

Stress Mastery Guide

"Don't Just Manage Stress. Learn to Master IT!"sm



STRESSMASTER[®]
INTERNATIONAL



STRESS MASTERY GUIDE



“The Mind Is Its Own Place And In It...
Can Make a Heaven of Hell
Or a Hell Of Heaven”

John Milton, Paradise Lost

DISCLAIMER

Regardless of your scores on the SMQ, if you are in distress, depressed or feel that life is hopeless, contact a mental health professional, counselor or physician. This Guide is not intended to replace or be a substitute for quality medical or psychological assistance. The materials provided by Stressmaster and Dr. James Petersen are for educational purposes only and are not to be construed as providing medical or psychological diagnoses or treatment. If you are in acute distress, anxiety or depression or thinking about harming yourself or others, seek help immediately.

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THE STRESS MASTERY PROGRAM

STRESSMASTER

The Stress Mastery Program

ASSESS. FEEDBACK. LEARN. CHANGE.



Built On 30 Years Of Research & Use In...
Training, Coaching, Counseling & Wellness Programs

Greetings,

This Guide is designed to help you change and live a less stressed and a better quality of life, whether at work or home. There are four steps to change:

- **ASSESS.** Using the **SMQ** and other tools you will learn about more about yourself and why stress is occurring in your work or home life.
- **FEEDBACK.** Using the **Stress Mastery Report** that comes after one completes the SMQ on-line, you will see the behaviors and attitudes, both internal and external, that drive stress. Armed with this information, you will be better able to know what to change.
- **LEARN.** This **Guide** provides the latest evidence-based tools, techniques and approaches to stress mastery and resilience. With this information you will know precisely what to change and how to develop better skills to reduce and master stress both at work and home.
- **CHANGE.** Change requires not only information, but also the motivation to change, along with a personal plan to make the change you want...happen!

This Guide provides the first three elements, however, motivation and desire to change is ultimately up to you. Begin the journey. . .

James Petersen, Ph.D.
Stress Mastery Psychologist/Founder



THE SMQ

The SMQ is both a personal stress “risk” assessment and an educational tool that can help you to identify and understand your Stress Warning Signs, the kinds of Stressors you are currently facing, and the possible Effects of Stress on your health and well-being.

The Stress Mastery Guide provides information on the meaning of each Stress Mastery Questionnaire (SMQ) scale, along with WHAT TO KNOW and WHAT TO DO if you scored High on any given scale. Use the Guide as a for personal development and change.

The SMQ is comprised of 11 scales in three (3) separate stress categories; they are:

I - STRESS WARNINGS

The Stress Warning Sign Scales are the result of a validation study conducted and funded by the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (Petersen, J. and Lawrence, H. NIOSH, 1982). The specific scales are:

Hostility/Anger
Perfectionism
Time-Urgency
Disappointment
Burnout
Under-Achievement
Tension

II - STRESS EFFECTS

The Stress Effects Scales shows how stress may be affecting you at both a physical and emotional level. The two scales are:

Physical Stress Effects
Life Work Satisfaction

III - STRESSORS

The Stressor Scales reflect the two major types of stressors that are known to be a cause or “trigger” of the stress response. The two scales are:

Life Events
Hassles

THE MEANING OF STRESS “RISK” SCORES



Each SMQ scale provides a view of one important aspect of stress and how it may be affecting you at this time. Your “Risk Level” relates to the possibility of having or developing stress-related physical, behavioral or emotional issues. Having a High score on any given scale indicates that you may be at “risk” of developing stress related problems, but it does not mean you will necessarily experience any problems. Use the concept of “risk” as meaning a “warning sign” and not as an absolute.

The SMQ is based upon a research and validation study conducted by Dr. James Petersen through a grant from the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health. (NIOSH, 1982). Each scale is normed and your scores are compared to the study group.

Based on your responses to the 87 SMQ questions, you were placed in a High, Medium-High, Medium, Medium-Low or Low “Risk” area for each of the 11 SMQ scales. The research showed that High to Medium-High scores on one or more of the 7 Stress Warning Sign Scales are associated with such physical problems as: headaches, cardiovascular disease, digestion and bowel problems, or emotional issues like burnout or excessive tension. However, some people score High do not experience any of these problems. There are many factors that can prevent or delay the development of stress related problems. Some of these factors will be explained and discussed later in this Guide.

A High or Medium-High score on any of the SMQ scales is a warning to look more closely to determine what you can do to reduce or change your level of stress. A High or Medium-High score on more than one of the Seven Stress Warning Sign Scales puts you at greater risk of developing stress-related problems. Everyone is different, so use this information to see if stress is causing you physical, social, or emotional problems and make your own determination of what if anything you need to change.

A Medium score on any of the SMQ scales places you in a borderline situation. Check to see if stress is becoming a problem for you now. Determine if you could do more to improve your response to life’s stressors and daily hassles. If you have a positive attitude, feel in control of your life and have few health issues, you are probably at Low “risk”. However, if you feel that things are not improving in your life or work, are experiencing more stress than usual, or you do not feel in control of important situations, then begin to apply some of the techniques shared in this Guide.

If your scores fall into the Medium-Low to Low on one or more scales, chances are you are doing better than most people and your stress response is not likely to be very high. These are the areas where you are most stress resilient. Keep up the good work. However, be on the alert for the encroachment of stressors in your life and a deterioration of how well you are mastering those stressors. Your scores can change over time.

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

Use this Guide to journal and record your thoughts on what may be causing any stress. This Guide can help you to take Action to make the changes you want and may need to make!. While everyone experiences stress, some people have greater challenges with their stress than others. Even if your stress is relatively minor or if you experience stress only under certain circumstances, taking the next step in “digging deeper” into your results can be of great benefit. In order to gain a deeper understanding of the SMQ, isolate the one or two attitudes, behaviors or thoughts that you want to change and make a difference for you and those around you. The following provides a framework to help you see what you might want to change so that you will feel better, more relaxed and less stressed. There are several steps you may wish to take. To get the most from the SMQ, follow these five (5) steps.

#1 - SEE THE BIG PICTURE



The first step is to take a “big picture” look at your scores on each scale. What you see may only be the tip of the iceberg! Look at your SMQ scales and take note of the scales where you scored the highest, such as High to Medium- High Risk. If you scored Medium to Medium-Low on all scales; GREAT. You’re probably mastering your stress quite well. But, if you scored Medium to High on one or more scales, it may be time to take steps to change how you perceive and respond to life and work stressors. Only you can change how you feel.

Ask yourself, “which areas are my main stress warning signs?” For example, if you scored High on the Anger Scale, ask yourself, “How would I feel, if I wasn’t so angry and frustrated with others all the time?” Chances are you’d feel a lot better! The key to mastering stress is to become aware of the behaviors and attitudes that reflect your inner stress, so that you can take action to prevent your stress from getting worse. Stress mastery is not about changing your world or the people in it, even if they need to be changed, but in learning how to respond appropriately to problems, people and events that you don’t like.

#2 - IDENTIFY YOUR HIGH to MEDIUM-HIGH RISK AREAS

After looking at your risk scores on the 11 scales, focus on the specific questions where you scored High (4 or 5). The higher the score, the greater the “risk” that stress may be affecting you and/or others at this time. Ask these questions:



- Did I score this correctly?
- Was I being honest with myself? Should it be higher or lower?
- What does this question mean to me?
- Does this reflect who I am right now?
- Is it a problem for me, my family or co-workers?
- What can I do to change, so that I will have less stress?



#3 - DIG DEEPER



Many times people answer a question one way and then would like to change their response later after reviewing the questions. No problem. Think about each question where you scored High or Medium-High and ask yourself if it is accurate? Change your response if you feel that it would be more accurate with a lower or higher score. Likewise, review the Medium Scores to see if they should be higher or lower. And, finally, go over the Low to Medium-Low scores and make any changes necessary. Review all of the questions and how you responded to them. Change any answers, up or down, so that you will have a more accurate view of yourself.

#4 - GET ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE



Share the results of the SMQ with someone you trust and who can give you objective and honest feedback. Be open and non-defensive. Sometimes we are not the best judge of our behaviors; in many cases others will see us in a different light. That is okay! No one is perfect and most people, even very successful people, experience stress. As you may see, your view of yourself can be quite different than how others see you. As there is no right or wrong answers, by seeking input from a companion, family member or close friend can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of how you are handling stress that can lead to positive solutions as discussed later in this Stress Mastery Guide.

#5 - TAKE ACTION

**STRESS
MASTERY**



The SMQ is the first step in your quest to create less stress, peak performance and greater life and work satisfaction. You can use the Guide for self-development and personal growth. However, if you are participating in a stress management training or coaching program, you will be able to discuss your results and the meaning of each Scale with your counselor, coach or a stress mastery trainer. Having someone to work with can help you isolate what needs to change, improve your ability to create a plan for change, and move in a direction that helps you reduce stress and, also, prevents stress from dominating your life.



OVERVIEW OF THE SMQ SCALES



Following is an explanation of each of the 11 SMQ Scales. You will notice they there are three main categories: Stress Warning Signs, Stress Effects and Stressors. The overview will provide you with how the SMQ is oriented and what it measures. After the overview, you will dive deeper into the meaning of each scale, why it is important and, ultimately, what you can do to lower stress levels and build personal stress mastery. Start by understanding your own **Stress Warning**

Signs. While there are many stress warning signs, based on research, there are seven behaviors that are the most common behaviors that reflect inner stress. Then, we discuss **Stress Effects** or how stress may be affecting you physically and emotionally right now. This is important, since stress can have a major impact on health, productivity and wellbeing. Finally, you will take a look at the role of **Stressors** in your life and what you can or cannot do about them.

