

Stress Management:

“Tension is who you think you should be. Relaxation is who you are.” ~ Chinese Proverb

By Liggy Webb

The pressure of modern living is becoming more and more challenging for so many people these days. If real life was like being on the set of a reality TV show – and as easily manipulated – many people, when overwhelmed with the burden of stress, would sooner be voted off. Clearly, in the real world, we don’t have that as an easy option, and being able to develop our personal coping strategy is essential to maintaining our physical and mental health.

The term “stress-related burn-out” is becoming commonplace, especially in the workplace where many people spend the majority of their waking hours.

Of course, what is stressful for one person may not be stressful for another. We all react differently, with some people thriving on it while others crumble.

The interesting thing is that no one really knew that they were “stressed” until around 1956. The word “stress” was not included in our vocabulary until Hans Selye, a Canadian physician and endocrinologist, defined it over fifty years ago.

His pioneering work into the influence of stress on people’s ability to cope with and adapt to pressure has opened a fascinating debate into the pros and cons of this modern-day phenomenon. His belief was that it isn’t stress that can kill us; it is our reaction to it. And, by adopting the right attitude, we can convert a negative reaction to stress into a positive one.

Stress Benefits?

Stress, despite the dangers, does also bring some benefits. We all need a certain amount of pressure in our lives to galvanise us into action and “healthy stress” can be productive and act as a motivator. However, too much pressure or prolonged pressure can lead to stress disorders, which are unhealthy for the mind and body.

Anxiety and depression are some of the most common mental health problems and the majority of cases are caused by stress.



Research by mental health charity MIND also suggests that a quarter of the population will have a mental health problem at some point in their lives.

When faced with a situation that makes you stressed, your body releases chemicals, including cortisol, adrenaline and noradrenalin. These invoke the “fight or flight” feelings that help us to deal with the situation. However, when you're in a situation that prevents you from fighting or escaping, such as being on an overcrowded train, these chemicals are not used.

If the chemicals that are released during stressful situations accumulate from not being used, their effects are felt by the body. A build-up of adrenaline and noradrenalin increases blood pressure, heart rate, and the amount that you sweat. Cortisol prevents your immune system from functioning properly, as well as releasing fat and sugar into your blood stream.

“A crust eaten in peace is better than a banquet partaken in anxiety.”

Aesop, Fables

Stress is a well-known trigger for depression and it can also affect your physical health. So it's important to identify the causes of stress in your life and try to minimise them.

Any sort of loss, from bereavement, divorce and separation to a child leaving home, causes stress, as do long-term illness and disability. But things such as marriage, moving house, a new job and holidays have quite high stress ratings too.

In work, worrying about deadlines or about not being up to the challenges of a particular task can cause stress.

Every one of us is unique in the way that we respond to stress. However, some common signs may include: increased irritability, heightened sensitivity, signs of tension (such as nail-biting), difficulty getting to sleep and waking up in the morning, drinking and smoking more, loss of appetite or comfort eating, loss of concentration and lack of emotional control.

If you suffer from any of these, it is so important to take action to relieve damaging stress before it affects your physical or mental health.



The secret of managing stress is to look after yourself and, where possible, remove some of the causes of stress.

If you start to feel things are getting on top of you, then do something about it straight away.

Stress Management - Tips:

- Exercise is one of the very best ways to reduce stress.
- Breathing exercises will reduce stress immediately.
- Avoid caffeinated drinks and alcohol.
- Focus on simplicity and do one thing at a time.
- Know your own limits; don't expect too much of yourself.
- Talk to someone and discuss constructive ways to deal with stress.
- Study and learn time-management techniques.
- Try to spend time with people who are positive.
- Use visualisation techniques. Explore alternative therapies.

Life is what YOU make it!

The above article is an extract from *The Happy Handbook - A Compendium of Modern Life Skills* by Liggy Webb which is out now.



Liggy Webb is widely respected as a leading expert in the field of *Modern Life Skills and Workplace Wellness*.

As a presenter, consultant and author she is passionate about her work and improving the quality of people's lives. She is the founding director of The Learning Architect a consortium of niche industry experts. Liggy has developed a range of techniques to support individuals and organizations to cope more effectively with modern living and the demands and challenges of life in the twenty tens and beyond.

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