



STRESS

You Can Handle It!

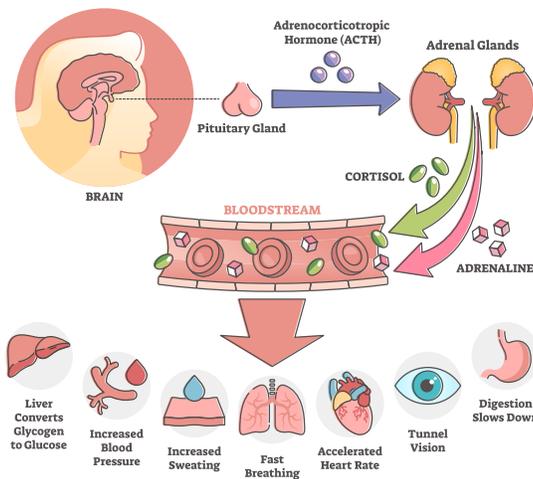
Life is filled with challenges, conflicts, problems, and sometimes hardships and tragedies. Some of these are personal, others involve major world events, the news of which can create stressful feelings. For example, in recent years there has been a global pandemic, food shortages and rising cost of living, multiple wars, and a range of natural disasters.

It's important to learn how to deal with the stress you feel over world events and your own personal challenges because chronic stress adversely affects your health. Feeling stressed interferes with digestive function and can lead to indigestion, gastritis, constipation, or diarrhea. Stress also creates muscle tension, which can cause various types of pain, such as back pain, neck pain, and headaches. Stress increases heart rate and blood pressure and is a contributing factor in heart disease. It also depresses immune function, which leaves you more susceptible to infections and illness. It may also be a contributing factor in diseases like cancer and dementia.

The good news is that all of these health risks can be reduced or even eliminated by learning better stress management skills. That's because stress is not just about what happens, it's also about how you react to it. So, in this issue of *Sunshine Sharing* we'll be exploring what stress is and how you can respond to it in healthier ways.

Understanding Stress

Stress is rooted in the fear response. Anything you perceive as frightening, problem or threat, will trigger a stress reaction. When you perceive something dangerous your brain sends a chemical message to the pituitary gland via the hypothalamus to release adrenocorticotropic hormone (ACTH). This stimulates the adrenal glands to release the hormones cortisol and adrenaline into the bloodstream. The diagram shows this process and the systems this release impacts.

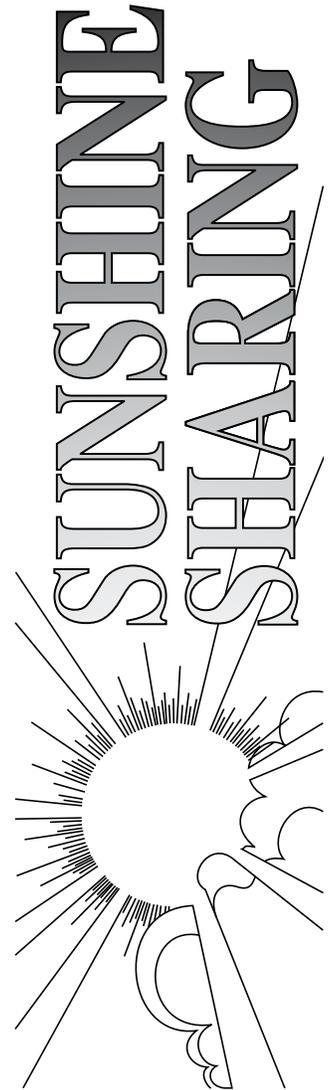


Adrenaline is also the neurotransmitter in the sympathetic nervous system called epinephrine. Adrenaline/epinephrine is what causes the rush when something is startling or frightening.

This stress response isn't meant to cause harm. Rather, it's designed to help you survive. It primes the body for action so that you can escape the danger, fight back against the threat, or react in other ways that can save you in life-threatening emergencies.

