

the superstress solution.

We can't avoid life's stresses, but we can manage them better. This advice from naturopath [Louise O'Connor](#) will help you to restore physical and mental harmony and balance, and feel truly well.

Today more than ever we live in a society that places enormous demands on the mind and body that directly threaten our wellbeing. Plus, there is little opportunity to retreat from the extraordinary pace of modern life - mobile phones, social networking, email, and televisions and other electronic gadgets keep us plugged in 24/7.

The superstress syndrome

According to integrative medical doctor Roberta Lee, today's stress is of such magnitude that it can only be called 'SuperStress'. Lee is the author of *The SuperStress Solution 4-Week Diet and Lifestyle Programme* (Random House, 2010). She believes our bodies are hardwired to cope with stress, but that we are biologically ill-equipped to handle the overwhelming amount of stress we now endure.

GET LOVED UP

"Oxytocin - the hormone that induces emotional bonding as well as labour and lactation - also directly counters the effects of cortisol," says Lee. "Cortisol suppresses libido, oxytocin increases it; cortisol breaks down bones, oxytocin repairs them; and cortisol increases blood pressure, but oxytocin lowers it." Nor do you have to be pregnant, she adds: meditation, yoga, exercise, massage, caring for a pet, and intimate relationships all promote the production of this 'warm and fuzzy' hormone.

SuperStress is caused by an over-stimulated, undernourished lifestyle. In her book, Lee provides an integrative approach to healing from SuperStress. The tools she has selected in her four week programme can help restore peace to the mind, body and spirit. Are you suffering from SuperStress? Here are Lee's four warning signs:

1 Stress is compounding. With chronic stress you may experience a stress-provoking situation over a period of time, but it is not until you have a cluster of symptoms that you reach the tipping point of SuperStress.

2 You can't handle stress anymore. Usually you can deal with stress with a little bit of effort, but with SuperStress you no longer feel you can deal with the symptoms of stress. The strain colours every moment of your day and your life feels like it is out of control.

3 Life has lost its lustre. You have lost your sense of humour and motivation. Sure, you can numb yourself by eating chocolate ice cream, watching TV, or drinking a few glasses of wine. But when you finish self-medicating, your stress is still right there waiting for you.

4 Anxiety is the new norm. SuperStress causes you to wake exhausted. It feels like you are desperately fighting off an attack from an

enemy that never tires. Depression, anxiety and/or apathy have become your default mental state. SuperStress is very much like post traumatic stress syndrome, which occurs after extremely disturbing events.

Stress accelerates ageing

We already know stress makes us tired and worn out. Now new scientific evidence reveals feelings of stress reach deep within the body to accelerate cell ageing.

A study from the University of California published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences* confirms stress affects telomere length. Telomeres, pronounced TEEL-oh-meres, are the DNA protein structures located at the ends of chromosomes. They carry genetic information and act as protective sheaths by keeping chromosomes from unravelling, much like plastic tips at the ends of shoelaces. These key pieces of DNA are also involved in regulating cell division. Each time the cell divides, the telomere shortens, until eventually there is nothing left, making cell division less reliable and increasing the risk of age-related disorders.

Telomere length is increasingly considered a marker of wear and tear on the body. The researchers found stress does indeed speed up ageing. They discovered women with the highest levels of perceived stress had shorter telomeres equivalent to at least one decade of advanced ageing compared to low stress women. One of the best ways to slow



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WHAT'S YOUR TYPE?

Lee believes that understanding your SuperStress type helps you personalise a stress management action plan. There are five types:

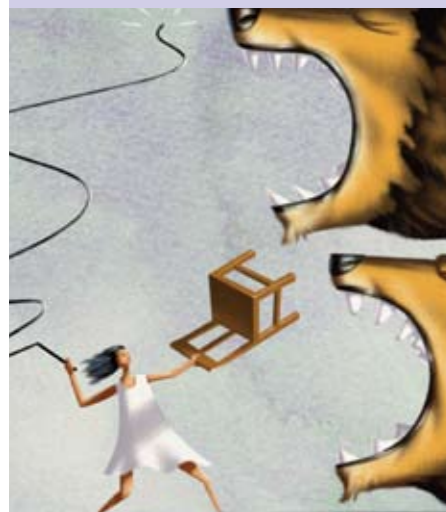
Type 1, Burned out and exhausted: You sense you are fighting a losing battle. You are always busy and it feels like everyone is putting demands on your time. The 'tired all the time' feeling has become all too familiar.

Type 2, Agitated and overwhelmed by life: You feel irritable and restless. Sleep no longer comes easily at night as you are so wound up. Caffeine-loaded drinks can make you feel more jumpy.

Type 3, Emotionally sensitive: You have lost your sense of humour and can feel melancholy some days, despite your best efforts to be your old fun self. You are emotionally vulnerable and sensitive to even the slightest criticism.

Type 4, Driven and controlling: You are a first-rate goal setter and achiever - but the flip side is you have become work-obsessed. Socialising or spending time with the significant people in your life has been put on the back burner.

Type 5: Explosive, can't slow down: You live at an ultra-fast pace as you feel driven to succeed. You use coffee and sugary foods to keep you going. Over time, this type of SuperStress creates aggressive behaviour and explosive outbursts.



