

## **Stress, Christmastime and Immunity**

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By Dr. Derek Conte

Let's go shopping for the gifts, the tree, the lights, the food, the wine and garlands. Let's go caroling in the neighborhood. Let's pack up and jump on a plane to see grandma! How wonderful are the love and joy of Christmastime and the entire holiday season and how often with it inevitably go things like stress and sickness. We try to do everything we can think of to make it the best Christmas ever. And we often do too much! In our frenzy to check every box on our long list, we cut corners taking care of ourselves. Too little sleep, fast food, diet soda with plenty of caffeine (ouch!), take a gradual toll and, just as we are ready to cook the big meal or jump on that plane, we start to sniffle, our joints are aching, and all we want to see is our beds.

Stress ignites a cascade of physiological events that can steal our enjoyment of the season like the Grinch himself. Headaches, earaches, sinus pain, sore throat, colds and the flu are frequent. We may even experience a heart palpitation. Why? Stress causes a reflex known as the "FIGHT or FLIGHT" response which is natural in all animals, intended to protect us in times of emergency such as during an earthquake or any life-threatening situation. You've heard the scenario: a mother, upon sensing a threat to her child, will respond instinctively and with extraordinary strength to protect the child and destroy the threat. But what exactly happens in the body as a result of this reflex? And can it be harmful to us if it comes at inappropriate times or lasts too long?

Under mental and physical stress, a fast-acting hormone (*epinephrine aka adrenaline*) is released causing the heart to beat faster and harder and vessels to constrict to drive up the blood pressure. The pupils dilate and the skin tightens. Blood flows away from the central organs and toward the muscles in readiness. Digestion, bowel function and the immune system are slowed --- why waste valuable energy when a grizzly is bearing down on you? Our sense of time and space are altered, slowing things down. Rational judgment is reduced and anxiety enters the scene. If this state of stress endures, the powerful long-lasting hormone (*cortisol*) is released which shuts off the immune system, exposing us to infections like a cold or flu and serious illnesses like cancer.

So what do we have? Too little sleep, bad diet, high blood pressure, reduced blood supply, constipation, altered judgment and a compromised immune system – the perfect recipe for constitutional breakdown. In fact, this is the state deliberately induced in POW's before interrogation and brainwashing begin! Fear, worry, anger and resentment all tend to arouse this state.

Chiropractors are highly trained in detecting stress in the body and removing it, without drugs, using specific adjustments to the spine. When the body is relaxed, the mind and spirit are also. This is the best way to enjoy the holidays and any day in your life. Stay close to you chiropractor this Christmas season and God Bless!

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