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MECCA

An Association of Mt. Bike Enthusiasts -- since 1996

Eight Ways to Relax

Poor cortisol: It means well but just doesn't know when to quit. Produced by your adrenal glands, this "stress hormone" helps regulate blood pressure and the immune system during a sudden crisis, whether a physical attack or an emotional setback. This helps you to tap into your energy reserves and increases your ability to fight off infection.

Trouble is, relentless stress can keep this survival mechanism churning in high gear, subverting the hormone's good intentions. Chronically high cortisol levels can cause sleep problems, a depressed immune response, blood sugar abnormalities, and even abdominal weight gain. "When cortisol spikes, it tells the body to eat something with a lot of calories--a great survival tactic if you need energy to flee a predator but not if you're fretting over how to pay bills," says nutritional biochemist Shawn Talbott, PhD. Fortunately, an antidote to the body's fight-or-flight mode has evolved: the relaxation response. Here are eight surprising ways to invoke stress management--and in some cases, cut your cortisol levels almost in half.

1. Meditation

Subjects who practiced Buddhist meditation significantly decreased both cortisol and blood pressure in a 6-week Thai study. Similarly, participants who meditated daily for 4 months decreased the hormone by an average of 20% in a study at Maharishi University, while levels in the nonmeditating control group actually went up slightly.

2. Tunes

Music can have a calming effect on the brain, especially while you're facing down a major stressor. When doctors at Japan's Osaka Medical Center played tunes for a group of patients undergoing colonoscopies, the patients' cortisol levels rose less than those of others who underwent the same procedure in a quiet room. Even if an invasive gastrointestinal exam isn't in your immediate future, you can forestall cortisol spikes in other stressful situations--when hosting a dinner, for instance--by queueing up background music. To wind down faster, listen to something soothing instead of watching TV.

3. Sleep

What's the difference between getting 6 hours of sleep instead of the suggested 8? "Fifty percent more cortisol in the bloodstream," Talbott says. When a group of pilots slept 6 hours or less for 7 nights while on duty, their cortisol levels increased significantly & stayed elevated for 2 days, found a study at Germany's Institute for Aerospace Medicine. The recommended 8 hours of nightly shut-eye allows your body enough time to recover from the day's stresses, Talbott says. When you fall short of the mark, take a nap the next day--Pennsylvania State University researchers found that a midday snooze cut cortisol levels in subjects who'd lost sleep the previous night.

4. Tea

The "cup that cheers" has deep associations with comfort and calm--just think of how the English revere their late-afternoon teatime. As it turns out, science confirms the connection: When volunteers at University College London were given a stressful task, the cortisol levels of those who were regular black-tea drinkers fell by 47% within an hour of completing the assignment, while others who drank fake tea experienced only a 27% drop. Study author Andrew Steptoe, PhD, suspects that naturally occurring chemicals such as polyphenols and flavonoids may be responsible for tea's calming effects.

5. Funny Friends

The pal who keeps you in stitches can do more than distract you from your problems--his very presence may help temper your hormonal stress response. Simply anticipating laughter is enough to reduce cortisol levels by nearly half, according to researchers at Loma Linda University. (You may be able to achieve the same stress-melting effect by popping in a DVD of *The Office* or *Groundhog Day*.)

6. Massage

A little pampering can rub your stress levels the right way. After several weeks of massage therapy, subjects' cortisol levels decreased by nearly one-third, on average, according to studies at the University of Miami School of Medicine and elsewhere. In addition to keeping cortisol under control, massage sessions reduce stress by promoting production of dopamine and serotonin, the same "feel good" hormones released when we socialize with pals or do something fun.

7. Developing your Spiritual Side

Religious ritual fortifies many people against everyday pressures, and it can also lower cortisol secretion, report University of Mississippi researchers. Churchgoing study subjects had lower levels of the stress hormone, on average, than those who did not attend services at all. If organized religion isn't of interest to you, try developing your spiritual side by taking a walk in nature's "cathedral"--in the woods or along a beach--or volunteering for a charity.

8. Chewing Gum

Next time you feel frazzled, try popping a stick of gum into your mouth to instantly defuse tension, suggest new findings from Northumbria University in the United Kingdom. While under moderate stress, gum chewers had salivary cortisol levels that were 12% lower than nonchewers and also reported greater alertness than their gum-deprived counterparts. One possible mechanism: In past experiments, chewing gum increased blood flow and neural activity in select brain regions.

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*Always looking for
stuff to put in this
newsletter - send
me something!*

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FINALLY – IT'S BIKING SEASON!!!

Future Events

Planning meetings are going on for the 24th Spring Festival. The next one = Monday, May 10th - 8:00 p.m. Sheriff's substation next to HomeTown Market in Huntington. Lots to do - come help us make plans! We have grand prizes lined up: bikes, weekend stay at Red Cliffs Lodge in Moab - a weeks' stay at Bear Lake. We have food and entertainment all lined up too. KOA campground is offering pay one night get 2nd night free and Holiday Inn Express has reduced rates for those calling and saying they are coming to the festival. We have AWESOME sponsors!

May 1st & 8th etc. = riding trails in the desert to prepare for the festival. Call Kim for time and place.

Spring Festival = May 14,15,16 - John Wesley Powell Museum - Green River, UT Register NOW at biketheswell.org - it's only \$40 for club members! - **NO DOGS OR 24 INCH or smaller TIRE BIKES ALLOWED ON ANY BUT THE BEGINNER RIDES.**

June 25 = Antelope Moonlight Ride - 10:00 p.m. @ Antelope Island State Park. 22 miles registration - \$22 before June 11; \$27 after. Register at www.daviscountyutah.gov or call 801-451-3286

Huntington Lake Triathlon = July 9-10 - plan to come participate or help out!

Cleveland Days Bike Ride = July 20 - (that's a Tuesday)-6:00 p.m.

CLUB BUSINESS

Please give Kim a call if you want to invite the club on any rides... or even if you want us to organize a ride for you!

Have you heard any news about any club members to share in this newsletter? If so, please let Kim know about it.

Go to biketheswell.org for all the latest information about any of our activities.

Remember your club membership gets you discounts on MECCA festival registrations and on AWESOME biking supplies at DECKER'S BICYCLES.

Kathi, Bartons, Deckers, Larry, Charlie, Betty, Jones' & Danny VW have requested email only copies of this newsletter. Please contact me (player@emeryschools.org) if you'd also like to stop getting the hardcopy in the mail - and go with just the email copy.

KNOW ANYONE WHO NEEDS A MECCA MEMBERSHIP?

Get the form at biketheswell.org

We are thinking of getting new club shirts – NICE ones with pockets, moisture wicking fabric, etc. We're wondering how many would be interested in paying \$20 or \$30 for one. The more shirts we get the cheaper it will be for each of us.

So far Will, Ed, Joy, Steve, Dan D, Dan VW, Kim, Rod, LaMar, Eldy, Emery & Sue have said they are interested.

Are you?

If so call or email Kim or Bartons.