

## **Domestic Violence Class for Court – 39**

authored by Yvonne Sinclair M.A., LMFT

### **Relationship Revitalization/Food, Mood, Stress and Your Brain**

Remember the old days? No, not that early... I mean the *real* old days, like the 40's and 50's. Well, I am sure some of you were not even a thought in your parent's expectations at that time. Have you seen presentations, photos, or articles about that era? Have you listened to the music?

Well, let us explore those eras to see why they were the "good ole days." In those times, people actually sat down and ate dinner with their family. People talked to the neighbors and had neighborhood parties. Some people sat on the porch in rockers and watched the cars cruise by their house. People on the porch waved at the people in the cars, and the people in the car waved back. Food was not as processed as it is now. Clothes were made from real fibers. Now, I am sure you can list the negative, but this is my story, and I like the positive aspects of that era.

Today, we are on the go constantly. Who says hello to someone they meet walking (fast, I am sure) down the sidewalk? Have you ever sat on a porch and rocked? Can you see the zillions of stars from your back yard? How processed is the food you place into your body, and what affect does it have on your well-being? We go, go, go today. We have a great need to progress and succeed... progress to where and succeed in what? How is the stress of this era affecting the people struggling to survive? Has your neighbor dropped over and chatted just to chat, ever?

Most of us feel this everyday stress is at an all-time high. Unfortunately, this fast-paced lifestyle takes its toll on our

physical selves. Between parenting with soccer, football, cheer, dance, music, karate, teacher conferences, home work, and keeping your employment satisfied, “life” does not happen. What happened to just being with your partner, much less the children? Where do we find the time to nurture our relationship and connect with our children?

As busy as our life is and as hard as we try to keep it all together, living in a constant state of overdrive can have a serious effect on our health. There are some things we can do to help notice our stress level, pay attention to the ones we love, and care about ourselves. The fast pace itself creates physiological problems within our bodies. Our ability to handle anger is lowered not only by the stress, but also by the effects of the stress and constant on the go.

\*Anger is thought to be the leading cause of divorce.

\*The Department of Health and Human Services reports, “Domestic fights turn violent when anger is not controlled. This accounts for more visits to the emergency room than auto accidents, muggings, and rapes combined.”

\*The American Heart Association in 1996 reported, “People who chronically lose their temper have far higher risk of developing serious cardiac and other disease.”

Stress can be controlled. Even the stress level you experience on a daily basis can be lowered by engaging in certain activities and eating certain foods. Some physical conditions can increase your fatigue and therefore your stress level.

### **Stress and Fatigue.**

In the November 2010 issue of the magazine *For Women First*, Dr. Oz explores physical conditions to have your doctor consider if

you are fatigued. Even though the magazine is for woman, these conditions are not limited to the female gender.

\*Pre-diabetes symptoms: intense cravings for sweets or carbs, belly-centric weight gain, frequent infections, severe PMS perimenopausal or menopausal symptoms, and/or darkened skin on the inner thighs, neck, armpits, knees, or elbows.

\*Chronic Fatigue Syndrome symptoms: exhaustion even after mild physical activity, brain fog/forgetfulness, body aches/joint pains, and/or sore throat.

\*Anemia symptoms: light-headedness, a racing heart or shortness of breath, frequent headaches, cold hands and feet, and/or muscular weakness.

\*Low Thyroid symptoms: brittle fingernails and hair, often feeling cold, weight gain, depression, constipation, and/or memory lapses.

If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, then you should visit a Primary Care Physician. Feeling fatigued can increase your stress, and an increase stress can lower anger control.

## **Stress and Foods.**

Most of us live with a full schedule each day. Operating in a constant state of overdrive can be detrimental to our health. Shawn Talbott, Ph.D., author of *The Cortisol Connection*, states “Any kind of stress—from traffic congestion to public speaking—prompts the adrenal glands to produce hormone cortisol.”

