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# *Balancing* *AcT*



DEVELOPED AND PRESENTED BY  
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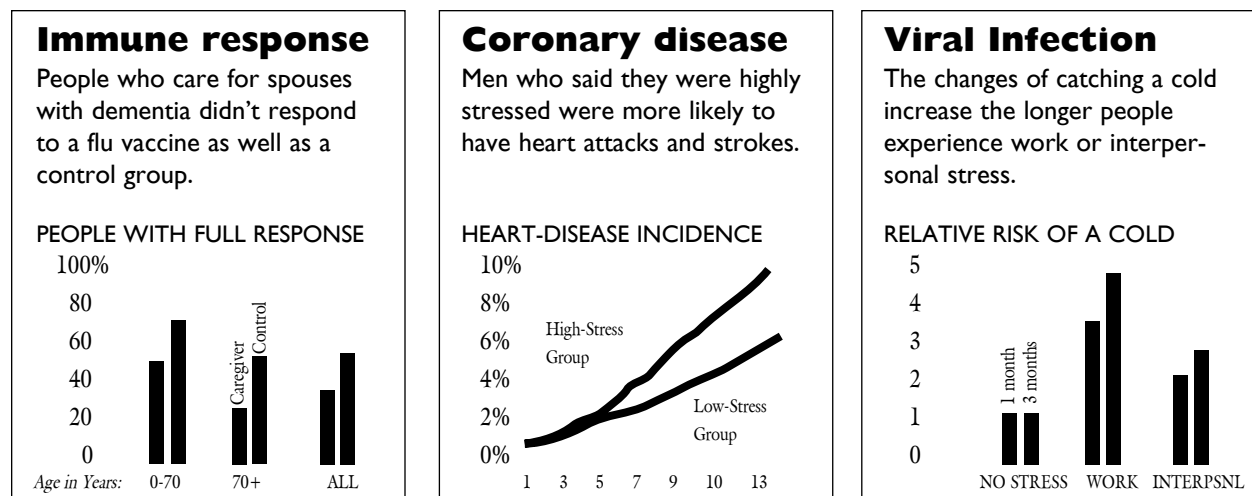
# Balancing ACT

It was at one time vital to survival-an initial response to danger. Some people make a virtue of stress convinced that they can handle anything under the mantra **"that which does not kill me makes me stronger."** But science shows this to be a lie. A whole new body of research shows the damage stress wreaks on the body: not just heart disease and ulcers, but loss of memory, diminished immune function and even a particular type of obesity. That which doesn't kill you, it turns out, really does kill you in the end, but first it makes you fat.

The classic study linking stress to immune dysfunction was done just in 1991 when Sheldon Cohen showed that people who ranked high on a psychological test of perceived stress were more likely to develop colds when intentionally infected with a respiratory virus.

*"The human body," says Dr. Pamela Peeke of the University of Maryland, "was never meant to deal with prolonged chronic stress. We weren't meant to drag around bad memories, anxieties and frustrations."*

## The Toll Stress Takes on the Body



Newsweek, June 1999

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## Stress Busters



Living a stress-free life is not a reasonable goal. The goal is to deal with it actively and effectively. Though that's easier for some people than others, studies suggest that anyone can learn to cope better.

One approach is to **emulate people who are naturally resistant to stress**. By studying them, researchers have found that they share distinctive habits of mind and body.

### STRESS BUSTER #1: *Develop a funnybone!*

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Humor helps to put everyday events into perspective and produces attitude adjustment. Laughter has a curative effect on problems and can be initiated almost anywhere. Some of the benefits of laughter include:

✓ **Endorphin Production**

*A powerful neurotransmitter in the brain, endorphin is secreted when we laugh. It helps to make us feel physically and mentally better.*

✓ **Stress Reduction**

*Laughter tends to take the edge off of problems and helps people keep a perspective. It is helpful to ask whether the current situation will make a good story at a later date.*

✓ **Fights Disease**

*There are numerous studies with cancer patients that demonstrate improved outcomes when they are exposed to funny movies and other positive support.*

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## The Science of Serenity

Whether you suffer from bad skin or high blood pressure, these stress-busting techniques have real medical benefits:

**Meditation.** Psoriasis sufferers who combined conventional therapy with guided meditation cut healing time from 95 days to 46.

**Massage.** Premature infants, massaged regularly for 10 days, gained 47 percent more weight than other preemies—and left the hospital six days earlier.

**Exercise.** Men reported less anxiety after 30 minutes on a treadmill, and EEG tests showed favorable brain-activity changes.

**Social support.** Melanoma patients who received six weeks of structured group support suffered only half as many recurrences as their peers.

### ✓ **Increases T-Cells**

*The specialized cells that fight disease in the body, T cells actually increase as people laugh and relax.*

### ✓ **Improves the Immune System**

*The overall immune response improves, as people are happier. People with a good sense of humor tend to have an optimistic "explanatory style," to life's events. They assume that their problems are temporary ("I'm tired today") rather than permanent ("I'm washed up").*

**Can you recall a funny event in your life?  
Was it funny at the time it happened?**

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## The Stress Response

The Stress response is a response to danger, with two distinct phases. The first of these is the famous **"flight-or-fight"**

**response.** Your brain perceives a threat—a lion crouched in the brush—and sends a message down the spinal cord to the medulla, or core, of the adrenal glands, signaling it to pump out adrenaline. In a matter of seconds, the body is transformed. To prepare for exertion, blood pressure and heart rate skyrocket; the liver pours out glucose and calls up fat reserves to be processed into triglycerides for energy; the circulatory system diverts blood from nonessential functions, such as digestion, to the brain and muscles. This is precisely what you need if your goal is to survive the next 10 minutes.



