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Stress can ruin your GOOD LOOKS!

Learn What You Can Do to Fight Back

Rarely have Americans faced so much stress as in recent months. The results are apparent on our psyches. Unfortunately, stress also takes a toll on our appearance. So, what are the hazards and what can you do to prevent lasting damage?

STRESS AND THE SKIN

When one is under stress, the skin is often the first organ to reflect it with increased sensitivity and reactivity. North Carolina dermatologist Beth Goldstein, M.D. explains, "On a cellular level, stress impacts the skin's primary function of acting as a protective barrier." Not only do chemicals that may normally not penetrate the skin get access, but an excess of inflammation-inducing chemicals is also released. The signs include redness, itching or swelling.

Adds Goldstein, "Decreased barrier function results in dehydration of the skin, which causes more superficial wrinkles." When stressed, people also tend to pay less attention to basic self-care, like hydration. This can lead to dull, dry skin, which progresses into fine lines. Both age-induced and stress-induced wrinkles can result from the release of excessive free oxygen radicals.

There's even a scientific link between the skin and stress. Psychodermatology is the practice of treating skin disorders with psychological and psychiatric



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therapy. "It involves seeing the patient in their entirety," says Dr. Goldstein. Using psychodermatology, doctors treat the underlying skin condition and recommend stress management techniques to improve clinical outcomes.

STRESS AND THE MIND

A recent European study looked at rates of stress and depression among 1,000 workers. Researchers found that 45% of new depression diagnoses could be attributed to excessive on-the-job demands under extreme time pressure. Charles Nemeroff, M.D., Emory University professor of psychiatry and behavioral sciences, says that despite variability in individual response to pressure, disrupted sleep is a common response.

"Sleep deprivation has a marked effect on one's appearance...it is seen in all of

the major stress syndromes including major depression and anxiety disorders." According to Nemeroff, individuals with stress disorders often have poor self-esteem and view their appearance with great disdain and self-criticism.

STRESS AND THE BODY

Long-term stress can generate serious health problems in the body's respiratory, reproductive, immune and nervous systems. Atlanta-based internist Arshia Shahriari, M.D. states that one of the most common presentations of nervous tension is weight gain. She explains, "Often patients resort to overeating as a means of self-soothing and this in turn affects their lifestyle." Stress can also cause weight gain by inducing excess production of cortisol, a stress hormone. Shahriari adds that in some people, a prolonged cortisol surplus results in fat deposits in the abdominal region.

Adds Dr. Nemeroff: "In individuals vulnerable to eating disorders such as anorexia nervosa or bulimia, stress often precipitates another episode or worsens the disorder."

STRESS AND THE SMILE

Stress may also be ruining your smile. Most of us endure some level of daily stress, whether it's a decision about what to wear or what to eat. Then there are the more significant concerns related to job loss, finances and health problems. One common physiological response to stressors is an unconscious clenching or grinding of the teeth (uncontrolled

grinding is known as bruxism). The ligaments and facial muscles associated with biting are attached to the temporomandibular joint. If grinding is not stopped or controlled it can cause headaches, and eventually even neck or back aches.

Teeth-grinding can rapidly age a youthful smile. Normally, the front two teeth are slightly longer than the adjacent lateral incisors. When the enamel biting edges of the front teeth are worn away, the smile takes on a much older appearance. Bruxism can also lead to chipping or cracking of teeth and fillings, which is not only unattractive but can be costly to repair. The more stress one is under, the more damaging the potential results.

Stress may also be affecting your gums and the bone supporting your teeth. Studies have shown a relationship between periodontal (gum) disease and anxiety. In addition, people with higher anxiety levels tend to increase bad habits like sucking on cheeks or lip-biting, which harm oral health.

Other conditions made worse as a result of emotional distress are dry mouth, canker sores, plus a tingling and burning sensation commonly known as burning mouth syndrome.

WHAT YOU CAN DO

Laughter is great medicine and is a proven stress-reduction strategy. If relentless media coverage of negative news stories is getting you down, listen to satellite comedy radio stations or pop in a comedy CD on the drive to and from work to put you in a more positive frame of mind. Laughter is known to generate a relaxed feeling, ease digestion and stimulate circulation. A good chuckle improves oxygen intake, which in turn



stimulates the heart, lungs and muscles. Positive thoughts create a chemical reaction by releasing neuropeptides that help fight anxiety.

Laughter can also help relieve pain by causing the body to produce endorphins, the body's natural painkillers. At the very least, laughter is a welcome distraction from stressful situations.

Another way to beat stress is to get in motion. Exercise will not only improve your appearance, but it can make you feel better by getting your mind off the things that are causing the stress.

Some people turn to medication to fight stress; Goldstein warns, "For skin conditions even the more powerful drugs will only provide a certain level of improvement unless the underlying stressors are addressed as well." For

others, meditation is a helpful and more natural antidote.

Cosmetic procedures may lead to a happier you. Enhancing appearance can boost self-image, which can reduce your risk for depression. But, Nemeroff urges caution: "Those who seek multiple procedures in the hope that they will remove their anxiety, depression and poor self-esteem are invariably disappointed with outcomes."

The experts recommend that the best approach is to address the underlying causes of stress, while remaining attentive to its effects on the skin, body and mind. It's tough out there these days. But taking care of yourself, and taking care to reduce stress, can keep you looking and feeling better as you tackle life's many challenges.



WITH A LIFELONG INTEREST IN BEAUTY, DR. RONALD GOLDSTEIN CONDUCTS ONGOING RESEARCH ON THE PHYSICAL ATTRACTIVENESS PHENOMENON AND ITS ROLE IN THE ACHIEVEMENT OF PERSONAL SUCCESS. HIS DENTAL PRACTICE WAS THE FIRST TO MOVE BEYOND THE SMILE AND FOCUS ON OVERALL FACIAL HARMONY. HE WRITES EXTENSIVELY FOR BOTH CONSUMERS AND THE DENTAL PROFESSION ON BEAUTY, ESTHETIC DENTISTRY AND RELATED TOPICS. DR. GOLDSTEIN IS THE AUTHOR OF THE 2-VOLUME TEXTBOOK, *ESTHETICS IN DENTISTRY* AND *CHANGE YOUR SMILE* (8 FOREIGN TRANSLATIONS), WHICH NOW IN ITS 4TH EDITION IS THE TOP-SELLING CONSUMER GUIDE TO DENTISTRY FOUND IN THOUSANDS OF DENTISTS' RECEPTION ROOMS AROUND THE WORLD. HE IS ON THE ADVISORY BOARD OF *NEW BEAUTY* MAGAZINE AND WRITES FOR IT AS WELL. HE IS THE FOUNDER OF TOMORROW'S SMILES, A NATIONAL NON-PROFIT FUND THAT HELPS DESERVING ADOLESCENTS RECEIVE LIFE-CHANGING SMILES THROUGH COSMETIC DENTISTRY. HIS MULTIDISCIPLINARY PRACTICE IS IN ATLANTA, GEORGIA.