In the November 2010 issue of the magazine *First for Women*, this topic is further discussed. “In small bursts, this hormone sparks the release of stored blood sugar, increases heart rate and increases circulation—physiological effects meant to energize you

to respond to whatever is triggering anxiety. The problem is modern stressors like bills and deadlines rarely go away. This keeps the adrenals in a continuous state of cortisol production. Complicating matters: Over time unrelenting stress leaves the adrenals exhausted and unable to keep up with the cortisol demands. This depletes the glands' ability to pump our sufficient levels of hormones like adrenaline, nor epinephrine, and testosterone, which help the body cope with anxiety. And left untreated, adrenal fatigue can lead to more serious conditions, including fibromyalgia, autoimmune disease, and type 2 diabetes.”

In other words, our constant on the go lifestyle and stress will lead to more stress with physical problems and disease.\

The good news is there are some foods that help us break down excess cortisol. Of course the most permanent and healthy solution would be to slow down our schedule and spend time taking care of ourselves, spending time with family and friends, and smelling the roses.

Here are the foods to help lower the cortisol level:

- \*Vitamin C rich foods like citrus fruit, bell peppers, and sweet potatoes.
- \*Magnesium found in spinach, beans, and, nuts.
- \*Omega-3 fatty acids found in fish and flaxseed.
- \*Zinc rich foods like red meats and dark chocolate help as well.

*For Women First* promises, “All told, these healing foods can restore adrenal health and leave you with increased energy, sunnier moods, sharper focus and a slimmer waistline in as little as two weeks!”

Wow! I'm going shopping for these foods. Got your grocery list ready?

The internet offers sites to help you with eating to control your mood. Here are some to start:

from Sparkspeople.com

## **How Food Affects Your Mood**

Although the foods you eat cannot *treat* depression, your diet does have significant effects on your mood, energy levels, mental health, and your ability to cope with stress. If you suffer from depression or [seasonal affective disorder](#) (SAD), certain dietary changes can help you get well when combined with a treatment program outlined by your health care provider.

- Structure your meals. Eat at approximately the same times each day and don't skip meals. Enjoy three well-balanced meals and plan snacks between meals.
- Eat quality nutrients. Try incorporating more whole foods, [fruits and veggies](#), and [healthy fats](#).
- Consume [plenty of calories](#). Eating less than 1,000 calories per day reduces the amount of serotonin in the brain, which increases symptoms of depression and its chances of recurring.
- Go for [omega-3s](#). These fatty acids can help with depression, by affecting cell signals in the brain. Foods rich in omega-3s include salmon, sardines, mackerel, [soybeans](#), walnuts, ground [flaxseed](#) and more.
- Cut back on caffeine. Caffeine acts as a stimulant, making you feel anxious and interfering with sleep patterns. Consume no more than 200- 300 milligrams daily.
- Avoid alcohol and drugs. They interact with medications and addictive or abusive behaviors can prevent you from a full recovery.
- Eat plenty of [carbs](#). They increase the amount of serotonin in the brain, improving mood and decreasing symptoms of

depression. Aim for *at least* 130 grams of carbohydrates from foods like [whole grains](#), fruits and veggies each day.

Depression is difficult for anyone who lives with it. It can sap your motivation to care for yourself, eat well, and exercise--the very things that can help you feel better. While dietary changes alone aren't a surefire way to prevent or treat depression, they can help you feel better when combined with the treatment options that your health care provider recommends.

## **How Does Stress Affect Your Brain?**

By Kathleen Hall

Reviewed by QualityHealth's [Medical Advisory Board](#)

Scientists have observed this response in baboons and other highly social animals. And experts specializing in workplace dynamics warn that stress interferes in important relationships with colleagues and individual performance, especially for leaders.

