



December 17, 2011 – Pigeon Forge, TN

## STRESS!

*Waking up two hours before your family's flight for Christmas—with the airport 30 minutes away.*

*Spending time with family, including people you're not that crazy about.*

*The last push to fill everyone's wish list with no parking places at the mall.*

What are those? Stressful situations. Stress is something we all have, especially this time of year—not Job-like plagues, but rather the things we have to deal with over the holidays. In and of itself, stress isn't bad; it's how you respond to stress that can affect your health. Either you're going to get stress, or it's going to get you. Either you deal with it, or it will eat you alive. Literally.

Stress releases hormones into your bloodstream that can raise your heart rate and blood pressure, raise triglycerides and cholesterol levels, increase blood sugar, and release cortisol, a stress hormone that can reduce inflammation when you're injured but can have a bad effect when you're not. There are probably 100 other things that stress can do to you, but one of the most significant is that it can compromise your immune system. You're more prone to colds, flu, and even more serious diseases such as cancer if you can't deal with stress.

Conquering stress is mostly attitude. I'm not talking about pie-in-the-sky, Pollyanna attitudes. I'm talking about having a gut feeling that whatever life brings, you'll conquer it. It's still football season, so let me use this example. When there's one second on the clock and your team is behind, you have to want the ball. You have to want the game to depend on you. Some days you'll win, and others you'll lose. That's the nature of life. But wanting to be the guy or gal who puts it all on the line: that's the attitude you need if you're going to deal with stress. Holidays? Bring 'em on!

Another kind of stress comes from the little irritations that build up and add to your overall stress level. A squeaky door. A shoelace that's about to break. A suitcase that's on its last wheel. Sometimes fixing those problems isn't hard—once they've been identified. Attack them like they're little dragons and you're the fiercest knight in the kingdom. Fix it, replace it, throw it out, whatever applies. You've got enough big stuff on your to-do list, you don't have time for a bunch of little stuff irritating you every day.

Two more things will help you deal with stress: exercise and a good night's sleep. I know it's tough to do either one when you're going through the holidays, but try hard to work in some exercise; when you blow off steam by working out or going for a walk, your body's blowing off a lot of the effects of stress. And do whatever it takes to get a good night's sleep—ear plugs, a new mattress, a warm bath before bed. If you still can't sleep, see your doctor. Especially when your body's suffering from stress, it needs time to repair itself, and if you're not sleeping well, that's not going to happen.

One more thing. Living with holiday stress won't always be fun—I can tell you that from experience. So what! For so many people, life is just happening. Don't you want to be one of those people who make life happen? I do and I hope you do, too.

What are you prepared to do today?

***Dr. Chet***

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