Civilization, however, gives you the opportunity to experience an adrenaline rush at every traffic light. And, since all you're doing is sitting in your car, the elaborate preparations your body makes are wasted. Worse than wasted: every heartbeat at elevated blood pressure takes its toll on the arteries. The excess fats and glucose don't get metabolized right away, so they stay in the blood stream. The fats contribute to the plaques that form inside blood vessels, which can lead to heart disease or strokes; high levels of glucose are a step in the direction of diabetes.

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## STRESS BUSTER #2: *Know Your Early Symptoms of Overload*

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How do you know when you have had too much stress? The body and mind will send you signals that indicate you are moving towards overload. What early symptoms do you experience?

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### Oxidative Stress

This is some of the most exciting research in the past few years. The stress response causes an increase in oxidative stress, the breaking down of molecules in the body thus releasing a free radical. Free radicals are extremely damaging and tend to accumulate and attack the body where it is the weakest.

Oxidative stress has been associated with the onset of a number of diseases including depression, lupus, aging, cancer, cardio-vascular, rheumatoid arthritis and degenerative diseases.

## STRESS BUSTER #3: *Keep Dancing*

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Exercise is absolutely essential if you are going to stay physically and mentally healthy. Two new studies printed in the September 2004, issue of the Journal of the American Medical Association demonstrates that even moderate exercise can reduce the risk of death by 37 %. This can be as simple as walking ½ hour per day.

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### Some of the benefits of regular activity include:

- ✓ **Lower levels of free radicals.** It tends to "burn off" stress and rid the body of the harmful chemicals of the stress response.
- ✓ **Improved self-esteem.** People tend to feel good about themselves and their efforts.
- ✓ **Reduces chance of diabetes and metabolic syndrome.** It increases collateral circulation, which improves insulin usage and heart function.
- ✓ **Prevents dementia.** A recent study at the University of Naples found that elderly men who walked on a regular basis had half the risk of dementia as those who were inactive. Another study found that women who were physically active scored better on cognitive tests than women who were less active.
- ✓ **Improves mental health.** Researchers, studying depression have shown that exercise can be as effective as anti-depressant medications such as the Selective Serotonin Uptake Inhibitors (SSRI), ex. Paxil, Prozac, or Zoloft.

## STRESS BUSTER #4: *Eat Your Vegetables*

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Vegetables and fruits significantly lower free radicals in the body. The more color, the better. Bright colors indicate the presence of flavonoids that have been proven to detox the body and prevent cancer and other diseases. Some other important diet considerations:



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- **The Mediterranean diet.** According to new research reported in JAMA, September 2004, this diet promotes good health and is associated with a 23% lower risk of death.
    - Fresh vegetables, fruits, fish, whole grains, and olive oil
    - Minimal meat and dairy products
  - **Try Five Alive.** That is, five fruits and vegetables per day, every day. If you eat 8-10 per day, you will lose weight with very little effort.
  - **Drink water.** Water tends to also wash out free radicals and fat from the body. The minimum requirement is 8-10 glasses per day. If you are not in the habit of drinking water, measure one glass each hour.
  - **Take anti-oxidant vitamins.** They are an easy insurance policy against stress. They bind with free radicals and remove them from the body.
  - **Drink red wine.** Recent research show a 22% lower risk of death. It may be the flavonoids in the wine.
  - **NO SMOKING!** Non-smoking decreases the risk of death by 35%. Smoking increases the production of free radicals by 50%.

## STRESS BUSTER #5 *Have Realistic Expectations*



We set ourselves up for stress and frustration when we establish expectations for ourselves and others that are not realistic. We often overextend ourselves with unreasonable commitments and demands, thinking somehow we will just find the time.

### **The Expectation Machine means:**

- We assume that others think/react like us
- If people care about us, they will know what we think/feel
- There is one right way to do things

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## STRESS BUSTER #5.5 *Manage Your Stress*

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Sometimes the little things make a big impact on how we handle our stress.

- ✓ Wear comfortable clothes.
- ✓ Keep emergency supplies of all necessities.
- ✓ Always be prepared to wait.
- ✓ Say "No" More Often.

### *And, The Top Two Habits of Very Happy People*

#### **Forgiveness**

You can carry either love or anger in your heart. There is not room for both. You must decide which one serves you better.

#### **Gratitude**

Make a list of all of the people & things for which you are grateful. Consider

- People (such as parents, spouses, teachers, friends,) that you have known
- Possessions (such as gifts, jobs, houses, apartments, personal income, etc)
- Events (such as birthdays, vacations, job accomplishments, educational achievements, parties, etc) that you have experienced.
- Opportunities for personal growth and development.

*Identify ways in which you can acknowledge and show your gratitude.*

- Send a card or e-mail to thank someone.
- Visit a neighbor.
- Send a note of thanks to a former teacher or mentor.
- Recognize an agency or organization that has helped you or your family.

*[ Thank Yourself Too. ]*

