HEART RATE INCREASES ...

ADRENALINE FLOODS ...

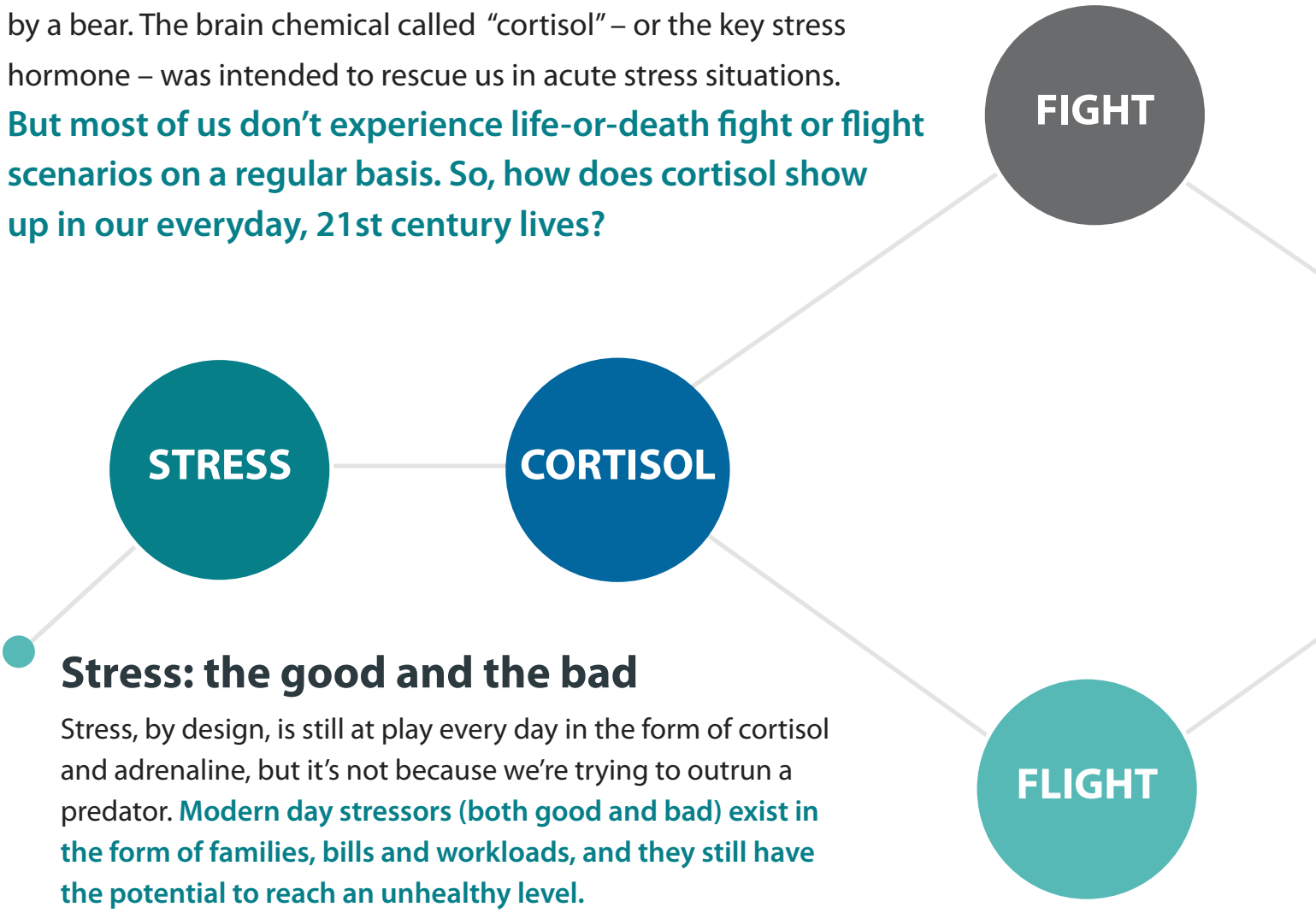
ENERGY SURGES ...

