



Managing Stress

“A CALMER,
MORE PRODUCTIVE YOU”

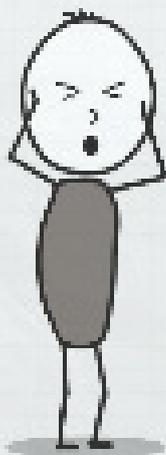
Many of us experience stress in life, whether this is in the short term from one-off projects, or long-term stress from a high-pressure career.

Not only can this be profoundly unpleasant, it can seriously affect our health and our work. However, it is possible to manage stress, if you use the right tools and techniques.

NAME



WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW ABOUT STRESS



WHAT IS IT?

Stress is your body's way of responding to any kind of demand. This means it can be caused by both good and bad experiences. When you feel stressed, your body reacts by releasing chemicals into the blood. These chemicals give you more energy and strength. Great - if the stress is caused by physical danger. But damaging if the response is to something emotional and there is no outlet for this extra energy.

WHAT CAUSES IT?

The instinctive stress response to unexpected events is known as 'fight or flight'. The fight or flight response was first noted by one of the early pioneers in stress research, Walter Cannon. In 1932 he established that when organisms experience shock or perceived threat, they quickly release hormones to help it survive. Intermittent stressful events are what keeps the brain more alert, and you perform better when you're alert.

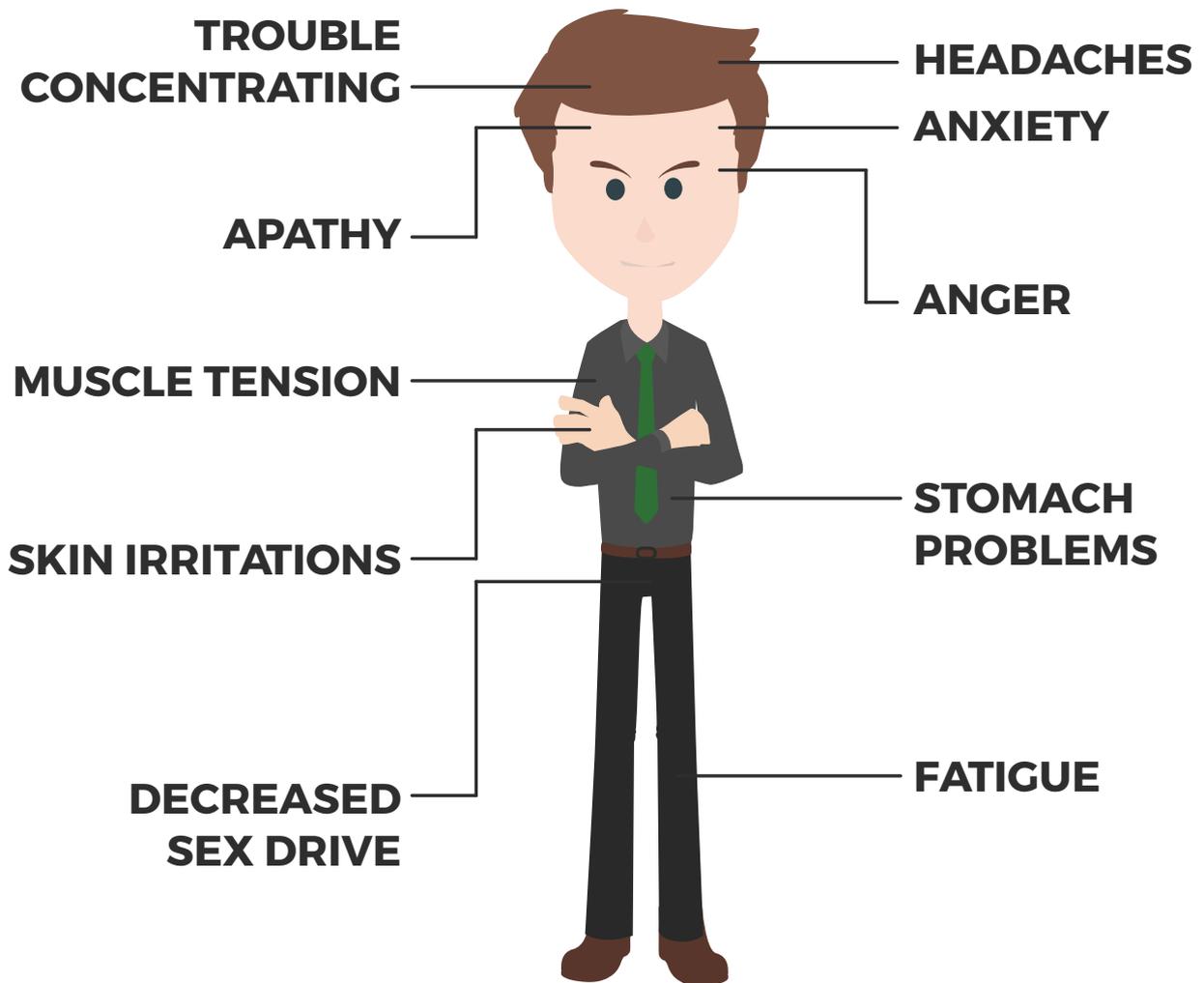
When your body feels stressed or pressured hormones are released that increase your heart rate and blood pressure - which delivers more oxygen and blood sugar to important muscles.

