

# stress less

## with healing touch

BY TRACEY L. KELLEY

**H**ow you experience stress is based primarily on your perspective of the stressor. Positive stress, often referred to as *eustress*, encourages motivation and helps you handle major changes or challenges, such as embarking on a new business venture, getting married, or successfully lifting into King Scorpion pose for the first time after hundreds of falls. Often a short-term sensation, eustress prompts optimal performance.

*Distress* is a reaction to negative stressors that drain your energy, mental capacity, and ability to cope. You're in a heightened state of "fight or flight." If you experience chronic long-term distress, it settles into your body—and stays there.

The resulting symptoms may include muscle and joint tension, brain fog, anxiety, irritability, disease, and immunity issues. Many yoga instructors remind students that "issues are in the tissues," and your mind and spirit remain trapped until you have physical release. Yoga and meditation provide a foundation for stress relief, but bodywork moves deeper to reveal your best self. There are numerous modalities that may help.

Zachary Hoover is co-owner of The Family Tree Yoga and Massage in Des Moines. He specializes in myofascial release therapy (MRT), a hands-on technique without oils or creams that involves gentle sustained pressure into the myofascial connective tissue restrictions to eliminate pain and restore motion. *Myo* means muscle, and *fascia* means connective tissue. "Everything in our body is supported by and linked to connective tissue," Hoover says. "So when something happens to one part of the body, the rest of the body is inherently affected."

He says stress has an emotional, mental, and physical effect on the body. As a result, the fascia loses its pliability, becomes restricted, and creates a source of tension. MRT can help you not only relieve symptoms, but also that source. "In this way, the therapist helps you understand how your body responds to stress and learn how to self-correct in stressful situations," says Hoover. He's also used MRT to help yoga practitioners undo particular body patterns and improve breath capacity.

Structural integration, or the Rolf Method, is another stress-relieving modality. Created by Dr. Ida Rolf in the 1940s, it also addresses fascial tension. Therapist Frank Epstein, owner of Rolf Method Bodywork in Des Moines, says this method "rebalances muscles and manipulates fascia. It creates a more fluid movement pattern by balancing your body in the field of gravity." Epstein says structural integration promotes better body awareness to subtlety, "which helps to eliminate stress and also enables you to be more adaptable in your daily life, whether walking, playing a sport, or expanding your yoga practice."

Blair Pieczynski, owner of Davenport Acupuncture, says acupuncture reduces the effect stress has on your sympathetic nervous system. "This ancient Chinese healing modality uses extremely thin needles inserted at specific points in the body located along meridians, or pathways," she says.

"Acupuncture communicates with your central nervous system to address a wide variety of issues, including pain, hormonal or emotional imbalance, sleep problems, and anxiety."

Pieczynski considers acupuncture to be a good companion to yoga and meditation as a way to reduce stress. "Acupuncture signals the adrenal glands to decrease the production of stress hormones," she says. "It's important to give the body a rest to recover from the 'fight or flight' response." ↴

### consider these other stress-reducing modalities

- **Aromatherapy:** the use of essential oils to promote wellness
- **Autogenics:** the method of self-directed relaxation using suggestions to create feelings of heaviness and warmth in the body
- **Bioenergy:** light physical touch to re-pattern higher energy bodies and chakras
- **Champiassage:** the Ayurvedic method of head and upper body massage
- **Floatation Therapy:** the practice of floating in salt water to balance the nervous system
- **Pranayama:** breath focus techniques, including alternate nostril, visualization, and reduced respirations
- **Progressive Muscle Relaxation:** sequential release of muscle tension through active and passive actions
- **Qi-Gong:** a combination of timed breathing, flowing movement, and often hands-on techniques designed to better cultivate and balance qi, or life force
- **Reiki:** a form of spiritual healing and self-improvement
- **Sound Therapy:** the use of sound to realign natural body rhythms.
- **Thai Massage:** a mat-based manipulation involving peripheral stimulation to produce internal effects along key points in the body
- **Yoga Therapy:** the application of yoga techniques and practices to help individuals manage health conditions