Not only that, but some stress is actually exciting. It's why people go to amusement parks, engage in extreme sports, or watch horror movies. A good challenge triggers a mild stress response that provides energy to deal with the situation. This positive stress, which helps you feel focused and motivated is known as *eustress*. It's *distress* we want to minimize. Distress is the negative stress that you experience in situations when you don't feel able to

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Your guide to better health the natural way.

Vol. 35 No. 1

Important Notice

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handle the situation. This chronic distress is what leads to feeling overwhelmed, anxious, and eventually exhausted.

Stress Management

Stress management involves learning and applying skills that will help you turn unhealthy *distress* into positive *eustress*. It's kind of like adjusting the stress volume to a comfortable level. The expression "turning stumbling blocks into stepping stones," is another way of viewing this process. An obstacle in your path can either trip you up or can be used as an opportunity for personal growth and development.



Perhaps the best way to think about this process is to compare stress management to exercise. Regular exercise puts a eustress on the muscles that causes them to become stronger. However, if you hurt yourself trying to perform a task your muscles aren't conditioned to handle you can experience a distressing injury.

It works the same way with the things that cause stress. If you exercise your stress management muscles regularly, you can increase your ability to handle life's difficulties without having them negatively impact your health. But, if you're mentally, emotionally, and spiritually out of shape these same events can cause harmful distress.

Recognizing this, let's talk about seven skills you can work on to increase your ability to manage stress. As you practice these skills you'll find yourself able to handle life's challenges.

1. Practice Calming Down

An important aspect of the fear reaction or stress response is that it can temporarily shut down your rational thought processes. This helps you react instinctively to the current situation without over thinking. These instinctive reactions include getting angry and fighting, running away, or freezing to avoid attention. These responses work well if you're facing a wild animal, but they don't work very well if the source of stress is an unexpected bill, an IRS notice, or watching some bad news.

For example, getting angry and arguing with a bill collector or IRS agent is likely to make the situation worse not better. And it's not going to help to yell at your TV or computer screen or by taking your anger out on the people close to you.

Likewise, running away won't help. While you can physically run away from some problems, it is much easier to run away emotionally by turning to distracting habits. For instance, spending hours playing video games, watching videos, or scrolling through social media are all ways to emotionally distance yourself so you don't have to think about or face what is causing stress. People also run away by drinking or using drugs. But none of these escape behaviors relieve the cause of the stress.

So, when something is causing you distress, you need to ask yourself, "Am I in any immediate physical danger?" If not, you need practice calming down and engaging your rational brain, so you can act on the situation rather than reacting to it.

The easiest way to do this is with deep breathing. Stop whatever you are doing and start to consciously slow down your breathing. As you breathe deeply, you can also start a process of autosuggestion. For instance, you can think, "I am relaxed," or "Everything will be OK," or "I'll get through this."



You can also give yourself a hug, wrap your arms around your shoulder and give yourself a squeeze. It may also help to allow yourself to shake or tremble to discharge the tension in your body. Once you feel more calm and relaxed, you can move to the next step.

2. Do Something Constructive

Remember that the stress response is priming you for action. So, one big stress management skill is to learn to take action when you feel stressed. It's important to calm down and think first, so your actions will be constructive, but doing something, particularly something physical, will put the energy created by the stress response to positive use.

So, once you calm down take a piece of paper and start writing down constructive actions you can take to help you deal with whatever is distressing you. Then pick one and start doing it.

Remember that all problems, no matter how big, are solved by many small steps, taken one day at a time. Taking these actions, even small ones, will exercise your stress management skills.



If the problem is one that you can't do anything about, such as news of a tragedy or problem in the world, then make a list of things you can do to take better care of yourself. For example, you can take a walk to clear your head or decide to eat healthier food or take some supplements that help your body deal with the stress so you'll be better equipped to handle it.