STRESS WARNING SIGNS - SCALES

HOSTILITY/ANGER SCALE



The Hostility/Anger Scale assesses the degree to which someone is experiencing frustration and anger at this time in his or her life. Indicators of Hostility and Anger are irritability, a strong tendency to focus on the incompetencies of others, a feeling of impatience and, of course, verbal or physical expressions of anger toward others or events.

PERFECTIONISM SCALE



The Perfectionism Scale assesses the degree to which someone shows more than normal demands for excellence. Perfectionists demonstrate a strong demand that no errors be made from those around them, whether at work or home. Perfectionists are often irritated with the mistakes of others, tend to overwork a task to make it perfect, demonstrate that they are a perfectionist in what they do at all times.

TIME-URGENCY SCALE



The Time-Urgency Scale assesses the degree to which someone is in a great need to rush, move faster, work harder, and do more in less time. Generally, a time urgent person eats fast without really tasting the food, moves and walks rapidly and seems always to be in a hurry. These individuals tend to talk fast and hurry the speech of others, and are known as “clock watchers”. The inability to slow down is a hallmark of those individuals who believe that life is to be lived in the “fast lane”. Time-urgency is a classic “Type-A” behavior.



DISAPPOINTMENT SCALE



The Disappointment Scale assesses the level of personal disappointment with others and their job or home life. Individuals who are frequently disappointed think and talk about getting out of their job or life situation, feel that they are not appreciated for their work or effort, talk about people who are or have disappointed them and express discouragement, in general.

BURNOUT SCALE



The Burnout Scale assesses the degree to which a person shows, feels or talks about being sad or unhappy with their work and, often, life in general. These individuals tend to have a “thin skin ” and have difficulty laughing at themselves when a joke is made about them. They are also unenthusiastic and talk pessimistically about their life, work or relationships. Periods of negative mood or feeling burnout may be an indication that stress is having an effect on your body, mind and quality of your life.

UNDER-ACHIEVEMENT SCALE



The Under-Achievement Scale assesses the degree one feels and believes that they are not achieving very much in their work and life. Under-Achievement is a self-perception about what someone believes is needed or required in their life, but is not being attained. People who score High or Medium-High often talk about how hard it is to accomplish anything, even if they are by all objective standards doing quite much. This scale is a reflection of the feeling that things take too long to accomplish and that what they do is rather pointless.

TENSION SCALE



The Tension Scale assesses the degree to which someone is able to relax and take time for themselves. People who score High on this scale have a high level of physical and emotional tension in their bodies. They rarely take time to relax and take time for themselves. When they take breaks, they are short and lunches are avoided or done rapidly. They are always on the go and work late and on weekends. Their leisure time on weekends is almost none existent.

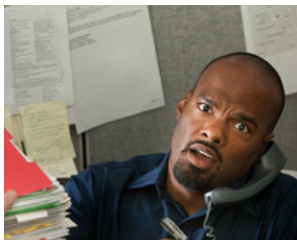
STRESS EFFECTS SCALES

PHYSICAL STRESS EFFECTS SCALE



The Physical Stress Effects Scale assesses the possible effect of intense or prolonged stress on the body. Research has shown that individuals scoring Medium to High on one or more of the Seven Stress Warning Sign Scales (see previous section) also have a tendency to score High on this scale. This Scale is like a compass that points to how stress may be having a detrimental effect on one's body and health.

LIFE/WORK SATISFACTION SCALE



The Life/Work Satisfaction Scale assesses the degree of satisfaction or, rather, dissatisfaction that someone has with regard to work, job or life, in general. People who score High on this scale are often very unhappy with their career choice, current job, co-workers, level of income, quality of supervisors and managers and amount of work they are under. Generally, when one perceives their life/work as being negative, stress increases dramatically.

STRESSORS SCALES

MAJOR LIFE EVENTS SCALE



The Stressors Scale reflects the quantity and quality of major negative life events that have occurred in the past year. People score High on this scale when they experience many life events such as the death of a loved one, financial loss, divorce, separation, injuries, loss of job, retirement, legal problems and other events that may be unexpected and out of the control of the individual.

HASSLES SCALE



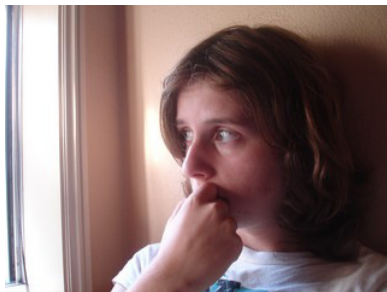
The Hassles scale assesses the amount of daily hassles and challenges one faces each day, many of which could be avoided. Hassles are not major life events, instead they are the every-day irritations and events that just happen, such as challenges of a new job or career, concerns about weight, lack of money, conflicts with spouse or friends, difficulties with employees or co-workers, too many responsibilities, vehicle repairs and being delayed in traffic.

ABOUT STRESS MASTERY

The Stress Mastery Program is unique. While mindfulness, meditation, deep breathing are important to lowering stress levels, they are not sufficient to build resilience and stress mastery. To help clarify the focus of the Stress Mastery Program, let's take a closer look at the words that are often used when people talk about stress.

The words "Cope, Manage or Master" stress are terms used every day; they are often used interchangeably by both professionals in the field, as well as the public, at large. But, do they have the same connotation, meaning and message? Let's take evaluate what these three words really mean and why it is important to make a distinction between them.

"COPING" WITH STRESS



Michelle lamented, "My stress level is high, and I personally don't 'cope' with it very well. When I am with my family, it's hard not to talk about work, especially when the day has been horrible. It affects my family when I become quiet and need to be alone after work. I would love to have a magical way to snap off the stress, but no such luck."

Michelle is essentially saying that she has no control over her stress and that all she can do is to "cope" with it. "Coping with stress" is to struggle with stress, without a belief that "I" can do something about my stress.

When someone is just coping with stress, they tend to "muddle through" without making much of an effort to reduce their stress levels or to deal more effectively with the source of their stress. The fundamental belief is that they have no voice or choice in their own personal stress levels, so why try... "no such luck." And, for many with a coping mentality, there is a tendency to engage in unhealthy and counterproductive behaviors, such as drug and alcohol abuse, over eating, under eating, excessive sleeping, social avoidance and excessive smoking.

"MANAGING" STRESS



Stress coaches and trainers typically use the term "Managing Stress" for their programs or services. "Managing Stress" communicates an important message; we can modify and reduce the impact of the "stress response" on our bodies, health, behaviors and emotions. By learning how to bring down stress levels, the body will naturally move back to homeostasis or internal balance.

Stress Management programs tend to focus on techniques or ways to bring down stress through deep breathing, meditation, exercise, yoga, Tai Chi, progressive relaxation, Autogenics, and many others. These techniques can reduce stress levels; however, focusing on just reducing stress, by itself, does not address the underlying cause of one's stress or how to prevent stress from escalating or recurring.

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Even though we can exercise, do yoga, meditate and deep breathe to reduce the stress hormones like cortisol and adrenaline, the reason why stress is occurring, is not addressed or solved. After an hour of exercise or meditation, while we may feel better and our stress hormones have been metabolized, we still have to go back to the office, for example, and face an overbearing manager, excessive workloads, deadlines, poor communication or irresponsible co-workers who just don't do their jobs.

Life and work stressors happen at the least opportune time and it doesn't take long for the stress response to return in the form of anger, irritation, intolerance, disappointment, fear or burnout. We may have been relaxed an hour ago, but now we're fuming at some workplace manager who has piled on more or a co-worker who is rude and angry. Reducing stress is important, but unless we take control of the thoughts and perceptions about the stressors that occur each day, we're only half way to truly mastering stress.

“MASTERING” STRESS

Mastering stress starts with believing that we can alter the severity and duration of the stress response by changing how we perceive, interpret and respond to the stressful events that often trigger it. This is not easy, since many of us are conditioned to respond automatically to stressors with emotions like fear, anxiety and behaviors like anger, road rage, and verbal aggression. We call these Negative Automatic Thoughts (NATs). These internal and external NATs or thoughts are actually behaviors that are learned. The good news is that these responses can be changed by recognizing the warning signs of stress, both internally and externally, and then taking mental steps to intervene and **STOP STRESS NOW!**



Once stress is recognized, stress masters take action and prevent the stress response from escalating. They do this by “talking to themselves” with words, thoughts and images that counteract the stress response. These mental acts will bring the mind and body back into balance and allow the relaxation response to take over. In psychology, this is called cognitive restructuring and may include a variety of mental techniques like re-focusing, re-directing attention, using positive affirmations, taking a more rational view of events or replacing a negative mental image with a more peaceful and serene one. As the American psychologist William James once pointed out. . .

“The greatest weapon against stress is our ability to choose one thought over another.”

William James, Psychologist

WHAT MAKES A GOOD STRESS MASTER?

There are three things stress masters do to control their stress. These characteristics have profound impact on stress levels and, most importantly, they can be learned:

- First, stress masters have a mental gyroscope that provides a sense of internal control and balance; it allows them to change what they think and perceive when things go wrong and take ownership of how they respond to negative life events.

***“The Mind is It’s Own Place and In It Can
Make a Heaven of Hell or a Hell of Heaven.”***

John Milton in “Paradise Lost”

- Second, stress masters are quick to accept a negative event and, then develop a strong sense of commitment to do something positive to alter their reaction to the stressor. And, when appropriate, they take positive steps to prevent the stressor from recurring or to change the stressor itself. Again, as William James, once pointed out that. . .

