# Five Reasons Acupuncture Helps Reduce Stress

Stress is a word many people are familiar with. The dictionary defines stress in multiple ways, but there is only one that matters when we discuss how stress affects our physical bodies. The definition is this, “stress is a physical, chemical or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension.” And while most people think of stress as being detrimental, it truly does have a function in our bodies. Stress is the body’s way of signaling for help or a break in the routine. If we don’t listen to these signals, we can develop imbalances in our bodies, which can then lead to illnesses.

Cortisol is the hormone most closely related to stress. Cortisol is a big component of the “fight or flight” response we feel when we are scared or threatened. And in small bursts, cortisol is helpful. However, when stress becomes chronic, cortisol levels become elevated and never return to normal. This puts the body in a constant state of being on edge, eventually causing insomnia, depression, anxiety, digestive issues and even mental illness.

There are ways to fight and reduce stress though. Simple things like exercise, meditation, coloring, talking with friends and even acupuncture. Admittedly, most people don’t think of being stuck with tiny needles as “relaxing,” but it really is. Acupuncture has been around for thousands of years and it is becoming more mainstream every single day. It is even being used in some hospital emergency rooms for those who are in pain and anxious.

Acupuncture acts like physical therapy for the nervous system. The tiny needles retrain the nervous system and the brain to behave as it should normally. For the nervous system to act and respond accordingly, cortisol has to be at normal levels and only used when a true “fight or flight” situation occurs. Studies show acupuncture does this.

Another way acupuncture helps reduce stress is by keeping the heart rate normal. When the body is stressed, the heart tends to pump faster and in some cases, a person may even develop palpitations or atrial fibrillation. The heart rate is closely connected to the vagus nerve. If the vagus nerve is stimulated, so too will the heart rate. There are specific acupressure points on the arms and hands that can calm the vagus nerve and the heart.

Stress is frequently related to specific emotions. Acupuncture controls anxiety and stress by affecting the part of the brain that regulates emotions and then reduces anxiety naturally. This allows the body to calm down and the mind to relax.

Chronic stress frequently leads to depression. Again, acupuncture can help with this. As the stress is relieved through regular acupuncture treatments and other mind/body techniques, then depression will start to clear up as well. Many people are even able to get off their depression medications following a regimented treatment plan that utilizes acupuncture and herbs.

Lastly, digestive disorders can be caused or exacerbated by chronic stress. Digestion occurs while the body is in the “rest and digest” phase. When stress is added into the mix, digestion may become disrupted and things like diarrhea can occur. Studies have shown acupuncture is extremely effective at decreasing or eliminating bouts of diarrhea.

Acupuncture is a wonderful tool for fighting stress. As few as two needles can reset your body and decrease your daily stress level. Talk with an acupuncturist to find out how to resolve your stress the natural way.