3. Give Your Body the Nutrients It Needs

The production of neurotransmitters and hormones requires nutrients, which long periods of stress can deplete. The healthier your diet is, the better you'll be able to cope. Unfortunately, one way people attempt to soothe their stress is to eat junk food, particularly sugary foods. This is because simple sugars temporarily increase the levels of dopamine and serotonin in the brain. Unfortunately, refined carbohydrates also spike the blood sugar and are followed by a big let down or crash about



two hours later. In contrast, if you eat complex carbohydrates like fruits, vegetables, and whole grains, you'll get a more sustained lift and the nutrients your nerves need to function properly.

There are also nutritional supplements that can help. Vitamin C and the B-complex vitamins are particularly important for the nervous system during stressful times. An *Anti-Stress Vitamin Supplement* containing these important vitamins along with herbs to help calm your nervous system can be very helpful.

Neurotransmitters require amino acids from protein, so it also helps to make sure you're getting adequate protein when you're stressed. An *Algae Supplement* containing spirulina, blue-green algae, and chlorella may be helpful for this.

The mineral silica aids resiliency in the nervous system. If you aren't getting enough silica and other minerals to keep your hair, skin, fingernails, bones, joints, and teeth healthy you'll also have a harder time coping with stress. So, surprising as it may sound *Watkin's Hair, Skin, and Nails Formula*, which contains horsetail, dulse, sage, and rosemary may also help you be more resilient under stress.

Two other minerals that may be helpful when you feel you're under a lot of stress are magnesium and zinc. Both are responsible for helping to produce calming neurotransmitters in the brain, which can aid feelings of relaxation and the ability to sleep when you feel stressed. Magnesium is especially important if you feel tense and edgy, finding yourself easily irritated or upset by small things. Zinc is important if you feel cranky and irritable.

4. Pamper Yourself A Little Every Day

While it's important to try to do something constructive about the problems you're facing, this doesn't always mean doing something to tackle the problems head on. Taking the time to unwind and de-stress can be an important step in reducing distress.

In *The Pleasure Prescription*, Dr. Paul Pearsall explains that pleasurable experiences do more good than stressful experiences cause harm. This is good news because while you can't avoid all problems and stressful experiences you can create pleasurable experiences to counteract them.



The key is that these experiences need to be *physically* pleasurable, that is, to cause pleasurable sensations in the body. Mental activities, such as watching videos, playing games, or even reading don't soothe the body. Examples of things that do include getting a massage, soaking in a hot tub or bath, tak-

ing a walk in nature, and surrounding yourself with pleasant fragrances, calming colors, or relaxing sounds. Playing with children, being affectionate with one's partner, or engaging in a relaxing hobby or activity are other examples of pleasurable experiences one can create.

The pleasure prescription involves making a list of ten activities you find physically pleasurable and devoting at least 20-30 minutes each day to one of those activities. Making time for such activities can be likened to sharpening a saw or axe when cutting wood. A sharp cutting instrument makes the job easier, and following the pleasure prescription will make the job of dealing with stressful situations easier.

If you're having trouble thinking of things you can do, here's a good place to start. Try taking an Epsom salt bath every night. Run a tub of water as hot as is comfortable for you and add 1-2 cups of Epsom salt to the bath along with some relaxing essential oils. Lavender, chamomile, rose, jasmine, and ylang ylang are all good choices. (Mix 10-20 drops of the oil with a little liquid soap when adding them to the bath.) Light some candles, put on some relaxing music, dim the lights and soak for at least 15-20 minutes.

5. Relax with Herbs



If you need help relaxing and coping with stress, use herbal remedies. They can both help you relax and increase your ability to cope with stress.

Nervines are the herbs that can help you relax. Along with the nutrients previously mentioned, you can try taking a nervine formula when you feel stressed, especially in the evening to help you unwind and sleep better. Herbs that are helpful here include hops, valerian, passion flower, skullcap, vervain, California poppy, and motherwort. Try taking a *Relaxing Nervine Formula* containing herbs like this.