***“Acceptance of what has happened is the first step
to overcoming the consequences of any misfortune.”***

- Finally, stress masters respond to adversity with an attitude of challenge. They believe that the “problem” facing them is not a problem, but an event or situation that can be overcome; it becomes a challenge. The sense of challenge, control and commitment are hallmarks of those who master stress on a daily basis and, in the end, they are healthier, more productive and happier.

With the help of this Guide, you can explore how you respond to life and work stressors behaviorally and emotionally, how to recognize and understand the role of stressors in triggering the stress response, and explore evidence-based tools and techniques to reduce and master stress for peak performance, improved health and a better quality of life.



THE SMQ: STRESS WARNING SIGNS



The Hostility/Anger Scale assesses the degree to which you are experiencing frustration and anger at this time. The research on anger and stress has been widely studied and results of hundreds of studies are clear...Anger is the number one behavioral factor most highly correlated with an increased risk of coronary heart disease, stroke, myocardial infarction and high blood pressure. Other physical and behavioral stress problems are also known to be directly influenced by stress. For example, gastrointestinal or stomach problems have a high correlation with anger.



WHAT TO KNOW

A high level of anger is a strong behavioral predictor of early illness, disease and, possibly, even death. This scale measures such things as irritability, anger, and impatience and is also one of the classic Type-A behaviors. If you scored Medium to High on this scale, it may be wise to find more constructive and appropriate ways of dealing with your angry thoughts and, ultimately, how you interact with others.

Most anger is harmful and counterproductive; it undermines relationships and can result in both physical and emotional scars. Anger is most often expressed in the form of verbal abuse, such as the “putting-down” or yelling at a child, spouse or even a coworker when they do not meet your expectations or needs.

Anger is also revealed when someone physically hits or bullies a person. Physical abuse and bullying are all too often a common occurrence in homes, schools and workplaces. People die because someone has lost control of his or her temper and actually killed someone they loved. All too often we hear on the news about someone who exploded in “road rage” and killed a complete stranger.

Anger is a way to control the actions and feelings of others through coercion. People often use anger as an emotional hammer to get what they want. While anger can be expressed directly by lashing out, it can also be shown indirectly through passive-aggressive behavior. With passive-aggressive behavior, individuals punish others by being belligerent, not responding, pouting or simply running away; this is emotional bondage that is, unfortunately, often effective at controlling others.

WHAT TO DO

Determine if the anger you feel is excessive or harmful to you or those around you. If anger has affected you and, possibly, your loved ones or friends, it may be time to develop new ways of thinking and behaving.

The key to controlling anger is learning to change your expectations about the person or situation. When anger erupts, the first step is to recognize that you are, in fact, angry. Knowing that you are in an agitated “angry state” and possibly not in control of your words or actions, means it is time to STOP, THINK and RELAX. Force yourself to recognize there is a better way to deal with people who fail to meet your expectations.

FEAR DRIVES ANGER

Since fear is the engine that drives people to do such offensive things such as hit, yell or scream at someone, ask yourself, "What am I afraid of right now?" Chances are you are experiencing anxiety and fear that the person will not do what you expect. As a result, you may feel anxious when you are not in control and react disproportionately.

If anger is a challenge for you, recognize that the need to control others is often unrealistic and counter-productive. If anxiety about a situation or person is high, work to change or modify your thinking about that situation or individual. Once you do, you will be able to master your fear more effectively and your response to the stressor that irritates you will be much more appropriate and effective.

WORK ON "LETTING GO"

"Letting go" is the key to freeing yourself from excessive anger. Our culture teaches us to always take action and maintain control. While this approach is good in some situations, it is harmful when there is no real threat. By "letting go," you will actually gain control over your responses. When you do become aware of any excessive anger, aggression or hostility toward others, you can begin to talk to yourself in a more effective way.

Flow! Don't try to control fear, flow with it. The more you focus on fear, the more fear you get. Once you have recognized the fear behind your anger, you can give yourself permission to let it go. Doing so will allow the fear to flow through and then out of you. Energy is wasted trying to push away our fears. Unfortunately, this keeps us smack in the middle of our fear and anxiety. Accept that the feared condition has occurred and take positive steps to change or make the best of the situation.

BUILD SELF-ESTEEM

Most people experience some frustration and anger from time to time. It is normal. However, a positive and productive expression of that anger is essential. A good sense of self-esteem or self-worth will enable you to express anger and frustration in a more effective way.

When self-esteem improves, it is possible to accept others for who they are and to resist the use of anger to get your way. For example, you might say to yourself:

***"I can let go and it's OK.
Letting go does not mean I'm out of control."***

"I can let go and still feel in control."

***"Letting go makes me feel better.
That will make the situation better."***

***"I don't need anger to change
this person or situation at this time."***

***"Anger is not controlling me,
I am the master of my anger."***

***"I'm not an angry person. ANGER is
destructive.
I will raise myself above this anger and LET
GO."***

BE PREPARED FOR ANGER

Get prepared for anger—it is going to happen. Think about when you get angry. Who do you get angry with and why? Write down or make a mental note of when you feel anger or express it either outwardly toward others or inwardly toward yourself. By becoming aware of the circumstances that trigger anger you will be better prepared to STOP ANGER ,

Re-think how you will respond differently when others do not live up to your expectations. You may not always succeed, but if you make the effort you will make progress. Look for small successes and reward yourself for progress.

USE “I-MESSAGES”

“I-Messages” are effective ways to communicate with others and can defuse a potentially explosive situation. Use “I-Messages” as alternatives to screaming and yelling. “I-Messages” take the form of telling the person how you feel because of what they did or did not do. “I-Messages” focus on behavior, not the person as a human being. For example, a common anger expression might be: “You idiot! Where have you been? You said you’d be home by 10 and here it is midnight. You’re a stupid, no-good kid. Get out of my sight.”

An “I-Message” alternative would be: “When you don’t call me or let me know when you’re coming home, I feel you may have been hurt. I was worried about you. It is important for you to call me. I know you want to be independent, but let’s discuss boundaries and limits. I don’t hate you. I’m upset with your behavior.” “I-Messages” should express how you are affected by another’s behavior.

SET REALISTIC GOALS

Sometimes when we get angry at our own lack of progress, that anger is reflected or redirected at others. When we do not reach our goals, desires and hopes, frustration and feeling anger can be the result. By setting realistic goals for yourself, you will feel better and less frustrated. The good news is that you become a better person to those around you. Finally, when you see even small successes, talk to yourself in a new way and affirm that you are making progress.

AVOID “SHOULD’S”

Setting high expectations for yourself or others is a problem that can lead to stress and even more anger. You know you are setting unrealistic expectations when you find yourself frequently saying that people should be or do something other than what they are actually capable of.

Engaging in these “shouldisms” is often self-destructive and usually harmful to your relationships with others. Examples of “shouldisms” are:

“She/he should be more loving.”

“When I walk into a room, people should immediately say hello to me.”

“When I assigned her the job, she should have completed it right away.”

“They should show me more respect. After all, I’m their superior. I deserve it.”



The Perfectionism Scale assesses the need to think and behave in perfectionistic ways toward yourself and others. Perfectionism is not the same as working to achieve excellence; it is the constant quest for unobtainable and the repeated setting of unrealistic goals, standards and expectations that results in stress. Stress, both internally as well as externally with coworkers, family and friends, can cause great angst and frustration, reduce productivity and harm relationships.



WHAT TO KNOW

A High score on the Perfectionism Scale is correlated with chronic health and emotional problems and is an important stress warning sign. Individuals caught up in perfectionist thinking and behavior can experience significant personal distress accompanied by physical and emotional problems. Their unrealistically high standards and quest to avoid failure can also produce strong negative responses from others who may not share the same values or standards. If you scored High or Medium-High on the Perfectionism Scale, recognize that your perfectionism may be damaging to your health and quality of life.

Perfectionism is not the same as making a conscientious effort to do your personal best. Seeking excellence is a realistic goal that generates a feeling of personal satisfaction. Perfectionists, however, set the bar so high that their expectations are not achievable. The result is stress due to unfulfilled expectations.

Perfectionists strive to be organized and on top of every detail and, regardless of their level of achievement, they come away feeling they have fallen short of their goal. Perfection is illusive, and generally speaking, unattainable. The net effect is an overwhelming and continuous sense of disappointment and unhappiness.

Perfectionism is a learned behavior. It is the result of years of external (imposed by others) and internal (self-imposed) pressure to improve one's own performance. Perfectionistic thinking is based on the unrealistic belief that, "Unless I am perfect, I am not okay." Perfectionists believe they cannot be happy unless they are perfect. Over time, this can increase the stress response and cause health and social problems to become worse.

WHAT TO DO

SET REALISTIC EXPECTATIONS

Perfectionists should re-evaluate and re-adjust their expectations for themselves, as well as for others who do not meet their needs. Most perfectionists set extremely high standards for themselves and others. Setting high standards is not the problem. Setting standards that cannot be realistically attained can be emotionally damaging to you as well as to others.

Determine if you are doing too much, for too many and in too short a time period. Ask: "Am I expecting too much from others, particularly those close to me?". Perhaps you have expectations for a child, coworkers, boss, or your spouse that are unreasonable. Goals that "stretch" people are fine and desirable. Goals that "break" people create stress.

MASTER FEAR OF FAILURE

Since fear of failure motivates the perfectionist, one should ask: "What is the worst thing that could happen if I didn't do this task perfectly? What if I am not perceived as being perfect?" Generally, the answer to these questions is not as dire as one might imagine. People will not reject you or think less of you if things are not perfect. The imagined consequences are typically greater than reality.

