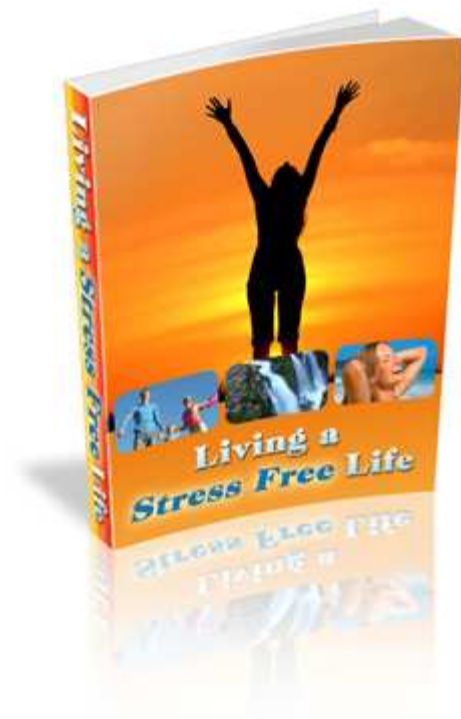


# Living a Stress Free Life

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## Introduction

Modern life has become a strain on millions of Americans. It seems that stress is everywhere we go whether it be work, school, on the road and even at home. For many people it seems nearly impossible to get away from the stress. It seems to be everywhere we turn. Stress can also be a motivator and an encourager for change. Stress is a part of life, this means that we must manage our stress rather than run from it.

There are thousands of causes for stress. They can appear anywhere and everywhere we go. Research readily suggests that there are numerous ways to reduce stress, but many people are unable to find what those ways are because life can be so stressful. However, if you find that one thing that works, then you can lead a fuller, more productive life. You will also be able to escape the demands of stress and feel relaxed because of it.

Stress is everywhere we go. It can be at the mall, at work, school and even on vacation. We may become stressed out at home from our marriages or personal relationships. Even your pets and kids may cause you stress! This eBook is designed to show you how to deal with all of these stressful situations to make your life more stress free and relaxed.

# Chapter 1

## Stress is Everywhere

We are bombarded on a daily basis by the news of increased stress in our society and most of you are probably feeling stressed about something right now. There are many different definitions of stress and there are various different effects of stress as well. Most people would think that the definition of stress is one that is completely obvious, but many are actually unable to recognize when they are feeling stressed and that many ailments are actually caused by stress.

There are several reasons that a person may not realize they are stressed. One is that they have been stressed out for such a long period of time that they don't even recognize it any more. For these people, stress has become a way of life that they are unable to shake. They have been stressed for so long that their bodies and minds have stopped trying to tell them that they are stressed. These people tend to adjust to the stress in their life and think that this is the way life is.

Stress also doesn't come from one source. It can come from a variety of different sources in your life and your responses to situations may also increase or decrease your stress level. You may find that you handle stress differently than your friends and family as well. Situations such as heavy traffic may bring out the road rage in you, while your spouse stays calm and collected.

Because of these variances in stress causing factors, different people will have a different definition of what stress is. As you can see the definition of stress is not as easy you may think.

Stress was defined by Richard S. Lazarus as “a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.” In other words, we have a “stress response” of an individual occurs when we feel we cannot control handle or resolve a situation.

### **Not All Stress is Bad**

There are two types of stress, positive and negative. Positive stress might be when an actor gets nervous before going on stage. This may be his career choice and he may love it, but he is still getting nervous. This is not necessarily stress that is unhealthy, as it aids him in keeping him sharp for his performance. He receives satisfaction at the end of the show, even though he was stressed at the beginning. Positive stress is good stress. It is a natural, performance enhancer and it actually heightens your abilities in performance.

Negative stress is the bad stress. This stress is usually your response to a situation that you are unable to control. It is what causes you to feel moody, achey and irritable. It causes headaches and a drop in work productivity. It is estimated that 60 billion dollars per year go to health care costs, accidents, lost work and productivity.

