



Hero 2 Hero

Gain the empowered edge

- healthcare workers
- first responders

Effects of Stress

During a stressful event, the body is designed to go into the “fight, flight or freeze” response. This reaction is triggered by the Sympathetic Nervous System and is a way to escape or defend against danger. As first responders however, this response is triggered when we are responding to a high stress situation which is AKA, our job. The body release several hormones into our system when this response is activated. These hormones are not meant to be released frequently but in the first responder, that is exactly what happens. Two of those main chemicals are cortisol and adrenaline.

Symptoms of adrenaline release are:

- Rapid Heart Rate
- Sweating
- Heightened Senses
- Rapid Breathing
- Decreased Ability to Feel Pain
- Dilated Pupils
- Feeling Jittery/Nervous
- High Blood Pressure
- Severe Headaches
- Increased Strength & Performance

Adrenaline can stay in our systems for over an hour. Persistently high levels of adrenaline from chronic stress increases your risk of anxiety, depression, heart disease and weight gain.

Cortisol is essentially a steroid. The body releases Cortisol to regulate blood sugar, the immune system, metabolism, etc. It is also released as a response to stress. Normal cortisol levels should be highest of the mornings and slowly decrease in time for bed. Exposure to chronic stress and swing shifts cause an over production of cortisol leading to the following side effects:

- Weight gain
- A puffy, flushed appearance
- Mood swings
- Increased anxiety
- Fatigue/poor sleep
- Increased urination
- Irregular periods/fertility problems
- Higher susceptibility to illness
- High blood pressure
- Acne or skin changes
- Higher risk of bone fractures & osteoporosis
- Muscle aches and pains
- Changes in libido
- Excessive thirst





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Effects of Stress continued

Lowering Cortisol levels can be done by good self-care practices. These practices include but aren't limited to:

- Adequate sleep
- Breathing techniques
- Physical Exercise (can be anything you enjoy)
- Eating healthy
- Decompression techniques (listening to music, talking about the stressful event, meditation – anything that relaxes you)
- Recognizing your stressors and working towards eliminating them
- Setting healthy boundaries to rest when your body needs to rest
- Healthy Relationships

Healthy habits and exercise combat these negative hormones that we are exposed to everyday. During exercise our body releases endorphins that give us that happy feeling and thus counteract the cortisol. By having healthy habits, we not only combat the physical aspects of stress, but decompression is proven to decrease the chances of developing PTSD.

For examples or information on this topic see either my Instagram page *Grit_meets_Grace* or my FB page *When the Hero needs a Hero*.

Please take care of yourself and each other.

