

# CONTROLLING STRESS HELPS CONTROL ASTHMA

## Tools To Control Your Asthma & Allergies

We're stressed out, burned out, stressed to the max. Fifty years ago stress was thought to be a "good" thing needed to enhance performance. Physicians now know *stress is harmful, a condition or feeling we experience when we feel the demands made on us exceed our personal ability to cope – in other words, a feeling of being overwhelmed*. Stress can be *internal*, from a physical illness; it can be *external*, caused by pain, extreme heat or cold; it can be *psychological*, caused by poor working or living conditions, financial strain or by difficult social and personal interactions.

Stress is a built-in "fight-or-flight" response: when we experience a shock or something we feel is a threat to our safety, we **release hormones** that help us **to survive**. The body responds to these hormones: our heart rate & blood pressure increases; more oxygen and blood sugar is delivered to power important muscles; we sweat more in an effort to cool these muscles and make them stay efficient. The hormones divert blood away from surface skin to our internal organs, reducing blood loss if we are hurt. These hormones focus our attention on the threat; we forget everything else & thus improve our ability to survive life-threatening events. This came in handy when primitive man was fighting dinosaurs.

But this survival technique has **negative effects** for modern-day living: when stressed, we become *excitable, anxious, jumpy and irritable*, unable to work effectively with other people. It is *difficult* to do activities requiring *precise, controlled skills*. Focusing on survival *interferes with our ability to make good decisions* normally made through examining information from many sources. When stressed, we are *more accident-prone*. We **re-act** rather than **act**. *Most life situations have better results* approached from a calm, rational, controlled and socially sensitive manner rather than acting on the "fight-or-flight" reactions.

If not controlled, **stress causes health problems**. It *lowers our resistance* and makes us prone to diseases and skin eruptions; it can make us *emotional cripples* and *age us prematurely*; it can lead to the *loss of jobs, friends, family and loved ones*. Studies show stress is associated with the onset of *depression or anxiety*; it *diminishes our quality of life* by reducing our feelings of pleasure and accomplishment.

**Stress** can be a **major trigger for asthma attacks**. A chronic illness like asthma creates its own stress because of the constant medical, emotional and physical disease pressures. *Dealing with your stress levels, or those of your asthmatic child, is an important step towards controlling and preventing asthma symptoms, as well as enjoying life a lot more!*

**Stress and strong emotions can worsen asthma symptoms** in some people. Crying or laughing increases the rate and depth of breathing in the same way heavy exercise does. The hormones released by the body during times of stress cause the muscles around the air passages in the lungs to tighten, which narrows the air tubes, making it difficult to breathe.

It is important to teach your asthmatic child how to quickly deal with stressful situations so they don't experience a worsening of their asthma symptoms or contribute to an asthma attack. It is important they recognize stressful situations, to know when they **need to relax and to learn how to concentrate on slowing down their breathing.**

**Stress often makes many allergy related symptoms appear, or get worse.** When we are under stress, allergies tend to develop; you can actually accumulate more allergies in times of stress as your body's immune system goes into overdrive. Learning how to stay calm and focused helps reduce stress and keeps many symptoms from developing.

**CONTROLLING STRESS HELPS CONTROL ASTHMA AND ALLERGY SYMPTOMS:**

- 1) learn to change your thought patterns that produce stress – what we think helps determine how we feel
- 2) avoid situations or people that cause you stress
- 3) exercise to help reduce stress
- 4) practice relaxation techniques – meditation, yoga, deep breathing, biofeedback, massage
- 4) eat well, avoiding sugars, caffeine & alcohol which increase anxiety
- 5) delegate responsibility – don't try to do it all yourself – by yesterday
- 6) get enough sleep; you shouldn't be tired when you arise
- 7) play – have fun, take vacations. Two weeks are better than one, and one week is better than 3 days
- 8) ask for help from friends and family
- 9) Ask your physician for help in learning how you can reduce your stress and improve your health.
- 10) Ask for the AAFA-TX hand-out sent via email, on breathing and relaxation techniques



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