### **Causes of Negative Stress**

As we know there are a million causes of negative stress in our lives. However, the number one cause is rapid change. Anything unexpected causes our stress levels to skyrocket. We have a constant need to continue to adjust to different demands and new information and responsibilities every hour of every day. We live in a rapidly changing world and those changes allow us little time to adjust and absorb to the changes around us.

To understand how negative stress is harmful, we have to understand what

happens to our bodies when we are able to not use the “flight and fight” responses that our body sends us. This response allows a person to recognize whether they are in danger or being threatened. This response tells you to either run from it as fast as you can or to stand and fight against it. Unfortunately, when your employer throws you a short deadline you don’t have the option to do either. You can’t run from it even though you want to and you can’t fight your boss without losing your job. This means that this response goes unused and the negative stress is allowed to build.

Because you receive an adrenaline rush of sorts and you are unable to use it, the stress on your body builds. Your body exhibits this in a variety of different ways and we know those expressions your body makes as stress.

## **What So Bad About Stress?**

Our version of stress is much different than the stress our ancestors knew. Our version of stress is technologically advanced and it includes features such as:

- 1 Overtime at work
- 2 Too much responsibility
- 3 A lot to do and no time to do it
- 4 Heavy traffic
- 5 Divorce or Marital Problems
- 6 Child care issues
- 7 Elder care issues
- 8 Too much competition in the workplace
- 9 Overcrowded cities
- 10 Familial problems
- 11 Credit card debt
- 12 Downsizing companies
- 13 Lost pension
- 14 Health care is too expensive, especially for the self-employed

15 Drug addiction

16 Alcoholism

Our bodies respond to these life events as if they are faced with life or death in the jungles or plains the ancient world. The difference is that they can't get out of these situations and you definitely cannot flee or flight them! Because you are able to neutralize these chemicals that are being sent to your brain, they build up and cause more strain on your life. We are very overwhelmed and our brains keep releasing chemicals that you can't get rid of.

In the midst of all this stress, you are forced to continue life as normal. You have to go to work, talk with other people and pick your kids up from school in addition to go to soccer practice, the grocery store, the dry cleaners and you have to cook dinner. It is hard to focus because you have so many different thoughts buzzing around in your head and your daily life suffers from it. You are unable to focus and work effectively because you are so distracted with life's stresses. You may even feel physical changes such as tension headaches and shaky hands.

When we are in such a state, we are unable to think clearly and you have more accidents. We then get to the point to where we are dealing with long-term stress all of the time. Here we have to make two decisions:

1. Are we being threatened or endangered by a situation?
2. Are we able to handle and control the effect of this situation?

The amount of stress that you feel in any situation depends how on how much danger you face and whether or not you can handle that danger. But, what happens if you can't get rid of stress?

## **Effects of Long-Term Stress**

- 1 Allergies
- 2 Indigestion
- 3 Appetite problems
- 4 Sleep problems
- 5 Insomnia
- 6 Asthma
- 7 Depression
- 8 Depression of the immune system
- 9 Chronic illness
- 10 Colitis
- 11 Stomach cramps
- 12 Heart attack
- 13 Migraines
- 14 Tension headaches
- 15 Loss of memory
- 16 Thyroid problems
- 17 Ulcers
- 18 Constipation
- 19 Diabetes
- 20 Stroke
- 21 Fatigue
- 22 Anxiety
- 23 Panic attacks
- 24 High blood pressure
- 25 Alcohol abuse
- 26 Drug abuse

Do any of these sound familiar? Most people can probably pick at least two or three items off of this list that they suffer from on a regular basis. When you are

under long-term stress your brains is unable to release those chemicals that make you fight or flight and the result is one, two, three or more of the items off of this list.