A good relaxing formula can also contain non-herbal ingredients like l-threonine, magnesium, zinc, B-complex vitamins, and CBD. CBD can help dial down your stress reactions because it aids a feedback process in the nervous system that calms down the stress-inducing neurotransmitters.

Adaptogens are herbs that can help increase your ability to cope with stress. They can help you have more physical and emotional resilience when facing life's challenges. Examples of adaptogens include ashwagandha, cordyceps, eleuthero, holy basil, maca, reishi mushrooms, rhodiola, schisandra, and suma. If you're feeling tired and are struggling to cope with life's problems, try taking an *Adaptogen Formula* containing herbs like these.

Avoid using drugs or alcohol to relax or cope with stress. While these substances may temporarily mask stressful feelings, they won't help resolve the problem.

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This issue of *Sunshine Sharing* is provided by:

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6. Let Plants Teach You

About 100 years ago, a British pathologist and homeopath, Edward Bach created a new form of plant remedy—flower essences. These homeopathic-like remedies, made from the flowers of various plants, help people with their emotional issues. The theory of flower essences is that plants, like people, have to overcome environmental stresses. Through the flower essence remedy, the plant teaches the person on an energetic level how to overcome the difficulties they are experiencing.

The most widely used of these Bach flower remedies is a blend of five flower essences—star of Bethlehem, rock rose, impatiens, clematis, and cherry plum known as *Rescue Remedy*. Rescue Remedy can help you calm down in a crisis and return to conscious awareness of the situation, which is helpful for helping you practice calming down. It's a good idea to keep Rescue Remedy in a first aid or emergency preparedness kit so it's you have it available when you get into a stressful situation.

A more modern flower essence blend is the *Fear-Reducing Blend*, which contains the flower essences mimulus and aspen, which help a person deal with fear and anxiety. It also contains scleranthus, which helps a person who is wavering in their decision-making process and mountain pride which helps a person face difficulties with courage. Two other useful flower essences in this blend are blackberry, which helps a person untangle themselves from difficult situations by establishing clear goals and following through with them and red clover, which prevents you from being drawn into emotional stress by negative news and the resulting negative emotional state of large groups of people.

Other flower essences that can help you cope with stressful situations include the following single flower essences. Elm helps a person when they feel overwhelmed by what is going on in their lives. It restores a person's faith and confidence in their ability to handle what is happening in their lives.

Borage is a remedy for those who have “lost heart” due to difficult circumstances. It helps them “take heart” and find cheerful courage in facing adversity in their lives.

Arnica can help a person who is in shock due to what has happened to them and is feeling beside themselves or out of it. It helps them be present in the difficulty and maintain clear thinking in a crisis.

Finally tansy is a good remedy for people who are procrastinating taking action. It helps when people are avoiding doing what they know they need to do to make their lives better.

There are many other flower essences that can be used to help a person cope with whatever challenges they are facing in life. With a little research you can find a flower essence which might help you.

7. Get the Help You Need

Even the best of us can get overwhelmed from time to time, so don't be afraid to reach out for help when life gets too difficult to handle. Seek help from friends, family, spiritual leaders, or get some counseling to help you sort through the things that are distressing you and gain the skills you need to cope. It also helps to pray and seek Divine strength and wisdom to help you cope with life's difficulties.

Above all, have faith that whatever life hands you, with the right help and stress management skills, “You can handle it!”

Additional Help and Information

For more information about stress management skills, contact the person who gave you this newsletter. You can also consult the following resources:

Strategies for Health by Steven Horne

The Pleasure Prescription by Paul Pearsall

Flower Essence Repertory by Patricia Kamynski and Richard Katz

Adaptogens: Herbs for Strength, Stamina, and Stress Relief by David Winston and Steven Maimes