Some people have been living under an accumulation of stress for so long, they don't even know they are stressed – it's just part of their lives.

down and switch off telomere shortening is to enhance a positive state of mind with meditation. According to a study from the *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, this may combat advancing cellular ageing.

Natural solutions

Stress disrupts just about every system in your body. Too much places an immense load on the heart, blood vessels and immune system. You then become susceptible to many ailments, ranging from allergies and insomnia to hormone imbalances and heart disease. Fortunately, according to *Alternative Medicine Review*, there are many proven natural remedies. Here are some of my top picks:

Bacopa (*Bacopa monniera*): Helps to stress-proof your brain. This remedy is native to India and is considered the foremost brain tonic by traditional Ayurvedic practitioners. A study in *Phytomedicine* shows that bacopa

has the ability to increase mental clarity while reducing nervous anxiety. **Rehmannia** (*Rehmannia glutinosa*): The supreme rejuvenating tonic. This highly respected herb has been used extensively in traditional Chinese medicine to enhance vitality and boost wellbeing in those who are debilitated by ongoing stress.

Rhodiola (*Rhodiola rosea*): Sometimes called Arctic root as it thrives in the cold, high-altitude regions of Europe and Asia, this herb demonstrates a remarkable ability to combat the negative effects of stress. It is considered a powerful tonic as it enhances physical endurance and mental clarity during times of stress

Ashwagandha (*Withania somnifera*): Has long been used by the traditional healers of India to improve energy levels by supporting the nervous system. Ashwagandha can improve stress tolerance and is not over-stimulating to the nervous system.

Zizyphus (*Zizyphus spinosa*): A natural sedative to help calm the nerves. It has long

BREATHE IN, BREATHE OUT

When you are on constant high alert, your body pumps out a stress hormone called cortisol directly into your bloodstream. This powerful hormone prolongs your body's inbuilt 'fight or flight' response. However, too much cortisol is extremely damaging to the part of your brain that controls your memory and learning. Are you finding it hard to concentrate, or are simple tasks becoming overwhelming? When stress hits hardest, stop what you are doing and take 10 slow, deep breaths.



been used in traditional Chinese medicine to help reduce fatigue related to disturbed sleep. Taken at night, zizyphus promotes relaxation and improves sleep quality.

A multi-mineral formula: The body demands a wide range of minerals to deal with stress and these nutrients are often depleted during periods of nervous tension. Minerals work hand-in-hand with vitamins to spark metabolic activity and a healthy stress response

Chromium: Too much stress disrupts blood sugar control. Chromium is a trace mineral that plays an important role in maintaining healthy blood sugar levels. Not all forms are equally effective; chromium nicotinate and chromium picolinate demonstrate higher bioavailability. Check the ingredient list on the product label.

Coenzyme Q10 (CoQ10): This compound generates energy at a cell level. When CoQ10 levels diminish, the ability of cells to sustain basic energy production is compromised. CoQ10 is vital if you are taking statin drugs to lower cholesterol. It is well accepted these drugs severely deplete CoQ10 levels. Taken orally, CoQ10 can maximise the body's energy output.

B-group vitamins: These are often called the 'stress vitamins'. When you are stressed out, the body's demand for the B-group increases and they are often the first to be depleted. B-group vitamins are mostly water-soluble and do not store in the body. This means they are required on a daily basis to aid nervous system activity. Pyridoxal 5-phosphate, the metabolically active form of vitamin B6, is necessary for the activation of neurotransmitters such as serotonin,

dopamine and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA). These important brain messengers regulate your mood.

GABA: This is your major inhibitory brain chemical. It puts the brakes on stress and helps keep you calm. In supplemental form, PharmaGABA™, a natural form of GABA can help to reduce stress and nervous tension. As it does not make you drowsy, it may be used during the day.

Vitamin C: Demand for this water-soluble vitamin rises in times of

environmental stress, with a deficiency making you prone to infections. The ability to manufacture vitamin C is not possible in the human body; therefore this nutrient must be obtained from the diet or through supplementation.



LOUISE O'CONNOR is a leading Australian naturopath with over 15 years experience. Louise educates and writes on natural health to empower individuals to achieve a higher level of health. www.natural-weightloss-programs.com

STRESS LESS. LIVE MORE

The response to stress is usually immediate and your body does not distinguish between a physical or psychological threat. Whether you are stressed over a demanding work schedule, a disagreement with a partner, hunger or a traffic jam, your body reacts just as it would if you were facing a life or death situation. Problems arise when the stress load exceeds tolerance levels, triggering negative behavioural coping patterns that become deeply ingrained. Here's what you can do to move towards more positive coping mechanisms:

Lose

- Smoking
- Drinking alcohol
- Using recreational drugs
- Relying on caffeine-containing beverages (coffee, energy drinks or soft drinks)
- Eating sugary foods
- Eating on the run
- Skipping meals
- Overeating
- Social isolation
- Procrastination or denying problems

Choose

- Taking time out to relax and enjoy life
- Controlled breathing and meditation
- Allowing others to help you
- Participating in regular exercise
- Spending time with the significant people in your life
- Balancing work/life commitments
- Setting realistic expectations for yourself
- Eating nutritious meals
- Getting enough rest and sleep
- Allowing time to rejuvenate after a stress has passed