There are a variety of brain chemicals that should provide you with a sense of balance and well-being. These chemicals include:

- 1 Serotonin
- 2 Dopamine
- 3 Cortisol
- 4 Endorphins
- 5 Melatonin
- 6 Noradrenaline

When the balance is off with these chemicals, the body and your life feels disrupted.

There is a normal cycle of chemical processing that provides your body with rhythm. This is the 24-25 hour cycle that allows you to sleep at night, eat and have energy. When you get your work done without stress, you are able to sleep, eat and maintain good health. When the balance is right you are able to feel normal.

In short, they are responsible for keeping you on track and synchronized. When you are synchronized you are able to enjoy life. You are able to work efficiently, feel happy, socialize with friends and family and enjoy things in your life that you once enjoyed.

Of course, there are also several physical factors that occur in the body that cause stress as well. Many people may not consider some of these as stressful problems, but they do. These include:

- 1 Puberty

- 2 Environmental exposure to toxins
- 3 Smoking
- 4 Extreme heat
- 5 Extreme cold
- 6 Pre-menstrual syndrome
- 7 Post-partum depression
- 8 Impotence
- 9 Menopause
- 10 Long-term illness
- 11 Hospitalization
- 12 Immune System Disorders or Dysfunction
- 13 Eating disorders
- 14 Heart disease
- 15 Lung disease
- 16 High blood pressure
- 17 Alcoholism
- 18 Drug addiction (including prescription drugs)

In many circumstances these can be stress causing and stress related. If stress has not already caused you to have heart disease, then there is a good chance that the heart disease is causing you stress. The same goes for just about any other type of condition.

### **How Much Stress is in Your Life?**

There are numerous “stress scales” that can be used to measure stress. There are various causes as we have discussed, but there are also various ways to measure stress.

Many people have a personality that allows them to cope and deal with stress. These people often think that they are not *that* stressed out, but these tests tend

to show them otherwise. If you are one of these people, you may be shocked by your results.

If you don't address the stress in your life, then you are going to experience some sort of emotional, physical or mental effect. By the time you realize the cause, you may not be able to solve those problems.

Here is a chart that will show you how many points a stressful event is in your life.

<b>Stessor</b>	<b>Points</b>
Death of a spouse, significant other, mother or father	75
Death of another family member	50
Divorce, separation with spouse or significant other	50
Incarceration, significant legal problems, lawsuit	50
Menopause, puberty, post-partum depression, impotence	30
Serious illness, injury, or hospitalization	30
Work termination or retirement	30
Working 50 or more hours per week	30
Getting married or moving in with a significant other	30
Reconciling with spouse or old mate	30
Pregnancy or adding a new family member	30
Hospitalization or significant illness of spouse or family member	30
Impotence or sexual dysfunction	30
Financial troubles, new loan, mortgage or a repossession of property	30
Change of a job, school, added responsibility at work, working longer	25

Now, total your score and put it aside. Remember that each person is going to handle stress differently and some of your stress tolerance is developed over the years. It relates directly back to how you saw your own parents handle and deal with their stress.

Much of how a person deals with stress also relate to your own personality. If you are a positive person, then you may have better stress tolerance. If you are a negative thinker, then chances are that you will not deal with stress as well. If you are juggling several stressors at once you are less likely to be able to cope as well.

Now, take a look at your totals. If you have a score of 200 or more, then you are definitely way over the average stress level. If you have a score of 150 or more, then you are definitely overstressed.

## **Chapter 2**

### **What's Causing Your Stress?**

Okay, so you know you are overstressed, but what's causing it? If you have become immune to the feeling of getting stressed then you know that you are probably really stressed. It is important to remember that stress does not come from just one source, this means that you need to find out the sources of your stress.

One way to do this effectively is to journal. Many people have found that their journals give them surprising insight into where their stress comes from and they even discover how to deal with it on their own. They are also able to see the symptoms that it is causing them to suffer from.

