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OPINION COLUMN

Proactive measures tackle stress head on

Melissa Carr, 24 hours

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(FOTOLIA)

Stress is a bad word to most of us as it conjures up thoughts of impending work deadlines, relationship challenges, money troubles, family hassles and too little time for too many things. But stress is not all bad; it is key to our survival and can get us out of bad situations in a jiffy.

When stress becomes chronic, however, that is when it can be very damaging. It weakens the immune system, contributes to insomnia, causes fatigue, increases inflammatory diseases such as arthritis and worsens pain. It can also result in depression and anxiety, contribute to digestive disorders, aggravate diabetes, raise blood pressure, disrupt hormonal balance, bring about skin diseases, cause weight gain (or loss), result in heart attacks, and accelerate aging by up to 15 years.

If stress has contributed to some of these symptoms, here are some simple traditional Chinese medicine solutions to try:

- 1 of 3 • Headache: Press on the tender point on the back of your hand between your index finger and thumb.

13-08-12 8:43 PM

- Fatigue: Choose green tea instead of coffee for a pick-me-up that won't let you down later. While this tea contains caffeine, it also

- Digestive problems: Brew some ginger tea. Take time to eat without distractions, such as paperwork, TV or the computer.
- Insomnia: Put a crushed onion in a glass jar and inhale its vapour through the nose while in bed.

More complicated problems will need more personalized solutions, as each person responds differently. Acupuncture has shown to increase the release of anti-stress, feel-good endorphins and many patients often fall asleep during treatment.

Several TCM herbs, including Korean ginseng (ren shen), Siberian ginseng (wu jia shen), and schizandra berries (wu wei zi) have been found to be adaptogens, meaning they help the body to adapt to various stressors.

Note that it's important to have a qualified practitioner determine what herbs are appropriate for you. Exercises like tai chi and qigong involve slow, focused movements and proper breathing. Both have been shown to improve health as well as relieve tension.

Good nutrition is also essential. For the body to recover and build strong and healthy cells, the correct nutrients are necessary.

In the meantime, enjoy some of the more fun stressors of summer, like a rollercoaster ride at the PNE, ziplines at Whistler, white-water rafting, and more.

Melissa Carr is a doctor of traditional Chinese medicine, caring for patients in an integrative medicine clinic in Vancouver.

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