



SIMPLE STRESS *Solutions*

TO TURN YOUR STRESS AROUND

GILLIAN PADGETT

MISMA, MNLP, CHT



STRESS LEVELS

Research has found that self-assessment of our stress levels can be surprisingly accurate. Being able to estimate how stressed we are on a scale of 0-10 takes a few moments, requires no equipment, can be done anytime and is free.

I hasten to add that this process is a helpful tool, but should not replace a professional check-up or diagnosis, particularly if you have concerns about your stress levels and health. Nonetheless, it is extremely useful, in the middle of a flight or tricky meeting, to be able to do a quick stress check and if necessary take immediate stress relief action.

The first step to managing stress is to be self-aware and be able to recognize whether you feel totally relaxed, slightly stressed or super stressed. Ask yourself “How stressed do I feel on a stress scale of 0-10?” (0 = no stress; 10 = maximum stress-before collapse or explosion)

Interpret your answers in the ranges set out below:

- 0-4: acceptable;
- 5-7: levels to keep an eye on. If 6 and 7 are the norm, then look for ways to reduce your general stress levels;
- 8-10 are signs of potential danger. Even short term stress at these levels can be harmful to your health. If your stress is constantly hovering between 8-10, I recommend you:
 - **Immediately** follow some effective stress relief strategies;
 - **As soon as possible have a medical check.**

CONSTANT HIGH LEVEL STRESS IS HARMFUL TO HEALTH.

Even if you consider that the cause of your stress is not serious, the effects on your body can be extremely serious. For example, one of the physiological responses to stress is the release cortisol. High levels of cortisol constrict blood vessels, raise blood pressure and can damage an already weakened heart.

There are many ways to bring down stress levels, such listening to calming music, dimming harsh lighting, spending time in nature or stroking a pet.

We can become stressed by not listening to our inner voice when it tells us to stop or slow down, and instead keep plodding on. If this rings true for you, here is a tip:

Regularly (every hour or two) stop, breathe and take a stress busting break. Depending on where you are: walk around the block, stand and stretch, have a glass of water, take a shower, have a nap or have a good laugh.

REMEMBER TO ALWAYS TAKE CARE OF YOURSELF. BE GENTLE WITH YOURSELF.

Let me share with you one of the most impactful things someone said to me when I was unbelievably busy and feeling absolutely exhausted but still plodding on.

“Gillian, instead of pushing through, stop and rest; you will know when to carry on.”
I followed this guidance and two things happened. Firstly, I had masses more energy. Secondly, I felt enveloped in a cocoon of trust, kindness and love – for myself by myself. I stopped pushing myself to the limit. My stress levels were significantly lowered.

TREAT YOURSELF WITH LOVING KINDNESS.



ENERGY

Our mood for the day can be set by how we feel the moment we open our eyes in the morning. Do you groan, roll out of bed on automatic pilot or feel energized as you begin a new day?

Here is a **Five Minute Practice to Centre and Balance** as you emerge from sleep to wakefulness:

PART 1

Before getting out of bed and rushing into your day, sit on the edge of your bed:

- Place your feet on the floor and feel the surface of the floor beneath your feet.
- Breathe gently.
- Stretch your arms above your head (to the count of 3); bring them to your sides and relax.
- Tighten the muscles in your legs, feet, arms, hands, body; then relax. Do this 2-3 times.
- Yawn once or twice

PART 2

Still sitting on the edge of your bed, spend one to two minutes imagining and declaring every part of yourself to be comfortable and healthy as you track down from the top of your head to the tip of your toes. If you have a problem area, change the statement appropriately, for example for a broken leg, change “my leg is comfortable and healthy” to “the bones in my leg are healing”.

PART 3

Spend one or two minutes imagining the day ahead working out well, and yourself feeling great at the end of the day.

If you are one of the millions of people who rush from dawn to dusk caring for kids, working and dealing with a gazillion tasks, it may seem impossible to take five minutes to follow this practice. In which case here are three suggestions. One of them may work for you.

1. Set your alarm to go off five minutes earlier than normal.
2. When you can grab five minutes alone, instead checking something off your to-do list, use the time to follow the Five Minute Practice to Centre and Balance.
3. Follow the practice sitting at your desk or in your car.

This short routine brings you into the present moment, gets your circulation going, focuses your conscious mind, and activates your imagination and your sub-conscious mind - *all in the first five minutes of your day!* You can also use it to de-stress at anytime.



SLEEP

Sleep is essential for life, and good sleep is vital for good health. While we sleep, the events of the day are processed and stored in memory, our body has the opportunity to rest and heal, our brain clears out toxins, and our dreams work through emotions and situations.

