How Stress Affects the Mind and Body

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Stress is considered a “normal” part of our lives, and the societal norm is to just ignore it as much as possible while moving forward with your life. What happens though when stress controls people’s lives, and they have experienced chronic stress for many years? Dr. Rangan Chatterjee, an influential author, and TV host has come to the conclusion that the effects of long-term or chronic stress on the human body are quite under researched. In fact, Dr. Chatterjee believes that 80 percent of the issues he sees in his clinic, relating to insomnia, high blood pressure, depression, metabolic disease and weight gain are all related to stress. We have all heard that small amounts of stress are beneficial. That ideal mainly pertains to the basis of stress motivating us to do things that we know need to be done. Furthermore, stress has kept us safe from environmental stressors since the beginning of humanity.

As of recently, numerous studies have shown the prevalence of negative effects from persistent psychological stress. One of the most significant ailments related to stress is that it can weaken your immune system. Natural stressors such as exams were shown to suppress cellular immunity. Chronic stressors were associated with the suppression of humoral immunity (substances found in body fluids) as well as cellular immunity (T Cells). Chronic stress can also cause or put people at risk of cardiovascular disease. In fact, cardiovascular disease has been proven to be caused by chronic stress, regardless of whether you have a family history of it or not. Also, chronic stress can cause premature ageing. Take a look at Obama over the course of his presidency, the most stressful job in the country, and you can see how all those stressors affected his appearance. A study done by the National Center for Biotechnology Information delved deeper into this concept. Chronic stress basically inhibits the stability of homeostasis due to the changes in the autonomic, immune, and endocrine systems. Persistent stress actually can weaken our DNA strands, and our telomere length is an indicator of ageing. When telomeres
Stress

(protective caps on the end of chromosomes) get shorter, they weaken and cause cells to age more rapidly as well as causing the subject to die more prematurely. The negative effects of stress are numerous and obvious, but fortunately Dr. Chatterjee has a way to combat this. His recently published book, “The Stress Solution,” provides certain things like breathing exercises, meditation routines, sleep schedules, diet routines, cutting back on social media/smartphone usage as well as building stable friendships. With these foundation building techniques, it is easily achievable to live a much less stressful burdened life. One of the main stressors he advises people to avoid is avid smartphone and social media use. He believes that the constant use of these things creates a life for people where there is always something to do, to think about or compare yourself to. Coincidently these social media stressors lead to an uptick of anxiety, and depression. Stress can be beneficial in certain circumstances, but when left uncontrolled it can wreak havoc on your physical, and mental health.

Personally, I think stress is one of the biggest preventable issues in our lives, but at the current state of events in our nation it is rather hard to avoid. Recently in class we have been talking about substance abuse, specifically relating to drinking alcohol. I think that a lot of college students binge drink in order to ease their stress or try to forget about their problems. I think that a great, scientifically proven way to reduce stress is to work out every day. Not only is cardio important for your heart, but it also reduces the negative aspects of stress. It is also important to take some time to just write down a list of your individual stressors. With that list you can assess the things that are easily preventable and take care of them, and then try and find logical pathways out of the more concrete stressors. I believe that it is possible to live life relatively stress free. Although I cannot speak from personal experience, I know people who
have mastered this art by cutting out the negative things, having healthy mechanisms, and creating a daily schedule that suits their needs.