

Allostatic Load: Managing the Wear and Tear on The Body

By: Tiah Terranova, Psy.D., LP

Anxiety is omnipresent in life. There is no escaping this fact. Stress is everywhere and the majority of life is outside of your control, but you do have control over your thoughts, feelings, behaviors and reactions to impact of the human condition one moment at a time. For those who are in the practice of serving others, it is paramount to make efforts to remain physically and mentally healthy in order continue to serve others and care for yourself without harming yourself in the process.

Allostatic load is a term referring to the cumulative toll that chronic stress and life events take on the body. When this load is too high our bodies become unable to cope. Allostatic overload can occur, resulting in increased occurrences of anxiety, depression, gastrointestinal difficulties, inflammation and muscle tension, sleep disturbance, diabetes, headaches, hair loss, and acne, just to name a few. This is not for the faint of heart. If you keep pushing through and ignoring all your body's alarms you will likely continue to deteriorate, resulting in decreased quality and length of life.

In order to continue the meaningful and difficult work many of you do and simply to care for yourself on this journey through life, here are a few suggestions that may aid in lessening the allostatic load. These are simple additions to incorporate into your busy days:

- Avoid eating when you are stressed, as the body does not digest food when the stress response is activated. Try to eat when you are in a relaxed state. Taking a few deep breaths prior to eating can help activate the relaxation response in the body.
- Put utensils down for 15-30 seconds between each bite of a meal. An intentional life is one that grounds you to the present moment. We only get so many trips around the sun so pause and enjoy the moments you take to nourish your body. That to do list will be there when you return and with a little break you will be better able to knock a few off the list.
- I hear you now, you do not feel you have time to eat in your busy day. All excuses aside, a simple solution is to have a handful of 10-20 raw almonds a day! They are a nutrient powerhouse, packed with antioxidants. Almonds, aid with gut digestion, improve mental health, are great for skin health, lower risk of heart disease, keep down cravings, and can help lower your blood pressure from the stress of the day. This is an easy way to take care of your body and mind and not eat into your day...no pun intended!
- Chew your food approximately 50 times until almost liquid. This helps the nutrients in the body break down so that fuel your body needs actually gets absorbed. Vroom vroom!
- Get your ZZ's--it is key! Only go to sleep when you feel sleepy. If you go to bed too early it just fuels frustration and perpetuates insomnia. Stop being a clock watcher and get out of bed if you cannot fall asleep or cannot get back to sleep within 15 minutes. Do a relaxing activity, like reading, and return to bed only when you feel sleepy (e.g., yawning, concentration decreasing, head bobbing, eyes heavy). The goal is to fall asleep quickly. If at first you do not succeed, repeat, repeat, repeat! And remember no matter how the night went, stick to your scheduled wake up time to keep the body regulated.
- Raise the bar and aim for 30 minutes of physical activity a day. Exercise stimulates the digestive track, improves mental health, strengthens the body, gets blood to the brain and stimulates the

cerebellum. Get your dopamine fix! Exercise releases dopamine which is the feel-good hormone. Who would turn down a bit more pleasure, satisfaction, and motivation?!

In conclusion it appears that getting loaded is not in your best interests! Good luck taking the load off, you deserve it!