

Keeping Healthy During Tough Times:

Part 1: Fighting Stress

The financial crisis has brought hardships into many peoples' lives. Those people who focused solely on money may have realized that physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual balance is more appropriate to seek. Finance can affect or be affected by each of those four categories. For this reason, you should take control of your health more than ever.

Losing a job, losing money, searching for a job, fear of being fired, and all other financial stressors can have a negative effect on your health. Those who have been deeply affected by this crisis have turned to church, volunteer work, friends and family, while others turn to alcohol, despair, and depression. The latter categories, of course, all result from a feeling of weakness, vulnerability and hopelessness. These three feelings all spawn biochemical reactions that can be detrimental to your health. There is no doubt that any crisis that befalls someone will cause stress and anxiety.

This feeling of stress releases hormones in your body aptly named "stress hormones," the majority of which have some combination of unhealthy short-term and long-term effects on your body. Cortisol for example, can cause decreased lean body mass and increased fat storage. Furthermore, these stress hormones can interrupt the regular functioning of neurotransmitters that allow us to feel strong, confident, and happy. I'd like to tell everyone to be more positive about their current financial situation and realize that there is a beautiful sunny spring at the end of every winter, but that's easier to say than swallow. Instead, I'm asking you to ignore the small stressors and focus on helping yourself rebound from the larger stressors. The smaller stressors are easily avoidable and only bring you down.

What you may not know, is that even small daily stresses have been shown to be detrimental to one's health. Recent studies have shown that small-scale stresses like waiting in traffic, waiting in line, being in a rush, being angry at a friend, etc., can have a cumulative negative effect on overall health. These stressors can result in the deterioration of heart health, mental health, muscular health, intestinal health, and immune system function. As these

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stresses accumulate, the body begins to shut down and exhibit similar symptoms as when infected with a harmful pathogen—lack of desire for societal interaction, inactivity, lack of motivation, and lack of desire for enjoyable activities. Prolonged behavior of this type weakens the immune system, weakens muscles and, as stated, results in the gradual deterioration of your body. By being in this state, employers will be less likely to hire you and a vicious cycle may result. However, this deterioration is reversible and merely requires the true heartfelt desire to change your attitude. Of course desire is not the only requirement—action must take place too. So, here are some helpful hints for not letting small stressors affect you:

- It's all about your mindset. You wouldn't believe how much control your mind has over your actions and your own physiology.
- If you program yourself consciously and always remind yourself to let things go, it will eventually become subconscious.
- Let things go, especially the small stuff. Unless you have Inspector Gadget's car, then I don't think you can get out of the traffic jam you're in.
- Recognize that not everything is in your control. This may be the hardest point to grasp, but it is the most important and will help you tremendously in dealing with stress.
- Fight diligently, courageously, and intelligently for your goals. Never lose hope.
- Go for a walk or run to think things out and clear your head.

Do something you like! Try to forget the big stressors in your life and enjoy whatever it is you want to do.

Laugh... a lot!

Help others out. Whether you are fortunate or less fortunate, this is beneficial for all involved.

Use wisdom, but have the innocence and wonder of a child. Every adult can learn something from watching a child, as I'm sure most parents have. There is no reason that adults cannot be loyal, loving and find enjoyment in something near them.

Dave Tate, a world class power lifter, recounted a story that brought tears to his eyes in an interview with a well known fitness magazine. As he was sitting in on his son's kindergarten class one morning, the teacher brought a child who had recently lost his home in a fire to the front of the room, allowing his classmates to ask him questions. "Did you lose your toys?" "Did you lose your sneakers?" The child answered yes and even said that his dog had gone to heaven. He had lost everything but his family. Within minutes, all the children began to offer him what they thought they could. "You can have my toys." "You can stay in my house." "You can have my dog!" The kid, as gracious and wise as he was, said "Thank you, but we're fine. Everything I need is right in front of me."

It may not be easy or obvious, but if we learn to love what is most important in our lives and—regardless of our own circumstance—be kind and gracious to others, a lot of good can come in the midst of this financial crisis. Learn to let things go, to accept, to fight when the time is right, learn to love—and the daily stresses of life will no longer be pinning you down.