

STRESS & HERBS

Anytime we experience a major change or event, we have stress.....Trust me I know!

So what is stress? Stress can possibly be best described as a group of body-wide non-specific responses induced by any number of situations or events. Just staying alive creates demands on the body for life maintaining energy. So by this definition even the fundamental part of being alive is stressful and should not be avoided. The trick is to ensure that the degree of stress we experience makes our life a joy, not a drag.

The body's reaction to stress is the same, independent of the source. Nerve signals are sent from the brain to several glands and these react by secreting hormones to cope with it. So stress is not just worry and strain, it is a keynote of life with all its ups and downs. A new exciting love can cause us as much stress as a major work deadline.

The wide array of triggers that elicit a 'stress response' are many and varied-marriage, divorce, death of a loved one, new job, move, etc.-any intense emotion such as fear or anger, fatigue, physical injury, surgery, temperature extremes, noise, crowding, illness. Change is the most powerful of stressors, any kind of change, even one perceived as positive, requires an adaptation of a new set of circumstances. The effects of stressors are cumulative, the more stressors in one's life at any given time, the higher the stress levels will be.

No two people are exactly alike as to which aspects of daily life will increase their stress levels. What might be a pleasant situation to one person, may be extremely stressful to another. In a general sense, a situation will be a stressor if it is perceived as threatening to well-being or requiring adjustment in any way.

There is a definite relationship between stress and illness, although the exact nature of this relationship is not yet fully understood. The more frequent and severe the life changes, the more likely we are to become ill. Some commonly stress related illnesses include: heart disease-stress often increases blood pressure and pulse along with altering blood chemistry such as increasing cholesterol levels; infectious diseases and cancer-stress reduces the effectiveness of the immune system; digestive disorders-the sympathetic nervous system which is activated during periods of stress, reduces production of most digestive juices, except for stomach acid, and often we tend to over or under eat during stressful periods and probably the most recognized-skin disorders, the most obvious effects are the appearance of rashes and premature aging.

Herbal help for stress depends on four categories of herbs, #1. Adaptogens-these are herbs that demonstrate a non-specific activity-like increase in power of resistance against physical, chemical or biological agents, and it has a normalizing influence, independent of the nature of the pathological state. Examples are Siberian Ginseng, Ashwagandha, Shitake and Schizandra

#2 Nervines-herbs that have an effect on the nervous system in some way-there are nervine tonics like Skullcap, Ginkgo; nervine relaxants such as Lemon Balm, Lavender, Lobelia and Hops; and nervine stimulators such as kola nut, coffee, rosemary and peppermint.

#3 Antispasmodics-these herbs affect the peripheral nerves and muscle tissues and have an indirect relaxing effect on the body. These include; Black Cohosh, Mugwort, Linden, Damiana and Hyssop among many others.

#4 Hypnotics-this group of herbs aid in inducing a deep and healing state of sleep. (they do not cause hypnotic trances) The mild hypnotics include Chamomile, Linden, the medium ones include Motherwort, Skullcap and the strong hypnotics include Valerian, Hops and Passionflower.

During times of stress and to help us to better handle the stressors in our daily lives, there are a number of things we can do. Along with the Stress Relieving Herbs mentioned above, it is also important to eat well balanced meals-especially foods rich in the B vitamins, get adequate rest along with a moderate exercise program and take time to 'smell the roses'-relax, pamper ourselves, enjoy quality time with family and friends or enjoying a favourite hobby or past time.

Yes, it really is all about balance!

Sue's Stress Fighting Tonic

Defense against those daily stressors!

100g Siberian Ginseng-root cut

60g Chamomile-flowers

60g Oatstraw-green tops

60g Skullcap-herb cut

3 litres of water

To Make: Starting with cold water and the Siberian ginseng, slowly bring to just below boiling point, then add remaining herbs, remove from heat, cover and let steep 30 minutes. Then strain out herbs and store in a glass covered container in fridge.

Take 2 Tablespoons (30ml) twice a day. I use this for 6 weeks at a time with 1 week off between repeats.

Emergency Stress Relief Formula

Keep this in a tincture form for those desperate times!

60g Skullcap

60g Valerian

30g Oats

Vodka or other 40% Alcohol

To Make: Place all herbs in a clean glass jar and cover with 40% alcohol-Vodka works well, cover tightly. Make sure that there is at least an inch of alcohol above the herb level. Shake well and store out of direct light for two to three weeks-shaking jar well at least once a day. Strain out the herbs and store in an amber glass bottle out of direct light.

Use during times of extreme stress and take by the teaspoon as needed. If acute stress is accompanied by indigestion and palpitations add 30g Motherwort, 30g Mugwort and 30g Chamomile to the above formula.