EXCELLENCE NOT PERFECTION

Practice leaving some things undone or less "perfect" than your normal performance. Most things can wait a day or two. Distinguish between life's essentials and nonessentials, so you know where to place your time and energy. Misplaced effort results in disappointment. Some tasks need to be done very well; others can be done less perfectly or even haphazardly. Strive for excellence only when excellence is required; be perfectionistic only when perfectionism is really achievable.

ACCEPT WHAT COMES, THEN IMPROVE

Not reaching your goals does not mean you are a failure. Failure is relative to your ideals and expectations. Keeping standards reasonable does not mean you will necessarily develop an ineffective program, product or that you might produce less. It is well known that many people only succeed after repeated "failures". For many, it can actually contribute to their eventual success.

Practice on "letting go." There is a time to turn off the computer, put the pen down, turn the phone off and call it a day. When you let go, stress will flow away from you. The result is that you actually feel better and become more relaxed.

**PRACTICE LETTING GO**

Perfectionists often do not know their needs or how to meet them. When you stop and take time for yourself, your deeper needs will begin to rise into your awareness. To fulfill those deeper needs, you must fight the mental tapes that you unconsciously say to yourself such as: "Do more, be better, work harder and never stop."

Try talking to yourself in a kinder and more positive way. For example, use words that reassure yourself such as, "I am a good person. I did the best that I can do. I can rest now. I do not need to be perfect in everything I do. I will let go of all unrealistic expectations and do something just for myself."

We all use self-talk to direct our behaviors and actions. Changing your self-talk and using new and more positive words will make a difference in how you feel. Make the phrase, "Let it go", become an integral part of your thinking and stress will automatically dissipate.

Today more people than ever are in a great rush to move faster, work harder and do more in less time. While a “go get ‘em” attitude can be the spark which makes great things happen, an excessive amount of Time-Urgency can cause personal stress. With the explosion in information technology, constant text messaging and e-mailing, living each day attached to a “smart” phone, the external and internal pressure we place upon ourselves to do more and to do it quicker is causing increased physical and emotional stress problems.



WHAT TO KNOW

Time-Urgency is a result of several factors including unrealistic expectations, poor time management and procrastination. The term Time Management is a bit confusing...we really don't manage time... we manage ourselves with respect to time. If you are good at slowing down, living in the moment and recognizing that not everything should be done in a hurry...your sense of Time-Urgency will be reduced and so will your stress.

Excessive Time-Urgency is a classic component of the Type-A personality characteristics. Individuals who are in a constant state of Time-Urgency have a higher risk of physical problems like cardiovascular, gastrointestinal, and other health problems than those who work at a more relaxed and steady pace. In effect, excessive Time-Urgency keeps the stress response in high-gear which has a direct impact on one's overall level of stress,

Individuals who view life in a time-urgent way tend to be in a constant state of hyper-vigilance that keeps the body in a continuous state of arousal. High scores on this scale have very busy schedules, overly-tight deadlines, rush when rushing is not necessary, and are constantly multi-tasking. These self-defeating thoughts will create stress and rob you of the enjoyment in your work, social interactions and play.

The key is to develop solid time mastery skills that will enable you to “walk” not “run” through life. If you scored Medium to High on this scale, consider slowing down and taking life as it right now, and not as you think they should be. Managing your time better will help you defeat this negative thinking.

WHAT TO DO

MAKE TIME YOUR FRIEND

Time can be your friend or your foe! When time is your friend, you take a more relaxed approach to work and play. If you make time your enemy, you see time being drained away and your anxiety increased.

Time-Urgency is a perception problem. Everyone has some time pressure to get things done, meet occasional tight deadlines, and have places to go. This behavior is now common in our accelerated society. When you place everything under time pressure, the Stress Response is quickly engaged. Re-think your view of time. Ask: “Does my sense of time-urgency reflect what is really important to me?” Putting events and tasks in their perspective will make a big difference in how you feel and how well you function.

SLOW DOWN AND LISTEN

Practice doing some things slowly. Not all tasks need to be done quickly. Take a child's view in which tasks are done in the time it takes to do them. When you are talking with people, LISTEN more than you talk. Little is learned when we do the talking. By listening more and talking less you slow down and actually hear what the other person is saying. Under stress, our ability to interpret what a person is saying is reduced. Quiet listening reduces stress.

GET ORGANIZED

Lack of organization in the home or office is a major contributor to causing Time-Urgency to be present in your life. One key problem that leads to delays is an inability to find important documents, files or items that are needed. When they are not available and time runs short, the fear of failure or being late (rejection) crops up. The result that follows is always being late or rushing to an appointment.

BALANCE WORK, FAMILY AND PLAY

Keeping a balance in one's life is key to less stress. Try to keep work, family life and play in balance. While work has more time pressures than play, it is important to not apply those time requirements to family or social gatherings. Think about it! Do you want to treat your family or friends as though you're in a business or sales meeting?

PLAN BETTER

Constantly rushing is often the result of poor planning. Do you know what activities are more important than others? Do you fall into the trap of "failing to plan" and then wind up rushing at the last minute? Evaluate your organizational skills to see if you can reduce the stress caused by poor planning.

CHANGE EXPECTATIONS

Expecting that you must always do more and do it faster is at the root of a Time-Urgency problem. Determine if you are trying to do more than you are reasonably capable of doing. Focus on one thing at a time. Keep expectations of yourself and others in-line with reality. Since negative "self-talk" and improper expectations are the cause of stress, it is important to evaluate your expectations for yourself and as well as others. Ask, "Are my expectations reasonable and realistic?" If not, the key is to change your expectation.

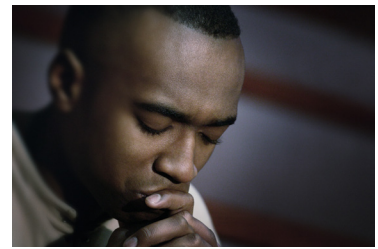
MASTER FEAR OF REJECTION

Many people operating in the "hurry mode" fear rejection and disapproval. Trying to please everyone by rushing to meet "their" needs is the problem. If you must make all your appointments on time or, if you must never be late, you may have an excessive need to please others. Ask yourself, "If I fail to live up to someone's expectations, what's the worst that could happen?"

TIMELINESS, NOT TIME-URGENCY

Being on time is necessary for most situations and meetings. However, while it is important to be on time for many appointments, not all require a "do-or-die" attitude. It really is not necessary to rush through traffic, risking life and limb, just to avoid being late. So, take the foot off the gas, take a deep breath and relax.

Research has shown that those who scored High on the Disappointment Scale had a greater frequency of physical or emotional difficulties than those who scored Low. Individuals who experience a high level of disappointment tend to have more headaches, gastrointestinal difficulties, moist palms, over-perspiration and other physical problems than those scoring Low on this scale.



WHAT TO KNOW

Disappointment stems from what we expect from others or from life, in general. Some disappointment is normal and unavoidable. Disappointment that is unavoidable might include a decrease in business revenue through no fault your own, getting laid off because of a decline in business or having good friends being forced to relocate. Very little can be done to prevent these stressors from occurring; they just happen.

Disappointment is a result of thinking negatively of others because they do not meet your expectations. People who score High on this scale have difficulty setting realistic expectations for others and typically resist changing their expectations to be more in-line with reality. Their attitude is: "This is what I expect and nothing else will do."



Even if you think your expectations are appropriate and realistic, they may not be. For example, you call a friend several times and she does not reciprocate and call you back. You allow yourself to become upset, angry or, possibly, sad. Consequently, you "write her off" as a friend. However, the reality may be quite different. She may want to call but is overworked, out-of-town or simply overwhelmed with her personal life. Perhaps she is not time-oriented and forgets or fails to do what she knows she should do, not because she dislikes you, but because of her nature. To reduce stress, either accept her as she is, or adjust your thinking to make the relationship work, not how you wish it to be.

All of us experience disappointment to some extent; however, some are more prone to feeling disappointed when our expectations are not met by the people around us. Feeling repeatedly disappointed is a result of a pattern of faulty or irrational thinking about the person or situation. If you experience frequent disappointment, evaluate your expectations and, if necessary, you may need to change or lower them to be more in-line with what is actually possible.

WHAT TO DO

“IS THE STRESSOR AVOIDABLE?”

If you learn to differentiate between avoidable and unavoidable stressors, you will have greater control over how you respond and, consequently, reduce personal discouragement, disappointment and stress. Focus on changing an event that is, indeed, changeable. One way to reduce your disappointment is to create realistic expectations from the beginning. Recognize that faulty thinking may be at the heart of disappointment and work to understand that what you think affects how you feel.

CHANGE EXPECTATIONS

Expectations play a central role in disappointment and when expectations are not met, the result is stress. Evaluate what you expect from family, friends, coworkers and volunteers. What do you expect from life, God, your spouse, coworkers or your children? Take a close look at your expectations to determine if they are reasonable and achievable. If not, you may need to change or alter your expectations. However, if your expectations are reasonable, then go with them.

Determine if your disappointment is specific to one person or situation or to most aspects of your life. This will allow you to focus your energies more effectively. Write down specific disappointments or examples of disappointment and look for the cause, not just the symptom of your stress.

Ask someone close to you if they think your expectations are out-of-line with what is reasonable. They may have a better, or at least a different, perspective than you. Listen to what they say. “If the shoe fits,” it is up to you to make the necessary change.

In reality, the only control we have is the control we place on our own thinking, not the attitudes and behaviors of others. We can influence, ask, request, even demand, but ultimately, you control only YOU and no one else.