Thankfully, modern civilisation mostly provides a shield against physical dangers such as predators but the inherent 'fight or flight' response still resides in you but now, it is triggered by different, seemingly less life threatening events. A difficult boss, a traffic jam or an unrealistic deadline.

The more often you are exposed to this type of stressor, the more overactive your 'fight or flight' response becomes.

WHAT ARE THE SIGNS OF STRESS?

We all experience stress differently in different situations. Sometimes you might be able to tell right away when you're feeling under stress, but other times you might keep going without recognising the signs. See if you recognise any of the signs our character is suffering from below:



CALCULATE YOUR STRESS BASELINE

The questions in this scale ask you about your feelings and thoughts during the last month. In each case, indicate by circling how often you felt or thought a certain way.

0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? 0 1 2 3 4
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? 0 1 2 3 4
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”? 0 1 2 3 4
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? 0 1 2 3 4
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way? 0 1 2 3 4
6. In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do? 0 1 2 3 4
7. In the last month, how often have you been able to control irritations in your life? 0 1 2 3 4
8. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were on top of things? 0 1 2 3 4
9. In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control? 0 1 2 3 4
10. In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them? 0 1 2 3 4

HOW TO SCORE

While the scale does not have specific score cut offs, your total score does give you a perception of the amount of stress in your life.

Total scores will range from zero to 40 points, with the higher scores indicating greater stress.

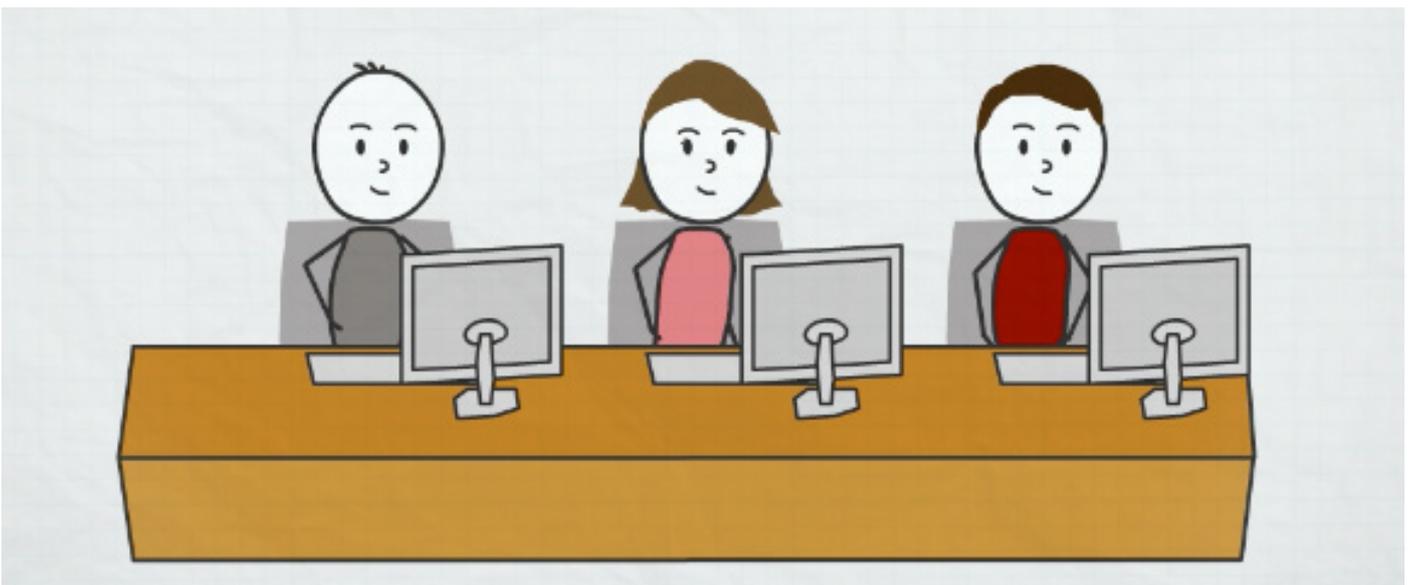
PSS scores are obtained by reversing responses for questions 4, 5, 7 & 8.
(e.g. 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1 & 4 = 0)

