FACT SHEET

How the Mind Matters to Your Skin
- Stress is a basic coping mechanism that allows humans to adapt in order to address short-term immediate dangers.
- Stress leads to increased vulnerability to diseases, including those of the skin.
- There are two types of stress: acute and chronic
  - **Acute stress** is a one-time stimulus that triggers the ‘fight or flight’ response in humans. This type of stress can be beneficial because it can alert a person to potential dangers and trigger his or her survival instincts.
  - **Chronic stress** is a state of ongoing psychological stimulation due to one or many external factors. Modern-day stresses such as high-pressure jobs, long commuting times and traffic congestion can keep the body in a constant, chronic state of stress.
- It is important to remember that what is stressful for some people may not necessarily be stressful for other people as each individual reacts to stress differently.

Stress and the Appearance of Your Skin
- When a person becomes stressed, the level of the body’s stress hormone (cortisol) rises.
- Cortisol, in turn, causes an increase in oil production, which can lead to oily skin, acne and other related skin problems.
- Stress also leads to abnormalities in the immune system as well as the skin barrier function, leading to the worsening of cutaneous diseases such as psoriasis and eczema.

Stress, Infections and Wound Healing
- From the common cold to herpes, studies have shown that as a person’s stress level increases so does his or her chance of getting sick.
- One study showed that individuals with high levels of chronic stress were twice as likely to develop colds as opposed to individuals with low levels of stress.
- Studies have shown chronic stress can cause wounds to heal much slower.

Stress and Skin Cancer
- While staying out of the sun greatly reduces your risk of skin cancer, maintaining low levels of stress may be beneficial as well.
- Research in mice showed that over a 28-week period of ultraviolet (UV) exposure, the stressed mice developed a tumor in just eight weeks whereas the non-stressed mice developed tumors in 21 weeks.

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How can you reduce stress?

- Dermatologists are a resource for patients experiencing stress-related skin conditions. In addition to treating the skin condition, dermatologists can be a resource for suggesting additional therapies that can help the patients address the source of their stress.
  - **Psychotherapy** is the treatment of mental issues, such as anxiety and depression, by a trained professional through the use of psychological methods. In a study of patients who had breast cancer, the patients that received psychotherapy had an average survival rate of three years, which is twice as long as the control patients who survived just one-and-a-half years.
  - **Hypnosis** is a state during which suggestions are readily accepted by the patient. Stress reduction through hypnosis has been shown to be effective in treating eczema, warts and psoriasis.
  - **Mindfulness Meditation** is a method to positively affect patients’ state of mind, reducing their stress. In a study where psoriasis patients received ultraviolet therapy, patients who listened to meditation tapes while being treated had their psoriasis go into remission 50 percent faster than those that did not undergo meditation.

Speaking at the American Academy of Dermatology’s (Academy) 66th Annual Meeting in San Antonio, dermatologist Francisco A. Tausk, MD, FAAD, professor of dermatology and psychology, University of Rochester, Rochester, N.Y., recommended basic tips to help reduce the stress of everyday life:

- Learn to recognize the underlying problem that is triggering your symptoms and develop skills to help minimize the stress.
- Exercise helps release endorphins in the body that can reduce stress.
- Get enough sleep.
- Allow yourself time for privacy, quiet, and relaxation every day.
- Practice stress reduction through relaxation, meditation, yoga or self-hypnosis.

See your dermatologist for successful diagnosis and treatment of skin, hair and nail conditions.

Find a dermatologist by visiting the American Academy of Dermatology’s Web site at www.aad.org.