REDIRECT YOUR THINKING

Your thoughts determines your expectations. The good news is that what you think about and what you focus on is under your control. Keep in mind that while you have some control over your thoughts, you have no control over the thoughts, or action of others.

Taking control of your thoughts is central to stress mastery. Learn to re-direct your negative thoughts about people who are not meeting your hopes and desires to more accepting and tolerant thoughts. If someone cannot or will not give you what you want, you have some choices: i.e., accept the person as he or she is or choose to limit your time with them. Make this kind of decision with care.

COMMUNICATE MORE EFFECTIVELY

When you think about it, we really have little or no control over the actions of others. We can, however, have some influence over people through good and clear communication. In the end, you will have better success in helping people to change or do what you desire by simply using good communication and effective listening skills.

STOP DWELLING!

Dwelling on a disappointment can result in a “mental obsession” that causes chronic stress. Dwelling does not change a person or what they may have done or not done, it only makes matters worse. Being preoccupied with a person who does not meet your needs, creates unnecessary stress. When you catch yourself thinking a great deal about recent disappointment in your life, take control of your thoughts and focus on letting go. It may be time to just accepting the person for who they are.

Being “in the moment” is the key to nurturing a positive view of the situation and that will help you feel better with less stress.. The first step to thinking clearly is to lower your stress levels. Anxiety and fear interferes with rational thinking. Do some deep

breathing, take a slow walk, sit back and focus on the moment! Then, begin to redirect your thoughts .

LISTEN!

Listen actively and hear more of what others are really trying to communicate. By understanding the person, your expectations become more realistic and achievable. You will also feel much better and reduce your stress response. Plus, you may see some changes in his or her behavior and attitude.

One of the most effective communication tools involves stating what you want from someone and then asking that person to restate what you said to see if they understood you. Simply asking for the person to restate what you said will ensure that your message got through. They may choose to ignore or not do what you ask, but at least they know exactly what you want and expect.

In turn, you can use the same technique when someone expresses their desires and expectations of you. Start with: “If I understand you correctly, what you are saying is...” This is a simple but powerful tool. Ultimately, you can reduce or eliminate disappointment through better clarification of what is being said and heard.



Frequent periods of negative moods are a clear stress warning sign. Individuals who scored High on the Burnout Scale are likely to experience greater stress than those who scored Low. If you scored Medium to High on this scale, evaluate what you are thinking and what is the source of how you feel. Is your thinking positive or negative? Do you frequently think about the worst of situations, people or yourself? Are your thoughts mostly negative and do you feel down? The key to feeling better is to make changes in how you view yourself and the world around you. Keep in mind that Burnout is not the same as depression or, even, manic-depression. These are clinical conditions that require competent professional attention from a psychologist or mental health professional.



WHAT TO KNOW

People whose life is filled with both major life changes and a large amount of daily hassles often become “burned-out” and discouraged. Some burnout is normal. Most of us experience it. When burnout occurs frequently or with intensity, focus on finding ways to reverse the negative thinking which generates and maintains these moods.

Periods of negative mood or feeling burned-out may be an indication that stress is having an effect on your body, mind and quality of your life. Recent research has shown that individuals experiencing burnout experience changes in the frequency and amount of stress hormones, such as cortisol, in their bodies. These hormones can produce feelings of being down and “lifeless”. The more you feel this way, the greater the stress.

As with most stress “coping” mechanisms, burnout is the result of prolonged periods of hassles and major life events that lead to increasingly negative thoughts and perceptions about oneself and the world in general.

Frequent occurrences of negative mood indicate that stress is affecting you detrimentally. You may be experiencing personal burnout. You may also be trying to communicate with others in an indirect way that you are unhappy with yourself, them or life in general. Showing the world how bad you feel may be a plea for help. Unfortunately, those around you may not be able to interpret your moods, nor know what to do to help you or the situation.

Some negative mood may not be avoidable. Occasional “down” times may have a cleansing effect, for example, after being rejected for a new position, you feel hurt and “blue”. This is a normal reaction to your “perceived” failure. As you work through those moments, you will realize that there are things you can do to improve the situation such as: move, apply for another position, or simply talk to key people in your organization about what you can do to improve your skills and eligibility for advancement or change. Your mood lifts and you feel more in control.

Burnout is often the result of irrational thinking. A common irrational thought is to focus on the negative and not see the positive in life. For example, your spouse does not tell you he/she loves you. You interpret this as “he/she doesn’t love me anymore”. You may discover that with some rational thinking you too have stopped saying, “I love you”—not because you do not love them, but because perhaps you have been too preoccupied and worn-out from work. You realize that love is there, but you and your spouse are just not saying what is in your hearts.

One cause of burnout is negative self-talk or “stinkin’ thinkin’”. If you do not change the thoughts that are causing you to feel bad, angry or sad, those negative feelings and emotions will perpetuate. Changing thoughts can change feelings in most cases.

WHAT TO DO

KNOW WHERE FEELINGS COME FROM

Feelings usually follow, not precede, thinking. It is through our thoughts and mental images that anxiety, sadness and anger appear. It is a fallacy that you must first feel good before you can do something. There are many things you can do. For example, imagine a very positive time in your life when you felt great. If you really visualize it, you will feel some of the warm and good feelings of that time. Focus your thoughts and visualizations on good experiences and feelings will change. It is a fact: “Negative thinking produces negative feelings; positive thinking produces positive feelings.”

Ultimately, you have more control over your thoughts and consequently your feelings than you may realize. It takes focus and work and may require focusing on changing long established faulty, negative or distorted thinking patterns.

There are exceptions. Feelings can come from physiological imbalances from too much alcohol or other drugs. Hormonal imbalances can also be a factor for both men and women. Major depression may be the result of inherited neurological imbalances. If a feeling has a physiological basis, changing thinking will help, but may not be able to override the chemical basis of the problem. You may want to check with a medical professional to see if depression is caused by medical problems.

IS IT “CLINICAL” DEPRESSION?

Depression and negative moods are closely linked but are not the same. If you think you are chronically depressed, have no desire to make changes in your life and feel that all is hopeless, seek professional help—immediately. If you have a work Employee Assistance Program (EAP), call them today. If not, seek out professional assistance from a psychologist or mental health professional as soon as possible.



CHANGE IRRATIONAL THOUGHTS

Irrational thinking is at the heart of burnout. You may think to yourself: “I am a failure in business”, but in reality you may actually be a success in other areas of your life. You choose not to see the good in you or your actions. You may think, “I never do anything right”. Or, “No one could love someone like me”. Do a reality check. Ask: “Are my assumptions correct?” If not, it may be time to change what you are thinking. This is called “Refuting Irrational Thoughts” and it is at the core of becoming more stress resilient.

It has been said that Assumptions are the lowest form of knowledge. When you make decisions or plan responses based on assumptions you are using the Lowest form of knowledge at your disposal. The reality is, you don't know. So, avoid reactions based on assumptions until you have the facts

There are many types of irrational thoughts that should be challenged and, if necessary, changed to improve your stress levels. Here are a few of the more common ones:

• EXTREMIST THINKING

If you think everything and every event as being all bad or all good, you're using an irrational approach to life called Extremist Thinking. Most situations are a mix of good and bad, but for some people, taking the position that "the sky is falling" is stressful and counterproductive. For example, when someone makes a mistake, you think he or she is a total idiot and incompetent.

• REJECTING THE POSITIVE

If you commonly choose not to see the good in a situation or person and reject anything positive, chances are you're not seeing the situation accurately. You go to the extreme and put down or reject anything positive. Even if a positive comment is made about someone you do not like, you reject the comment and point out his or her flaws.

• DWELLING ON THE NEGATIVE

Do you tend to focus only the negative aspects of a person or situation? By becoming overly focused on the negative, anger and stress are increased. You may be obsessed with mostly the bad experiences in your life and not the good with the end result being dissatisfaction and anger.

• ESP THINKING

If you think you know how others feel and think about you, chances are that you're only assuming something over which you have little or no knowledge. ESP thinking is putting your assumptions ahead of facts or reality. The reverse of this is expecting others to know what you think or feel. A common statement for this type of irrational thinking is, "He should have known what I wanted."

• OVER-GENERALIZING

When bad things happen, you believe everything is going to fall apart. Recognize the error of over-generalization and tell yourself that everything will not fall apart just because a few bad or difficult things have happened.



THINK RATIONALLY CHALLENGE IRRATIONAL THOUGHTS

The solution to burn-out which is correlated with Irrational Thinking is to take control and refute and challenge your assumptions; they may be wrong or skewed. When you are feeling burned-out, "re-think" what you are mentally saying to yourself. One strategy that works well is to just do something new or different to break the negative thinking. Take a walk, ride a bike, go to the movies, visit a friend, read a book or do something you enjoy. Of course, if your sadness is overwhelming, seek professional help as soon as possible.

Those who score High on the Underachievement Scale believe that they are living unproductive or unsuccessful lives. Underachievers think this way even when there is objective proof that they are in fact achieving much in their lives. People who feel they are unproductive tend to feel dissatisfied, and that can result in a variety of physical and emotional problems. Ironically, both the quality and quantity of their work, not to mention other areas of their lives, can be negatively affected. If you scored High on the Underachievement Scale, learn more about how to mobilize yourself in positive and productive directions.



The perception of personal under-achievement may be the result of faulty self-perceptions about yourself. These self-perceptions can be quite negative, such as when one has been told repeatedly that he or she is not amounting to much by family or friends. Ironically, even a highly productive person can perceive and believe that they are an underachiever. Learning to have a rational view of your life and personal productivity will help you conquer the perception of under-achievement. It is also helpful to not “buy-in” to what others have told you over the years as they are probably incorrect.

