

STRESS, IT'S A BIT OF A DRAMA !

We have only evolved 0.02% since we humans were cave dwellers, back in those times our lives were much less stressful and our stresses were less frequent although a tad more dramatic. Imagine one day a sabre toothed tiger shows up at the mouth of your cave, this would be a highly adrenaline fuelled stress situation with only 2 probable actions plans for the caveman ... fight the tiger and subsequently eat it or take flight and run away from it. Once he had executed his 'fight or flight' action he would then be able to relax and recover, safe and happy that this type of stressful situation probably wouldn't happen again for some time. All this is natural and the release of adrenaline is desirable to shift him into gear.

Fast forward to today's caveman, He is constantly under threat from mini sabre toothed tigers and as such has a constant drip feed of low grade adrenaline (cortisol) into his system. This constant release of cortisol from the adrenal glands, into our body is something that we are ill equipped to deal with. Coupled with a lack of exercise and poor nutritional choices this stressful life we lead is a recipe for dramas.

A day in the life of our modern sabre toothed tiger fighting caveman aka stressman:

- Get up after poor sleep and eat a high carb breakfast.
- Drive across town in maddening traffic.
- Get to a highly stressful job and work like a dog.
- Eat more high carb food throughout the day or eat nothing because you don't have time, instead have umpteen coffees and fags.
- Leave work late tired and stressed, drives through maddening traffic home.
- Partner asks him to put up the flat packed wardrobe.
- Eat more high carb dinner and a few beers to relax.
- Watches TV and snacks on junk.
- Goes to bed and tries to sleep but cant because mind is whirling about work.
- Get up 2-3 times in the night to pee.
- Repeat.

We are not designed to deal healthily with these constant types of stresses and the never ending flow of cortisol in our systems. Something has to give ! **Problems associated with excessive and prolonged exposure to stress / cortisol:**

- Erratic emotional behaviour.
- Lack of sex drive.
- Decreased muscle mass and reduced strength.
- Reduced metabolic rate (lethargic lacking energy and enthusiasm).
- Increased fat, cushings disease, syndrome x etc
- Weaker bones.
- Back pain / joint pain.
- Elevated cholesterol.
- Poor concentration, forgetful, poor work performance.
- Too tired to exercise.
- Sleepy during the day after eating.
- Food cravings especially high carb processed food.
- Reduced immune function causing increase susceptibility to illness.

So where's the good news ?

There is no problem with having some infrequent stresses in our lives and the odd shot of adrenaline (high grade cortisol) is good so long as we do what nature intended, namely, exercise and then have time to recover. We can off-set the debilitating effects of our 'stressman' lifestyle by doing the things we are designed to do:

• **Exercise.** Without a doubt, exercise is a good thing ! However not all exercise is equal, for example a long run may make us feel better, but it may still be adding to an already stressed system. The 'feel good' factor we get from low intensity, high repetition training is a by product of endorphins. Our system can't differentiate between stress from work, relationship, training, substance abuse, food intolerances, dehydration, illness or electromagnetic stress, it's all stress to the caveman in us. Therefore some clever training with weights / body weight or some interval type training may be best. Of course excess training can cause adrenal fatigue, this is whole different ball game and often effects enthusiastic athletes who train hard without allowing adequate rest. Training to combat stress isn't just about getting sweaty and out of breath, it's about training smart. Hormones such as growth hormone (GH) and testosterone can play a significant part in countering the effects of excess and chronic cortisol exposure.

• **Nutrition.** Eat as we are designed to eat with plenty of protein and vegetables. Our food should be nutrient dense to keep us healthy and to receive the correct amount of protein, fats, carbs, minerals and vitamins and also avoid the 'spike - crash' that a diet high in processed carbs and sugary food gives. Our cave man ancestors only eat what he could hunt, fish, gather, pick or pluck. Fluctuating blood sugar levels caused by poor food choices lead to a big increase in cortisol (stress hormone) and subsequently a reduction in testosterone. This in turn leads to fat storage, wasting of muscle mass, poor brain function, poor sex drive and a host of other modern day medical problems.

• **Relaxation.** Learn to relax and be gentle with yourself. Try Yoga, stretching, Qigong, Tai chi, walk the dog, get out into nature, meditate, keep a grateful diary, actually breathing deeply, anything you enjoy that helps you relax. Unfortunately getting leathered doesn't count !

• **Supplements.** Some supplements will surely help with stress, medical problems, brain function and the fat accumulation associated with stress. When we are stressed our ability to absorb food is greatly reduced so we do not get the full benefit from the nutrients in our food. Fish oil and multivitamins will help for a start as will ginseng and a digestive enzyme.