

## Men's Health

By Adam Rigby, Optimal Nutrition

Men's health issues are now gaining more public awareness with the creation of International men's health week. When I was asked to write a feature on the promotion of men's health using nutrition, two clients immediately came to mind, that were pretty typical of the way many men tackle or consider our health.



- 'Bill' a middle aged man worked 65 hours a week in a high stress office job for 20 years. He progressively developed obesity, diabetes and gastro intestinal disease and avoided tackling the worsening symptoms by continuing a lifestyle of food on the run, caffeine and little exercise. Eventually he became unable to eat without nausea and vomiting and had to seek support in making lifestyle and dietary changes before it became too late.
- 'Greg' who had pain in his elbow following an accident. He continuously waved off family concerns and recommendations to get the arm checked and suggested he would "Rub some cream on it, it'll be right". His arm turned out to be broken and needed to be cast, reminding me of the movie My Big Fat Greek wedding where Windex was the cure for every mans ailment.

So why is it that men will wait till a limb has to be amputated before seeking help? Maybe it's related to not wanting help with directions or our building endeavours. Is it that we feel that soldiering on is the man's way and it would be soft to slow down and nurture ourselves?

### **What happens when we continue to soldier on?**

Any action be it exercise, work or relationship stress an injury or infection causes an internal cascade of hormones and neurotransmitters having a major impact on our system. The stress response is part of our normal response to life but when it continues our bodies hit a state of chronic stress and that's where chronic complications can arise.

Hans Selye documented a 3 phase model to map the body's response to prolonged periods of stress:

1. **The Fight Flight response** - is a reaction to an immediate requirement for activity. A release of adrenaline causes an increase in blood glucose and oxygen availability. Increased heart rate and cardiac output delivers nutrients to the brain, heart and skeletal muscle increasing blood pressure exacerbated by reduced blood flow to the kidney increasing fluid retention. Digestive function and the immune system are inhibited.
2. **The Resistant Reaction** - is a longer lasting hormonal response involving elevated cortisol that can be initiated by chronic stress, excessive exercise, infection and disease.
3. **The Exhaustion Phase** - due to prolonged exposure to cortisol sees muscle wasting, immune suppression, gastric ulceration and a decrease in pancreatic function affecting insulin.

Note: New Leaf does not endorse any form of treatment, nor does it encourage you to undertake any such treatment on your own. We urge you to see your family healthcare practitioner before undertaking any kind of medical treatment. Supplements are to be taken with an appropriate diet, exercise program and advice from a qualified healthcare practitioner.

The body can either be in 'rest and digest' or 'action' but not both. Diarrhoea, constipation, bloating, stomach cramps, malabsorption or heartburn can all be associated with decreased digestive function affected by stress. As the absorption of nutrients decreases and the need for blood sugar increases - creating a shortfall in energy, adrenaline works to break down muscle to provide glucose the preferred fuel, thereby decreasing muscle mass and metabolism.

Energy highs and lows occur as blood sugars fluctuate causing sugar cravings, with caffeine often being the saviour to soldier on. Increased adiposites and triglycerides occur with elevated blood sugar risking increased blood pressure and cardiovascular disease.

The adrenal glands that produce adrenaline eventually fatigues potentially causing chronic fatigue syndrome and adrenal exhaustion which as you see may develop from an acute stress response that is left to flourish.

Diet and lifestyle choices are the key factors in balancing and maintaining optimal health. With the right approach the body can bounce back remarkably well. We just need to make our health more of a priority and get the support we need as we need it.

**June 9<sup>th</sup> to 15<sup>th</sup> 2008 is International Men's Health Awareness week.** The purpose of the campaign is to heighten awareness of preventative health problems and encourage early detection and treatment of disease among men and boys.

The Australian College of Natural Medicine; one of the worlds leading authority on natural medicine, will be offering **FREE HEALTH SEMINARS** for the public on **Saturday 14<sup>th</sup> June 2008**, in Brisbane, Gold Coast, Melbourne and Perth, Promoting Men's health with Musculoskeletal Therapy and Nutrition.

For more information go to [www.acnm.edu.au](http://www.acnm.edu.au).



**About Adam:** Adam Rigby is a Nutritionist, Chef and Lecturer at the Australian College of Natural Medicine (ACNM). He has a private practice in Nutritional Medicine specialising in sports nutrition and digestive disorders and runs regular Nutritional cooking classes in Melbourne. You can read more about Adam and find his contact details on the New Leaf Online [Partners](#) web-page.

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