

Stress less and achieve more

This is a barebones, factual approach to stress. I am not going to sugar coat it and say stress is healthy or everyone is stressed because the truth is those that perform at the top of their game and are most effective are those that are not stressed. Much as I have full sympathy for people who are suffering from stress (I've been there) I believe it is much more beneficial to show you a way out than to say it's normal or do less.

Being stress-free is a skill you can learn and I want to give you a starting point, but in order to do this I will probably have to convince you this is true because we have been conditioned, and in fact prefer, to think stress is inevitable so as not to have to change (and also we like blaming other people....).

I also want to point out that stress, excitement and nervousness are all the same physical symptoms it's just how we label it that then affects the outcomes, eg people tend to say a bit of stress keeps you on your toes when in actual fact excitement does that without any of the negative after effects.

This report also doesn't include such things as saying no, doing less etc. It's much more effective to learn to manage your energy levels so you can do more, relax quicker and be more considered in your choices. My approach is to remove the cause as well as relieving immediate symptoms. Having said that please bear in mind that it can take time to release stored up stress and change your habits. Think of it like training for a marathon, it gets easier each day.

Right – lets get to it:

The facts

Stress is caused due to 3 things:

1. What you tell yourself about your situation, eg. I must get this right, if I fail I will suffer, I can't say no, I've got to prove I'm good enough etc
2. Keeping yourself in a situation that is not right for you, eg my analogy would be expecting a racehorse to pull a plough – that would cause as much stress as expecting a plough horse to win a race. Ironically you keep yourself in the situation because of what you tell yourself, so really, again, stress is caused by your own thoughts.
3. Not managing your energy levels, and basically expecting yourself to work well on empty rather than replenishing your energy first.

Your mind cannot tell the difference between what you think and what is happening outside of you, so if you think about danger your body believes you are in danger and it reacts by pumping adrenalin into your body to help you survive that danger, and nothing else. This might sound over dramatic but if you are thinking about what a disaster it would be if you don't do 'X' then your body perceives that as danger (in the same way watching a scary movie does).

Our instincts are to escape danger and relax, however if you keep your body believing you are under threat for long periods of time it becomes stuck. Initially stress can help you think clearer, but once it gets stuck your body is fighting to get you away from the danger and doesn't care about logic – hence irrational thoughts and behaviour - you are compelled to escape or fight, nothing else. Sadly for most people who suffer from stress the danger is actually in their own mind. That doesn't mean to say that things can't go wrong externally but how you respond to it is 100% down to how you think. A simple example of this is if someone becomes aggressive with you, 3 options could be:

1. think 'how dare they' and become aggressive back
2. think 'I'm in danger', panic and run or freeze
3. think 'I wonder what's eating them', stay calm and calm them

Same situation, different thoughts, different outcomes. All 3 are about how we think and have nothing to do with the other person. It is also easier to change how we think than to try and control external situations or people.

The way you think is decided according to how you were taught/ programmed growing up and your past experiences. You can change that though so that you can stay calm and choose what the best response is for each situation. Staying calm also helps you perform better at anything you do as your brain functions better when you are alert and relaxed. (although it might not seem like it if your idea of relaxed is not actually relaxed. A busy mind is not relaxed)

So the good news is that your levels of stress, and therefore your enjoyment and performance, are all under your control and you can learn how to achieve more and stress less. This is a skill you learn like anything else.

The other important thing to realise about stress is that different people have different stress thresholds in different situations. You cannot compare people, nor think you are weak because you get more stressed than others. We are all designed to be good at different things, eg. some people are like sprinters and perform best in short spurts, others are better over long distances. If you make

them swap places neither will do well. All types of people are vital so it is more efficient for people to do what they are designed to do and find easiest to do.

Stress depletes energy, so you literally feel like you are running on empty. As I mentioned earlier stress is about getting you away from danger, so your body expends a huge amount of energy to get you do so, and yet you stay. **Relaxation restores energy**. *So one way to look at stress management is as energy management*. It is OK to use a lot of energy in a stressful situation if you then restore it. Athletes know this and do everything they can to keep their energy levels optimum. The interesting thing is that once you practise this then you can literally **restore your energy in 5 minutes**.

Think what a difference that can make if you are feeling tired and can restore your energy to full in 5 minutes.

Or deal with a stressful situation and give 100% and then after 5 minutes be back to full efficiency.

That is normal when you know how to manage your energy.

Managing energy

Like anything you want to do well you need to practise and be prepared. The better your body and mind are functioning then the easier it is to keep your energy at full throttle. You have a finite amount of energy stored, if your body needs more energy to keep going you will have less available for your mind, and visa versa. Again think of the racehorse. If you want it to win then you look after it, you should do the same with yourself. Also if your body and mind are working efficiently then you can still function well even when something depletes your energy, eg little sleep or being very busy.

Things that help:

1. Diet – I think we all know that certain foods are not converted to long lasting energy in the body. If you have a poor diet long term you are weakening your body's efficiency, and if your body is struggling to function then you will have less energy to think.
2. Exercise. Again this is about getting your body in a state that it works most efficiently, and therefore uses the least amount of energy to function well. Some exercise actually trains you in how to manage energy as well as be relaxed, eg. yoga or martial arts.
3. Sleep. Too little prevents the body restoring energy, but too much can be a sign that other areas in your life are using too much energy.

4. Learning to relax. As I said before this restores energy, and we are actually designed to be relaxed most of the time. In martial arts the best fighters are the ones who are most relaxed as this means their minds can pick up on what is happening and process the information much quicker. A good analogy for this could be that your computer works quicker the less programs that are running, so too does your mind work quicker the less it has going on in there. Being relaxed slows down the noise in your head so your thinking is sharper. (Incidentally stress can aid thinking to begin with because it causes you to focus on one thing, which mimics the process of slowing down the noise in your head by you tuning it out). Most people associate relaxing with not performing well as they have been so stressed, and their energy is so low, that when they relax the body switches off until it restores energy. If you are relaxed most of the time your mind and body will stay alert when relaxed.
5. Change your thinking. As I said earlier all stress is caused by the way you think, and therefore you do it to yourself. This is not to say you are at fault, just that you were never taught any different. Now you can learn how. Meditating is the best way, and in fact lawyers in the US are being taught a method of meditation called mindfulness and are finding it makes a huge difference to their work and stress levels. This is also taught in hospitals, and has been scientifically proved to change your brain functioning for the better.

There are many other ways too – becoming aware of your thoughts so you can change them (we are mostly unaware of a lot of our thoughts), writing down what is going on in your mind also gets you using a different part of the brain, and hence you react differently to the thoughts.

You could also learn the skills necessary to handle the situation better, eg. if you feel intimidated by someone learn how to handle that situation better so you feel more confident, and hence have less panicky thoughts.

Some thoughts are ingrained, and are like a habit, eg. 'X' situation occurs and it triggers off a train of thought that stresses you out before you are consciously aware it has happened. There are techniques in NLP and Evo-k that can easily change these patterns, and I'm happy to teach you them.

There are also many other ways to change your thinking and relax yourself, some of these are available through my website or in books.

Immediate way to relax

Whenever you feel a way you don't want to feel the only thing you have to do is relax, and then think about the why after you are relaxed. Your thinking when you are stressed, angry or upset is often irrational and it is difficult to process information in that state. The situation will be the same when you are relaxed but you will handle it better.

1. Distract yourself. If you can think of something completely different the stressful thoughts will lose their grip and you can relax. This can be by going for a walk, reading, music, repeating something in your mind or doing anything that easily absorbs you.
2. If you have been practising meditation then a few minutes deep breathing can instantly relax you. Alternatively try 10 deep slow breathes, focusing on your breathing rather than your thoughts.
3. Think of a time you felt relaxed and happy. Make the picture life size, in colour with you actually there, listen to the sounds and notice where in your body the feeling is. This is focused daydreaming.
4. Aromatherapy. Some smells relax you, or trigger happy memories.
5. Act 'as if' you are relaxed/ everything is going well.
6. Stay in this moment. Most stressful thoughts are you replaying past negative events or worrying about future events, neither of which are reality. Right now you are OK.

There are many other ways I can teach you, including EFT which uses tapping acupuncture points on your body to release stress, or anchoring in NLP where you can set your own trigger to relaxation – like a phobia in reverse.

Whatever you decide please know it is a proven fact that it is possible to learn how to be your best without stress in any situation. It's your choice whether you learn how.

My name is Kathryn Hodgson and I am trained in NLP Psychotherapy and Evolutional Kinesiology (amongst many other things!). If you want to learn more about how I can help you, or read any of my other free articles please visit my website at www.katalyst4change.co.uk or call 07748 351758

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