WHAT TO KNOW

The perception of under-achievement is at the core of self-disappointment. While the Disappointment Scale is related to disappointment with other people and what “life” is not giving to us, under-achievement is related to your disappointment any perceived shortcomings and mistakes you may have made.

People who think they are under-achievers, think they are failing to accomplish what they set out to do with their lives. They feel frustrated that they are not accomplishing what they had expected or feel they are not achieving their goals fast enough. For example, a highly “successful” insurance person, who reached all her goals and was the most successful person in her agency, thought of herself as an under-achiever and was stressed out about it. In effect, she had set herself up for failure with goals and expectations that were extremely unrealistic and unattainable. Changing how she viewed herself and resetting expectations made a difference in her stress levels and happiness.

The perception of any under-achievement is directly related to the perception of what you think you can and should be achieving. Any negative self-talk as to why you are not achieving what you want from yourself should be changed to become more positive and self-assuring.

WHAT TO DO

FACT OR FANTASY?

The view that one is underachieving is directly related to the goals and expectations set and the degree to which one is meeting those expectations. If you set unrealistic goals for yourself, such as “I’ll be a millionaire by 30”, then you will most likely feel like an under-achiever.

There are several things you can do to ensure that you do not feel like an under-achiever. First, determine if there is a sound and rational basis for your belief that you are under-achieving. You may be correct that you have the capability and skill to

achieve more. You may have a patent or invention that will indeed make millions for you. However, if you do not have an immediate way to reach your goal, then consider modifying your expectations to a more realistic time frame.

Second, take stock of what you are doing with your life at home, social life and work to identify those things that you are actually accomplishing and doing well. You may be disregarding positive achievements and only looking at the negative. At home, for example, you may have a very loving family and you are always there for your children or spouse. Focus on that achievement and be thankful. At work, acknowledge that you have done many good things for your department, your customers or yourself over the past year and give yourself credit that you are in fact doing many things very well.

Third, take a broader look at life and do not over-generalize when things do not go as expected. If you only occasionally fail to meet your own expectations, then look more closely at other areas of your life to reassure yourself.

Last, if you frequently fail to meet your expectations, ask yourself, "Did I really miss the mark? Did I truly fail at what I set out to do?" Take a different perspective. Perhaps there are other ways to measure success. Avoid thinking of success as all or nothing. Consider that satisfaction in life comes from a quest for constant improvement and not the actual achievement of a single goal.

BECOME A BETTER PLANNER

Once you have a clear goal in mind, remember that under-achievement often results from poor planning, inadequate organization, and other "controllable" factors. Learn how to take action to improve your skills and behavior in these critical areas. Seek assistance from those who know how to plan, organize and follow through with plans. Attend

workshops and seminars, read books or listen to audio recordings on being more productive and organized. Learn better time management skills. Better organize yourself, your office, or your home.

Evaluate your situation very carefully. If your under-achievement is a fallacy and you really are accomplishing much, ask yourself, "Am I setting myself up for failure by not evaluating my goals correctly?" If unrealistic expectations result in the perception of under-achievement, scale down or modify what you expect. Work to develop more realistic expectations in future situations. Setting unrealistically high expectations for yourself guarantees you will feel disappointed. Such thinking often lowers self-esteem and increases stress.

DEVELOP NEW SKILLS

If you are not accomplishing what you want in life, both at home and work, evaluate your skills to see if you need more training or skill building. Many people fail because they lack the necessary skills to foster success. Always keep on learning.

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Stephen Covey, in his book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* (see Resources at the end of this booklet) points out to "Begin with the end in mind," as one of the key habits that can lead to success. Not reaching our goals is often a result of a lack of a clear view of what you want to accomplish.

REMAIN POSITIVE

Mild or severe depression can also cause one to under-achieve. If you are depressed and this is indeed affecting your life and work, seek professional help. Review the section on Burnout. Ultimately, to feel better you will need to change your thinking about some aspects of your life.

A High score on the Tension Scale may indicate a high level of physical and emotional tension. Those who score High on this scale rarely take time to relax and release inner tension. As a result, tense people do not enjoy good physical and emotional health. If you scored Medium to High on this scale, you probably have more stress and discomfort than others who score Low. Create more time to relax and you will counteract the negative effect of stress.



WHAT TO KNOW

Under prolonged tension, the body begins to produce a change in all of your body systems including: muscles, endocrine, digestive, cardiovascular and other bodily systems. One common complaint from too much tension and stress is pain. Pain is often the result of prolonged tension in one or more areas of the body. For example, headaches are very common these days and are usually the result of muscles being unknowingly constricted for hours.

Many physical problems are correlated with chronic tension. One negative consequence of prolonged tension is chronic fatigue. Chronic fatigue is produced from both the physical and mental tension within us. Some people are so fatigued that they can barely work. Yet, they push on, only to make matters worse.

Not taking time to “relax” is an important indicator of stress. Some people think that just relaxing in front of a TV set is not sufficient. While this form of relaxation is okay, it does not accomplish the goal of bringing down body tension.

Deep relaxation is the process of allowing the body to let go and reduce inner physical and emotional tension. It is a conscious act of mentally “letting go” accompanied by intentionally focusing on something positive that lifts our spirit and builds hope. Ask yourself, “What is the value you place on taking time for yourself?” This will determine if you will become a relaxed person in a tense world.

Tense people experience the consequences of prolonged stress in muscle tension, physical pain and fatigue. These individuals tend to also have a higher than normal rate of errors and mistakes at work or in their daily lives. When the body is tense, one does not see, hear or, even, process ideas very well.

For example, employees who work for long hours at a computer without interruption experience muscle tension and fatigue. Many workers who do repetitive work develop a host of physical aches and pains that can result in errors, mistakes and, ultimately, lower productivity. However, those individuals who take time to bring down tension through periodic breaks, deep relaxation exercises and meditation function better and become more productive.

On the emotional side, overly tense people often feel incredibly guilty about taking it easy and being good to themselves and their bodies. They rarely take lunch breaks, read books or take walks. When they do, they feel guilty. The core cause of this behavior is a value system which says, “The only thing good...is to work! Play and relaxation is sinful.”

In general, not taking time to relax can result in: mental burnouts, increased errors, poor decision-making, head, neck & back pain, reduced physical energy, lowered quality of work difficulty concentrating and many other problems.

WHAT TO DO

Are you giving too much to others and not enough for yourself? Do you want to take time for yourself, but just cannot seem to make it happen? Do you really believe that if you stop work to relax for 10-15 minutes, the job will never get done? Many people believe that taking time to do relaxation exercises, for example, is a waste of time. Research shows that taking relaxation breaks improves performance.

If you do something good for yourself, refuse to feel guilty about it. **JUST DO IT!** When people feel guilty about taking time for themselves and doing something they enjoy, they often stop doing it. Then, resentment sets in and the potential benefits are lost. Do not live your life through other people's standards and expectations. Set your own standard and change the mental tape that says, "It's wrong to take care of yourself or it's a sin to focus on yourself."

Take control of any guilt-producing thoughts and tell yourself that "it is okay and good for you to take time for yourself." Focus on the benefits to you and your family when you are more relaxed and energized.

HAVE A RELAXING, SLOW LUNCH

Take a long and relaxed lunch break several times a week. Do not do business. Take a friend with you and enjoy good conversation. Volunteer your time for a good cause. Read a novel over a cup of tea. Go to a museum. Sit quietly by a stream, in a park or in your own car where no one can reach you.

WALK EVERY DAY!

Walk by yourself or with a friend. Talk not about problems, but possibilities. Walking 30 minutes a day will reduce stress and tension and improve your health! When you walk, look around you and notice the world before you. Look at the trees, flowers, people and children and, yes, stop and smell the roses.

LISTEN TO RELAXATION AUDIOS

Relaxation audios are an excellent way to learn how to let go and relax. To develop the skill of deep relaxation takes time and, yes, dedication. But, the end result will be less stress and the body will cleanse itself of damaging stress hormones and chemicals.

EXERCISE

Exercise brings down tension and reduces stress. It takes up to 24 hours for the body to purge stress hormones from the body, but with exercise those hormones are gone in just a few hours. Join an aerobics class, go to the gym, play tennis, ride a bike, hike on weekends, go to a fitness center or jog with friends. You will feel better.

LISTEN TO RELAXING MUSIC

Music is an excellent way to reduce stress. Many forms of music can help you to let go and relax. Everyone has a music preference and is different. Listen to music that is calming: e.g. classical, contemporary, soft jazz and New Age music are particularly helpful for reducing stress.

DECOMPRESS

Scuba divers who spend long periods of time at significant depths have to incorporate decompression stops into their dive several times before returning to the surface.

In a similar manner we can apply this model to the stress you are experiencing. Build decompression stops into your schedule, between meetings or appointments, and after prolonged periods of increased pressure, which may require longer periods of rest time. Do not try to live with the increased pressure of stress for long periods of time and not build decompression stops into your schedule.

THE SMQ: STRESS EFFECTS



PHYSICAL STRESS EFFECTS SCALE

STRESS EFFECTS SCALES

The Physical Stress Effects Scale assesses the possible effect of intense or prolonged stress on the body. Research has shown that individuals scoring Medium to High on one or more of the Seven Stress Warning Sign Scales (see previous section) also have a tendency to score High on this scale. This Scale is like a compass that points to how stress may be having a detrimental effect on you. For people who score High, look to see if stress may be having an impact on your current health or emotional condition. If you are in distress, it is important to see a physician or mental health professional. Seek help if you have any questions or concerns about your health, physical problems or symptoms if they are of concern to you.

