

Louise's Healthy Nutrition Hints

✓ **BE Proactive: A 2 Part Series examining Stress** **Part 2 – Stress and Exercise**

In our last issue, we detailed how exercise can be a complementary stress; it can make you stronger, better fit and mentally clear out the cobwebs, even relieving everyday stressors. However, whether you are just starting out or are a conditioned athlete, your workout goal should include a fast recovery rate. It's not just about repairing sore muscles; it's about the positive "domino effect" of faster recovery. The quicker you recover from your workout, the sooner you can train again and make gains faster, whether it's to lose weight, increase strength or endurance. But what happens when exercise flips over to cause uncomplimentary stress?

In exercise, one of the main detriments to the rate of recovery is hormonal imbalance brought on by stress. Hormonal imbalances affect the body's ability to stay hydrated and its electrolyte function (minerals such as sodium, magnesium and potassium to name a few). It even slows mental ability and movement, impairs the delivery of messages and can cause muscle cramping.

Three of the major elements of recovery and maintaining the complimentary aspects of exercise are: sleep, rehydration and nutrient dense foods (highlighted in Part 1 of this series). Sleep, in particular, is very easy to take for granted but is a natural elixir for stress and recovery. Aim for 7 to 8 hours a night. Rehydration may seem more obvious. In our society, we are constantly reminded to drink water throughout the day. Being well hydrated also means your blood volume will be thinner, enabling you to pump more blood to your muscles with fewer heart beats, aiding overall endurance. Just be sure to add electrolyte drinks into the picture if you sweat a lot, exercise for more than an hour and the temperatures are warm/hot or experience any cramping in the muscles. This is especially important after a race or long distance. If you only drink water, your blood will dilute before your full blood volume has been restored, voiding or flushing out minerals. You can offset this negative effect by choosing electrolyte drinks that also include sodium, so more of the fluid is retained after a workout or event.

What exercises are best for relieving stress? Any exercise that makes you want to move; fitness should be enjoyable. Whether it's walking, swimming, cycling, running, strength training or team sports, start slow and work into it. Exercise should not become another negative stressor in your life. The formula for stress relief is simple: choose a fitness activity you can look forward to and incorporate the three major components of recovery, discussed above. Your body and your mind will thank you for it.