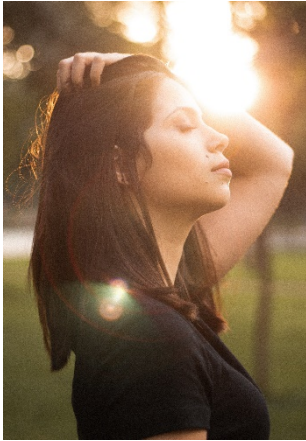


## RELAX!!! ..... It may Save Your Life!!!!



It's true. Studies show that activities that produce the relaxation response lower blood pressure, enhance the immune system, and reduce the likelihood of having a heart attack, stroke, asthma attack and some gastrointestinal disorders.

To understand HOW, let's look at how the body responds to each incident of stress.

When the internet crashes, you're running late, or swerve to avoid hitting a car who's just moved into your lane – the "stress response" is triggered. You know the feeling. Your muscles tighten. You breathe faster. Your heart pounds. Your chest tightens. Your palms sweat.

And inside, stress hormones like adrenaline race through the blood stream. Energy-boosting glucose and fats race through your blood stream. Your blood pressure soars. Your body stops unnecessary activities like digestion and fighting illness. Your heightened sight and hearing make you feel more alert. Your body has prepared you to "fight" or "flee".

This "fight" or "flight" response is governed by the autonomic nervous system – the same system that makes your heart pump blood through your veins and your stomach digest your food. These activities occur AUTOMATICALLY all the time without our conscious control.

Any event that triggers the stress response, no matter how large or small, sets off a series of responses that basically prepare us to "fight" or "flee".

The "fight" or "flee" response is a protective measure to assure our safety, which is the primary goal of our primitive brain – to keep us alive! And it is likely quite useful to have an extra boost of adrenaline if you're confronted with a saber tooth tiger or woolly mammoth.

But most stressors today can't be resolved by running or fighting. I can't fight or run away from the traffic jam I'm stuck in. Nor will running away or fighting solve my internet problem – (even though the thought of throwing the computer against the wall is quite compelling in the moment.)

And, unfortunately for us, the myriad small stressors that we encounter daily trigger the same "fight" or "flight" response as seriously dangerous stressors, like tigers with big teeth. And if we experience this stress response again and again, the toll on the body is clear.

Chronic stress has been shown to raise blood pressure and levels of cholesterol and is associated with heightened risk of heart attacks and strokes. The immune system appears to be suppressed by long-term stress, creating heightened susceptibility to colds, viruses and other common illnesses.



Although it's impossible to eliminate all sources of stress from our lives completely, we can learn better ways to handle stress. Learning strategies to produce the relaxation response and other helpful tools can reduce the impact of stress on our physical and mental health.

