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Chronically Busy? Here's How That Affects Your Body

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Modern life happens at an obscenely fast pace. From early-morning workouts and endless kid drop-offs to late meetings and getting meals on the table, the run-around is *real*. And even if you're an ace at keeping the trains running on time and somehow still remembering to send your mom a birthday card, the reality is this: The chronic busyness that has become the baseline for so many of us impacts our bodies in some less than desirable ways.

Here's a closer look at how being go-go-go 24/7 affects our biochemistry and physiology—plus realistic ways to bring slowness and spaciousness into your life that don't involve moving to an off-grid hut.

- **ABOUT OUR EXPERTS:** Jennifer Chung, M.D. (https://jenniferchungmd.com/), is a board-certified internist and functional and lifestyle medicine physician. Dr. Joseph Mercola, D.O., F.A.C.N., is a board-certified family physician and author of Weight Loss Cure (https://www.amazon.com/Weight-Loss-Cure-Naturally-GLP-1-ebook/dp/B0FV4M3SZJ/ref=sr_1_3?crid=3FRVWN9VYE3GS&dib=eyJ2IjojMSJ9.3S6mcCefDORhEVYyUws186BVnkSiHHROlvHt0kWfupcWmFuvTrAle71Lc8T2txvCqNldN-nYaSLI_nrGJ89YfzLRKQynFdpMt8ER6v5X0HXJPL7TFIQoN2Mgu7SmLif8X2GeeGOw72agXqljTXCaw-SVYKS5cVEjmgdKWu0f7xnV-y_p0C7cnlwmtRcxJuOaMJBYqzb7V898Ydn8YBH5AMxt--oTVbDt_26TRWHctlvTcagA5sWnMpQ3lgGR9-yL9b_OkZw8OYVwHCrL-OkTY&dib_tag=se&keywords=weight+loss+cure&qid=1762285165&prefix=weight+loss+cu%2Caps%2C174&sr=8-3).

The Problem With Being Busy All The Time

If the requirements of being a human in the 21st century have you feeling a little fried, it's not a "you" problem. "Chronic busyness and everyday stress cause significant biochemical and physiological changes in the body that impact numerous organ systems, from the brain to the heart to the immune system, and even the musculoskeletal system," says Jennifer Chung, M.D., a board-

certified internist and functional and lifestyle medicine physician.

The root of the issue is a nonstop state of fight-or-flight. "When you stay in a constant go-go-go mode, your body treats everyday life like a threat that never ends," says Dr. Joseph Mercola, D.O., F.A.C.N., board-certified family physician and author of *Weight Loss Cure*. "You release stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline more often, and instead of shutting off after a short burst, those hormones stay elevated."

Read More: These Supplements Can Help Temper Cortisol Spikes (<https://www.vitaminshoppe.com/blog/supplements-for-high-cortisol/>)

The downstream effects of these hormones being jacked up are many. "Your heart rate rises, your muscles tighten, and your body shifts resources away from repair and toward survival," notes Mercola. Over time, such shifts take a toll. "Chronic busyness leads to a wide range of short-term and long-term health problems affecting nearly every organ system," Chung shares.

Short-Term Health Implications Of Chronic Busyness

While some impacts of nonstop "doing" take a while to creep in, others rear their ugly heads quite quickly.

1. Sleep Suffers

"The most noticeable short-term consequences of stress include sleep disruptions," reports Chung. "Common changes in sleep due to stress include difficulty falling asleep, staying asleep, or experiencing non-restorative sleep." You can thank cortisol (<https://www.vitaminshoppe.com/blog/science-backed-ways-to-lower-cortisol/>) here. The stress hormone makes it harder for you to wind down at night, affecting sleep quality and recovery.

2. Mood And Focus Tank

During the day, uber-busy folks might notice they feel increasingly tense or mentally fatigued. According to Chung, changes in mood—such as increased depressive symptoms or heightened anxiety—and difficulty concentrating are common.

