

# Family Focus Wellness Center

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## STRESS

Here's a simple check of your anxiety level: try to lower your shoulders. If you could – if your shoulders were tense – your body is in *defense physiology*. You are ready to defend yourself against attack. But you aren't in danger – you are supposedly relaxed while reading this paper. Keeping your shoulders raised is just one clue that you are not relaxed – you are “stressed out.” Other stress clues include sensations of a “knot” in your stomach or your heart pounding, feeling tense or nervous most of the time, habitual foot-bouncing or finger-tapping, teeth-grinding, jaw-clenching, or coming “unglued” easily. Unless you are in a crisis situation, you should be reasonably relaxed.

Raised shoulders mean tight muscles that are constantly poised for defense. The fuse on your disease-producing time bomb is getting shorter.



### How Stress Affects your Body

We depend on defense responses to high-stress events to get ourselves geared up to survive critical situations. Quick defensive responses help protect us from accidents and injury. If man couldn't adapt quickly to threatening situations, none of us would have survived this long. Responses to stress are normal, natural, and necessary; but constant defensiveness is not appropriate or healthy.

When you are under any kind of stress – life-threatening or just irritating – your body is stimulated. Organs and glands change gears and speed up or slow down activity as needed. Body functions, or physiology, prepare for defense. Your adrenal glands are activated, and increased amounts of energy are ready to be used. Blood pressure goes up, digestion slows, muscles tense, and your overall physiology prepares to help you survive. This all happens in a split second. This process is known as *fight or flight*.

Stress from an emergency is over in a short time. However, stress from anxiety, worry or anger keeps your body in defense physiology 24 hours a day whether you are awake or asleep. Anxiety affects every cell of your body. Your adrenal glands work overtime. Sooner or later, they become exhausted and your body must rely on other glands to handle the stress responses. In time, these glands lose their ability to function properly. Eventually, your body becomes exhausted and normal, repairing and healing processes are put on “hold.” You are a candidate for pain or disease.



Anxiety and worry are more devastating to your body than the emergency type of stress that comes with a frightening brush with a potential physical disaster. Anxiety goes on and on with little relief. As physiological exhaustion sets in, the internal processes that keep your body going can't operate efficiently to repair day-to-day wear and tear. Pain develops, and the “welcome” mat is out for disease. Pain, indigestion, headaches, allergies, and other symptoms can oftentimes be seen as the effects of long-term anxiety.

### Defense Physiology – Good News and Bad News

An active response to emergencies can save your life. In a life threatening situation, you usually feel your heart pound and race, and you may be aware that your muscles are more tense than usual. However, you aren't aware that the blood supply increases to muscles that you may need to use to run or fight. You don't notice that some of your organ functions (like digestion and assimilation of food) slow down. You don't need to waste energy processing food if you're about to be hit by a car or attacked by a snarling dog.

The same physiological adaptations for defense are made in response to less physically dangerous situations – an unexpected summons by your boss, an important examination, or disturbing family problems. You're not in danger of being injured or killed, however, you are anxious. In our “civilized” world, we generally can't respond to anxiety-producing situations by physically “fighting back” or “running away.” We try to hide our defensive instincts – we store them for future reference.

Yet even something as simple as getting tied up in traffic can spark a defense response. The energy needed to run or fight is generated but there is no outlet for that energy. Frustrations take their toll because the body stays in a constant state of emergency. It can't return to its normal, natural state.

## Relieve Habitual Tenseness

We never “forget” anything, including how we have responded to stressful situations in the past. For example, if you are nervous when speaking to a group, you probably experience the same feelings of nervousness and fear each time you get up to speak. During similar stress of public speaking in the past, patterns of the physiological responses were stored in your subconscious mind. These stored patterns stay available in your subconscious mind to be used again and again. Each time you encounter a situation similar to the one that “set” the pattern, your body reacts in the same way it did when the pattern was imprinted.

Let’s suppose that one day in school when you were very young, you were called on to recite. You weren’t sure of what you were supposed to say, but you mumbled a reply anyway. Some of the other students made fun of you. You were highly embarrassed. Embarrassment is a very strong emotion. We go to great lengths to avoid it. However, a single, small incident such as being very embarrassed can firmly fix in your subconscious the relationship between speaking before a group and the threat of embarrassment. For years after, whenever you try to speak to a group, your body responds to the “threat” by following the prescribed pattern of physiological defense.

If you react with intense feeling when the memory of an event or person in your past is stimulated, the **reaction patterns** to that event or person have become a part of your physiology. Tense muscles, shallow or deep breathing, continual flow of adrenaline, and other adapted functions can become the standard for the way your body functions.

## Updating Defense Patterns

In order for your body to function normally again, gentle adjustments help you to function at your optimum and to update outmoded patterns that have been keeping your body in defense physiology.

It isn’t necessary for you or your doctor to know the circumstances that brought about a particular defensive habit pattern. It is the response pattern – not the event – that causes physical problems. You can never “forget” events of your past. The patterns of response to these events can be updated so that your body can function naturally again.

We can find the storage area of inappropriate subconscious response patterns by observing where tension is stored in your body. By adjusting your subluxations and monitoring these areas of tension we can signal your body that a new relaxed response pattern is now appropriate. With the new relaxation patterns in place, your body will function without defensive adaptations.

With response patterns updated to reflect more relaxed muscle tone and free of defense physiology your innate wisdom is better able to balance your body’s operation systems to allow them to function in harmony. In this office we are concerned with your whole being – not just muscles, joints, and organs. When you keep your nervous system functioning at its optimum, your body is better able to withstand the effects of everyday stress and resist disease.

Stress can come from physical trauma, mental anguish, emotional upsets, and chemicals and poisons. We all experience stressful situations throughout our lives. There is no cure for stress – we need stress. But stress RESPONSES don’t have to dominate your life. We can help you develop more appropriate physiological response patterns to past experiences. Relaxed, defense-free response patterns to non-threatening day-to-day events mean a healthier, more disease-free, pain-free life.

Take the simple shoulder-lowering “stress test” described at the beginning of this article throughout the day. You may be surprised at how helpful it is to realize that you are physiologically defensive. When you begin to relax, you reduce muscle tenseness.

Our Patients Don't Just Survive... They **THRIVE!!!**