If you scored Medium to High on this scale or if you feel that you are experiencing frequent headaches, stomach problems, or neck and back pains, begin the process of developing your Stress Mastery skills.

If you scored Low on this scale, you are doing great. However, if at any time you begin to see an increase in physical problems consider that stress may be playing a role in those problems. Perhaps you are experiencing more stressors than usual (see the following section).

**WHAT TO KNOW**

What happens to the body under short and long-term or chronic stress? Essentially, the Stress Response, or Fight or Flight Response, is immediately activated. The Stress Response is a well researched and medically accepted concept. While the neurochemistry of the stress response is clearly known, what is not known is how stress hormones affect one another and interact with the body's organs and systems. What we do know is that these hormones play an important part in our lives.

In response to a perceived stressor, the Stress Response is engaged. Neurons in the hypothalamus of the brain trigger a secretion of two key hormones; corticotrophin and arginine-vasopressin. These hormones trigger a neuroendocrine response producing epinephrine. Epinephrine is essentially a "global warning system" that produces ACTH (adrenocorticotrophic hormones) from the pituitary gland. ACTH charges up the adrenal cortex where

Cortisol and other glucocorticoids are then pumped into the blood stream. These hormones are part of the "flight or fight" response that affects all systems of the body including cardiovascular, respiratory, gastrointestinal, renal and endocrine changes.



The Stress Response is now felt and uniquely experienced physiologically by each person. But, stress also affects others who observe the stressed-out behavior socially and emotionally. The SMQ provides a unique perspective of how stress is affecting not only the body but, also, our daily behavior, attitudes and thoughts.

GAS - GENERAL ADAPTATION SYNDROME

Another way to look at the Stress Response is the **General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS)** that was created by Hans Selye, the father of modern stress theory. Through extensive research, Selye discovered that under stress the body reacts in three phases. The GAS consists of the following:

PHASE ONE: The ALARM REACTION. During this phase the body prepares itself to defend against the stressor (physical or emotional).

PHASE TWO: The body moves into a RESISTANCE PHASE, where it fights to keep the body in balance. This can be a long, protracted phase often covering months or years in chronic stress situations.

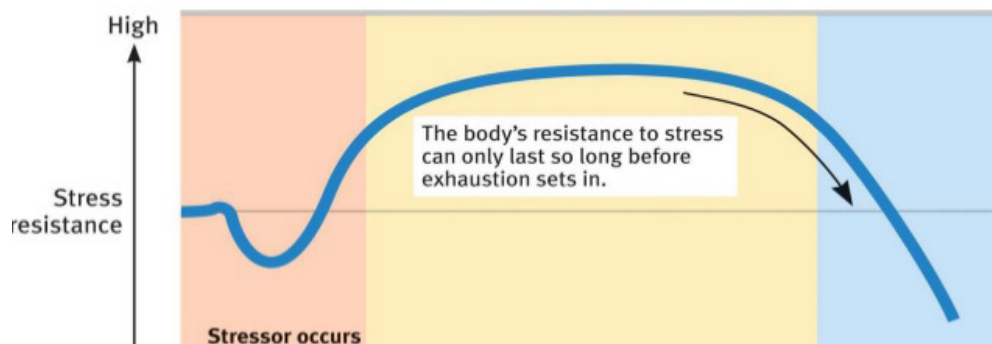
PHASE THREE: The final GAS stage identified by Selye is called the **EXHAUSTION PHASE**. If the Stress Response continues for a long period of time and there is no “buffering” of the effects of the Stress Response, the body becomes exhausted. At this point, systems of the body begin to break down and illness and ill health can occur. The ultimate consequence is death.

WHAT TO DO

The goal in learning to become more stress resilient and to master stress on a daily basis is to pay attention to your body and to take positive steps to reduce and master stress. All the techniques and approaches to mastering stress presented in the previous sections will help you to bring down stress and enable you to master stress more effectively.

General Adaptation Syndrome [GAS] (Identified by Hans Selye):

Our stress response system defends, then fatigues.



The Life/Work Satisfaction Scale assesses emotional satisfaction with different aspects of your work and personal life. As with the Physical Effects Scale, this scale offers a glimpse of the consequences of stress on feelings and emotions and measures the level of happiness with key aspects of your life.

High levels of dissatisfaction in one area can result in unhappiness in other areas. A person who is dissatisfied with his or her career choice can easily bring that dissatisfaction into their home life. When one is dissatisfied, they may show it through anger or, possibly, depression. Likewise, a person experiencing dissatisfaction and unhappiness with their family life can see an impact on their quality or quantity of work. In addition, their relationship with coworkers can also be negatively affected.



WHAT TO KNOW

The Life/Work Satisfaction Scale measures the effect of stress on personal and job/work happiness. This scale can guide you toward those areas where a personal change can improve the quality of your life at work or at home. Only you can make the changes.

If you scored Medium to High on this scale, you appear to be quite dissatisfied with one or more areas of your life. Being unhappy with key areas of your life is a clear stress warning sign. If you have been experiencing high levels of dissatisfaction for some time, take a closer look at the causes of your dissatisfaction. Pay special attention to the Disappointment, Burnout, and Underachievement Scales of the Seven Stress Warning Signs.

WHAT TO DO

Understand that the Stress Response can be both a “friend” or “foe.” The Stress Response can help you to be creative and productive or, if it continues unabated, it can negatively affect you physically and emotionally.

Since the Physical Stress Effects and Life/Work Satisfaction Scales are a reflection of your level of stress, one key to reducing the negative impact is to learn the Relaxation Response. Also, review the “WHAT TO DO” sections of each of the Seven Stress Warning Signs areas for the knowledge and skills that will increase your Stress Mastery abilities. Learning how to reduce tension, stress and anxiety is ultimately up to you.



THE SMQ: STRESSORS



The Stressor Scales measures the more common major life events we all experience, as well as daily hassles that can trigger the stress response. The two types of stressors assessed by the SMQ, Life Events and Hassles Scales, can be divided into those stressors that are unavoidable and those that can, to some extent, be changed or modified.

If you scored High or Medium-High on either the Life Events or the Hassles scales, you appear to be experiencing a higher than normal amount of stressors in your life at this time. If you scored Medium to Low, you probably are not experiencing much distress at this time. However, some life events alone can be so important that it will cause a considerable amount of stress. An example of a major life stressor that could have an overriding impact is the death of a loved one or major loss of financial stability. In these cases, you may score Low on both scales, but the fact that they are so important and powerful a stressor might lead to high stress levels. Regardless of your score, evaluate each stressor to determine the best course of action.



WHAT TO KNOW

What is a stressor? A stressor is an event or person who is viewed or appraised as being negative or threatening. Stressors are very subjective and each person will often view a stressor in a different way. Some will view the event that may be harmful or threatening as “so what” or “who cares.” Others may respond to an event with great angst and consternation.

Stressors can also be in our minds, such as when we are asked to speak in public or when we lay awake at night thinking about possible negative consequences of a job interview or performance review. How we choose to perceive a stressors is at the heart of Stress Mastery.

In general, the Life Events Scale is an indicator of the amount of unavoidable life stressors (problems) that you have experienced during the past 12 months. In addition to the total number of different Life Event stressors experienced, it is important to keep in mind that some major life events can have a stronger or more lasting impact on you than other stressors.

Each person perceives and responds to major Life Events in their own unique way. In general, experiencing a high amount of major Life Events has been shown to be correlated with “future” physical health problems. Due to the uniqueness of each of us and our level of ability to master stressors, it is not always predictable how a person will respond to these stressor events. Sometimes there is an immediate physiological reaction, like getting the common cold, headaches, or experiencing stomach problems. At other times, there is a delay between the onset of multiple negative Life Events and the development of physical problems. The degree to which major life events can affect us is related to our own ability to master stress on a daily basis and our degree of sensitivity.

There is evidence that when one experiences many major life events in a given year that there is a higher “risk” of developing physical health problems in the following year.

Some examples of major Life Events stressors are...

Death of a loved one
Divorce or Separation
Personal injury
Marriage or Retirement
Financial loss
Change of job status
Legal problems

WHAT TO DO

Few of these stressors are preventable and most cannot be changed, although some, such as financial loss, can be prevented by improving how you handle money, such as saving more or finding ways to increase your income. Once they have occurred, there is no way to change or alter them.

ACCEPT THE STRESSOR

The key mastering your response to these unavoidable and uncontrollable stressors is to learn to “let go” and accept the reality of the situation. This is easier said than done; yet, as emotions subside, one can gradually move from rejecting and denying the event to accepting the fact that it has occurred and that there is nothing that can be done to change it. The core of stress mastery is acceptance of what life gives us and to “let go” of trying to change what has happened.



RE-FRAME

Sometimes major life events need to be Re-Framed or put into a different context, so as to give it a new or more effective perspective. For example, the death of a loved one or having a major illness or financial problem can be viewed from multiple perspectives. One person might say, “Why me? What have I done to deserve this? I should have done something to have prevented this.” A re-framing would mean thinking differently such as, “I’m not in control of this situation and there is nothing I can do to change it. I will be strong and positive to help my family and friends weather this storm.”

EMBRACE THE CHALLENGE

People who choose to look at a major stressor as a challenge and not a “problem” function better emotionally and physically. These hardy personalities are the ones who tend to hold up much better. So, mentally challenge yourself to overcome the current difficulties.

