



How to Beat Stress

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Stress is a choice. Stress has nothing to do with external events or how other people are treating or mistreating you. Stress is unrelated to what's going on around you. Rather, stress is the sole result of what's going on inside. We make sense of what is happening externally based on what psychology calls our "stored knowledge" – things we have learned from previous experiences, in particular those that took place in our formative childhood years. This stored knowledge enables us react without having to give too much thought to what is actually happening. However, when you consider that the average adult's stored knowledge is decades out of date and, therefore, totally unrelated to what is actually happening in the here and now, the average normal adult ends up making non-sense of external events and, in being enabled to react without giving it too much thought, is effectively disabled from taking any real action to appropriately handle what is actually happening in the moment.

It really is that simple – stress is the result of a disabled mind reacting to what it thinks is going on. And, yet, stress is very real. It can make you physically sick – I've known people to vomit prior to making a presentation or attending an interview. It can cause more serious longer-term illness – stress is directly linked, through empirical research, to heart disease, high blood pressure, digestive disorders and cancer. Indeed, one's ability to survive cancer is, at least partly, influenced by the role stress plays in your life. And a review of research surveys in the US and Britain easily leads me to conclude that hundreds of millions of people are suffering from stress as you read these words.

Yes, stress is ruining people's lives – the World Health Organization says it killing people. But stress does not exist – it is the illusionary creation of a seriously deranged normal mind that would prefer to focus on the thoughts that lead to stress, instead of focusing on the one place and time you can banish stress and be at your most effective – now. So, which would you prefer, because if you're feeling stressed, you've already made your choice. Choose differently – it can save your life and will certainly change it for the better. It is that simple – if you know how!

As we have already said, stress is solely the result of what is going on inside your head – and the really, really good news is that this is the one and only area of your life over which you have absolute and total control. It is you who decides which thoughts you will pay attention to – it is you who decides where to focus your attention. This is a skill we all have but, as normal adults, we have not so much forgotten – rather we just don't bother to pay attention anymore, because it's easier not

to. But, as we have already discussed, the consequences of not paying attention to the here and now are dire – they are ruining what could be an extra-ordinary and effortlessly successful life – for you.

So, here's the deal – moment to moment you need to choose to pay attention to the here and now, to what is actually going on in the here and now, not what your sick mind thinks is going on. And I can think of no better phrase to describe the process that “coming to your senses” – for that is exactly what the process of paying attention is. In order to drag your mind – conscious and subconscious – away from its obsession with out-of-date “programs” and destructive, negative, stressful thoughts, you simply use your five senses to experience the here and now. It's what young children (two- or three-years old) do – and they don't suffer from stress, they live life and that is what you must do. Except, of course, with the advantage of life experiences, you can be childlike without being childish.

Your five senses are your only interface with the outside world. Instead of paying attention to what your senses tell you, you have gotten into the adult bad habit of using your stored knowledge to make a nonsense out of now – your stress, based on thoughts resulting from this perverse process, is the result. Your stress is nothing more – it is not real. It only feels real because your behaviour and body are reacting to these weird and useless thoughts which are unrelated to the reality of now.

You need to relearn how to pay attention without misinterpreting the moment. You need to learn how to observe and notice what is going on without adding your own prejudices. This process of relearning starts in the comfort and privacy of your own home – or somewhere where you know you will not be disturbed. In sitting comfortably for a few minutes – perhaps five or ten – simply close your eyes and notice how much louder the sounds appear. Of course, they're not louder, it's just that you're paying them attention. Notice how your body feels, how your clothes feel on your skin, how your feet feel on the floor – tune yourself in to what you are actually feeling. Notice your breathing – something that you are doing all of your life but of which you are rarely aware.

Get to know what it's like to be alive in the moment – at first, in privacy, where you feel comfortable – then, your practice will flow over into the ordinary situations of everyday life.