Add this number up

Now add the remaining scores from the other questions (1,2,3,6,9,10)

Now add up the two numbers you have, this provides you with your perceived stress score:

You'll take this survey again in a few weeks' time to see if your score has dropped.



MANAGING STRESS TOOLKIT



MANAGING STRESS TOOLKIT

There's no shortage of strategies to manage stress and it can be difficult to know where to begin. So thankfully we've done the research for you, and found the 10 most effective strategies that successful people employ when faced with stress. Some of the topics we'll cover may seem obvious, but the real challenge comes from following through on them, even when stressed.

APPRECIATE WHAT YOU'VE GOT

Research shows that people who take time to contemplate what they're grateful for are happier, less depressed and less stressed.

THE THEORY

Here's the science to explain why...

Scientists believe that cultivating an attitude of gratitude actually reduces the stress hormone cortisol by 23%.

THE GRATITUDE CHALLENGE

For the next seven days, you need to write down three things that you are truly grateful for...

DAY 1

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DAY 2

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DAY 3

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DAY 4

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DAY 5

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DAY 6

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DAY 7

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TAKEAWAY

Try to regularly write about things you're grateful for in a journal. In one study - a group of people were asked to practise this gratitude exercise every day for a week - even though it only lasted seven days, participants were happier and less stressed than they'd been at baseline.

MANAGING STRESS TOOLKIT

AVOID ASKING “WHAT IF?”

“What if?” statements throw fuel on the fire of stress and worry.

Things can go in a million different directions, and the more time you spend worrying about the possibilities, the less time you’ll spend focusing on taking action that will calm you down and keep your stress under control.

STRESS BUSTING TIP

While you can’t control what your boss does, what your in-laws say or the state of the economy, you can control how you react, how you accomplish work and how you spend your time.

The worst thing for stress is trying to take control over uncontrollable things. Because when you inevitably fail – since it’s beyond your control – you only get more stressed out and feel helpless. So after you’ve thought through what’s stressing you out, identify the stressors that you can control, and determine the best ways to take action.

Take the example of a work project. If the scope is stressing you out, talk it over with your manager or break the project down into step-wise tasks and deadlines.

TAKEAWAY

Stress can be paralyzing. Doing what’s within your power moves you forward and is empowering and invigorating.

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STAY POSITIVE

Positive thoughts help make stress intermittent by focusing your brain's attention onto something that is completely stress-free.

THE THEORY

You have to give your wandering brain a little help by consciously selecting something positive to think about.

Any positive thought will do to refocus your attention. When things are going well, and your mood is good, this is relatively easy. When things are going poorly, and your mind is flooded with negative thoughts, this can be a challenge.

THE CHALLENGE

In stressful moments, think about your day and identify one positive thing that happened, no matter how small. If you can't think of something from the current day, reflect on the previous day or even the previous week.

The point here is that you must have something positive that you're ready to shift your attention to when your thoughts turn negative.

Write down four positives from your life that you can focus on next time you're feeling stressed e.g. "Buster my cat", "my lovely family" or a favourite place:

What makes me happy No.1

What makes me happy No.2

What makes me happy No.3

What makes me happy No.4

TAKEAWAY

You must have something positive that you're ready to shift your attention to when your thoughts turn negative.

MANAGING STRESS TOOLKIT

DISCONNECT

Given the importance of keeping stress intermittent, it's easy to see how taking regular time off the grid can help keep your stress under control.

