

Yoga & Meditation – the antidote to stress

Stress is now one of the most common words in the English vocabulary, describing everything from a missed appointment to a life-threatening diagnosis.

So what really is stress?

Stress really results from perceiving obstacles to the fulfillment of our needs and desires.

The body responds aggressively to these perceived obstacles or threats. It's called the "fight/flight" response. It's a stress response that arises from a primitive part of the brain and is designed to ensure our survival.

During this fight/flight response, a number of physiological changes occur which prepare the body to respond aggressively to a perceived threat:

- Raised heart rate and blood pressure – heart pumps more blood
- Faster breathing – consume more oxygen and expel more carbon dioxide
- Stress hormone release
 - adrenal glands pumps out adrenaline and cortisol
 - pancreas releases more glucagon and less insulin, raising blood sugar
 - release less rejuvenating hormones (DHEA, growth hormones – age)
- Shifting blood circulation away from digestion to muscles
- Sweating
- Stickier blood clotting cells- platelets become stickier
- Weakened immunity – immune system becomes suppressed

If the challenge is life threatening, these bodily changes are useful, but if the threat is more psychological, the regular activation of the fight/flight response can weaken our health. These are the seeds of illness.

Change in Physiology	Leads to
Increase blood pressure, heart stress	Coronary heart disease
Increase stress hormones	Anxiety, insomnia, addictions
Increase blood sugar	Diabetes, obesity
Decrease circulation to digestive tract	Digestive disturbances
Decrease growth, sex hormones	Premature aging
Decrease immunity	Infections, cancer
Increase in sticky platelets	Heart attacks, strokes

This is where meditation and/or yoga come in.

When you meditate or practice yoga, the body shifts into a state of restful awareness, which is counterbalancing to the fight/flight response. During meditation or yoga you can experience:

- Decreased heart rate – heart pumps less blood
- Normalisation of blood pressure
- Quieter breathing- consume less oxygen and release less carbon dioxide
- Reduced stress hormones
 - adrenal glands produce less adrenaline and cortisol
 - produce more rejuvenating hormones (DHEA, growth hormones)
 - pancreas function normalises
- Reduced sweating
- Strengthened immunity – immune function improves

- Platelet function normalises

Regular activation of the restful awareness response has physical and psychological benefits.

War vs. Peace	
Fight/Flight	Restful Awareness
↑ Heart rate	↓ Heart rate
↑ Blood pressure	↓ Blood pressure
↑ Respiration	↓ Respiration
↑ Perspiration	↓ Perspiration
↑ Stress hormones	↓ Stress hormones
↓ Anti-aging hormones	↑ Anti-aging hormones
↑ Platelet stickiness	↓ Platelet stickiness

When you feel overwhelmed or anxious, it is easy to forget that you have choices and that there are many tools and techniques that can help you to feel better right away. One of the most effective stress-relieving practices is meditation.

A regular practice helps you go beyond turbulence, releasing stress, fatigue, and emotional turmoil. Even as your body is resting deeply in meditation, your mind is awake, although it is quiet.

The yoga classes that I run are based on Dr Deepak Chopra's Seven Spiritual Laws of Success and is a meditative and relaxing style of yoga. Yoga is a philosophy, a science, a way of life that originated in India over 5,000 years ago. The word Yoga is a Sanskrit word. Sanskrit is an ancient language of India and it is related to the English word yoke. Yoga is the union of body, mind, and spirit and when our physical, mental, emotional and spiritual selves are working in harmony with one another, we enjoy a sense of wellbeing, calmness, clarity, peace of mind and enthusiasm for life.

It is not about sitting in a lotus position and getting into bendy poses. It's about doing what your body allows you to do, and eventually you'll improve your flexibility, strength, balance and also cardio function. It's the integration of body, mind and soul through procedures that enhance mind-body coordination. These techniques awaken poise, grace, strength and the development of centered awareness even in the midst of chaos and turmoil. They improve your physical health and your mental clarity while heightening your senses of perception.

As a consequence of these practices, you are able to experience increased vitality along with better mental and physical capacity. When you feel physically vital, emotionally stable, and psychologically centered, your ability and desire to love and express authentic compassion expand.

Yoga classes are on:

Mondays at 6.15 pm – 7.15 pm and 7.30 pm – 8.30 pm

Fridays at 9.30 am – 10.30 am and 11.30 am – 12.30 pm

Or you can join us for a taster meditation session on Fridays at 10.45 am and see how meditation could work for you.