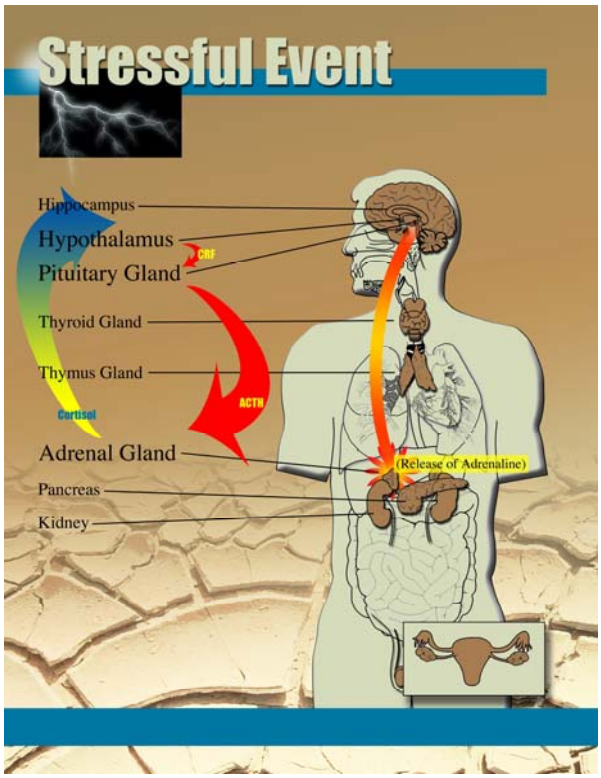
UK COOPERATIVE EXTENSION SERVICE
UNIVERSITY OF KENTUCKY — COLLEGE OF AGRICULTURE

Calming the Storm

The Body's Response to Stress

What happens to your body when you encounter a stressful event or situation? Follow the process below to understand how your body responds to stress in normal and distressed situations.



- Your body has an automatic physical reaction to any form of stress.
- Your brain and your body interact in an effort to protect you from harm.
- Changes take place in your body chemistry, heart rate, and blood pressure.
- In highly stressful situations, this stress response allows you to act quickly; sometimes with increased physical strength.
- In normal situations, when the stressful event is over, your body returns to its normal level of functioning.
- However, in distressful situations, when stress is constant or near constant, your body's stress response does not get a chance to rest.
- In a natural effort to help in distressful situations, your body stays tense. The chemical and hormonal responses to distress are continuously flowing, like a water faucet that doesn't turn off.
- This continuous response can begin to have damaging effects on different parts of the body – the heart, kidneys, circulatory system, even the bones.

- The damaging effects will weaken your immune system, making you more vulnerable to diseases, illness, and infections.

- Your body is giving you the signal that it is time to change your behaviors and the way you respond to stressful events.

Refer to *Calming the Storm: Gaining Control over Stress* (HEEL-DB.805) to learn more about signs of distress, factors that contribute to distress, and what you can do to better manage your stress response.

For more information on health issues in Kentucky, please visit:

www.ca.uky.edu/HEEL

Sources: Bruno, Leonard. *Stress Reduction*. Health A to Z (Medical Network, Inc.). Retrieved September 30, 2003. http://www.healthatoz.com
McEwen, Bruce. (2000). *The end of stress as we know it.* Washington, D.C.: Joseph Henry Press.

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