THE THEORY

When you make yourself available to your work 24/7, you expose yourself to a constant barrage of stressors. Forcing yourself offline and even—gulp!—turning off your phone gives your body a break from a constant source of stress. Studies have shown that something as simple as an email break can lower stress levels.

THE CHALLENGE

Choose blocks of time where you cut the cord and go offline. You'll be amazed at how refreshing these breaks are and how they reduce stress by putting a mental recharge into your weekly schedule. If you're worried about the negative repercussions of taking this step, first try doing it at times when you're unlikely to be contacted—maybe Sunday morning. As you grow more comfortable with it, and as your fellow workers begin to accept the time you spend offline, gradually expand the amount of time you spend away from technology.

Commit some time you're going to set aside to 'go off grid' e.g. "from now on, I won't check my e-mails after 8 o'clock in the evening".

TAKEAWAY

Force yourself to take a break and keep stress intermittent – you'll be amazed how regular time switched off will keep your stress under control.

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DITCH THE CAFFEINE

Drinking caffeine triggers the release of adrenaline. Adrenaline is the source of the “fight-or-flight” response.

THE THEORY

The fight-or-flight mechanism sidesteps rational thinking in favour of a faster response. This is great when a lion is chasing you, but not so great when you’re responding to an email. When caffeine puts your brain and body into this hyper aroused state of stress, your emotions overrun your behaviour.

THE CHALLENGE

Everyone drinks coffee for different reasons. Do you recognise any of the common coffee traits below:

The Break Taker

Sometimes we go get coffee simply as a way to take a break from work. It’s the modern version of a smoke break. You have a legitimate reason to leave your desk for 5 minutes since you need to stock back up on coffee. If you find that you’re going to get coffee just because you need a break from work, try spending those 5 minutes talking to a friend or going for a walk in nature. Both of these options will give you the short break you need, and help you return to work just as refreshed and energized as if you’d gotten a cup of coffee.

The Yawner

Maybe you need the caffeine because you’re too tired to get through the work day without it. You have a cup right when you wake up and then keep drinking it throughout the day to keep up your energy. If this is you, then you should try addressing the problem at its core. What’s making you so tired all day? The most likely cause is not getting enough sleep, so see if you can adjust your schedule to get at least 7 hours each night. Once you’re better rested you’ll be much more productive and won’t be as reliant on the caffeine to get through the day.

The Connoisseur

Maybe you just love coffee for the taste. There's nothing wrong with that. Coffee has a very diverse array of blends, roasts, flavours, and beans. But maybe your appreciation for it goes too far sometimes and you end up more wired than you'd like to be. If this is you, then try tea! With all the different types of tea leaves and all of the different regions you can get tea from, it's even more diverse than coffee. You can even develop an appreciation for the different styles of making it, just as you can develop an appreciation for operating a fine espresso machine.

The Scatterbrain

Maybe energy isn't your problem, but focus is. It could be that you start working fully energized and ready to seize the day, but then find yourself checking Facebook, Twitter, email, texts, the news, etc. The caffeine helps you to focus in on what you need to do and blocks out those other distractions. If this is you, then you probably have a high stress level and tend to give in to your impulses to check all of your different apps and websites. Instead of using caffeine, try meditation. It helps quell the voices in your head pushing you to procrastinate, and doesn't leave you exhausted from a caffeine crash.

The Addict

Maybe you started drinking coffee for one of the other reasons... but now you can't stop. You just don't feel like yourself when you're "pre-caffeinated," and the day doesn't start until you've had your first cup. If this is you, then your body has turned down its own internal energizers since it knows you're going to pump it full of caffeine every morning. You've become chemically reliant on caffeine to be at full energy. The fix here has to be slow and steady. Try reducing your intake by just one cup a week, and then eventually switching over to tea or water. If you quit cold turkey, you'll feel terrible for a few days and it might not be worth the struggle. Slow and steady wins the race.

TAKEAWAY

If you think you can't cut that coffee out, think again. It's a wise experiment to provide yourself a break from coffee intake and see what it feels like to live your life on your own fuel. Remove coffee and caffeine safely from your system and see how authentically energised you feel!

GET SOME SLEEP

When you sleep, your brain literally recharges, shuffling through the day's memories and storing or discarding them (which causes dreams), so that you wake up alert and clear-headed.