"You may also experience trouble concentrating or memory lapses because stress can affect areas of your brain involved in learning and recall," Mercola adds.

3. Energy Gets Wobbly

Chronic stress also places a heavier demand on the energy-producing organelles in all of your cells, your mitochondria (<https://www.vitaminshoppe.com/blog/optimal-mitochondrial-health/>), according to Mercola. "When that demand stays high, energy production becomes less efficient, and you start to feel fatigued, wired, or both at once," he says.

4. Metabolic Fire Wanes

When your system is overtaxed by endless emails, social obligations, and the like, your metabolic function takes a hit almost immediately. "Stress hormones push your liver to release more glucose, which can disrupt blood sugar balance," Mercola explains. They also interfere with insulin, making it harder for your body to regulate blood sugar. In the short term, this leads to cravings and a cycle of overeating.

5. Aches And Pains Pop Up

Stress hormones activate your muscles, so when you're in "go mode" all the time, your muscles can essentially get stuck in a state of contraction with little opportunity to rest, according to Chung. This can leave you feeling physically wound-up or contribute to various aches and pains.

Long-Term Health Implications Of Chronic Busyness

The longer you stay stuck in chronic busyness or stress, the more serious the impacts on your health become. In fact, living in a state of low-grade fight-or-flight contributes to a slew of chronic diseases and health conditions.

1. Insulin Resistance Paves The Way For Metabolic Disease

"One of the prominent long-term effects of chronically elevated cortisol is the development of insulin resistance," says Chung. "This refers to a condition in which the cells in the muscles, fat, and liver do not respond appropriately to insulin (which helps to regulate blood sugar levels). This can lead to weight gain, fatty liver changes, and type 2 diabetes."

2. Cardiovascular Health Takes A Hit

"Chronic stress also negatively impacts the cardiovascular system," notes Chung. "The sustained activity of cortisol, epinephrine, and norepinephrine leads to numerous downstream effects, such as increased blood pressure, higher inflammation, repeated damage to the inner lining of blood vessels, and increased formation of blood clots."

3. Aging Speeds Up

Chronic busyness makes it difficult for your cells to function optimally. "At the cellular level, ongoing stress also accelerates aging," notes Mercola. "It can shorten telomeres, the structures that protect your DNA, and disrupt the body's natural repair systems." Over time, these factors contribute to signs of aging, including excess inflammation and fatigue.

4. Brain Function Continues To Struggle

Unsurprisingly, the mental fatigue and trouble concentrating you first experience when in the grip of constant stress just worsen over time. "Chronic stress causes inflammation, structural changes, and disruption of neurotransmitter systems in the brain," Chung says. "These changes lead to increased depression symptoms and cognitive impairments such as trouble concentrating, memory problems, and slowed processing."

Realistic Ways To Slow Down

You don't have to become a monk to help your body come down from the craze of chronic busyness. "Small, consistent actions help you move out of that constant alert state," says Mercola.

Think of it this way: "I like to explain stress management to my patients using the Chinese concept of Yin and Yang," shares Chung. "Activity, ambition, and hard work are not inherently harmful. In fact, our bodies and minds benefit from low-dose, intermittent stress (called hormesis). However, the problem arises when that 'Yang' energy is not balanced with enough 'Yin' activities that promote rest, recovery, and restoration."

Here's where to focus your restoration efforts.

1. Balance Your Movement Routine

One of the best ways to start is with movement. "Regular activity helps reset stress chemistry and supports healthy energy production at the cellular level," shares Mercola. "Even simple walking can improve how your body handles stress hormones."

For most folks, moderate-intensity exercise is the move here, as it's realistic to sustain without ultimately becoming another stress on the body, Mercola suggests. "Moderate activity means you feel slightly winded but can still hold a conversation. Think brisk walking, gardening, housework, recreational cycling, yoga, nonintense swimming, and pickleball," he says. Go for 30 to 45 minutes most days of the week. (Bonus points for doing it with friends or family!)

