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What Happens to my Body When I'm Stressed?

Cortisol is commonly known as the stress hormone. It's released from your adrenal glands when your body is stressed. Cortisol is released within your circadian rhythm, so it's naturally highest in the morning, when a burst of energy is needed to wake up and get out of bed, and declines throughout the day, with its lowest point being at night just before sleep. However, if you're under high stress, cortisol can be secreted throughout the day and at night, interfering with your ability to get a good night's sleep. The majority of cells in your body respond to cortisol so its effects are wide-ranging. Did you know

this stress hormone regulates most of your bodily functions? Below are some of the body systems influenced by cortisol during stressful times.

- *Hepatic:* Cortisol triggers the liver to release sugar for an immediate supply of energy to your muscles.
- *Digestion:* Cortisol slows digestion so glucose will be available and not stored.
- *Circulatory:* Cortisol causes your arteries to narrow so blood pumps harder and faster to the heart and large muscles.
- *Kidneys:* Cortisol controls salt and water balance and regulates blood pressure.
- *Immune:* Cortisol acts as an anti-inflammatory.
- *Nervous:* Cortisol helps memory formation and helps you wake up in the morning.
- *Glandular:* Cortisol regulates growth.

Cortisol release is controlled by a feedback system between your brain's hypothalamus gland, the pituitary gland [also in your brain], and the adrenal gland. Together these make up the "HPA axis" [hypothalamic–pituitary–adrenal]. The hypothalamus and pituitary glands are responsible for ensuring that your blood contains the correct level of cortisol. If it's too low or too high, the brain sends signals to the adrenal glands to make more or less. Once your stress has passed, your cortisol levels should return to normal. This allows your heart rate and blood pressure to regulate digestion and restart your other body systems.

As you can see, stress plays a significant role in your health. Although you're managing stress on the outside, your cortisol levels are overcompensating. That's why stressful things like a long day at work, relocation, anxiety, or worry tend to wreak havoc on your body. Monitor your stress levels for better health.

Sources: Endocrineweb.com

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