

STRESSBUSTERS

THE 'HOW TO FIX IT' MANUAL

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Aims:

To inform participants about the nature and effects of stress. To bring awareness and highlight choice. To encourage thinking and behaviour that helps reduce stress and support healthy living and a sense of well-being

Outcomes: At the completion of this session, participants should be able to:-

- Identify symptoms of stress and relate these to personal experiences
- Evaluate personal level of stress and identify possible causes
- Show awareness of support measures that might reduce stress levels: cognitive and somatic
- Practice a variety of relaxation techniques
- Develop healthy living and well-being strategies

What is Stress?

'**Stress** is a biological term which refers to the consequences of the failure of a human or animal body to respond appropriately to **emotional** or **physical** threats to the organism, whether **actual** or **imagined**.' (Selye 1956).

The dictionary defines **stress** as a constraining or impelling force, effort or demand upon physical or mental energy.

A **stressor** is a person or situation that makes you become stressed.

Stress, in the modern world, is an unavoidable part of daily life; everyone experiences stress and everyday stresses are not necessarily harmful. In fact, stress is not always negative, but can often be just stimulating enough to make life enjoyable, or at least interesting. Stress can be the motivation to perform. Situations become stressful when they become out of proportion to the cause. It is the effect of long-term stress that can be positively harmful to our bodies.

In simple terms stress affects us on all levels; mind, body emotions and spirit. Anyone can suffer from stress and it is the natural reaction when:

- ◆ There is any **threat** to our physical integrity and mental well-being
- ◆ We feel **pressure** exceeding our ability to deal with it
- ◆ We feel a **loss of control**. The concept of control is paramount to our experience of stress

The factors that seem to make any situation dangerously stressful are:

- *Lack of predictability*
- *Lack of control*
- *Lack of outlets for frustration*

***It may not be the events themselves that are inherently stressful
but our perception of the events***

Life event stress inventory

The work of **Holmes & Rahe** (1967) suggests that an accumulation of life events in any one year increases your vulnerability to stress related health problems.

Total up your score. A score of over 300 points in one year increases your susceptibility to stress-related problems, while a score of below 150 means a relatively low amount of life change and a low susceptibility to stress-related health problems.

LIFE EVENT	LIFE CHANGE UNIT
Death of a spouse/partner	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Imprisonment	63
Death of a close family member	60
Personal injury or illness	55
Marriage	50
Moving house	49
Dismissal from work	47
Retirement	45
Change in health of family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sexual difficulties	39
Gaining a new family member	39
Business/work changes	39
Change in financial state	38
Death of a close friend	37
Changes in amount of arguments with spouse	36
Major mortgage	32
Son or daughter leaving home	29
Outstanding personal achievement	29
Trouble with in-laws	28
Spouse begins or stops work	27

LIFE EVENT	LIFE CHANGE UNIT
Change in living conditions	27
Change in social activities	26
Change in recreational activities	25
Change in school	24
Holidays	15
Christmas	14
Minor violation of the law	11
TOTAL SCORE	

The inventory is based upon the idea that changes in your life cause stress

Comparison:

150-199 points - increases your likelihood of health issues by 40%

200-299 points - increases your likelihood of health issues by 50%

300 and over - increases your likelihood of health issues by 80%

Source: Holmes and Rahe, 'The Social Readjustment Rating Scale'

***Stretching herself too thin
She breaks her connections.
Staying too busy, she has no time.
Doing for others, she neglects herself.***

