



Back Column

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Stress of family dynamics

The new "buzz" or theory in psychology is that children's peers are more important in shaping their personality than parents are. But a 13-year study of adrenal stress, says home life is much more important for mental and physical health.

Mark Flinn, from the University of Missouri, has been studying the relationship between stress and health in children. He maintains that two of the best ways to measure stress are by asking questions and by measuring the adrenal hormone cortisol in saliva.

Since 1988, Flinn has collected more than 25,000 saliva samples from 287 children in the same rural village on a Caribbean island for an average of 96 samples per child.

He has tracked the children's growth, measured their immunoglobulin levels to see if their immune systems are healthy, checked their health records and sent out an assistant to see who's sick. Perhaps most importantly, he has watched, listened and asked questions in order to really understand what is happening in their lives.

His results are a compelling rebuttal to the 1998 theory proposed by Judith Harris in *The Nurture Assumption*, which states that parents have very little power to shape a child's character and basically "lets parents off the hook" for their children's problem behavior. If the theory is correct, parents can all relax, put their kids in day care, and stop worrying that a little scolding will damage them for life. In summary: From his more than 25,000 data points, he has come to the conclusion that family matters more than anything else in a child's life. When a family has problems, it sends stress hormones coursing through a child's system.

When family members get along, or have numerous relatives to call

on, they can shelter a child from the worst social upheavals in the outside world. Emotionally and physiologically, family life is paramount in a child's health.

The island where the study is being conducted is an ideal place to study these stresses, since many incidental sources of stress are naturally filtered out. There is no traffic, no rat race, and no threat of war. "In the village, illness among children increases more than twofold following significant stress", says Flinn. The reason for this is a complex biological process. When a person is in trouble, Flinn explains, the brain automatically sends signals to the sympathetic nervous system, initiating a "fight or flight" response. This response may be summed-up as follows: First adrenaline and then cortisol are secreted by the adrenal glands, revving up the body and then sustaining the energy flow to different systems. The lungs pump faster and the heart starts to race;

Blood pressure rises, charging up the muscles and sharpening the mind; The stomach gets jumpy and the rush of endorphins numbs the body. The appetite, libido, and immune system shut down, and the energy they would normally consume is diverted to muscles that will help the body fight the immediate threat. This is all well and good-unless the perceived threat persists. In that case, adrenaline washes out of the body quickly, but cortisol may linger for days, weeks, or even years, keeping the immune system and other important functions depressed.

Children are especially vulnerable to stress, says Robert Sapolsky, a stress researcher at Stanford University. In the long term, too much cortisol can slow down a child's growth, brain development and sexual maturity. In the short term, it can make a child prone to infections.

As an illustration of something he has seen time and again, Flinn describes a significant conflict within a group of children. Following this, he collected saliva from each of the participants, none of whom had high levels of cortisol. "And this is typical of mild peer conflicts" says Flinn.

Several weeks later, one of the children from that previous conflict returned home late from a shopping trip and was scolded by her mother. This time her saliva told a different story. Despite the fact that she quietly went about her school work afterward, her salivary cortisol level rose 60% above normal.

Flinn maintains that his results consistently show that families cause more stress than peers do. Only major fights with friends elevate cortisol levels as much as family troubles do. According to Flinn "There is nothing more important to a child than figuring out what makes those close to them happy, and what makes them sad." Flinn has found that children who live with both biological parents clearly do best. They have lower average cortisol levels, weigh more, and grow more steadily than those living with stepparents or single parents with no support from kin. Flinn has also found that boys from households without fathers have cortisol levels that are too low in infancy and that they grow slower than boys with fathers at home. Chronically high cortisol levels in children are very dangerous because it can actually cause permanent damage.

In Romania, for instance, orphans raised under the dictatorship of Nicolae Ceausescu were so completely neglected that they became withdrawn and temperamental, and were prone to rocking in place and staring blankly at visitors. Psychologist Elinor Ames, of Simon Fraser University in British Columbia, studied two groups of these Romanian orphans:

Those in the first group were adopted by American families by the age of 4 months'.

The second group spent eight months or more in a orphanage.

Three years after adoption, the children in the first group had caught up to their peers in terms of size and maturity. Many of those who spent the longest time in the orphanage still suffered from depression and withdrawal.

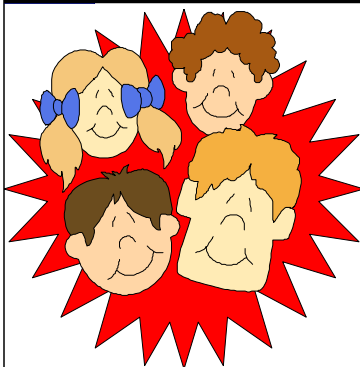
The difference between Judith Harris' "Nurture Assumption" theory and the findings of Mark Flinn may partly be a function of the different cultures they study. In the United States, families are an infant's first peer group, but children soon grow out of them. Without cousins, grandparents, and other relatives nearby to fill out their lives, they have to find their role models on the playground. In more traditional community studied by Flinn, however, families tend to be much larger and close-by and kin-networks are extensive enough to guide and support children well past adolescence.