The Hassles Scale identifies some of the more common types of daily events that may at first glance seem minor. Hassles are those situations that people experience each and every day that tend to irritate and cause strong emotional responses like anger or frustration. While there are many more hassles than assessed by this scale, these are some of the key stressors you are likely to experience. You can add other types of stressors more pertinent to your job or life as needed.



WHAT TO KNOW

Research has shown that hassles may be more important in producing a strong Stress Response than even major Life Events. Hassles, unlike Life Events, tend to be more frequent and can be extremely irritating if experienced on a perpetual basis.

Hassles are those often little but highly irritating events or situations that cause dissatisfaction, frustration and stress. The more irritating you perceive these hassles to be, the greater the impact on you. Frequent daily hassles in our daily lives can definitely affect our emotional and physical health. Hassles range from car breakdowns and home repairs, to people being late to meet you, or the boss piling on more work. The greater the number or amount of hassles, the greater the risk.

WHAT TO DO

THE RELAXATION RESPONSE IS A CHOICE

How you react to a stressor, whether that stressor is big or small, frequent or infrequent, is up to you. You can choose to react with anger, frustration and irritability or you can choose to accept the stressor for what it is...just an event in your life that will eventually pass.

You can choose to take a deep breath and let stress go, or you can dwell on the problem person or situation and make it worse. Mastering stress is about “letting go” and allowing the body to come back into balance. In medicine this is called homeostasis. To the average person, this means coming back into balance.

CHANGE THE HASSLE

Hassles accumulate and can overwhelm us. Unlike most life events like death, financial loss and taxes, which can be major Stressors to most of us, you can do something about hassles. For example, many hassles occur because we don’t take the time to plan or organize our work and lives. If you are always late for appointments, determine what you can do to improve your timeliness so that you’re not “stressed out” rushing to your next appointment.

MAKE A PLAN

Analyze each of your hassles and make a plan to change your behaviors and attitudes so that you put yourself in a better place to control, reduce or eliminate the hassle.



STRESS MASTERY ACTION PLAN





THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

The Relaxation Response is a quick and easy way to counteract the Stress Response, or as it is commonly known, the “fight or flight” response. Dr. Herbert Benson coined the term Relaxation Response in his book by the same name as a way to combat the Fight or Flight Response.

HOW TO ENGAGE THE RELAXATION RESPONSE

Step 1. *Sit quietly, feet on the floor and hands and shoulders relaxed. Turn off your phone and shut the door. Take several deep breaths filling the upper and lower cavity of the lungs. This brings more oxygen to the brain.*

Step 2. *With eyes closed or open, breathe through your nose and hold your breath for 5 to 10 seconds. Let out the air from your lungs slowly through your mouth. Imagine exhaling through a straw. Be aware of your breath and continue slow, deep breathing for 10 to 20 minutes.*

Step 3. *Keep your mind as passive as possible and when thoughts intrude, accept them and then turn your attention back to your breathing. You may use a word, like One, or Om, or focus on a point in the room.*

Step 4. *Practice several times a day and you will learn to “engage” the Relaxation Response whenever needed.*

CHOICES: ATTITUDE IS EVERYTHING

John is the kind of guy you love to hate. He is always in a good mood and always has something positive to say. When someone would ask him how he was doing, he would reply, "If I were any better, I would be twins!"

He was a natural motivator.

If an employee was having a bad day, John was there telling the employee how to look on the positive side of the situation.

Seeing this style really made me curious, so one day I went up and said to him, "I don't get it!"

You can't be a positive person all of the time. How do you do it?"

He replied, "Each morning I wake up and say to myself, you have two choices today. You can choose to be in a good mood or ... you can choose to be in a bad mood.

I choose to be in a good mood.

*Each time something bad happens, I can choose to be a victim or...
I can choose to learn from it. I choose to learn from it.*

Every time someone comes to me complaining, I can choose to accept their complaining or... I can point out the positive side of life. I choose the positive side of life."

"Yeah, right, it's not that easy," I protested.

"Yes, it is," he replied. "Life is all about choices. When you cut away all the junk, every situation presents choices. You choose how you react to situations. You choose how people affect your mood.

*You choose to be in a good mood or bad mood.
The bottom line: It's your choice how you live your life."*

I reflected on what he said. Soon thereafter, I left the Tower Industry to start my own business. We lost touch, but I often thought about him when I made a choice about life instead of reacting to it.

Several years later, I heard that he was involved in a serious accident, falling some 60 feet from a communications tower.

After 18 hours of surgery and weeks of intensive care, he was released from the hospital with rods placed in his back.

I saw him about six months after the accident.

When I asked him how he was, he replied, "If I were any better, I'd be twins. Wanna see my scars?"

I declined to see his wounds, but I did ask him what had gone through his mind as the accident took place.

"The first thing that went through my mind was the well-being of my soon-to-be born daughter," he replied. "Then, as I lay on the ground, I remembered that I had two choices: I could choose to live or...I could choose to die. I chose to live."

"Weren't you scared? Did you lose consciousness?" I asked.

He continued, "The paramedics were great.

They kept telling me I was going to be fine. But when they wheeled me into the ER and I saw the expressions on the faces of the doctors and nurses, I got really scared. In their eyes, I read 'he's a dead man'. I knew I needed to take action."

"What did you do?" I asked.

"Well, there was a big burly nurse shouting questions at me," said John. "She asked if I was allergic to anything. 'Yes', I replied. The doctors and nurses stopped working as they waited for my reply. I took a deep breath and yelled, 'Gravity.'

Over their laughter, I told them, 'I am choosing to live.' Operate on me as if I am alive, not dead.'"

He lived, thanks to the skill of his doctors, but also because of his amazing attitude... I learned from him that every day we have the choice to live fully.

Attitude, after all, is everything!

Author Unknown

STRESSMASTER INTERNATIONAL

COMMITMENT FOR CHANGE EXERCISE

Now it is time to make a commitment to creating a positive change and move toward Stress Mastery. Review the Stress Warning Signs section and select ONE area to work on. Copy this page for more areas, behaviors or attitudes to work on.

1: WHAT HAVE YOU LEARNED ABOUT YOURSELF BY TAKING THE SMQ:

2. SELECT THE AREA/BEHAVIOR TO WORK ON -

3: WHAT WOULD YOU LIKE TO CHANGE - E.g., behaviors, thoughts, or attitudes

4: WHAT WILL PREVENT YOU FROM BEING SUCCESSFUL? - People, things, my attitudes, lack of knowledge, lack of commitment, etc.:

5: WHAT WILL YOU DO TO OVERCOME THESE BARRIERS?

6. WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS YOU CAN EXPECT IF I MAKE THESE CHANGES?

7. WHAT IS YOUR COMMITMENT TO CHANGE” HIGH MED LOW

8: TIME COMMITMENT: I will allow myself _____ months to achieve a level of success.

9: COMMITMENT: I COMMIT to accomplish this goal! Sign: _____

10: ACCOUNTABLE: I give permission to _____ to hold me accountable.

IMPORTANT

Copy and share this contract with another person as soon as possible. Post on your refrigerator, bathroom mirror, or office wall! Let others help you to be accountable for your change.

Remember, a secret goal is rarely achieved.

KEYS TO STRESS MASTERY

The Stress Response is a choice. So, too, is the Relaxation Response! Choose the Relaxation Response...it will bring your body, mind and spirit back into balance.

Life is a journey over which you have some control...even if you choose to do nothing to improve your life and reduce your stress, you have made that choice.

Stress Mastery begins with changing your thinking, expectations and perceptions...not by trying to change the people and events around you.

Determine what you can and cannot change. Take action to affect a change when a change is possible. If the stressor cannot be changed—change your thinking about the stressor and “let it go”.

Recognize that your actions and words can be the source of incredible stress to others and yourself! Use the power of positive words and an upbeat attitude to affect a change in your world.

Fear and anxiety are at the root of many stress problems. Flow with fear of rejection, failure or not being in control. Fear is simply a function of how you perceive the threats of the world, even when the threat is only being a few minutes late. Flow and “let go”!

Keep expectations realistic. Nothing gets a person into trouble faster than expecting something that cannot or will not happen. If it is not going to happen, change or lower your expectations. That is the choice.

Use the resources available when you believe you have a problem. Work at problem solving, not playing the blame game. Seeking sympathy for your misfortunes will not change your misfortunes and will only hinder your movement toward Stress Mastery. If you are chronically depressed, seek out an appropriate doctor to see if your depression is influenced by stress or perhaps some chemical imbalance in your body.

Avoid over-using chemical substances to control your anxious and stressful feelings. Exercise, yoga, deep breathing, relaxation techniques, making love, giving or receiving a massage, walking, or listening to music are far better at producing serenity and calm than any chemical. Plus, you remain in control of your life.

STRESSMASTER INTERNATIONAL

RESOURCES

For additional assistance on your road to Stress Mastery, consider one or more of the following:

If in a Crisis Call...

- 911
- A friend, spouse, minister or rabbi
- Your physician or mental health professional

If not in a crisis, contact one or more of the following:

- EAP (Employee Assistance Program)
- Information and Referral Service in your community
- Local or State Psychological Association Information and Referral
- Local or State Social Worker's Association Information and Referral
- Your physician, hospital or clinic
- A psychologist, psychiatrist, marriage and family counselor or social worker
- A clergy member

World Wide Web

www.Stressmaster.com	Stressmaster Website
www.nimh.gov	National Institute of Mental Health
www.nih.gov	National Institute of Health
www.medscape.com	You may need to create a login I.D.
www.healthcentral.com	Good general health and mental health topics
www.intelihealth.com	The John Hopkins Medical Newsletter

SOME RESOURCES - MANY MORE ARE AVAILABLE IN YOUR BOOKSTORE.

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