***Defining herself only through others,
She loses her own definition.***

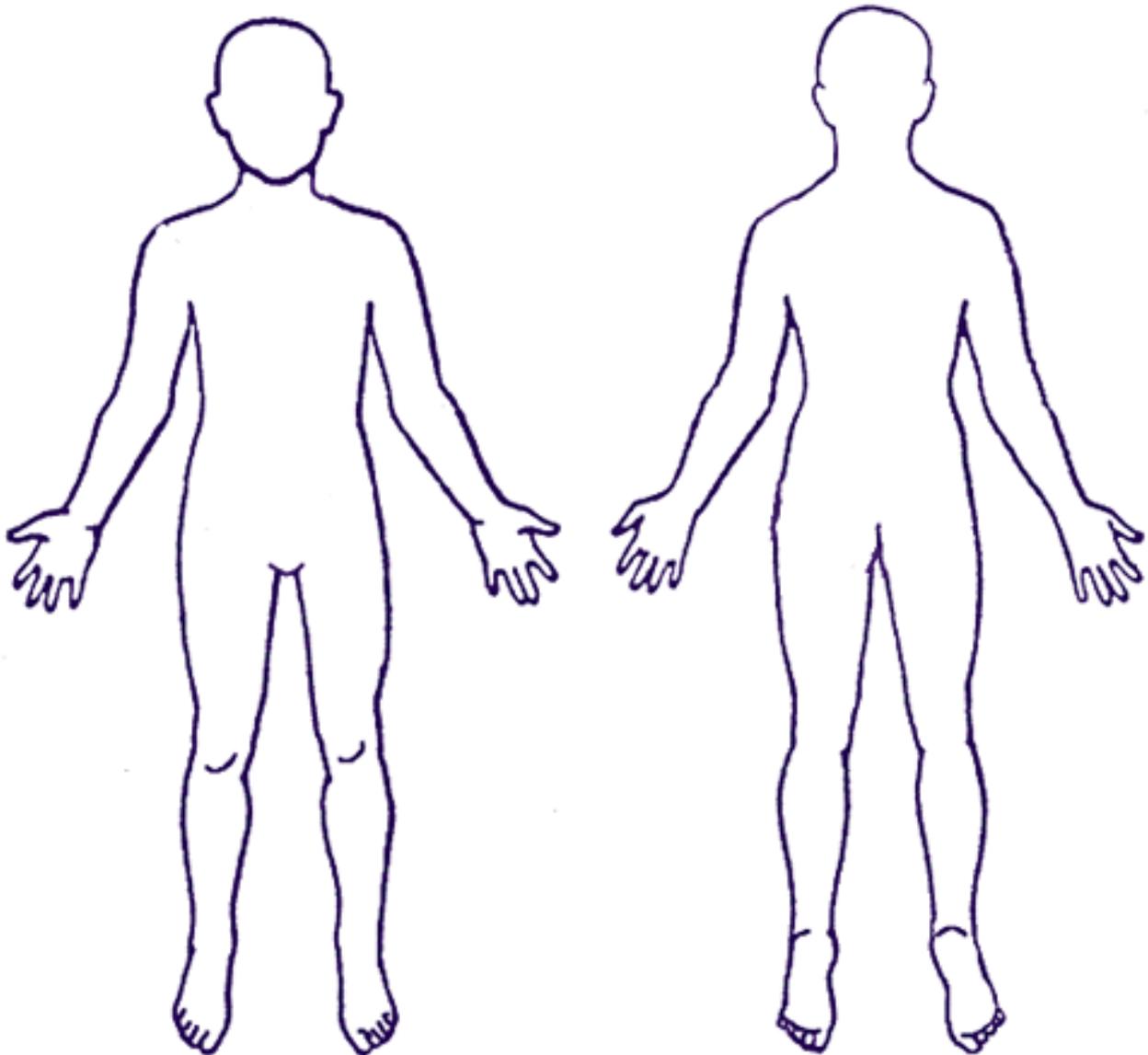
***The wise woman
Waters her own garden first.***

***The Tao of Women (24 Grounded)
Pamela K. Metz and Jacqueline L. Tobin***

Effects of Stress

The effects of stress can be cognitive (thoughts), emotional, physical or behavioural.

Draw or write your own symptoms in the body outlines below that you attribute to stress.



Signs of stress may be cognitive, emotional, physical or behavioral and include (but are not limited to) symptoms such as: poor judgment, a general negative outlook, excessive worrying, moodiness, irritability, agitation, inability to relax, feeling overwhelmed, feeling lonely or isolated, depressed, aches and pains, diarrhea or constipation, nausea, dizziness, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, eating too much or not enough, sleeping too much or not enough, withdrawing from others, procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, using alcohol, cigarettes, or drugs to relax, and nervous habits (e.g. nail biting, pacing).

General Adaptation Syndrome - [Hans Selye](#) researched the effects of stress ^[3] on rats and other animals by exposing them to unpleasant or harmful stimuli. He found that all animals presented a very similar series of reactions, broken into three stages. In 1936, he described this universal response to the stressors as the general adaptation syndrome, or GAS. ^{[4][5]}

Alarm is the first stage. When the threat or stressor is identified or realized, the body's stress response is a state of alarm. During this stage adrenaline will be produced in order to bring about the [fight-or-flight response](#). There is also some activation of the [HPA axis](#), producing [cortisol](#).

Resistance is the second stage. If the stressor persists, it becomes necessary to attempt some means of coping with the stress. Although the body begins to try to adapt to the strains or demands of the environment, the body cannot keep this up indefinitely, so its resources are gradually depleted.

Exhaustion is the third and final stage in the GAS model. At this point, all of the body's resources are eventually depleted and the body is unable to maintain normal function. At this point the initial [autonomic nervous system](#) symptoms may reappear (sweating, raised heart rate etc.). If stage three is extended, long term damage may result as the capacity of glands, especially the adrenal gland, and the immune system is exhausted and function is impaired resulting in decompensation.

