is a normal fact of life, we can't avoid it completely and it can be a positive motivator to enhance our performance, such as running a race or finishing a deadline task. In an ideal world, we learn to adapt to it and balance our lives around it. However, it is the prolonged state of stress - feeling threatened, overloaded and “distressed,” that has negative consequences on our health and leads to “dis-ease”. The challenge is to stay healthy by finding ways to manage stress effectively.

Stress Management

"Stress management" doesn't just happen - it requires us to consciously seek time, space and activities that allow us to detach from the frenetic pace and sensory overload we find ourselves dealing with each day. It takes our bodies time to relax, and we need to give ourselves time to benefit from the relaxation, as often as possible. A relaxing space may be found out in nature, in the garden, resting, listening to guided imagery or music, or meditation. Switch off the phone, TV, radio, and step away from your computer! Give your mind a chance to settle down and "tune in" to your body and your inner feelings. Exercise helps to relieve stress by releasing the pent up energy in our muscles, promotes deep breathing and causes our brains to release "feel-good" chemicals called endorphins. Mindful exercises like Tai Chi, Qi Gong, Yoga and walking, can help to strengthen our internal ability to manage our reactions to stressful situations. Playing with children, pets and finding humor in life, can do wonders for a stressed person's soul! Massage, acupressure and other gentle forms of bodywork help to relax our whole body, and remind us of what it is like to feel calm again.

Bowenwork for stress.

Many stressed-out people feel achy and stiff in their muscles and joints, their posture changes under the burden of their situations, which in turn leads to feeling burned out, and the cycle of pain is exacerbated. Bowenwork is a unique and unusual form of soft-tissue bodywork that is very effective in relaxing muscle tension and reducing the body's stress levels. It is a gentle neuromuscular technique that resets the nervous system, helping to restore calmness and deep relaxation throughout the whole body. By applying light rolling moves over specific muscles and areas of the body, signals are sent, via the nervous system to the brain, to reorganize the dysfunctional tension patterns in the body. Sets of moves are followed by two to five minute delays, where the practitioner leaves the client relaxing on the table and allows for the body to integrate the effect of the work. This leads to deeper breathing, slower heart rate, improved blood circulation to the tissues and the removal of waste fluids via the lymphatic system. When the nervous system relaxes, the adrenal glands reduce the amount of adrenaline and cortisol they are producing, which in turn sends signals to the brain and the rest of the hormone system to start returning to a point of balance. Pain levels can be reduced significantly and people report feeling more flexible, sleeping better, and are much more energetic for days after a session. The effect of a Bowenwork session can be quite profound and can last far longer than many other bodywork techniques. Many clients only need 2 –3 sessions, one week apart initially, and then a tune up once a month or when they feel the effects of stress returning.

Recent Case Study:

A woman in her mid 50's came to my office for Bowenwork to help with weight loss, bladder weakness and sleep issues. This lady is an administrative assistant and spends most of her day in front of a computer, working for a demanding boss. When she lay or sat in certain positions, she would get tingling and numbness in her hands. She was about 20 pounds overweight and felt too tired to exercise after work, so physical activities were limited to occasional walks on the weekends. In her 40s, she'd had a total hysterectomy and ever since then, she needed to go to the bathroom at least 3 times during the night, and had occasional incontinence. When I assessed her, she had significant tightness in her neck and shoulders. In the first Bowenwork session, I focused on general relaxation and supporting her kidneys and adrenal glands. She was surprised

at how she almost fell asleep during the session, even though the amount of work I did on her was minimal with very light pressure. A week later she returned and reported to me that on the night of the last session, she had slept throughout the entire night! She woke up feeling very energized and was able to take a walk for a couple of evenings after work, and the tingling and numbness in her hands had not bothered her. I did one more Bowenwork session on her and asked her to keep in touch with me, to let me know how she felt.

The next day, she was back to the office, specifically to tell me how much better she was feeling, her bladder problem was gone, and she was not feeling nearly as stressed at work, even though her employer was still demanding.

For further information about Bowenwork go to: www.bowenworkforlife.com

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