THE THEORY

Your self-control, attention, and memory are all reduced when you don't get enough—or the right kind—of sleep.

Sleep deprivation raises stress hormone levels on its own, even without a stressor present. Stressful projects often make you feel as if you have no time to sleep, but taking the time to get a decent night's sleep is often the one thing keeping you from getting things under control.

Dr. Weil Sleep Hack Challenge

If you are part of the 40% of us who struggle to get to sleep at night try this simple breathing technique:

Weil's technique is shockingly simple, takes hardly any time, and can be done in five steps. Weil explains to “place the tip of your tongue against the ridge of tissue just behind your upper front teeth and keep it there through the entire exercise. You will be exhaling through your mouth around your tongue; try pursing your lips slightly if this seems awkward.” This is followed by the five-step procedure listed below:

- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound.
- Close your mouth and inhale quietly through your nose to a mental count of four.
- Hold your breath for a count of seven.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a whoosh sound to a count of eight.
- This is one breath. Now inhale again and repeat the cycle three more times for a total of four breaths.

Weil emphasises the most important part of this process is holding your breath for eight seconds. This is because keeping the breath in will allow oxygen to fill your lungs and then circulate throughout the body. It is this that produces a relaxing effect in the body. The truth behind Weil's 4-7-8 exercise is it takes practicing this twice a day over two months to perfect the technique until you can truly fall asleep in a minute. Once you've mastered it, it will become more and more effective and even help you deal with anxiety and stress in your life. Soon, going to bed will be as simple as taking a deep breath.

TAKEAWAY

Your self-control, attention, and memory are all reduced when you don't get enough—or the right kind—of sleep.

SQUASH NEGATIVE SELF-TALK

A big step in managing stress involves stopping negative self-talk in its tracks.

THE THEORY

The more you ruminate on negative thoughts, the more power you give them. Most of our negative thoughts are just that—thoughts, not facts.

80% of everyone’s thoughts contain some sort of negative content. So it’s normal to have negative thoughts. It’s part of our evolutionary heritage. We’re constantly scanning our environment (generating negative thoughts all the while) looking for problems to fix.

THE CHALLENGE

When you find yourself believing the negative and pessimistic things your inner voice says, it’s time to stop and write them down. Literally stop what you’re doing and write down what you’re thinking. Once you’ve taken a moment to slow down the negative momentum of your thoughts, you will be more rational and clear-headed in evaluating their veracity.

TAKEAWAY

The difficulty isn’t that we have negative thoughts. The problem comes when we believe our thoughts are true.

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REFRAME YOUR PERSPECTIVE

Stress and worry are fuelled by our own skewed perception of events.

THE THEORY

It's easy to think that unrealistic deadlines, unforgiving bosses, and out-of-control traffic are the reasons we're so stressed all the time. You can't control your circumstances, but you can control how you respond to them.

THE CHALLENGE

Before you spend too much time dwelling on something, take a minute to put the situation in perspective.

If you're thinking in broad, sweeping statements such as "Everything is going wrong" or "Nothing will work out," then you need to reframe the situation.

A great way to correct this unproductive thought pattern is to list the specific things that actually are going wrong or not working out. The scope of these stressors will look much more limited than it initially appeared.

The negative thoughts you have, aren't facts, but self imposed limitations that you put on yourself which you also have the power to remove.

Most of us actually have very similar negative thoughts. Here are some of the most common negative thoughts we all have. Do you recognise any in your own process:

1. I am not good enough

Have you ever thought that you weren't good enough?

When we feel that we aren't good enough, we tend to drown in this emotion of self-doubt and pity. It really relates to a low self esteem, but the truth is, every one is good enough. You might not have the skills or tools to achieve what you want now, but you are certainly good enough and worthy of what you want. If you have a £10 note, and it falls on the floor into a puddle of mud, does that £10 lose value? Of course not!

So why do you feel that you lose value based on what you have done in life. Don't limit yourself, because everyone is good enough.

New Positive Thought - I am worthy of all I desire in this life, just like everyone else.

2. I can't do it

'Can't' is one of the most limiting words that you can tell yourself. Henry Ford said. 'Whether you think you can or you can't, you are right.' So if you tell yourself that you can't, you are sending messages to your mind and brain that you can't, and so that will be your experience. Your mind won't try if you have already told it that it can't.