The result can manifest itself in obvious illnesses such as [ulcers](#), [depression](#), [diabetes](#), trouble with the [digestive system](#) or even [cardiovascular](#) problems, along with other mental illnesses.

Source: [http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stress_\(medicine\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stress_(medicine))

What can help?

When we are physically, mentally and emotionally out of balance, we need assistance to restore comfort and harmony. A sense of peace, tranquillity and wholeness can then ensue.

- ◆ Reframing our goals
- ◆ Feeling empowered in situations / Taking control
- ◆ Time to unwind / Relaxation
- ◆ Exercise
- ◆ Reducing intake of stimulants i.e. Caffeine
- ◆ Learning to say NO / Assertiveness training
- ◆ Time management
- ◆ Reframing experiences as opportunities & challenges rather than problems (not hurdles but steps)
- ◆ Learning to delegate
- ◆ Learning to 'let go'

The first step in the process of change is 'Awareness'. Once we become aware we open up the possibility of change

Our reality at any time is dependant upon our focus What we focus on becomes our reality.

By changing our focus we change how we feel

50 Quick fix tips for a stress free life

1. Do at least one thing you truly enjoy every day.
2. Get up 15 minutes early every morning so you don't have to rush.
3. Plan ahead and prepare.
4. Do nothing that you'll have to lie about.
5. Learn relaxation techniques – and use them!
6. Avoid too much sugar.
7. Accept others imperfections and practice tolerance.
8. Spend time laughing.
9. Keep in mind your long term goals or vision for what you want in your life.
10. Keep reading material with you, so you don't fret about wasting time at appointments etc.
11. What you want to do tomorrow, do today. What you want to do today, do now. Procrastination is stressful.
12. Have time in your day to pause.
13. Reduce fatty food.
14. Remember that you can't control everything in your life.
15. Practise preventative maintenance on car, home and teeth.
16. Don't take things personally.
17. Learn to be more assertive.
18. Schedule a realistic day and don't try to do more than you're capable of.
19. Eat healthy snacks between meals.
20. Say "No, thank you" to extra projects that you don't have time or energy for.
21. Take brisk 30-minute walks, or try some other form of exercise.
22. Make time for solitude daily.
23. Pat yourself on the back and lavish yourself with praise when you have done well.
24. Reduce smoking and other props.
25. Stroke a furry animal.
26. Notice the good things and the things that are going well.
27. Try to make friends with non-worriers.
28. Drink in moderation or stop all together.
29. For every one thing that goes wrong, there are 50 or 100 blessings – count them.
30. Remember that sometimes a problem shared is a problem halved.
31. Write your thoughts down.
32. Don't put up with things that don't work. Get it fixed, or replace it.
33. Do one thing at a time.
34. Avoid gossip and before you say anything, ask yourself if what you say is
 - a. True? Kind? Or Necessary?
35. Accept yourself as you would a friend.

36. Learn to delegate.
37. Ask for help.
38. Stop worrying. If something concerns you, do something about it. If you can't do anything, let it go. 'God grant me the serenity to accept the things I can't change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference'
39. Smile inwardly and outwardly.
40. Reduce or cut out caffeine.
41. If you enjoy hugs then ask for them.
42. Play more.
43. Off-load to someone who will be honest and objective.
44. Have a goal each day that you can achieve.
45. Appreciate beauty wherever you find it.
46. Accept that you are doing your best in each moment.
47. Understand that every moment is an opportunity for new beginnings.
48. Use affirmations and mantras – they work!
49. Do everything more slowly
50. Love yourself more and find good ways to show it!

Some questions to help you get unstuck:

- What are the possibilities?
- What led up to?
- What have I tried so far?
- What do I want?
- What's another way of looking at this?
- If I were my best friend what would I say?
- What is the worst that might happen? What would that be like?
- How am I being too hard on myself?
- What will this situation look like in 1 day/ 1 week/ 1 year?
- In what ways am I stronger than I think?
- What are the emotions clouding my judgement?
- If I put it down on paper, what will that look like? How will that help?
- What am I making up about this without all the facts?
- Am I only seeing things in black & white? What are the grey areas that I am not seeing?
- In what way am I taking too much responsibility?
- What positive outcomes could there be?
- What would be one step forward right now?

'Notice the difference between what happens when a man says to himself "I have failed three times" and what happens when he says "I am a failure" - S I Hayakawa

The gift of 'the present'

Many of us spend our time dwelling over the past or worrying about the future; this is a perfect recipe for feeling stressed.