Former professor Henry L. Thompson, Ph.D. says stress impacts leaders' cognitive and emotional abilities and contributes to what he calls Catastrophic Leadership Failures (CLF). CLF occurs when leaders experience enough stress to cause a dramatic drop in their intellectual and emotional intelligence. The result: they don't listen well, they over-analyze things, flip-flop, and generally, make reactive rather than well-considered decisions.

In fact, Dr. Steven Stein, an expert in emotional intelligence, says emotional intelligence-or the ability to sense other's feelings, convey your own feelings, and effectively communicate-is more important than IQ (intelligence). He, too, says stress harms workers by affecting their decision-making skills, increasing mistakes, lowering productivity, interfering in workplace relationships, and causing workers to ignore important cues in others.

Fortunately, you can reverse these stress-related effects, and, by boosting your overall emotional intelligence, manage stress more effectively.

To help you increase your emotional intelligence, experts recommend you learn to assess the world properly. Instead of experiencing stress because you have unrealistic demands and expectations from the world, correctly observe, analyze, and assess people, situations, and the environment. Take an inward, rather than an outward view, by observing what you *have*, without focusing on what you don't have.

Learning effective stress management techniques will also help you stay focused and in control, regardless of the challenges you face.

The world is stressful and many things are beyond our control. However, you can take steps to prevent stress from making you feel dumb.

**Self-Soothing Plan - Getting Physical:** Try some new ideas and decide which ones work best for you. Here are some ideas to consider:

\*Deep Breathing – Take three deep breaths. Breathe air in through your nose and then breathe out through your mouth (like you are blowing out a candle). Do this at least three times.

\*4X4X4 – Breathe in to the count of four, hold the breath to a count of four, and then let the breath out slowly to a count of four.

\*Jogging or walking around the block - Take a brisk walk. Use a treadmill. During this time, practice positive self-talk.

\*Basketball - Go shoot some hoops. During this time, practice positive self-talk.

\*Count slowly. Start at ten, and count down to one. Do this slowly while using your positive thoughts to change your angry feelings.

\*Ripping newspaper – This helps to lower anger. Rules for ripping paper: rip paper, scrunch it up, and throw it in a basket or paper bag. Repeat until you feel better. Think of throwing your anger into the paper bag along with the newspaper.

\*Muscle work – Do you clench your jaw when you are stressed or angry? Clench your jaw really hard for a minute. Do this twelve times in a row. This will help to relax you. You can do the same with neck muscles. You can also do this exercise with your arms, legs, back, etc. This will systematically relax your body. The attention on your physical being can distract you from your anger.

\*Progressive relaxation - Start with your facial muscles and tighten them to the count of ten. Then, relax them. Pick another set of muscles and do the same exercise. Continue this process slowly down your neck and shoulders all the way to your toes. Continue the 10-count, tighten, and then relax each muscle until you have relaxed your whole body. This is addressed in more detail later in this lesson.

\*Personal time-out - You may want to take a nice, hot shower or bath as your personal time-out. Let the water and heat do the relaxing while you work on your thinking pattern, self-talk, and thoughts. Physical activity will help you to lower your stress level and reduce the feelings of anger. During the physical activity, what you tell yourself is an important part of reducing the anger. This is your “self-talk.” Notice what you tell yourself during times when your anger is escalating. You may need to do a “reality check” to keep your self-talk positive and real.

High expectations can be a factor that leads to displaced anger. Are your expectations realistic? Where do your expectations come from? Doing something to calm your angry feelings before they

build to an explosion is a healthy way to “manage” your anger. Using words and sounds helps. Pay attention to your self-talk and keep it positive. Learn your triggers and implement a positive action plan. This lesson will discuss doing something physical to help lower your stress level and decrease angry feelings.

First, let’s explore stress in general. Stress can be controlled. Even the normal, daily stress level you experience can be lowered with activities and certain foods. Some physical conditions can increase your fatigue and, therefore, your stress level.

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If you are experiencing any of these symptoms, then a visit to your primary care physician would be in order. Feeling fatigued can increase your stress, and increased stress lowers anger control.

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