



PURA VIDA HEALTHCARE
Your Mind-Body Connection

How to Dance Gracefully with Stress

~Nicola Dehlinger, ND

Let's face it: daily stress is inevitable for the vast majority of us. Buzzwords like "balance" and "stress management" float all around us, but do we know what that really means? Or better yet, why it's important?

Managing your stress effectively has never been more important and can prove to be tricky for a lot of us. Managing stress does not have to be about not having any stress. It's more about maintaining or re-establishing calm within yourself amidst the storm. If you don't have a wellness plan, take some time and put some *reasonable, realistic* goals on paper. Consider getting a wellness buddy to help keep you accountable and make it fun! Exercise can be a great way to manage stress and keep your heart healthy – it has been proven time after time to be one of the best ways to protect your heart.

When we get stressed out we produce cortisol, which actually increases inflammation. Inflammation is now being touted as the root of all evil (chronic disease evil, that is!). It is actually to blame in forming the plaques we all hear about that ultimately cause heart attack and strokes. Inflammation can be reduced by eating less sugar, drinking and eating more foods that reduce inflammation (like turmeric, healthy fats, green tea, and leafy veggies) and using alcohol in small quantities. What is interesting is that cortisol, the hormone released when we get stressed, also contributes to inflammation.

Here's the skinny on healthy fats: they are actually cardio-protective. They lubricate your joints. They are anti-inflammatory. They help to regulate your mood and focus. They help to normalize cholesterol (yep, you read that right). And, the research is showing that there is NOT a link between saturated fat or cholesterol and heart disease. More often than not, sugar and refined carbohydrates are to blame for cholesterol or blood pressure levels that are too high. Sugar has been linked to increased levels of triglycerides, which is a major factor in heart disease. Good news for whole foods like eggs, avocados, coconut milk, and grass-fed red meat. These are heart healthy foods, so feel free to incorporate them into your balanced diet. Don't forget to include your fish oil supplements, which are rich in both eicosapentaenoic acid (EPA) and docosahexaenoic acid (DHA). EPA has stronger anti-inflammatory benefits, especially helpful for heart and joint health. DHA seems to be more effective with enhancing memory and brain development.

Don't put off getting some lab work and checking in with your health care provider. Consider getting a full cardiac blood workup – research is showing total cholesterol, HDL and LDL to be outdated and not as useful as we once thought. What we want to look for is a breakdown in

types of cholesterol – some of which are harmful while others are actually beneficial. There are other markers like high sensitivity C-reactive protein which is an inflammatory marker and homocysteine which can be linked to “sticky platelets”.

Finally, there is more and more research linking feelings like gratitude, appreciation, love and joy to improved heart health. Many of us know this to be true, but can blow it off because it seems to simple or unattainable or just too “woo-woo”. Get over it. Emotional stress has been shown to create chemicals and hormones that promote inflammation. Feelings of optimism actually increase your antioxidant level (see research article review below). How many more scientists to you need to tell you that attitude is everything? You know it in your heart – and now your head knows it too.