

An Important Aspect of Stress Management

by Dr. Michael Nowazek

Stress can have a negative impact on your immune system [link to earlier blog] but there are things you can do to help manage stress.

What is an important aspect of stress management?
Sleep!

WHAT'S THE BIG DEAL ABOUT SLEEP?

Not only does not enough sleep or poor quality sleep make it that much harder to deal with stress it can also, all by itself, suppress and weaken your immune system.

Improving your sleep can significantly improve your stress management and positively affect your immune system. Your whole body and mind start to work better when you get a good quality, restful sleep. That's why I believe it is one of the most important aspects of stress management.

Health authorities recommend between six and eight hours of sleep and I think that is correct as a rule of thumb, although I lean more toward eight hours of good, solid, uninterrupted sleep. Some people need more than that, some people do need less.

One thing is for sure – if you get less sleep than you need, that is going to negatively affect how well you manage stress and it's going to negatively affect your immune system.

I WANT TO SLEEP. I CAN'T. NOW WHAT?

Some people have insomnia, trouble sleeping. There are two types of insomnia:

- Trouble falling asleep
- Trouble staying asleep

Difficulty with getting to sleep is often linked to what I call sleep hygiene and that means refraining from things that are going to keep your mind overstimulated. Things such as using electronic devices too late in the day, being online too much, too much TV, are going to keep your mind in high gear and make it hard for you to fall asleep. This can be especially true if you're watching overly violent or disaster-themed programs on TV.

What I've been recommending to patients is that they turn off their devices and the TV by noon, and then spend the rest of the day doing quality activities.

If you are going to watch TV, try to watch something light. Comedies are a good idea because the more you laugh, the better for your stress levels and the better for your immune system.

Reading before bed is a good idea but, again, nothing stressful, nothing overly stimulating. An adventure story or a comedy would be good choices. Listening to music can be very calming.

It's not always the case that trouble getting to sleep is rooted strictly in the extensive use of TV and electronic devices. There are other factors than can affect your ability to fall asleep, but most often the simple things like shutting off the TV and the electronic devices can help relax the mind so you're not so focused on stress.

Sleep hygiene can also be a factor in **difficulty with staying asleep**. Again, extensive use of electronic devices, too much TV, a focus on stressors, can keep your mind racing well into the wee hours of the morning and wake you up. There are also other factors that affect a person's ability to stay asleep. For instance, eating habits, hydration levels, salt intake

can have a negative impact on being able to stay asleep.

What I often recommend to patients who have a difficult time staying asleep is that they get up and have a glass of water, then focus on something other than whatever is stressing them. It's not always easy to shift the focus away from worries but here are a few things you could try. Read a good book, something that's not going to overstimulate you. An adventure story or a comedy, something light, would be a good choice. Or you could imagine your own adventure – imagine yourself skiing or hiking, working on your favourite hobby, something that you really enjoy. If you can keep your mind engaged with something pleasant, something that's not worrying you, you'll probably find it's a lot easier to get back to sleep.

If these simple remedies don't do the trick, you should consult your naturopathic doctor.

Even though our clinic is temporarily closed to help to flatten the coronavirus contagion curve, our doctors are still virtually available to patients via video and telephone. We urge all of our patients to book a virtual follow-up consultation so your care continues with little or no interruption. You can call the office at (780) 485-9468 to book, or you can [book online](#).

