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Letters

Sick of stress

Joanne Silberner's very incisive article, "What Triggers AIDS?" (SN: 4/4/87, p.220), suggests that the ultimate trigger may be stress, which is already known to trigger a great many diseases, ranging from the common cold to schizophrenia to heart attacks.

Stress researcher Hans Selye and others have found that the effects of stress are cumulative, so that a long series of small stressors can add up to a big problem, which may appear to occur suddenly, but is really a long time developing. Homeostasis — the staying power of the body — is gradually eroded by chronic stress, until something gives. In arthritis, it is the cartilage of the joints that deteriorates (possibly attacked by the body's own antibodies). In schizophrenia, it is mental function. In AIDS, it is the immune system.

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Cover: The Reagan administration's stepped-up efforts to keep nonclassified scientific and technical data out of Soviet hands include measures that some critics are labeling as "intimidating" and "extralegal." (Illustration: Sharon Roy)



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The implication of AIDS research seems to be that the victims are not only infected by the virus, but are also allergic to it or to chemicals it produces. Any stress, ranging from coinfection to a dental X-ray, could be "the last straw" that triggers the allergy. It gives insight into why babies are born without antibodies, which could be more dangerous to an infant than the diseases children have to go through to get the antibodies.

As Einstein said about the origin of the earth's magnetic field (SN: 4/4/87, p. 222), the cumulative effects of stress may be one of the most important unsolved problems.

*Kenneth J. Epstein
Chicago, Ill.*

Tasteless connection

I was especially interested in "New sugar may help fat, thin alike" (SN: 4/18/87, p.251) because it was the first time that I had seen

documentation of a feedback connection between satiety and the liver.

Fourteen years ago I underwent a gall bladder operation. After its removal a "T" tube was inserted to route the bile out of the body during healing. An apparent consequence of not having bile in the body was that for the next 10 days none of the food I ate seemed to have any flavor. It was as if I had a severe head cold and was unable to smell or taste. Upon the restoration of bile I was relieved to find that my "tasting" had returned to normal.

At the time I thought the effect was very surprising, since I had been taught that taste was primarily a function of smell and taste buds. I questioned my doctors, but they were unaware of this particular effect.

Your article may have shed some light on this mystery.

*Bob Dacko
Duncanville, Tex.*

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