Dr. Showalter's comments: This is an eye opener to how stress can not only affect our kids, but ourselves also. We can help you determine if stress is affecting your system through our Optimum Health Clinic by doing a nutritional blood analysis. If you'd like further testing give us a call at 855-5053 or visit or website chirodc.com.

Source:

Discover August, 2000

Mercola.com



Welcome New Patients

Here are the new patients that became members of our practice recently! We'd like to welcome you publicly and wish you all the best!

Benny Moore

Kate Chaigne (referred by Cariad Estella...Thanks!)

Michael Chaigne (referred by Kate Chaigne...Thanks!)

Danielle Gray (referred by Bobbette Trexler...Thanks!)

Dan Lastine (referred by Rhonda Lastine...Thanks!)

Ryan Kochenower (referred by Robin Wilham...Thanks!)

Congratulations to our March Madness winners:

Barbara Stander

Kate Chaigne

Herman Davenport

John McKinney

Thanks to all of our friends who referred patients to us. We want to say "thank you" in a special way. For each person you refer that becomes a patient, we give a "referral reward". Ask Lauren how you can receive an extra bonus for sharing the good news about chiropractic.

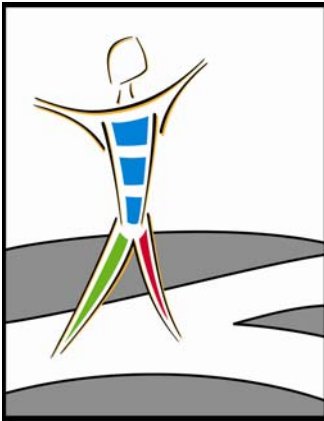
Larry Trew
Sondra Moore
Bill Douglas
Mark Davis

Memory Builders: Easy Techniques We All Need to Remember

A vital mind and strong memory depend on a healthy body. "Your brain's memory functions rely on and are part of your biological system. If there are problems with the physical body, memory enhancement techniques will not improve your ability to retain and remember information," says the internationally renowned expert on the subject, Douglas Herrmann, Ph.D., professor and chair of the psychology department at Indiana State University in Terre Haute. "Stress and lack of sleep are two of the biggest problems," says Herrmann. "They can make it difficult to concentrate and that makes it difficult to retain information."

Other common memory spoilers are drugs such as caffeine and tobacco. Caffeine makes you jittery and can add to your stress levels and smoking simply robs your brain of oxygen. Memory involves two steps: bringing information in and getting information out. "If you want to improve your memory, the challenge is to strengthen how you register and then recall information," says Herrmann, who has authored and co-authored more than 100 articles, plus several textbooks and popular titles on the subject. Here are a few of his favorite tips for improving your memory.

- 1. Use it or lose it.** Stay active mentally and physically and eat a balanced diet if you want your biological system-which includes your memory facilities-to stay in tip-top shape.
- 2. Practice spaced recall.** Studies have shown that when you want to memorize something, let's say, "the capital city of New Zealand is Wellington," it doesn't work to keep repeating the fact quickly, again and again, trying to stamp it into your memory. An easier and more effective way is to say to yourself, either verbally or mentally, "the capital city of New Zealand is Wellington," then wait for two seconds and say it again. Then wait for four seconds before you say it again. Then say it and wait for eight seconds before repeating the fact. Then wait for 16 seconds. Try it. Chances are you'll never forget that Wellington is the capital of New Zealand.
- 3. Use acronyms.** H-O-M-E-S clues us to the five Great Lakes. "Every good boy does fine" -E,G,B,D,F--recalls the notes that appear on the lines of a treble clef in a music score. You can devise acronyms for any information: If your grocery list is eggs, bread, milk, apples and cheese, arrange the first letters of each word into a sequence, let's say E-B-M-A-C (eat better; make a cake).
- 4. Establish routines.** You can stop trying to remember a whole variety of daily tasks if you create fixed behavior patterns: Always put your keys in the same spot; always put letters to be mailed by the front door. Or simply rely on lists, daily calendars or pocket computers. Don't burden yourself with extra memory tasks.
- 5. Reject negative stereotyping.** If you have low expectations, you may have low performance. In many instances older adults are more competent at remembering things than their younger counterparts. The best way to make sure you remember something important is to use two of the memory techniques. For example, if you try to imprint a memory using spaced recall and then use an acronym to help you retrieve the information, you will be surprised how often you can access what you need to know, when you need to know it.



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We're on the web!

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**Contact us today to subscribe to our free monthly
newsletter! Listen every Wednesday 7-8pm on
talk radio 102.3FM for Optimum Health Hour**

Mark your calendars...

Patient Appreciation Day is May 12th

On Wednesday, May 12th, all of our existing patients will receive a **FREE** adjustment in honor of our 4th year anniversary.

If you know a family member, friend or co-worker who would like to try chiropractic care, new patients will be seen on Thursday May 13th or Friday May 14th for **FREE.***

*Consultation with Dr. Showalter, exam and x-rays if needed

**It's only a couple of weeks away, so
call for your time now!!**

(Worker's comp and P.I. cases excluded)

