

AND NOW A WORD FROM THE DOCTOR...

Stress Can Damage Your Brain

By David Perlmutter, MD, FACN



These days life seems to have become a lot more stressful for many of us. Apart from the well-known effects on blood pressure and heart rate associated with stress, it's important to note that chronic stress is just plain bad for the brain.

New research reveals that the stress hormone cortisol, secreted by the adrenal glands, can have a damaging effect on memory function when stress is experienced over a prolonged period of time.

In a recent report in the journal *Psychoneuroendocrinology*, researchers found that chronic elevation of cortisol not only compromised memory function in elderly individuals, but also caused actual shrinking of the hippocampus, the memory center of the brain. In addition, the report found that even young adults suffered memory decline when cortisol was persistently elevated.

So the take-home message is that in order to preserve brain function, we need to look for ways to break the pattern of chronic stress. This may seem challenging in the face of our demanding lives, but there are simple steps you can take to break free of the brain-damaging effects of chronic stress.

For example, stress is reduced in people who practice meditation. Studies have shown that this practice actually can reduce levels of cortisol. Other stress reducers are enjoyable hobbies and regular exercise. These simple activities have long been known to be good for general health, and now we understand just why they're also good for the brain.

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "David".