When we don't get enough sleep, the brain isn't able to detox. Perhaps you can think of a time when you were short of sleep and your mind felt fuzzy. **Lack of sleep is considered to be as dangerous as drinking excess alcohol with respect to driving.**

We can also feel "wired" from lack of sleep, running on adrenalin and burning our physical, mental and emotional resources. Sleep helps us to relax and recharge.

LACK OF SLEEP AND POOR QUALITY SLEEP ARE STRESSFUL.

On average, how well do you sleep? 6-8 hours of good sleep, 6-7 nights a week; 2-6 hours of restless sleep every night; badly every night. Do you do shift work?

Age and life stages require different amounts of sleep. In general, between six and eight hours is considered good. Irregular and poor sleep caused by shift work can be unhealthy.

If you don't get enough sleep because you are too busy and forget to get to bed in good time, here are three tips to consider:

- **Work out how much sleep you need/want to have.** If you're having 4 hours sleep a night now and plan to increase to 7 hours, find a way to do this that will work for you. Some people may be able to sleep the extra 3 hours straight away while others may need to increase their sleep time by half an hour a week.
- **Go to bed at the same time every night, and get up at the same time every morning.**
- **Create a bedtime routine:** journal, read, bath or whatever feels best for you. *But if you have sleeping problems, don't watch TV in bed or violent or disturbing programs within two hours of bedtime (your brain will be processing them through the night which could interfere with the quality of your sleep).*

If lack of sleep is due to being unable to sleep once you are in bed, here are four tips to that could help you.

- Avoid caffeinated drinks after 2 pm.
- Ensure your bedroom is warm but not stuffy (with circulation of fresh air if the climate is suitable).
- Lie in bed in your most comfortable sleeping position, breathe, relax, and remember/imagine how you feel just before you fall asleep.
- If you are unable to sleep, after about half an hour, get up and listen to soothing music, relax in a warm bath, read something light. Return to bed when you feel tired and get up at the normal time in the morning.

REMEMBER THAT SLEEP IS THE MOST NATURAL THING IN THE WORLD.



PRESSURE

When do you experience pressure? Do you feel pressured as you make your way in the rush hour, when you have a deadline to meet, you have to give a presentation or you travel in a foreign country?

How do you feel pressure? Do you feel overwhelmed, do you breathe shallowly and begin to feel breathless, do you get angry, emotional or forgetful, do you have difficulty concentrating or do you get stomach upsets or headaches, or are there other ways you feel pressure? There are so many possible reactions to pressure and stress.

Whatever the causes of your pressure and how you react, here are two tips to help you.

1. Breathe. Whether you're in the rush hour, about to give a presentation or you're lost in a foreign city and you don't speak the native language, **STOP!**

- Find somewhere to stand or sit quietly for a couple of minutes and focus on your breath.
- Breathe in and out gently and slowly.
- Allow yourself to relax as you imagine:
 - your thoughts settling like autumn leaves falling from a tree;
 - your emotions flowing like waves lapping against the shore;
 - your body connecting to the earth through your feet, and to the galaxies through your head, as the energies of both mingle like stardust through your body.

2. Imagine Letting Go. Here is a visualization that some people find helpful to let go of pressure.

Be comfortable, relax and breathe gently. Imagine that the pressure you feel is a sack of heavy rocks you have been pulling up a mountain. You may think that there is a purpose for the rocks. Perhaps they stop you from being blown off the mountain in heavy winds. Or perhaps you plan to build something with them. Maybe you can find one or two rocks that you don't need to carry any longer; take them out of the sack, and send them rolling down the mountainside. As you continue walking up the mountain, you notice that the sack is much lighter and decide to let go of some more rocks to reduce the pressure. Feeling lighter you continue up the mountain, letting go of more and more rocks and watching them roll down the mountainside until the sack is empty. You are now able to walk forward effortlessly, having let go of the weight of the unwanted pressure and stress.



HEALTH

How is your general health? Do you catch colds, have headaches, digestive problems, or generally feel “run down”. Do you have major health challenges or is your health good?

Poor health is stressful. It can also be the result of stress.

If you feel that your health is less than excellent, here are some suggestions:

- If you have serious concerns about your health, get advice from a healthcare professional. If necessary seek a second opinion.
- To build your overall health and resilience, consider strengthening your immune system. Get guidance from a Nutritionist or Naturopath.
- Find enjoyable ways to exercise your body to stay healthy: strength (weights/resistance); stamina (biking, hiking, climbing, dancing and swimming) and flexibility (yoga, Tai Chi, dance). Get professional guidance to avoid injury. Also look into the benefits of infra-red saunas to detox, massage, reflexology and floatation tanks.
- Walk in nature.

