



Written All Over Your Face: How Stress Affects Skin

Stress is a part of the human condition, and almost everyone experiences it at some point in their lives. It's widely known that stress is more than just a mental state—it can affect the entire body, including the heart and other vital organs. The largest organ in the body, the skin, can be affected by the ravishes of stress.

But the good news is, ***you don't have to let stress get under your skin*** (both physically and metaphorically.)

In this article, we'll explain the connection between the mind and the body, how stress can negatively impact good skin health, and what you can do to keep anxiety at bay before it wreaks havoc on your skin.



The Mind-Skin Connection

There is a strong correlation between the body and the mind and the way the body responds to changes in our psychological state. And it all starts before we are born.

When we're small, as in just after conception, we're just a mass of cells that divide, develop, split, and stretch. From a single layer of embryonic tissue, two separate but inherently interconnected systems are born—the brain and the skin. And they are bound for life.



When the brain senses embarrassment, the skin blushes; when the skin senses pain, the brain processes it; and when the brain gets anxious about events like political unrest, global warming, or a highly contagious virus, the skin shows it—with a zit, an eczema outbreak, or a psoriasis flare-up, depending on the individual.

There are two different types of stress—acute and chronic. A sudden surge of stress, the kind that comes and goes, can be a good thing. It can enhance mental clarity, heighten senses, and create wound-repairing collagen. But it's the chronic stress—the ongoing and continuous kind—that can take a serious toll on the skin.

The last two-plus years have been that kind of stressful for most of us. Between the pandemic, political unrest, riots, and war, it's no wonder we're all feeling stress, and it's written all over our collective faces.



Cortisol

Conditions like depression, anxiety, and stress can cause new skin problems to develop or existing issues to worsen. And much of this is caused by the overproduction of cortisol, the primary stress hormone, and

its effect on the skin barrier, the barrier that traps moisture in and keeps allergens, irritants and pollutants out.

During times of stress, cortisol slows the production of beneficial oils, which causes the skin to get dry, rough, and irritated. Without adequate lipids to seal in hydration, the skin starts to leak water in a process known as transepidermal water loss.

At the same time, cortisol stimulates the overproduction of sebum, which is why our skin seems oilier when we're under stress, leaving it open to acne breakouts.

All of this alters the skin's pH and creates a hostile environment for the trillions of symbiotic microorganisms that exist on and in the microbiome, also known as the skin barrier.



Some microbes feed off sebum, which helps sustain healthy oil levels; others feed off dead skin cells, nature's exfoliation; some produce peptides and ceramides that keep skin firm and moisturized; and still other microbes offer protection from pollution, sunlight, and pathogens.

Stress also prompts the body to produce free radicals, which target various cells in the body. When free radicals target DNA, it can lead to skin cancer. When They target collagen, it can lead to wrinkles. And when free radicals target lipids, it can lead to dehydration and acne.



Long-term exposure to cortisol can also inhibit the production of hyaluronic acid and collagen, the chemicals that keep skin plump and youthful.

Oddly enough, skin-care products containing hyaluronic acid and collagen are actually not meant for people under stress. They are really meant for people who have healthy skin. That's because most topical ingredients can't penetrate deep down to the lower layer of the dermis. Exposing a broken barrier to too many topical agents can, in fact, exacerbate existing issues.

Ingredients like glycolic acid, salicylic acid, benzoyl peroxide, and retinol are very ineffective on stressed-out skin because they deplete the normal, healthy barrier function, so it's best to remove them from your skincare routine when you're under stress.



Inflammation

Psychological conditions like stress and anxiety can also cause internal inflammation because when your brain perceives a threat, the immune system sends out a response to protect and heal the body. A body under stress causes the immune system to go hog wild, sending out an inflammatory response. And the same response happens in the skin, which can cause conditions like cystic acne.

On top of all of that, stress can also cause inflammation in the gut, causing another reaction that affects the skin. This gut-skin connection impacts the balance of bacteria in your gut, which leads to a release of inflammation

that can work to magnify chronic inflammatory skin conditions like acne, eczema, and psoriasis, which can flare up when a person is stressed.

Managing stress

Managing stress may seem nearly impossible these days with so many stressful factors bombarding us every day. But a majority of our stress-induced issues do not actually come from the stressors themselves. Instead, they come from the way we deal with the stressors.



Tips for Keeping Your Skin (and Your Head) Stress-Free

- **Maintain a healthy skincare routine:** A consistent and thorough skincare routine every day, even on days when you feel tired or stressed, is critical to quell the effects of stress on the skin. Never forget to take off your makeup and wash your face before bed, no matter how crummy you might feel, because neglecting your skin worsens existing skin issues or can cause new ones, creating a vicious cycle.
- **Exercise regularly:** Exercise releases feel-good hormones that can boost energy, mood, and outlook. Exercise also increases antioxidants and lowers cortisol levels, meaning fewer breakouts and a stronger skin barrier.
- **Maintain a healthy diet:** To prevent free radical damage, fill your plate with antioxidants, which stabilize unstable molecules to leave skin clearer, calmer, and brighter. Vitamins A and C, lycopene, astaxanthin, and polyphenols are all great options that can be obtained from eating a healthy, well-balanced diet with whole foods. Equally important, avoiding processed and sugar-laden foods that trigger more inflammation inside your body is essential.
- **Get plenty of rest:** Sleep gives your body the time it needs to heal. It also improves your mood, boosts energy levels, and aids in cognition.
- **Take time for self-care:** Find time to relax and participate in re-energizing activities that make you happy. Take a bath, read a book, get a massage, listen to music, meditate, practice yoga, pet a dog, hold a baby, or do whatever it takes to make you feel good.
- **Spend time with nature:** Simply getting outside and witnessing the strength of a tree, the scent of flowers, or the songs of birds has been proven to lower inflammation in the body.

- **Have a good cry:** Crying is a stress reliever that helps decrease cortisol levels, which can result in fewer breakouts.

Sadly, no matter how hard you try, stress can leave lasting damage to your skin. And we're here to help. **Specialist Skin Solutions** offers a variety of treatments that are effective in restoring skin health that's been impacted by stress. **Give us a call @ (02) 4934 1700** if you have any questions or **contact us** today to set up a consultation. Our team is waiting to help you love the skin you're in!



In conclusion, we can't stop stressful situations in the world from occurring. They've been happening since the beginning of time. But you don't have to let stress show on your face. There are ways we can deal with stressors, things we can do for our skin, and ways we can treat ourselves that can prevent stress from getting under our skin.

Contact us to book an appointment today!