Your total stress comes many different factors and these factors build up over a period of time. These may continue over weeks, months and years. You will find that a journal is a great way to deal with this stress. Most of us are very

busy during the day and something then causes you stress. By keeping a journal you can vent all the anger, frustration and stress that has built up over the day. You can then look back over the journal and determine those areas that need to be dealt with.

In your journal you want to be sure that you rate how stressed you are throughout the day. Rate your stress on a 1-10 scale. 10 is the most relaxed and happy. 1 is the most stressed. Use this journal for at least one week. Describe your comfort zone, your mood, your stressors, your symptoms and your reaction to stress. Write in the journal morning, afternoon and evening. For even more detailed information, write in it every hour if you can. You will see the most detailed information out of the journal if you are able to keep it for two to four weeks.

When you are ready, sit down and analyze the data that you have gathered about your stress. Make a list of those stressful events that occur more often than others. Place the most frequent stressor at the top of a list and build the list down to the least frequent stressor.

### **The Number #1 Stressor – Our Jobs!**

For most people, the number one stressor is going to be their jobs. It may be because they are overworked and under paid. They have too many hours to put in and the environment may be awful. If this sounds like you, begin by writing down as many job related issues that you have, such as:

- 1 Low pay
- 2 50 or more hours in a week
- 3 Too much noise
- 4 Jerk of a boss
- 5 Rude co-workers

## 6 Short deadlines

Write down as many of these issues that you have. Understand that this list may get much longer as you go!

Now, perhaps you are stressed because you are overworked. This may be because you or your boss has poor time management skills or because you simply have too much work to do. The problem may also be that you do not have the right skills or you were not trained properly for your job. This may mean that you have to do re-work because you were not told how to do it right the first time.

When it comes to workload, some people are simply not overworked, but inefficient. If it is hard for you to determine which one it is, look at your co-workers to see how they are handling the job. Do they seem to chug along and you're lagging behind? Or, do they all complain about too much work?

Next, look at your time management skills. Are you a procrastinator? If so, motivation may be able to get your work done with minimal stress. If you are scatter brained with appointments, meetings, deadlines, etc., try to set a schedule and follow it diligently.

Schedule your daily events so that you can focus on the task at hand. If you have a lot of phone calls to make on a daily basis, don't put them off. Get them done first thing in the morning so your distractions will be minimal.

Delegate work to your staff if you have one. Many people are prone to doing all of the work themselves because they know they can do it right the first time. This is not always the best strategy if there is too much work for you to do.

These situations can also be handled with a little planning and preparation.

Don't be afraid to invest in training or other services that will help you. If you are able to reduce your stress load then that was money well spent.

## **Relationships**

Relationships are a tough one because you probably really love the person that is stressing you out. However, there are many types of stress that occur in relationships. The key is to figure out which one or ones are causing you stress.

Many people simply have conflicts due to different needs and values. This may mean that you are constantly disagreeing on subjects such as finances, raising the kids or how and where you spend your time.

Other conflicts arise from not being able to spend enough time together. If you are both overworked and irritable, there is going to be some stress in your household. You are both going to want to provide each other with company and time, but you are unable to because of other stressors in life.

Long-term goals may also be different. Perhaps one of you wants to have a particular career that would involve moving away, while the other person is perfectly happy where you are.

Outside family and friend influences can also cause stress. Perhaps your mother in law wants grandchildren, but you don't want children at all. Perhaps your partner's family just doesn't like you all together. Or maybe you don't care for one of them and you are constantly fighting over it.

Write down as many of these issues that you may have and begin to analyze what you can do to manage and change them. There are a variety of issues at hand when it comes to relationships such as:

- 1 Sex
- 2 Trust or lack thereof
- 3 Constant fighting
- 4 Constant disagreeing
- 5 Spending *too* much time together
- 6 Not spending enough time together
- 7 Family influences
- 8 Personal problems

When you are looking at conflicting needs it is important that you realize you can't change the other person, nor should you try. If you are very different people, you may not be able to live happily with each other without disagreements. These may be problems that are simply irresolvable.

