

Saying “YES” to Less Stress - Part 1 of a series of 3

A lot of people say that stress is bad for you and they're right - in a way. TOO MUCH stress is bad for you. And at the same time having TOO LITTLE stress is bad for you too! So just HOW do we get the right balance?

We get the right balance FOR US by controlling our reactions to stress. “Easy to say when you know how to do it” you may think, yet it could be easier to learn ‘how to do it’ than YOU think. So, let's have a little peek at what we could do to help ourselves begin to take control of our stress reactions.

Firstly in Part 1:

- ❖ We could start by learning STRESS AWARENESS which means recognising the different types of stress, how it can affect us, understanding where or whom it's coming from (stressors) and how we react to it personally.
- ❖ Let's find out about COPING SKILLS, whether or not we have adequate coping skills for us personally, and remember everyone of us is different – or as I say “unique”.

In Part 2:

- Are we being ASSERTIVE enough to stand up and say “No!” to things that are stressing us? Are we letting pressures or people get the worst of us for their benefit? We can look at different types of behaviour and see how we behave in ways in certain circumstances towards certain people, and whilst we're looking at behaviours we really ought to take a peek at our body language too, as we could be unwittingly allowing ourselves to become stressed by our body language. And what about the words we use? Why even certain words and phrases can show that we're not feeling passive. Find out what those words/phrases are. Do we have time to complete all we need to do, or are we at everyone's beck and call?
- We focus on some simple TIME MANAGEMENT tips to help us out here.

And finally in Part 3:

- ✓ It is recognised by the NHS in many parts of the country that EXERCISE is a good way to deal with stress – ‘Prescription Exercise’ - however it has to be the right type of exercise for us or we can quickly become de-motivated and stop doing it.
- ✓ We visit somewhere called ‘RELAXATION’ – a never-never land in the world of the stressed. So what exactly is meant by relaxation, what's involved and how easy it is to achieve?

STRESS AWARENESS

Stress definition:

The Health & Safety Executive's definition of Stress is "The reaction people have to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them. It arises when they worry that they can't cope". The HSE refer to it as *pressures or other types of demands* – the majority of people refer to it simply as 'stress'. Yet the word 'stress' has only recently (since the 1970s) become synonymous with '*excessive pressures or other types of demands*' because prior to this era 'stress' was the term used either when talking about bridges and metal being 'stressed' or else when one wanted to 'stress' a point or word whilst talking. So really stress (in this definition) is a relatively new term.

Two kinds of Stress:

It's fair to say that probably not a lot of people realise that there are two kinds of stress –the negative version '*dis-stress*' – when things are out of our control, where we don't have any say in the matter, we just have to do what we're told by others. And then there's the positive kind, '*eu-stress*' – which is where we put ourselves in a stressful position, maybe we're going for an interview, or sitting an exam to progress ourselves further – and in these types of situations we are in control of the decision to place ourselves there, so there is a certain amount of control by us here. What a novel idea - that having stress can be good for us. In fact by recognising 'stress' as either dis-stress or eu-stress helps us put things in perspective.

It was mentioned earlier that 'stress' is only a problem when there is TOO MUCH or TOO LITTLE of it in our lives. Yet when a lot of us become very dis-stressed all we want to do is to "not have any stress at all". So can we pick and choose how and when to get stressed? We can to a certain extent by recognising that stress is our own experience, it is personal to us and is also generated by us. It's not directly to do with things outside ourselves, they are only the triggers to which we respond, and that response comes from within you, a response that is individual to you. So let's have a look at what the response can be like.

Stress response:

And that response can be anything from the following:

- feeling light-headed
- hearing your blood pulsing in your neck
- throat going dry, voice sounding squeaky
- feeling breathless
- breathing faster and shallower
- heart pounding (like in a cartoon and you're sure that everyone can see it)
- sweating profusely
- clammy hands (remember those uncomfortable handshakes you've experienced when someone's been nervous?)
- wanting to spend a penny
- stomach rumbling like mad
- trembly legs (jelly-legs) and even
- being rooted to the spot.