Read More: Wanna Live Longer? Switch Up Your Workouts (<https://www.vitaminshoppe.com/blog/live-longer/>)

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If you want to add strength work, keep it reasonable. "The sweet spot is about 20 to 40 minutes per session, two to three times a week, with recovery days in between," notes Mercola. At least in the context of lots of busyness and stress, too much vigorous exercise can sometimes do more harm than good.

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2. Cherish Your Sleep

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"The foundation of the balance starts with prioritizing seven to nine hours a night for restorative sleep, which supports mental health, cognition, immune function, and overall health," says Chung. This is an absolute nonnegotiable, especially if your days are full and fast-paced.

"When you prioritize deep, consistent rest, your body gets a chance to repair and rebalance hormones," agrees Mercola. "Poor sleep keeps cortisol elevated, so improving sleep often creates a ripple effect across your entire system."

Of course, step number one is to adjust your routine to allow for enough time in bed. From there, you can support better sleep quality in a few ways.

"One of the simplest steps is to get bright outdoor light early," Mercola says. "The first 30 to 60 minutes of outdoor light exposure in the morning and again around midday create about 80 percent of the anchoring effect for your circadian rhythm." More light during the day means more melatonin production come nighttime.

He also recommends putting any work away, avoiding excessive fluid intake, limiting screen use, and engaging in a wind-down habit such as meditation, journaling, or reading a book in the hour or two before bedtime.

If you still need some extra support in the snooze department, consider adding a supplement like magnesium glycinate (<https://www.vitaminshoppe.com/c/vitamins-supplements/minerals/magnesium>), reishi (<https://www.vitaminshoppe.com/p/organic-reishi-60-capsules/vs-0284>), or l-theanine (<https://www.vitaminshoppe.com/p/l-theanine-200-mg-120-capsules/vs-3836>) to your evening routine.

3. Embrace Stillness Daily

Another simple tip for slowing down or at least mitigating the negative effects of being so go-go-go? Introduce brief moments of stillness during your day. "Even a few minutes of quiet breathing or mindfulness can lower stress signals and help your nervous system shift into a repair mode," shares Mercola.

"Multiple small breaks scheduled throughout the day can also make a meaningful difference," adds Chung. "This could include a five-minute walk outside, a short breathing exercise, a quick stretch, or even a quick diary entry in a gratitude journal. These 'micro-breaks' can interrupt the constant rush and allow your nervous system to recalibrate. When practiced consistently and over time, they can mitigate the long-term health consequences of chronic busyness and stress."

Take a look at your daily routine and decide when you can pencil in a few minutes of quiet here and there. Maybe it's a quiet coffee in the morning, 10 deep breaths between meetings, or a quick journaling session before bed. Whatever works!

4. Audit Your Lifestyle

There's no way around it, folks. If the pace of your life is driving you into the ground, all of the sleep and mindfulness in the world won't be enough to recharge you. "It's important to take a realistic look at your everyday demands," Chung says. "Be truly honest about what *needs* to get done and permit yourself to say 'no' to things that are not essential." The more balanced your lifestyle is overall, the fewer tools you'll need to whip out to keep yourself from burning out.

Busy Is Not Always Best

Although chronic busyness is normalized these days, it can significantly impact your physical, mental, and emotional health—and the effects can compound into serious issues over time. Inviting rest and slowness into your life whenever possible is a must-do for folks looking to maintain optimal health in today's go-go-go world.

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“Start by focusing on simple, supportive habits you can repeat daily,” Mercola suggests. “When you do that, you help your body regain balance, stabilize stress hormones, and restore steady energy. In the long run, you’d be wise to reorganize your life so that you’re not so chronically busy. Busy times do happen, but if you feel like a hamster in a running wheel and can’t remember the last time you stopped running, it may be time to reevaluate your priorities.” After all, are you *really* going to regret turning down yet another busy weekend or waking up refreshed after getting to bed at a decent hour? We think not.

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