Before you give up on your relationship, visit a professional therapist or psychologist for help. You may need the view of an outsider to help you both understand your relationship issues. This means that if there are no other options other than parting and going your separate ways, then at least you can rest with the fact that you sought professional help.

If you can work through your problems, a professional will teach you to be a better communicator. You must learn to do this so you don't feel as though you are constantly under attack or having to defend yourself.

Write down your thoughts and try to organize them. Stick to the facts and do your best to be objective. Do your best not to downgrade the other person and cause them even more stress and emotion.

You may simply need to focus. If you do agree on something, begin there and focus on that. If you feel as though you are neglecting each other, you both may need to learn how to shift your focus.

Stress for other sources may also be pulling you apart. The foundation of your home life is much more important than those other things and it is important that you are able to maintain balance at home. If you are unable to do this then you will suffer from even more stress. Just like your body does when it is unable to deal with the imbalance of chemicals in your brain.

## **Road Stress**

One of the most taxing times during the day is both on your way to work and on your way home from work. Rush hour and heavy traffic are probably the number 2 stressor on many people's list. Many people commonly know this as road rage.

The stress usually begins in the morning. It's morning rush hour and even though you left early enough to get to work on time, you are still stuck in traffic that is going to make you late. The stress of being late is one of the most overwhelming stressors.

The next overwhelming stressor in your day, besides work, is coming home from work. It's 5pm and everybody is heading to day care to pick up kids or they are heading home like maniacs. They switch lanes, cut you off, slam on your breaks and you are screaming at the top of your lungs trying to figure out why these people can't just drive normally. You probably barely avoid about 10 accidents before you even make it to the day care to pick up your child who sitting alone playing by himself because you are late again. The look of your kid plus the stress of the drive just adds to your total stress for the day.

Driving is a huge cause of stress. Most people, especially in crowded cities like New York City and Los Angeles, spend almost an hour trying to get to work or get home safely. In many cities, this traffic also causes several public safety

issues as well. As your stress builds, so does the stress of those who are traveling around you as well. With this stressor you are not alone and everybody is feeding off of everybody else's stress and anxiety.

Once you are able to get your kids picked up you may have another stressful situation. Perhaps they are separated in the car because you're tired of playing referee while you drive, but they still seem to annoy each other one way or another. One way to deal with this is to keep them as occupied as possible.

To deal with this type of stress, you may first want to try out some relaxing music. Invest in classical music that will make it more soothing as you drive. You may also consider nature sounds that will lighten up rush hour.

Another option is to change your daily route. Look for a way that is not as stressful, perhaps take residential streets instead of busy highways. You might find that this route is longer, but you will appreciate the reduced stress in your life by taking this route.

Another technique is to simply start your drive five or ten minutes early. This keeps you from having such a time crunch in the mornings. This can actually make a less stressful drive as well.

## **Chapter 3**

### **Tips for Managing Your Stress**

Here are several tips that can help make your life stress free, or at least stress-reduced.

#### **Keep Your Schedule**

If you are able to get on a schedule and stay on one then you're going to find that life is a lot less stressful. It is very important to get on a daily, regular schedule. This will ensure that your body gets enough sleep and that your daily rhythms remain consistent.

If you have problems sleeping, it may take about a month for your body to get back on a regular sleeping pattern. If you keep to a normal schedule by going to bed at the same time every night and getting up at the same time every morning, your body will adjust much more quickly.

#### **Don't Watch Television to Go to Sleep**

The best thing you can do when you're stressed is to relax your mind. TV keeps

you thinking and doesn't allow your brain to relax. Sleeping in the same position every night will help you as well. This will allow both your mind and body to relax. You also want to learn to breathe deeply and fully, pulling the air deep into your lungs. Take long deep breaths and consciously relax your muscles. Start with your neck and jaw and work your way down to your feet. If you are unable to fall asleep after about 45 minutes, then go ahead and try to do some reading.