We can experience all or any of these when we're stressed because these symptoms are recognised as being the 'fight-or-flight response' and happen automatically being triggered off by our autonomic nervous system (ANS). Our autonomic nervous system deals with our breathing rate, our body temperature, our eye blinking, our blood pressure, our digestion of foods, in fact it deals with thousands of different functions all at the same time – we don't need to think about them, they're done 'automatically' on our behalf. And yet these 'fight-or-flight response' symptoms are normal and natural even though they may be uncomfortable and unwanted.

'Fight-or-flight Response'

The 'fight-or-flight' response is what happens when we're placed in a position of fear or anger or embarrassment or frustration and we simply want to either stand and face the situation or turn tail and run like mad! For THIS is THE response that our ancestors had many thousands of years ago when they were faced with life or death situations – *imagine the caveman who has to make an instant decision to kill that bear or run for his life!* Thank goodness the majority of us don't have to kill bears for our existence anymore – however our physiology doesn't know that and so we still react to that spider, or flying, or getting in a lift or dealing with that angry customer as if they were THAT BEAR!

You can check to see how you react to stress, how YOUR personal symptoms reveal themselves by completing the Monthly Stress Check table at the end of this article.

COPING SKILLS

Learning how to cope with dis-stress means:

- ✓ identifying the particular things that cause us dis-stress;
- ✓ being able to recognise the signs when we are suffering from dis-stress;
- ✓ improving our skills at dealing with problems and relaxing when we're under pressure

Stress diary:

Having a look at where and when we become dis-stressed can help us tremendous. Have a look at the 'Monthly Stress Check' chart at the end of this article. Then write down anytime you recognise ANY of those symptoms happening to you, and then look BACK before the symptoms occurred and identify what was happening to you AT THAT TIME.

- Eg, Monday 11am headache started, 9.15am arrived late at work – held up in traffic
- Tuesday 2pm Indigestion, rushed lunch to be ready for afternoon meeting
- Wednesday 7am woke up feeling very tired, didn't sleep very well - worried about Appraisal at work on Wednesday afternoon

From the above diary example, it would appear that something at work is causing the stress.

When you have identified what the cause is, then that's half the problem solved, you then only have to find a solution.

'Half full' or 'Half empty' person

Do you feel that you are a 'positive' or a 'negative' person? OR to put it another way, are you a 'Half full' or a 'Half empty' person?

Here's a little tip which could help you to find out what kind of day you're going to have: draw a glass and mark it as though it were half full of a liquid. Keep it by your bedside. As soon as you open your eyes in the morning, look at it. Does it look 'half full' or 'half empty'? This may seem very simplistic, however it's showing how you're feeling first thing in the morning.

Lesson learned is: if it looks 'half empty' what am I going to do to put a more positive aspect on the day? And if it looks 'half full' then I'm ok for whatever is going to happen.

Changing Self talk from negative to positive

Do you find that you're talking yourself out of doing things because you're too ready to say "I can't do that", "I'm not good enough for that", "I don't feel important"? If you find these phrases familiar then have a look at your Self talk and Self esteem levels.

Out of control feelings

When things 'feel' out of control you can use deep breathing plus creative visualisation and relaxation technique to help you get things more in perspective. For breathing techniques ideas look under the relaxation section.

Take your time and pace yourself

Take your time making decisions. Even if you feel that it's the right decision to make, just hold onto saying WHAT it is for a few moments. And when you're 'doing things' again just take your time and pace yourself, don't rush, whatever it is will get done.

Acknowledge, control and choose the changes

Acknowledge what you can control and what you cannot, and when possible choose which changes you take on.

I hope that by reading part one of this 3-part article you will begin to realise that stress is quite normal to all of us and occurs in everyday life. Feeling stress is **your** choice and you can choose to continue or to stop. There is no such thing as a universal stress. Some people are able to cope much more successfully if they become aware of techniques and methods which assist in lowering stress levels so if you want to know more, or want to speak with me, you can contact me as follows:

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