

**By Dr. Derek Conte**

In September, I attended a medical symposium on the subject of psychoneuroimmunology, the study of how the state of one's mind affects their performance and health. Regular readers of this column are already familiar with this term. Being a subject dear to me and all chiropractors, I attended hoping to cross-pollinate the chiropractic view with that of my medical counterparts, many of whom were excited by this fairly new science, spiced by the notion that it was a touch heretical and almost forbidden.

This was validating to me since chiropractors are introduced to psychoneuroimmunology from their first days of training. Chiropractic texts have been trumpeting this understanding for over 100 years. Thankfully, research science is lending a hand by giving it even more credibility. Papers were delivered by these research scientists, immunologists, neuropsychiatrists, behavioral scientists and sleep specialists. Some of the speakers were leaders in their respective fields.

The culmination of the message was this: "When you are stressed, chemicals are released in your body that promote inflammation and reduce tissue resistance and immune system strength while also reducing mental function, physical strength and endurance" – in other words - short term stress in large amounts, or over a period of time, can turn us into an inferior version of ourselves incapable of giving our God-given best to life, work and love. Even a single, negative thought can cause a destructive chemical cascade to begin within the body.

The chemical cascade goes like this: When we're stressed by fear, lack of sleep, hunger, worry, anger, resentment - or even a very old, bad memory - our primitive, deep brain centers subconsciously react to the "emergency" by signaling the hypothalamus and sympathetic nervous system to release powerful chemicals to the pituitary gland, heart, lungs, vessels and skin.

Pro-inflammatory molecules are released in vessels and tissues in preparation for an injury that may soon come. Everything tightens up, blood rushes away from the brain and organs and toward the muscles. The digestive and immune systems are shut off. We are literally "scared spitless" as our heart rates jump and blood pressures soar.

Problem-solving ability yields to emotion, impulse and instinct. The part of you that reacts this way is unconscious and involuntary and deeply programmed in our physiology... as guileless as a child trying to protect itself. This state, known as "fight or flight", normal and good in small doses, but completely destructive to health and performance long-term if it is not controlled either by the removal of the offending stress or a strategy for neutralizing it is employed, such as breathing, meditation, exercise or just unplugging from media. If you can take good care of yourself in this way you'll find many immediate and long-term health and performance benefits for you and your families. Dr. Derek Conte is co-founder of Chiropractic Specialists at 1154 Concord Road in Smyrna and can be reached for questions or comments at: 404-784-6008. For more articles, info, photos, go to [drderekconte.com](http://drderekconte.com).