Protect Yourself from Toxic Stress

WHAT IS TOXIC STRESS?

Science shows that a sustained high level of cortisol, which results from chronic, unrelenting stress, can have a dangerous, even life-threatening effect on the body. Dr. Pamela Peeke, calls this “Toxic Stress,” because it literally poisons your body, making you vulnerable to colds, flu, fatigue and infections. “Toxic Stress” can impair memory and concentration and new evidence shows it can give you a raging appetite! Stress also stirs up hormones that affect every part of our body as well as the inflammatory processes, resulting in a host of “-itises” — arthritis, colitis, etc.

Pamela Peeke, M.D., M.P.H., F.A.C.P., is a nationally recognized physician, scientist, and expert in the fields of nutrition, metabolism, stress, and fitness. She combines wit and humor with the latest scientific data and common sense approaches to holistic, healthy living. Her books, Fight Fat After Forty, (Viking Penguin 2000; Copyright Pamela Peeke, 2000), and Body for Life for Women, (Rodale 2005; Copyright 2005 by Pamela Peeke, M.D) present her groundbreaking research describing how chronic stress contributes to weight gain and threatens the length and quality of life for men and women. Dr. Peeke calls this weight gain from chronic stress “Toxic Weight”; and the resulting fat that lodges deeper into the abdomen, surrounding the internal organs she refers to as “Stress Fat.”

According to Dr. Peeke, “Stress Fat” differs from the fat found in other parts of the body and when there is too much of it, it becomes toxic. This “Toxic Fat” overwhelms the liver and impairs its ability to function properly, resulting in a variety of metabolic disturbances. These disturbances can bring about serious health conditions such as: high blood pressure; high blood sugar; high cholesterol; and high blood coagulability, which predisposes a person to the formation of blood clots. These conditions can then lead to serious and potentially fatal illnesses including diabetes, heart disease, and stroke.

DO YOU HAVE TOXIC FAT?

A. Measure your waistline at the belly button. Ideally, men’s waistlines should be below 40 inches and women’s waistlines should be below 35 inches in order to drastically reduce the chance of developing heart disease, diabetes and cancer.

B. Take Dr. Peeke’s Toxic Fat Test:

1. Lie on your back on the floor or any level surface. 2. Use your index fingers to find your pelvic bone on both sides of your abdomen. 3. Tighten you abdominal muscles, then trace your fingers across your abdomen until they meet at your midline. 4. If your abdomen is flat, you don’t have a build-up of fat deep inside your abdominal wall distending your abdomen. If your abdomen is distended, you are suffering from “Toxic Fat.”
A MINDSET FOR SUCCESS

In Body for Life for Women, Dr. Peeke emphasizes mental transformation as the foundation for physical change, “If you are to achieve and maintain a stronger, healthier body, you must have the mindset for success.” Here are Dr. Peeke’s Power Mind Principles outlined in her book.

DR. PEEKE’S TEN POWER MIND PRINCIPLES

1. Embrace adversity. Anticipate there will be obstacles in your path and greet them as opportunities to sharpen your skills at keeping self-care on track.

2. Find what truly motivates you.

3. Bring joy into your life. However, in order to bring joy into your life, you have to believe you deserve it.

4. Get the job done. Don’t stew over the same worry. Get over the rumination rut.

5. Shoot for progress, not perfection. There can never be perfection in a human being.

6. Don’t let stress go to your head – or tummy. Stress is manageable, but “Toxic Stress” leaves you constantly overwhelmed and rapidly ages you.

7. Give yourself a license to chill. Sit still and relax.

8. Learn to be a master regrouper. Plan A is your life on schedule. Plan B is your life on stress. Learn to move from Plan A to Plan B without engaging in self-destructive habits.

9. Fight for your right to self-care. No one will book your gym time for you. Defend the time for your workout.

10. For women only: Form your “estrogen squad.” Form a support team you can call when you are about to embark on a binge.

STRESS-FREE EATING

In Fight Fat After Forty Dr. Peeke explains how your stress hormones daily follow a natural biorhythm – they peak early in the morning, at about 6 to 8 A.M.; by midmorning, they slowly begin to decline; and by 3 to 4 P.M., you may notice an actual drop in energy and mental concentration, as your body prepares you to rest and finally go to sleep. Your stress hormones reach their lowest levels while you sleep, allowing you to fully relax; but by 2A.M. they begin to rise, preparing you to awaken in the early morning.

According to Dr. Peeke, eating certain High-Quality/Low-Stress foods in appropriate portions at the proper time of day will offer less stress to your day. These High-Quality/Low-Stress foods are discussed by Dr. Peeke in detail along with valuable tips and advice for successfully working with your stress hormones’ natural biorhythms.

When to Eat:

**Breakfast:** No later than 9:00 a.m.

**Mid-Morning snack:** Three hours after breakfast

**Lunch:** No later than 1:30 p.m.

**Mid-Afternoon snack:** Three hours after lunch

**Dinner:** Anywhere from 6 to 7:30 p.m.

What to Eat: A Full Day’s Menu

**Breakfast:** Whole wheat toast topped with low-fat cottage cheese and cinnamon and broiled until bubbly, sliced peaches.

**Mid-Morning snack:** Cereal-fruit bar with nonfat yogurt.

**Lunch:** Pasta salad with vegetables and poultry seasoned with reduced-fat Italian dressing, whole grain roll, and orange wedges.

**Mid-Afternoon snack:** Reduced-fat cheese sticks and pretzels or saltines.

**Dinner:** Shrimp kabobs, spinach-and-mushroom salad, fresh pineapple.