

How Much Stress is Too Much?

(Connecting to the body)

When an animal is afraid, it experiences stress, and certain hormones are pumped into its blood to give it the strength to fight its enemy or run away. As soon as the animal is out of danger, the animal will seem to shiver for a few seconds, and then return to its natural, balanced state. The stress is gone, the adrenaline leaves the animal's bloodstream, and a state of peace comes over it until the next danger is perceived.

One way in which animals differ from humans is that they have nothing to worry about. Deer and rabbits don't have bills to pay, bosses to answer to, family responsibilities to carry, children to care for, or jobs or schools to go to. They only have to fear the danger that is immediately before them, and never worry about a possible danger that may or may not occur in the future.

We human beings can carry stress in our bodies for long periods of time, due to our daily concerns, problems, and responsibilities, and since we're capable of worrying about the future, we can even accumulate more stress inside us. This can wear our bodies down, drain us of our vital energies, and in many cases lead to different degrees of depression. The problem is that it builds up so subtly inside the body that we get used to the stress gradually. In some cases this might eventually lead to forgetfulness, while in others it might diminish concentration. Still others may find they are losing their enthusiasm for their jobs or their relationships. Lastly, carrying stress in our bodies cannot be good for our health.

So how do you know if you are carrying too much negative stress in your body? See if you can relate to any of the situations described below:

- Your neighbour Mr. Chen is worried because he doesn't make enough money to cover his financial responsibilities and dreams
- Your friend is stuck in a job that puts too much pressure on her and she doesn't enjoy going to work anymore.
- Your cousin doesn't know what he really wants to do with his life
- Your brother is not happy in his relationship, but can't leave it.
- Your partner has to drink alcohol to feel relaxed in social situations.
- Your colleague gets quickly irritated at work or in her home life, and often snaps at her colleagues or children
- One of your children often feels tense or jumpy, and has nervous habits (tapping his feet, chewing his nails, fidgeting, etc)?
- A woman is constantly complaining about her partner, children, workload, and even the weather.
- A man is often feeling critical about what is going on around him.
- Your boss is often impatient with the people at work, his children, his spouse and with what is going on in society.
- Your girlfriend thinks her work is too demanding and she feels great pressure to achieve results.
- Your aunt realizes that she has not smiled or laughed very much recently.

If you see yourself in any of these examples, it's possible that you're experiencing more stress than you know. Bringing more awareness to your behaviour, what you regularly think about, and your work and home environment, will help you determine if you may be carrying too much

stress. Once you are aware of its presence inside you, you can take conscious steps to release it from your system.

Assignment: Below is a list of the various areas of daily life that can influence your anxiety and stress level. Consider the examples of warning signs above one more time, and then rate the following areas of your life from 0 to 10, where 0 indicates no stress at all, and 10 indicates extremely stressful. If you are not sure what rating to give, trust your intuition or imagination to provide a number.

Home environment _____ Work Environment _____
Intimate Relationship _____ Relationship with children _____
Relationship with boss _____ Relationship with employees _____
Money situation _____ Personal health _____
School & studies _____ Social life _____

Now focus on the area of your life which seems to be inducing the highest level of stress. Notice if there is any physical sensations in your body as you think about that specific area. Especially notice if you feel numb when you think about it, since numbness is one of our most common methods of pushing the stress out of our awareness. If you do notice any sensations in your body, put your hand over that area and soothe it with gentle peaceful breathing, until the sensation dissolves into a calmer feeling. Stress can only accumulate and remain in us when we are unaware of its effects.

It's important to remember that, unlike animals, human beings hold onto their stress. This means that if you feel intense stress at work, you will

activate that stress even when you are at home if you merely think about your work situation, because you know that you will be going back to work the next day and are already anticipating what you will have to face. Continue to bring awareness into your day to day life. Whenever you are feeling tense in your body, just notice your breath and see if you can breathe just a bit deeper and as best as you can, bring awareness to what what you are stress about. You can practice being calm every day and fill your life with ease and tranquility.

Meditation

-Once again, you are asked to turn your phone off and put it in another room. This week's meditation is similar to last week's, designed to help you notice if stressful energy is building up inside you...

-You can sit or lie down and relax into a comfortable position... allowing the concerns and pressures of your day to dissolve... release... and relax...

- Notice the rhythm of your breath... going in... and out of your body...

-Notice how your breath gently flows into your belly ...and gently flows out again... breathing in relaxation... and exhaling unnecessary stress or tension... in peace and relaxation... out stress and tension

-Think about that area of your life where you indicated the greatest level of stress...

-... as you think about that stressful area, place your hand over your heart... pay attention to that area of your body... notice any sensations

that might be there...physical sensations... or energy sensations...
whatever sensation or feeling you experience is perfectly fine... even
numbness is perfect... simply notice whatever is there...

- If there is any tension or tightness... or discomfort of any kind...
allow a smooth, relaxing breath into that space... and through it into
your belly... then exhale the tension out...

- ... now, still thinking about that stressful part of your life, place your
hand over your solar plexus... notice any sensations or feelings in that
part of your body...

- ... even if the sensation is very subtle or faint... just notice it there...

- If there is any tension or tightness... or discomfort of any kind...
allow a smooth, relaxing breath into that space... and through it into
your belly... then exhale the tension out...

- ... still thinking about that stressful part of your life, you're invited
to place your hand just below your bellybutton... pay attention to that
area of your body... notice any sensations that might be there... physical
sensations... or energy sensations... whatever sensation or feeling you
experience is perfectly fine... even numbness is perfect... simply notice
whatever is there...

- If there is any tension or tightness... or discomfort of any kind...
allow a smooth, relaxing breath into that space... and through it into
your belly... then exhale the tension out...

- Notice how relaxed you feel now... enjoy this moment... let your
body absorb the peace and tranquility you feel... Help your body to
remember what relaxation really feels like... relax... release...
remember...

-... take your time... when you are ready... you can open your eyes, rise up from your position... and in a relaxed manner... go on with your day...

Dedicate this week to your sense of taste. Whenever you remember, close your eyes when you put food or drink into your mouth and focus on the miraculous experience of taste. Some suggestions for this include:

- Buy some food you have never tasted before. Eat slowly, focusing on the taste buds on your tongue.
- If you have tea or coffee or some other drink, choose a type you haven't tried before, again keeping it in your mouth a little longer to fully notice the taste.
- Make sure you try a different taste sensation every day, and appreciate your sense of taste. Taste is an amazing experience. You put something in your mouth, and your tongue sends signals to your brain which it translates into the experience of taste!
- Commit part of your weekend to taste experiences, consciously bringing awareness to this sensory experience.