

Health, Mind & Body

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Identifying causes is key to managing stress

IF THERE is one aspect of life in the modern world that affects all of us, it's stress. In fact, it's so prevalent and can have such a serious effect on our health, that April has been named Stress Awareness Month. Yet despite the potential negative effects of stress, it can also be beneficial.

Stress can lead to a wide variety of health conditions including impaired immune function, headaches, sleep problems, cardiovascular diseases, uncharacteristic anger, anxiety and even depression, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. Stress can also have a negative financial effect. It has been estimated that stress related medical expenses, lost wages and lost productivity among employers costs the U.S. economy upward of \$300 billion per year.

The key to managing stress is in our ability to identify its causes, according to Anna Zendell, PhD, MSW, and Carol Shenise, MS, RN of Excelsior College's School of Health Sciences. Events or conditions that cause stress trigger our mind and body into action in an effort to cope with the situation. When this happens, the body releases adrenaline and cortisol which can provide quick energy and sharpened focus. This can be beneficial when experiencing short-term



situations such as running late for an appointment, preparing for a test at school, having to take a traffic detour, or making a presentation to our boss. It's when a stressful situation overcomes our ability to cope with it, or becomes the norm and continues for long periods of time, that its negative effects can become a real health problem.

Managing stress, whether

short- or long-term, can depend upon the source of the factors or stressors that caused it in the first place. There could be environmental factors such as the change in seasons and natural or man-made toxins. Social factors such as living or working in crowded conditions and financial downturns are common triggers. Even our personal values and beliefs can come in conflict with every-

day events which can cause or aggravate an existing situation. Understanding what causes or increases our stress levels is the first step toward finding a means to lessen its negative effects.

The impacts of stress on daily life are often unique to each individual as these tend to manifest in our weaker areas. Our bodies and minds can become fatigued and we feel tired or worn out.

Our immune systems can become slow to respond so that we become ill more often or recovery from an existing illness becomes much more difficult to achieve. One or more important areas of our social lives may be affected such as work and personal relationships, and parenting. We just don't find pleasure and take less time to do the things that will help to relieve stress and promote relaxation.

While we cannot always change or eliminate the things that trigger stress in our lives, we can make a conscious effort to change our behaviors in response to these factors. We can say no to new responsibilities, or put limits to what we take on. We can take care of our bodies by healthful eating, drinking plenty of water, and exercising. We can use various stress reduction strategies such as setting aside some quiet time for ourselves, adding humor to our day, visiting with friends, or getting a massage.

Stress-causing situations may be common place in our fast-paced society but this doesn't mean that we have to accept their consequences as a fact of life. This, Zendell and Shenise say, is where exercising our personal power to take control and either change the conditions or our response to situations can make all the difference.

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Chiropractic care can greatly benefit runners

FOR THOSE who are regular runners and in overall good shape, it may seem odd to consider chiropractic care, but taking care of yourself when you're healthy can be the best way to avoid future injuries. Gone are the days when chiropractic care was needed just for aches, injuries or pain. Many athletes are turning to chiropractic care on a regular basis to maintain optimal health and fitness.

If your body is perfectly and absolutely aligned, then you might be the most unique person on the planet. Almost no one has perfect alignment. Getting aligned and staying aligned allows your body to handle the

hard pounding it takes when you run. The high impact of running can lead to long-term pain and injury if you continue to run without a properly aligned core.

Myriad issues are likely to occur for most people after years of running with poor alignment: pain in the feet, shoulders, lower back or even pinched nerves. In most instances, people don't seek chiropractic care until injuries begin, and by that time they require rehabilitation instead of injury prevention.

Dr. Christopher Lauer, LifeClinic chiropractor at Life Time - The Healthy Way of Life Company, has seen many runners come in for both injury preven-

tion and injury care. "The first thing we do with a patient is a thorough chiropractic examination, postural evaluation and functional examination," Lauer says. "Through these exams, we often find deficiencies or problems with biomechanics."

Runners are particularly prone to posterior chain weakness or lower crossed syndrome, both of which require adjustments for long-term correction. "Some of the most common injuries from running I see are overuse injuries including plantar fasciitis, shin splints, ankle sprains, knee pain and hip pain," Lauer says. "By being focused on function, and not necessari-

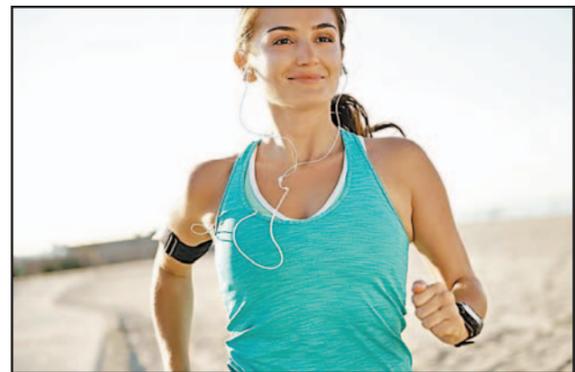
ly pain, we can catch injuries before they happen and get an athlete back on track faster than if they have sustained one."

Preventive chiropractic care offers runners many advantages. Joints can't flow through the full range of motion when misaligned and since runners rely heavily on their joints, preventive care can improve running experiences indefinitely.

Ways chiropractic care helps runners:

- Better coordination
- Better reaction time
- Increased balance
- Heightened accuracy
- Amplified precision
- Stronger muscles

Chiropractors can per-



form a full evaluation on your current alignment, offer personalized adjustments and set you on a course of optimal athleticism. "Depending on the condition of the individual, we also do rehabilitative

therapy or posture correction to ensure a longer-lasting result from the care that we give," Lauer says. "We find people are much happier with this approach, which leads to stronger athletes and families."



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