LIKE A PLANT GROWING TOWARDS LIGHT, THE BODY IS ALWAYS WORKING TOWARDS HEALTH AND HEALING.



LIFESTYLE FOR BALANCE OF MIND, BODY EMOTIONS AND SPIRIT

Do you follow the basic guidelines for health; moderate regular exercise, nutritious meals; relaxation, fun, family and friends? If so, how frequently: always, mostly, hardly ever or never?

Ideally, maintaining healthy balance is a gentle, comfortable and enjoyable process.

Occasionally willpower is needed to shift or stay on track. But we only have available a limited amount of willpower, so the key is to maintain balance with **ease and joy**. What is easy and enjoyable doesn't require willpower.

So when creating an exercise plan, it needs to be enjoyable most of the time in order to stick with it.

We also need to **enjoy our meals and relax as we eat** to support digestion. If we aim for healthy quantities of delicious and nutritious food, we don't need to obsess about every ounce of food we eat.

Often life can seem to be a mad dash from dawn to dusk. To prevent the stress response being constantly activated, we can have regular three to five minute breaks to breathe gently, clench and relax our muscles or stretch. This allows our minds and bodies to change gear and relax.

MAINTAIN BALANCE BETWEEN MIND, BODY, EMOTIONS AND SPIRIT.

Think of your spirit as your energy, joy and vitality. When things feel heavy, try to lighten your spirit and spend time in nature; laugh, play with children; write; cook; paint and be creative. To nourish your emotions and heart, appreciate and spend time with friends and family and find something to love in everyone you meet.

Look for ways to easily and enjoyably increase the balance between your mind, body, emotions and spirit.



REACTIONS AND SENSITIVITY

When someone is rude, insulting or unkind do you react emotionally often, occasionally or rarely?

The childhood chant “sticks and stones may break my bones but words will never hurt me” is sometimes difficult to live by. And yet if we choose to remember the saying that “hurt people hurt people”, it’s easier to say to ourselves “they must be feeling dreadful inside to do that”.

Stress and trauma can trigger reactions and make us much more sensitive than we might normally be. A slight sound can make us jump, a perfume can remind us of someone we loved or a particular stretch of road can bring back uncomfortable feelings from an accident.

Here are three tips to ease stressful reactions and sensitivity:

1. Sleep. Be sure to have enough good quality sleep. When we are short on sleep we can become hypersensitive. If you have trouble sleeping over a long period of time, consider taking non-addictive sleeping pills to get into a healthy sleep routine. Seek professional guidance to find what will be best for you.

2. Nourishment. Make sure that you are eating healthily. There are many foods and drinks that can interfere with sleep, as can the time you eat your last meal of the day. It is important to find what works for you. Get advice from a Naturopath and ask about B Vitamins that can help nerves.

3. Fresh air and exercise. We all need to move, to exercise and breathe fresh air. Exercise affects different people in different ways. Some people sleep better after a brisk walk or run, while others are stimulated and stay awake for hours. Find what works best for you.



CONCENTRATION AND MEMORY

Do you have problems concentrating or remembering always, sometimes or never?

Stress and trauma affect the brain, concentration and long and short term memory.

When we are short on sleep, have been in an accident or had an emotionally upsetting time, we may find that we keep losing the car keys, forget something important or can't focus on the details of a legal document.

The fear of losing one's mind can exacerbate the problem.

Know you are experiencing the symptoms of stress. Follow these simple steps.

Relax. Stop regularly through the day and tell yourself "this will pass".

Sleep. Make sure you have plenty of sleep and if you have trouble sleeping seek guidance about the possibility of taking non-addictive sleeping pills to help you get into a healthy sleep pattern.

Laugh. Watch comedy to relax your mind and boost your spirit.

Paint, plant or do pottery to focus away from worries and onto something creative.

EVERY DAY IN EVERY WAY I'M GETTING BETTER.



I hope that Simple Stress Solutions has given you some tips and strategies to follow that you will enjoy using. Remember that the ones that seem easy or effortless will be much easier to include in your routine and become stress-busting habits.

I would love to know the one thing you found most helpful.

Wishing you great success with your stress,

With love,

Gillian.

GILLIAN PADGETT, MISMA, MNLP, CHT
Stress Wisdom Solutions

Want help with stress or trauma?
I'm just an email away.

www.stresswisdomsolutions.com

gillian@stresswisdomsolutions.com