New Positive Thought - 'I can do whatever I put my mind to'

3. I'm not as lucky as other people

This thought normally comes from holding an illusion that other people's lives are better and they are luckier and that is what separates you from them.

'Perfect' doesn't exist, normally there is a lot of effort that goes behind that perceived 'luck'. It is very dis-empowering to think that you will never have luck and it is simply not true.

New Positive Thought - Good things can happen to me too.

TAKEAWAY

Stress and worry are fuelled by our own skewed perception of events.

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BREATHE

When you pause and breathe, this puts you in a state that allows you to make better decisions and consider the outcomes of your actions before you take them.

SCENARIO

Imagine your children are refusing to brush their teeth before school. You're about to lose your cool and start yelling. But instead, you resist, pause and breathe.

After doing so you feel calmer and clearer.

Maybe you even come up with an innovative teeth brushing game, instead of succumbing to the counterproductive reaction of shouting.

THE CHALLENGE

The goal is to spend the entire time focused only on your breathing, which will prevent your mind from wandering. Think about how it feels to breathe in and out. This sounds simple, but it's hard to do for more than a minute or two. It's all right if you get side-tracked by another thought; this is sure to happen at the beginning, and you just need to bring your focus back to your breathing. If staying focused on your breathing proves to be a real struggle, try counting each breath in and out until you get to 20, and then start again from 1. Don't worry if you lose count; you can always just start over.

TAKEAWAY

This task may seem too easy or even a little silly, but you'll be surprised by how calm you feel afterward and how much easier it is to let go of distracting thoughts that otherwise seem to have lodged permanently inside your brain.

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USE A SUPPORT SYSTEM

Ok superman or wonder woman - time to accept that you can't do everything by yourself.

THE THEORY

It's tempting, yet entirely ineffective, to attempt tackling everything on your own and it will leave you feeling stressed.

You need to identify individuals in your life who can support you. Everyone has them, the people on your team, ready to help.

Asking for help will mitigate your stress and strengthen your relationships with those you rely upon.

THE CHALLENGE

Take some time now to identify your support structure. Really think about who are the people in your life that you can turn to for support.

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TAKEAWAY

“You can do anything, but not everything”

HAS YOUR STRESS SCORE DROPPED?

Before retaking this stress scale test, spend a few weeks implementing some of the skills you have discovered using this workbook. You don't need to use all of them, just pick out one or two that stood out.

Then, have another go at the stress scale and see if your score has dropped.

0 = Never 1 = Almost Never 2 = Sometimes 3 = Fairly Often 4 = Very Often

1. In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly? 0 1 2 3 4
2. In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life? 0 1 2 3 4
3. In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"? 0 1 2 3 4
4. In the last month, how often have you felt confident about your ability to handle your personal problems? 0 1 2 3 4
5. In the last month, how often have you felt that things were going your way? 0 1 2 3 4
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HOW TO SCORE

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PSS scores are obtained by reversing responses for questions 4, 5, 7 & 8.
(e.g. 0 = 4, 1 = 3, 2 = 2, 3 = 1 & 4 = 0).

Add this number up

Now add the remaining scores from the other questions (1,2,3,6,9,10)

Now add up the two numbers you have, this provides you with your perceived stress score

So has your score dropped?

Old Score

New Score

ACTION PLAN

KEY SKILLS (WHAT ARE THE KEY SKILLS YOU HAVE LEARNT DURING THIS COURSE)

WHAT WILL YOU DO DIFFERENTLY IN THE WORKPLACE?

WHAT OBSTACLES MIGHT GET IN THE WAY OF YOU ACHIEVING THIS?

WHAT, OR WHO MAY HELP YOU OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS?

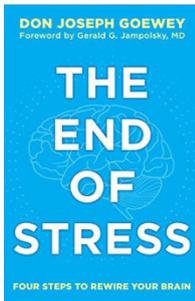


SUGGESTED READING

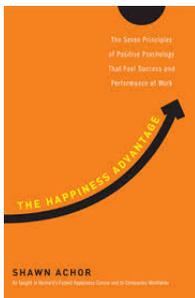
If you would like more detailed explanations or additional advice on the topic of managing stress we'd recommend the following literature:



DON'T SWEAT THE SMALL STUFF Richard Carlson



THE END OF STRESS Don Joseph Goewey



THE HAPPINESS ADVANTAGE Shawn Achor

This workbook was produced by:

