

Your Personal Guide to



Stress Management

*"I try to take one day at a time, but sometimes
several days attack me at once." ~Ashleigh Brilliant*

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Your Personal Guide to Stress Management

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Disclaimer

The techniques described for stress reduction in this e-book have been demonstrated to help individuals reduce the effects of stress in their lives. However, these techniques are no substitute for medical care.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	4
The Scope of the Problem	6
Definition of Stress	9
Overview of Stress Management Techniques	13
Learning to Relax	15
Breathing exercises	15
Extended relaxation	18
Mental strategies for reducing stress	22
Changing self-talk	26
Affirmations	28
Active imagination	29
Handling Emotions	31
Clarifying Values and Knowing Your Purpose	34
Time Management and Organizational Skills	38
Dealing with procrastination	42
Take a minute...	43
Communication Skills	45
DESC technique	48
Compliments	50
Planning Ahead	51
Quick Tips for Reducing Stress	53
Final Thoughts	54
Resources List	55

Introduction

Welcome to Your Personal Guide to Stress Management! This e-book contains a wealth of information on the causes of stress and how to reduce the stress in your life, along with numerous exercises for you to complete. We recommend that you complete the exercises as you read through the e-book for maximum benefit. All of the exercises are conveniently laid out in the workbook that accompanies this course material. **We strongly recommend that you print out the workbook so that you can easily complete the exercises as you go through this manual.** Be sure to practice the stress reducing techniques presented! The more you practice, the more rapidly you will feel a difference in your life.

Do you feel more stressed than you did 5 years ago? When we ask people in our seminars that question, most say “yes.” We know that excess stress affects performance, health, productivity, and the ability to enjoy life. On a professional level and personal level, learning to handle stress more effectively results in great benefits.

The goals of this e-book are:

- Define stress and the scope of the problem
- Identify how stress affects you personally
- Demonstrate and teach you effective methods of reducing stress.

So why are we so stressed?

Despite the promise of the technological revolution to help us, we actually have LESS leisure time than 50 years ago. (*The Overworked American*, by Juliet Schor) We are constantly on call with the ever present cell phone or beeper.

Email consumes an inordinate amount of time. Although the internet has made it possible to search for information instantaneously, it also provides an opportunity for endless wandering and time wasting. With information overload, our lives have become more complicated than they were even ten years ago.

In addition, society has changed so that we no longer have fairly stable family and friend groups for long periods of time to provide social support. Fifty years ago people knew everyone in the neighborhood. Now, many people live next door to someone they've never met.

Our expectations for having a meaningful job and achieving a certain life style are higher than they were. Many people feel frustrated (and thus stressed) that they are not living the life they want.

Finally, learning how to relax physically and mentally is not taught in schools! Few of us had good models in how to handle stress. So congratulations on purchasing this e-book to help you learn to reduce stress!

To your peace and health,

Patricia Crane, Ph.D.

Rick Nichols

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The Scope of the Problem

On a national level:

According to a New York Times article, the cost of stress to business is \$200-\$300 billion a year in absenteeism, lost productivity, turnover, and illness.

Statistics from the American Institute of Stress and the Attitudes in the American Workplace VI Gallup Poll (2000) indicate:

- Approximately one million employees in the US are absent daily due to stress or stress-related conditions
- 78% of Americans respond that their job is stressful
- Another 74% felt stress was impacting their coworkers negatively
- In California, Workman' Comp claims for stress have topped one billion dollars annually
- 80% of workers feel stress on the job, and nearly half of those say they need help in learning how to manage stress
- The percentage of employees who indicated their workload was "excessive" increased from 37% in 1988 to 44% in 1995 (WSJ-International Survey Research Corporation)

On a personal level:

In a survey conducted by Prevention magazine, 54% of respondents felt that they had more stress in their lives than their parents did.

Prescriptions for anti-depressants, anti-anxiety drugs and sleep aids rose 27% between 2000 and 2002

In other recent surveys and polls, respondents indicated that stress was having a negative effect on:

- About 50% of those surveyed said that stress was affecting their health.
- 21% said that stress was having a negative affect on their friendships
- 19% said stress was hindering their marriages
- 15% said their performance at work was affected by stress

Physically and psychologically, stress takes a toll. Medical researchers have found links between stress and the development of cancer, ulcerative colitis, headaches, backaches, and coronary heart disease.

