



## **Stress and Change...Stress Less, Live More**

Got stress? Silly question! These days there is overwhelming stress in the air itself!

Stress is a natural response to anything that creates the need for adaptation. That means that even positive events can cause internal changes that affect our energy level, how we think, feel and perceive. The important thing to remember is that we ARE in charge of how we respond to stress no matter how it may appear when the pressure is on!

The perspective we take regarding stress and change make all the difference to our mind-body health, our ability to be happy and the feeling of enjoyment or pleasure in life. Intellect alone is not in charge of this perspective. In spite of what is out on the airwaves, simply choosing positive thoughts does not change the inner biochemistry that rocks around inside when stress comes calling. No need for discouragement though. Read on and learn what is needed to truly shift your responses to stress. The good news is that the techniques for reducing and managing stress are not only pleasurable to use, they also open up the world of possibility, creativity and happiness and inner peace!

### **What is Stress Anyway?**

A simple definition of stress is wear and tear on the body and mind as we attempt to adapt to the triggers in our environment and any kind of change—positive or negative. We may be aware of the signs that we are stressed: physical symptoms such as muscle tension, headaches, trouble sleeping, eating too much or too little, digestive problems; mental symptoms like difficulty concentrating, confusion, disorganized or racing thoughts; spiritual symptoms of feeling isolated, empty, or without purpose. All that awareness is a good beginning to announce the fact that stress is in the house, but it is as important to know about the very real changes that go on inside that create the wear and tear that eventually take their toll on our health and wellbeing. In addition, it is important to know what methods are effective in helping you counter the effects of stress.

### How Does Energy Fit?

Most of us have some knowledge about the fight-flight-freeze response as it relates to stress. We may not know the complex biochemistry and neurology of this miracle of survival, but we sure know what it feels like!

When we are stressed or threatened there is an increase in our flow of energy. This increased flow precedes the biochemical and emotional shifts that prepare us for fight or flight. These were suitable options when we lived in the jungle, but aren't terribly effective choices in our modern world! We are not being chased by wild animals or being hunted by a predator. We are in traffic, coping with fast paced input from an electronic world, trying to keep a qajillion balloons in the air and dealing with unprecedented numbers of choices, and dealing with conflict of one sort or another throughout our weeks.

### What Goes on When You're Not Looking!

The Fight Flight response occurs through the activation of the Sympathetic branch of the Autonomic Nervous System. If the threat to us is physical then the opposing

Here we see the effects of stress and relaxation via the autonomic nervous system on mind and body

Sympathetic  
**Activation**

Parasympathetic  
**Relaxation**

**Increases:**

**Decreases:**

Tearing, Salivation

Tearing, Salivation

Heart Rate, Blood Pressure

Heart Rate, Blood Pressure

Cholesterol, Clotting Time

Cholesterol Clotting Time

Respiration

Respiration

Blood Glucose

Blood Glucose

Adrenaline, Cortisol

Adrenaline, Cortisol

***Decreases:***

***Increases:***

Intestinal /Stomach Motility

Intestinal/Stomach Motility

If our stress is physical and life threatening this activation works well. We are able to do what we must and then the relaxation response kicks in to balance our systems. This explains why animals do not experience the stress we humans do---they are operating at a simple level that allows for balance to be maintained. For the relaxation response to operate within us, we need to use a practice that produces this balancing effect.

**Frozen Energy, Loss of Responsive Freedom and Declining Health**

So, our problems with stress begin when our energy is activated and we cannot fight or flee---well we can, but it probably would create even more problems! When we cannot, or do not choose these options that would help to discharge the triggered energy we need to override the impulses generated by them. As a consequence, we end up with an energetic contradiction within our bodymind: energy is both activated and inhibited.

Another issue with our innate stress response is that it is meant to be a survival mechanism designed to function in the short term. It is not meant to be a preferred or permanent management tool! Unfortunately this is typically what happens as it is initiated from a multitude of sources throughout our days along with our habitual response. An unconscious automatic feedback loop is formed and we are only aware that we feel more and more stressed and out of control!

Trauma or chronic stress combined with no counterbalancing of release results in frozen energy. This condition of frozen intensity is known as tonic immobility or the freeze response. A portion of the energy gets locked inside and free expression is inhibited. This happens with both trauma, and with chronic repetitive levels of stress. Damage to our energy can also occur through physical injury, emotional hurt, or lack of attention to a particular aspect of our being. A common example in our culture of the latter is the overdevelopment of the intellect to the detriment of emotional energy or a focus on the physical/material at the expense of spiritual or creative energies that add meaning, purpose and richness to life.

More common than the above examples is the damage to our energy through limited belief systems, conditioned responses, restrictive & exhausting habits. As we work to change these and rebalance the energy system, our reactive, conditioned responses and habits can more easily be released. The result is that energy is returned to the system and it becomes easier to develop new more powerful ways of approaching the challenges of life.

*Stress is damaging to our whole being but there is much we can do to heal and rebalance ourselves.*

## Stress Facts

- ✚ The brain does not know the difference between real and imagined.
- ✚ Your brain does not differentiate threats to your life from threats to your ego.
- ✚ Too much or too little stimulation is harmful to the brain.
- ✚ The brain is capable of creating new neural pathways throughout life.
- ✚ New neural pathways are necessary to recover from depression.
- ✚ Behavior change can only occur with new learning.
- ✚ Meditation decreases effects of trauma; supports ability to let go and find ease.
- ✚ Decreasing stress hormones brings relief, feels good and restarts brain growth.
- ✚ Positive stress management creates Emotional Intelligence, happiness, inner peace, satisfaction and builds stress hardiness

*A body-mind-spirit approach to stress results in feelings of health and wholeness*

## More Than Common Sense Is Necessary

**Meditation and breath-work** open up our energy systems assist in releasing the pent up effects of stress and tension as well as creating an inner flow to support ease, feelings of abundance and resiliency. Our brains function better and our hearts become lighter.

**Techniques like Imagery, EFT and Visualization** help to erase old patterns, heal trauma and smooth the way with goal setting and achievement.

These inner technologies go deep to where the effects of stress and trauma live inside and bring healing from the inside out. They also facilitate self knowledge—always a good idea, release of what no longer serves us and help us to live from a deeper, more authentic place that is a wellspring of vitality, love and health.

## A Forgotten Ingredient

Another useful concept for navigating the process of change, whether it is initiated by us or from the outside, is what do we need for support? All growth and development requires adequate support in order to be successful. What are your particular needs? Support does not mean the same thing to all people. What works for one may not work for another. In addition, we may need something different at various stages of our change process. It is wise to have a variety of tools available.

*Begin by asking what support means to you.*

- ✚ What types of support are meaningful and important to you?
- ✚ Where can you look for that help? Multiple sources are preferable
- ✚ Obviously there will be things you can do for yourself, but you may also need others. Who are they? Can you ask them ahead of time to be available to ensure that what you need will be forthcoming?
- ✚ Do you need professional support, a group or some skill building?
- ✚ Having a list of all the ways that you may be able to offer yourself support can be useful. When we are stressed our thinking mind tends to shut down and we may not be able to sort out what we need. If it is available to you in written form it can really strengthen your chances of success.

✚ Perhaps also writing out the positives that will result from the change you are going through can help give you some confidence when the going gets rough. You may also want to write out some encouraging statements on index cards and carry them with you. A friend who has committed to be an aid can be of invaluable help....especially if they have gone through similar circumstances.

These approaches may seem self-evident in a lot of ways, but they tend to be things we overlook.... maybe because of their simplicity. Nonetheless they can help make a difference in whether you just survive or thrive through transition.