

Stress

The term implies any condition that harms the body or damages or causes the death of a few or many cells. The body immediately tries to repair the damaged cells but it can do so only if the diet is adequate, providing a generous supply of all the essential nutrients. If, however, rebuilding of cells is not able to keep pace with their destruction, the condition will result in disease. The most common disease associated with stress is heart disease, diabetes, headache and peptic ulcer. Other diseases resulting from stress are ulcerative colitis, chronic dyspepsia, asthma, psoriasis and sexual disorders.

Symptoms

The body and the mind react to any stress factor. A large number of physical changes take place at the time of stress induced arousal. The brain and nervous system become intensely active, the pupils of the eye dilate, digestion slows down, muscles become tense, the heart starts pumping blood harder and faster, blood pressure increases, breathing become faster, hormones such as adrenaline are released into the system along with glucose from the liver and sweating starts.

Treatment

In dealing with stress, the patient should completely change his life style. He should adopt an optimum diet which should be able to meet the nutritional demands of stress. Such diet should obviously be made of foods which, in combination, would supply all the essential nutrients. It has been found that a diet which contains liberal quantities of (i) seeds, nuts and grains, (ii) vegetables, and (iii) fruits would provide an adequate amount of all the essential nutrients. Each of these food groups should roughly form the bulk of one of the three meals. These three basic health -building foods should be supplemented with certain special foods such as milk, vegetable oils and honey.

There are many foods which are helpful in meeting the demands of stress and should be taken regularly by the patient. These are yogurt, blackstrap molasses, seeds, and sprouts. Yogurt is rich in vitamin A, B complex and D. It relieves insomnia, migraine and cramps associated with menstruation. Blackstrap molasses, a by-product of sugar refining process, is rich in iron and B vitamins. It guards against anaemia and is good for heart diseases. Seeds such as alfalfa, sunflower, and pumpkin and sprouts are rich in calcium and quite effective as deterrents of listlessness and anxiety. Steam cooked vegetables are best as boiling causes many vitamins and minerals to be dispelled into the water.

The leaves of holy basil, known as tulsi in the vernacular, are highly beneficially the treatment of stress. They are regarded as adaptogen or antistress agents. Recent studies have shown that the leaves protect against stress significantly. It has been suggested that even healthy persons should chew 12 leaves of basil twice a day, morning and evening for preventing stress.

Stress

Certain nutrients are beneficial in relieving stress. These are vitamins A and B, minerals such as calcium, potassium and magnesium which reduce the feeling of irritability and anxiety. Vitamin A is found in green and yellow vegetables. Some of the valuable sources of vitamin B are cashews, green leafy vegetables, yeast, sprouts and bananas. An element of vitamin B complex, pantothenic acid is especially important in preventing stress. It has a deep effect on the adrenal glands and the immune system and adequate amount of this vitamin along with vitamin A can help prevent many of the changes caused by stress.

Potassium deficiencies are associated with breathlessness, fatigue, insomnia and low blood sugar. Potassium is essential for healthy heart muscles. Nuts and unrefined grains are good sources of potassium. Calcium is a natural sedative. Deficiencies can cause fatigue, nervousness and tension. Dairy products, eggs, almonds, and soybeans are rich sources of calcium. Magnesium is known as nature's tranquilizer and is associated with the prevention of heart attack. Deficiencies may lead to excitability, irritability, apprehension and emotional disorders. Magnesium is also necessary for absorption of calcium and potassium and is found in many fruits, vegetables, seeds, dates and prunes.

There are certain foods which are associated with stress and anxiety and should be scrupulously avoided by patients. These foods are caffeine and many soft drinks, which causes nervousness, irritability and palpitation; salt which has been associated with heart diseases; cigarettes which cause tension, irritability and sleeplessness and which have been linked with cancer, and alcohol which depletes vitamins of B group consider essential for reducing stress.

Regular physical exercise plays an important role in the fight against stress. Exercise not only keeps the body physically and mentally fit, it also provides recreation and mental relaxation. It is nature's best tranquilizer. One can jog, run, walk or play games, depending upon one's liking. Walking is the simplest and safest exercise. One should take a brisk walk for 45 minutes or so daily. Yogic asanas, kriyas and simple pranayams, beneficial for maintenance of general health and mental relaxation, can serve as the best shock-absorbers against stress. These include asanas like pavanmuktasana, sarvagasana, halasana, ardhamatsyendrasana, bhujangasana, dhanurasana, yogamudra, padmasana, trikonasana, kriyas like kunjla and jalneti and pranayamas such as kapal bhati, anuloma- viloma, sitali, sitkari and bhramari.

Recreation and rest are equally important and patient should set a definite time for recreational activities. They should also take a holiday at regular intervals. And above all, they should simplify their lifestyles to eliminate unnecessary stress.

Reference

Shri H.K. Bakhru. (1999). Natures Cure.