

I learned from this interesting article about stress and lack of rest, and how they often are a cause of disease and a weakened immune system. In other words, what goes in our heads, our weekly worries, do not stay in our mind, but have a great impact in our body and in our overall health.

As I read this, I thought of Shabbat. Shabbat is a mandatory day of rest each week. Sadly, many Jews today misunderstand both Shabbat and the need for it. Shabbat for us, is not so much a rest from physical labor (which fewer of us actually do every day), but it is a time to rest from stress – to turn off for a day our never-ending business, our hyperconnected and 24/ 7 availability to email, work, and stress.

Enjoy this article: and think, how will Shabbat "care for you" and "help you", if you do it right.

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The Danger of Stress (By Melinda Wenner)

Getting stressed isn't just a state of mind. It also seriously harms the body.



You probably think you're doing everything you can to stay healthy: you get lots of sleep, exercise regularly and try to avoid fried foods. But you may be forgetting one important thing. Relax! [Stress](#) has a bigger impact on your health than you might realize, according to research presented yesterday at the annual conference of the American Psychological

Association in Boston.

Ohio State University psychologist [Janice Kiecolt-Glaser](#) and her partner, [Ronald Glaser](#), an OSU virologist and immunologist, have spent 20-odd years researching how stress affects the immune system, and they have made some startling discoveries. An easy example comes from their work with caregivers, people who look after chronically ailing spouses or parents (no one would argue that this role is quite stressful). In one [experiment](#), Kiecolt-Glaser and her colleagues administered flu [vaccines](#) to caregivers and control subjects and compared the numbers of antibodies—proteins involved in immune reactions—that the two groups produced in response. Only 38 percent of the caregivers produced what is considered an adequate antibody response compared to 66 percent of their relaxed counterparts, suggesting that the caregivers' immune systems weren't doing their jobs very well—and that the stress of caregiving ultimately [put them at an increased risk of infection](#).

If stress affects immune responses, then it should also affect how well the body heals itself. In one particularly cringe-worthy [study](#), Kiecolt-Glaser and her colleagues afflicted a group of caregivers with small arm wounds using a tool dermatologists use to perform skin biopsies. The caregivers' wounds took 24 percent longer to heal than wounds that they had afflicted to non-caregivers.

Okay, but what if caregiving isn't an accurate proxy for stress? To explore other stressful situations, Kiecolt-Glaser and colleagues performed [another experiment](#) in which they produced tiny lesions in the mouths of—quite appropriately—11 dental students at two different points in time. Once was during their summer vacation, when they were relaxed, and once was during the fall, several days before a difficult exam. The lesions done before the exam took from two to eight days longer to heal than the summer wounds. For some subjects, the exam wounds took nearly twice as long to get better. Ouch.

How [Stress Hurts](#)

It might seem counterintuitive, but Kiecolt-Glaser believes that stress makes our immune systems less effective because it actually elicits an immune response itself. Stress, she says, causes the body to release [pro-inflammatory cytokines](#), immune factors that initiate responses against infections. When the body produces these cytokines over long periods of time—for instance, as a result of chronic stress—all sorts of bad things can happen. Not only does it hamper our body's ability to fight infection and heal wounds, but chronic inflammation also increases our risk of [heart disease](#), osteoporosis, and autoimmune diseases including type 2 diabetes.

What's more, because regular stress causes a chronic immune response, it can also increase a person's risk for [allergies](#), which occur when the body elicits a chronic immune response against something that's not really dangerous (like pollen). In her most recent [study](#), announced yesterday, Kiecolt-Glaser found that when people are under lots of stress—for instance, when they are forced to deliver a speech or do difficult math problems on the spot—their [allergies](#) worsen over the course of the next day.

I admit, this post may not exactly have the intended effect—worrying about the danger of stress is definitely stressful—but take a deep breath. If you ask me, learning a few relaxation techniques sounds like a more appealing illness-prevention strategy than many other alternatives. (Go ahead and throw away that cod liver oil.) Indeed, instead of feeling guilty about taking a day off and enjoying a "lazy day", think again: your health demands that you do it! Your mind and body will thank you for it.