Stress and the Benefits of Exercise

What is Stress?

- Stress is the body’s reaction to any change that requires an adjustment or response, physically, mentally, or emotionally.
  - Positive Stress: Keeps us alert and ready to avoid danger
  - Negative Stress: Occurs when facing continuous challenges without relief or relaxation between challenges.
- The body has a “Fight or Flight” response to stress in which cortisol is released

Types of Stress

- 43% of all adults suffer adverse health effects from stress
- 75-90% of doctor visits are stress-related
  1. Routine Stress: related to pressures of work, family, other daily responsibilities
     * People with stressful jobs are 23% more likely to suffer from a heart attack
  2. Stress brought about by a sudden negative change (losing job, divorce, illness)
  3. Traumatic Stress: occurs after serious accident, war, natural disaster

How does cortisol (stress hormone) affect the body?

- **Cortisol Increases:**
  - Blood pressure, blood glucose, fat tissue in the body, cravings, erectile dysfunction, disruption of menstrual cycle, insomnia, heart burn, headaches, stomach or chest pain, acne, back pain, asthma
  - Risk of a stroke, heart disease, diabetes, depression
  - May also interfere with the brain’s ability to form new memories due to neurotransmitter interference

- **Cortisol Decreases:**
  - Inflammation in the body which suppresses immune system over time
  - Digestion and absorption of food

Stress Relief Through Exercise

- Exercising at least 30 minutes every day helps to reduce stress symptoms and improve mood.
- Exercising benefits include:
  - Decreasing premature aging
  - Preventing falls and back pain by strengthening muscles
  - Decreased risk of diabetes and cardiovascular disease
  - Decrease blood pressure
  - Reduced risk of some cancers
  - Slowing the development of Alzheimer’s disease
  - Weight loss/maintenance
  - Improved development and survival of neurons
  - Increased energy