Don't do anything that really wakes you up. Don't exercise, watch an intense movie or play video games. This will just cause you to get a "second wind" and you won't be able to calm down and rest. After you're ready for about 30 minutes or so, try to go back to sleep. Try not to get frustrated because you can't sleep, as you will only make it harder on yourself.

### **Take Breaks Throughout the Day**

Don't work hard and heavy all day long. Take those breaks for coffee or to walk around a bit. Many companies allow their employees to take two 15-minute breaks per day and these are something you should definitely take advantage of. If you are feeling sleepy, get up and walk around the building for a bit. This will help you get your blood pumping and energy flowing.

Plan at least one day a week to do something that you really enjoy doing. This may be visiting with friends over coffee, watching a movie or going horseback riding. You could even sit down and really get into that book you've been reading.

Be sure that each day you do your "To Do" list so you don't have things flow into your one special day of things you like to do. You also do not want to procrastinate and overload yourself on one day.

## **Try to Limit Changes in Your Life**

Remember, rapid change causes you excess stress. Try to limit the amount of change in your life. Patterns are good and stress free. If you are able to keep your life as change free as possible the better. Don't schedule any changes that are not absolutely necessary. Also, if you are getting a new job, don't take on any other responsibilities at the same time. If you must make changes, give yourself time to adjust to those changes that you are experiencing. Once you are acclimated, then you can decide on any new changes that you want to add.

## **Pay Attention to the Time**

Don't overwork yourself if you don't absolutely have to. For example, if you don't have to stay late at work then don't do it. Resist the urge to finish up and go home. Block off your schedule into specific times for specific things. If you are in school and working, block out some time to study.

## **Eat Healthier**

Try to eat as healthy as you can. If you can avoid eating fast food at lunch then don't eat it. Try to get healthy foods such as fruits and vegetables into your diet. That greasy hamburger might fill you up now, but it is full of empty calories. Eat foods that will take some time to digest, but won't make you bloated.

Vegetables will increase your brain's production of Serotonin and will help keep your brain in balance. Meat contains tryptophan, which will help you to relax. It's also the stuff in milk and turkey that makes you sleepy.

Stress also affects your blood sugar. When your blood sugar gets low, you may begin to get headaches and feel shaky. Eat a little snack and you will be surprised at how much better you will feel. Also drink a lot of water to stay hydrated. Water can help ward off headaches as well.

## **Exercise**

Exercise is one of the best ways to deal with stress. Many people resist exercise because they don't feel like they have enough time, but if they tried it once they would be shocked at how much better it makes them feel. If you can find one type of exercise that you like and do it three times a week for 20-30 minutes you will be able to work off a lot of that stress.

There are a variety of stress relieving exercises including:

- 1 Jogging
- 2 Walking (Don't forget your dog!)
- 3 Yoga
- 4 Biking
- 5 Swimming

Most people need to get more exercise anyway, so this is a great way to kill two birds with one stone. Not only are you relaxing and relieving stress, but you are also getting in shape. Exercise can also help you increase your productivity and focus by more than 30%.

## **Get Some Rest**

When you think of resting, you need to think about the physical and mental aspects of rest. You may not necessarily need to sleep, but you need to give your mind a break. This will help keep your day from becoming a blur and you will be able to remain clear-minded and more efficient. If you are fatigued, you will lose your short-term memory and feel exhausted.

## **Spend Some Time with Your Pets**

Pets are simplistic and they have an easygoing life. Psychologists report that

pets can be very beneficial to our mental health. They provide unconditional love and they always seem to be there for you. Just petting your pet can be a stress relieving activity. Animals to be content with a little of attention, so you don't have to commit a lot of time trying to please them. You can spend as much time as you want giving them attention to help relieve your stress levels.

If you owned a pet as a child, then you know they are relatively easy to care for. If you have a pet now, then you should consider spending a little more time with them and trying to see how much they can help you relieve your stress.