Ask yourself how many times you think in terms of:

If only

Ask yourself how many times you think in terms of

What if

We can only ever deal with anything when we focus on the 'present' moment

Zen Theory of Change:

I free myself not by trying to be free but by simply noticing how I am imprisoning myself in the very moment I am imprisoning myself

Relaxation exercises can be a simple and effective way of getting 'present' and reversing many of the physical symptoms of stress.

Deep Breathing Techniques:

- Sit in a comfortable position with your back straight, your hands soft and relaxed in your lap.
- Inhale deeply through your nose (your abdominal area should expand).
- Exhale slowly through your mouth, pressing your lips to control the flow of air.
- Perform this exercise three or four times a day, or whenever you feel stress.
- Breathing out more slowly than breathing in will help to enhance the benefit.

To develop this further you can focus on different words as you breathe in and out, e.g. try the word '**peace**' as you breathe in and '**calm**' as you breathe out.

Other words to try: '**beauty**', '**grace**', '**faith**', '**love**' & '**safe**'. Why not write your own words below:

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Positive visualization – 'safe place' technique:

- Allow your body and mind to relax and visualise a place that you have visited or one from your imagination – somewhere you feel completely safe and that helps you feel calm.
- Picture the place in your mind's eye and use all of your senses to bring it more clearly to mind.
- What does this place look like? Picture clearly the sky and the surroundings in every detail
- What does it feel like? Can you feel the warmth of the sun or a cool breeze? What is the ground like beneath your feet?
- What sounds can you hear?
- Is there a taste? Or any smells that you can identify?
- Focus on this relaxed setting for as long as you wish.
- Gradually bring yourself back by stretching and taking 3 deep breaths

Autogenic technique:

- Begin with deep breathing.
- Then clear your mind.
- Focus on a specific area of the body (for instance your arm).
- Say to yourself "My arm feels loose and heavy".
- Once that body area relaxes, move on to other parts of the body.

Refresher exercise:

Can't see the wood for the trees? If you just can't focus on the task in hand, this simple yoga exercise really brushes away the cobwebs.

- Stand in a relaxed position, feet shoulder-width apart, and arms by your sides. You may like to close your eyes.
- Clasp your hands in front of you and then slowly bring your arms above your head.
- As you reach full stretch, turn your hands so that the palms face upwards. Relax your shoulders. Hold this posture
- S-t-r-e-t-c-h as far as is comfortable, and breathe in and out through the nose several times. Slowly bring your hands back to step one.
- Feel how the energy in your body has shifted.

From: *The Five Minute Healer* by Jane Alexander (Gaia Books £9.99) © 2000 Jane Alexander

What we eat and drink has an impact on how we feel

Foods to Avoid

Saturated animal fat

Butter

Alcohol

Caffeine

Processed foods (additives, colourings, preservatives)

Artificial sweeteners

Dehydration



Never under-estimate the importance of water consumption..... Headaches, lethargy and poor concentration can often be the symptoms of dehydration. It is recommended that we drink 1.5 to 2 litres of water per day, depending on your size, level of activity and the air temperature.

The brain is 75% water, so even moderate dehydration can cause a headache. By the time you actually feel thirsty, you will have lost 1% of your body's water; roughly half a litre. A 2% loss causes stronger thirst, vague discomfort and sense of oppression.

Water helps flush toxins, such as alcohol, chemicals present in foods and the environment, through the liver. A sluggish liver, due to dehydration, will make you feel less energetic. Constipation, muscle cramps and dark circles under the eyes are also symptoms of lack of water.

Affirmations

Affirmations are a way of talking to yourself and giving yourself positive messages.

Affirmations are powerful, positive statements designed for repeated listening that override and outtalk negativity. Think of them as positive thinking tools, your own personal mantras ('mantra' means 'mind protector') that have the ability to change your focus and your reality. By reprogramming the unconscious mind, affirmations combat negative thinking, over time they can help make profound changes in attitude. Affirmations need to be repeated. Repeat them at least 7 times, or for ten minutes every day and try it in front of a mirror.

Affirmations are stated in the present and phrased in the positive.

I am creating everything I want, easily and effortlessly

I have courage, strength, resilience and resourcefulness

I allow my mind to relax and let go

I am now creating a healthy, radiant body

I am becoming more confident every day

I understand that when I make mistakes I have been successful in trying things

I have the power to change and I am changing

I know that each moment, each breath is a new beginning

I see myself as vital, healthy and strong

I intend to release myself from the quicksand of old, limiting messages

I have freed myself from the false pride of wanting to be perfect

I already have everything I need to accomplish what I was born to do

NOW CREATE YOUR OWN!

Thank you for reading this material, I hope that it is useful to you in helping to understand and reduce the stress in your life. Why not use the space below to keep a note of what else works well for you. I also encourage you to keep a journal and record for yourself what is contributing to your stress and what works to keep life in balance.

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