

Say No to Stress and Yes to a Better Sex Life

Men in today's business world work long hours without enough sleep, exercise or relaxation. They are often psychologically drained and physically exhausted when they get home.

Add financial anxiety; societal pressure; nervousness caused by the rapid-fire pace of modern life; traffic jams; conflicts with bosses, coworkers or clients; and problems with spouses and children, and one can see conditions are not conducive to maximum happiness.

These everyday stressors can interfere with all aspects of your life, including sex. Few issues have a more chilling effect on sex than stress, tension and anxiety. These forces exact a heavy toll on an intimate marriage relationship, polluting the atmosphere and filling the marriage bed with emotional toxins.

Cultural or personal ideals and expectations for perfect relationships and perfectly proportioned bodies can further compound the stress. Millions of relationships turn into no-win situations when people aim for some imaginary standard of satisfaction.

From my clinical observations, the single biggest sexual worry of contemporary husbands is that they will not provide their partners with orgasms of spectacular quantity and quality.

Stress has definite medical consequences that work against normal sexual function. During the stress response, blood moves away from the genitals to supply the large muscle groups of arms and legs. Anxiety, including performance anxiety, can increase the activity of the sympathetic nervous system. Anxiety can boost the flow of norepinephrine, a chemical that constricts blood vessels. This condition is precisely the

opposite of what is necessary for an erection—a smooth flow of blood through open vascular channels.

To have a happy and healthy—and sexy—life, you must say no to the stress and learn how to relax. Here are some simple ways you can reduce the stress level in your life:

1. Get plenty of rest. Happy and healthy men tend to live balanced lives. They are energetic, busy and productive, but they are not workaholics. They do work hard, but they also work intelligently and efficiently. And they know when and how to relax. Their capacity for fun is as big as their capacity for work.

2. Don't compare yourself to other men. It can be tempting to see images of sleek, muscular bodies with gorgeous women at their sides and feel that you don't measure up. Striving for an unrealistic, ideal body type or relationship can damage your mental health. Avoid the unnecessary stress that comes from comparing yourself and focus instead on being comfortable in your own skin.

3. Have sex. If you are feeling anxious or worried, if you need to steer your mind away from burdensome thoughts and work off some tension, then having sex with your wife is the best antidote. Vigorous sex increases the volume of oxygen in your lungs, quickens your heart rate and raises your effective circulating blood volume, all of which benefit your general health.

4. Keep stress out of the bedroom. Eliminating stressful situations altogether might be impossible, but that doesn't mean you have to let outside stress impact your personal life. Develop the capacity to prevent negative emotions from impeding your ability to achieve an erection. If you start to feel anxious, turn that feeling into positive energy. You can convert that edginess into stimulation and become even more aroused.

Reducing stress and learning to relax is essential to maintaining good mental health and physical health. Numerous studies have shown that people who undergo major traumas, such as the loss of a loved one or an accident, are much more likely to experience a serious illness. I have seen many patients suffering from post-traumatic stress syndrome, and I can tell you that their sex life can also be affected.

With some patients, however, even serious traumas do not seem to have a devastating effect. These individuals appear to deal with a crisis in a healthy, effective way. When the crisis resolves, they put it behind them, and their stressful encounter fades quickly from their minds.

If you do not learn to deal with life's difficulties in a positive way, traumas large and small will pollute all aspects of your life, especially your sexuality. It takes strength, confidence, and self-awareness to say no to stress, but your life—and your sex life—will be better for it.

Dudley Seth Danoff, MD, FACS, is president and founder of the Cedars-Sinai Tower Urology Group in Los Angeles, a Diplomate of the American Board of Urology, a Fellow of the American College of Surgeons, and the author of two books on men's health.