Just reading the statistics is stressful! However, you are not a statistic. Your personal experience of stress is most important. So take a few minutes now and complete the checklist for Physical and Psychological Symptoms of Stress and Stress Buffers. You will find them in your workbook as listed in the directory below:

Checklist	Page
Physical Symptoms of Stress	6
Psychological Symptoms of Stress	8
Stress Buffers	10
Interpretation of Stress Overview Result	12
Stress Log	14

Definition of Stress

The term “stress” is one that has become known just in the last 100 years!

One of the pioneers in stress research was Walter Canon, a physiologist at Harvard Medical School in the 20th century. It was he that first described the body’s reaction to stress. He called it the fight-or-flight response. The physical responses are: increased breathing, heart pumping, muscles tight, and pupils dilated. While this response can save your life if confronted by a threat like a bear, it is actually detrimental to have that same response to the threats of modern society, like deadlines, difficult co-workers or bosses, and being stuck on the freeway.

A young endocrinologist, Hans Selye, became interested in Cannon’s results, and began studying—rats! However, Selye’s research is very important because he discovered that the body reacts in a similar way regardless of the source of the stress. The General Adaptation Syndrome he describes explains why people tend to get sick AFTER a period of increased work, such as finishing a big project or completing exams. Selye became known as “the father of stress” because of his extensive research.

While most people associate the word stress with negative events, Selye saw that positive events, like a job promotion, could also require adaptation. He coined the term “eustress” to mean positive things that we need to adapt to. Selye noted that we actually perform

BEST with a certain amount of stress. Today, we would say we perform best when we're in the Zone.

Just by observing people around you on a daily basis, you know that not everyone reacts to stress in the same way. So, stress can be actually be defined as the combination of two parts:

1. The stressor (an event or thought)
2. Stress reactivity (the way you personally react to a stressor.)

With this definition, stress only has the POTENTIAL for eliciting the stress response.

Examples:

(1) Events

- On the freeway, someone cuts you off
- Your boss gives you an unreasonable deadline
- There is too little money in the checking account to cover this month's bills.
- You can't find your keys
- Your daughter tells you she is pregnant.

(2) Thoughts

- I'll NEVER be able to get out of debt.
- I'll NEVER get organized.
- This job is so meaningless.
- I wouldn't be stressed if my boss (spouse, or children) weren't so difficult.

Note: The environment can also be a stressor when it's too hot or too cold, or toxic in some way. Have you noticed that when the weather is hot for a period of time, people seem more short tempered? However, in this e-book we're focusing on events and thoughts.

If your stress reactivity is high, here's how you might react to a few typical situations:

- On the freeway: you continue to dwell on the annoyance of getting cut off, long after the event is over.
- With your boss: you fume over an unfair deadline, but don't confront him or her about it, cutting your performance significantly.

Now, what happens to you physiologically?

Under stress, blood vessels constrict, increasing blood pressure and raising cholesterol. Muscles automatically tense and your breathing becomes faster but shallower. These responses were adaptive when facing a bear or tiger, but in our modern world, frequent stress reactivity can result in many physical problems:

- Headaches
- Low back pain
- Bruxism (grinding your teeth)
- Increased risk of heart disease
- Less resistance to infections like colds and flues

But there is good news! This e-book is filled with techniques to help you relax and de-stress. (If you haven't looked at our relaxing presentation yet, we encourage you to do so! www.takingabreather.com.)

Have you heard the phrases?

- Don't sweat the small stuff
- It's all small stuff?

While there is some truth to these statements, in that most people let themselves get way more upset about small stuff such as getting cut off on the freeway, the truth is there is some big stuff, too. For example, loss of a loved one, a major illness, getting fired, divorce, getting married, and even retirement, are all examples of major life changes that can result in stress.

So there are major events AND daily hassles. There is some research that the daily hassles are actually MORE stressful over time because they are annoying on daily basis.

But enough of the depressing stats and potential problems with stress and on to the good stuff.

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