FIGHT or FLIGHT

IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Our brains are uniquely hardwired for survival.

Imagine you're trying to escape a burning building or being chased by a bear. The brain chemical called "cortisol" – or the key stress hormone – was intended to rescue us in acute stress situations. **But most of us don't experience life-or-death fight or flight scenarios on a regular basis. So, how does cortisol show up in our everyday, 21st century lives?**



Stress: the good and the bad

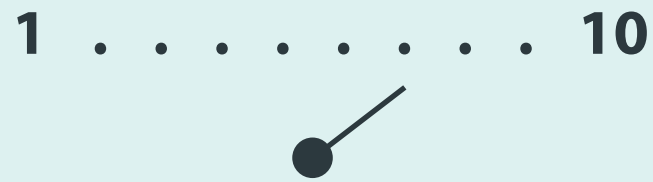
Stress, by design, is still at play every day in the form of cortisol and adrenaline, but it's not because we're trying to outrun a predator. **Modern day stressors (both good and bad) exist in the form of families, bills and workloads, and they still have the potential to reach an unhealthy level.**

When stress strikes

When a stressful event occurs, the hypothalamus (located in the back of the brain), sends the body a signal to release a mix of hormones, including cortisol and adrenaline. This causes heart rate and blood pressure elevation. This hormone response also communicates to the digestive, reproductive, growth and immune systems to stand by because they are not needed to address a possible fight or flight situation.

This process itself is perfectly normal – the brain and body are doing what they are trained/prepared to do. But stress factors can get out of control and become chronic, and the ongoing nature of the stress may impact the brain's chemistry – and our health.

If you feel very stressed for an extended period of time (weeks, months, years – it's different for everyone), the impact can be tied to a change in the brain's cortisol levels. That's why it's important to try to minimize the extra production of cortisol and keep stress levels in check.



Stress check

How stressed do you feel, on a scale of 1-10?

When is the last time you took an hour for yourself to decompress?

Do you feel adequately prepared to deal with stressful situations?

FIGHT or FLIGHT

Being "woke"

In addition to helping you run for your life, the hormone cortisol is also linked to biorhythms and the biological clock. **Approximately 30 minutes after waking up in the morning, cortisol is released to help us become fully alert and begin the day.**

Some studies show that chronic stress may impact cortisol levels and typical waking responses. If you fall into the overworked or burn out categories, you may not experience the typical waking cortisol surge as you should. If levels are chronically elevated, and they don't rise and fall in normal patterns, the brain may not be producing a typical amount of this important stress hormone.

The risk of stress

Our favorite stress hormone, cortisol, works hard for us when it matters most. But what about when we've activated our stress-response system and it stays on for an extended period?

Your body will know, and it will show. **Nearly every bodily system has the potential to be impacted, and many health problems can occur, including:**

- **Sleep disorders**
- **Weight or metabolic issues**
- **Heart disease**
- **Headaches**
- **Anxiety**
- **Depression**
- **Cognitive impairment**

IMPORTANT:

If your stress becomes unmanageable or you suspect you may be suffering from anxiety or depression, seek medical attention.

WAYS TO COMBAT STRESS

PRIORITIZE THE BASICS

Sleep, nutrition, exercise. These are three proven tools to help mitigate stressful events and times.

MAKE TIME FOR YOU

Take a break from your days to rest your mind and rejuvenate. A massage, meditation or yoga can help you regain stillness and reset.

SEEK OUT CONNECTIONS

Whether through friendships, volunteering or counseling, connecting with others and sharing your story will make a difference.

LIMIT EXCESS STRESS

By minimizing extra stress in your life, you can help your brain and body stay balanced and perform optimally.

CLICK THE LINK TO TAKE A SHORT QUIZ FOR PROOF OF COMPLETION:
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