

The Science of Stress

Part Three - Class Summary

- In the West, stress is treated in a disembodied manner
- But our mind, brain and body are connected through the autonomic nervous system
- The autonomic nervous system has two complementary branches, the sympathetic nervous system and the parasympathetic nervous system
- The sympathetic nervous system, our fight or flight branch, is needed for short term survival
- The parasympathetic nervous system, our rest and digest branch, is needed for long term survival
- The sympathetic nervous system and parasympathetic nervous system have evolved for us to achieve a state of homeostasis
- Modern, stressful lifestyles engage the sympathetic nervous system more frequently than in our evolutionary past, because psychological stress lasts a lot longer than physical stress
- Psychological stress is prolonged due to our ability to ruminate
- We live in a state of low level fight or flight, with sympathetic dominance, for much of our lives
- This can lead to chronic stress, anxiety and depression