



Many of us worry about stress, wonder about it and wish it would go away.

Education and behavioural consultant Therese Hoyle looks at some of the ways to overcome stress.

# Stress Busters

**T**he word stress can be defined as 'any force which causes an object to change'.

When we suffer stresses and strains in our body, it is our bodies response to physical, chemical, emotional or spiritual forces asking us to in some way adapt. It is our warning sign to change and

enhance the quality of our lives.

Too often, however we do not listen to our bodies and end up with *distress*, which manifests physically as pain, muscle tension, injury or

disease; emotionally with symptoms of jealousy, insecurity, feelings of inferiority to concentrate, poor decision making, mental disorientation etc.

After a particularly stressful period in my life a few years ago where my relationship broke down, I moved house and a member of my family died, I surprisingly enough, a few months later, became very ill. My body collapsed because I wasn't able to handle the stresses and the strains in my life.

Consequently I decided something had to change and it sure wasn't going to be my circumstances!

Yes I had to change.

A recent research report (Jan 1996) by the Industrial Society, of 699 top companies showed that 83% of managers interviewed said that stress won.

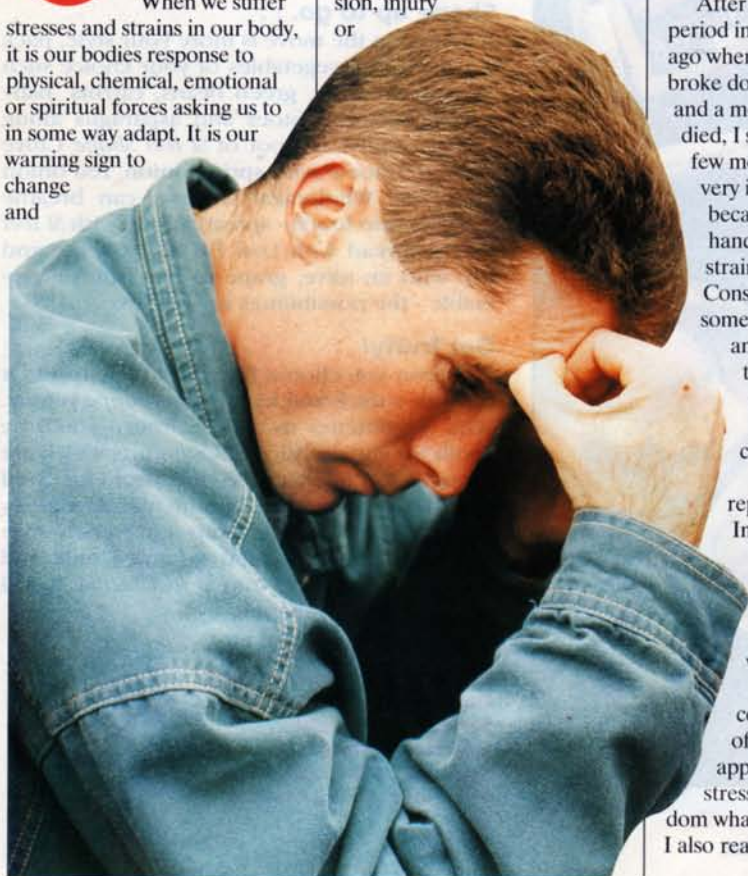
The big secret I discovered about all kinds of stress is that what appears to be causing the stress, the stressor, is seldom what causes damage. I also realised that stress only

becomes bad when I handle it "badly" either by fighting it, running from it, burying it, intellectualising it, suppressing it, or doing nothing about it. In fact I would say that one of the biggest causes of stress is doing nothing about it.

The idea that all stress is bad is absolute nonsense. Stress can be the spice of life, it can be exciting, exhilarating – in fact we frequently thrive on it. However as we also know too much spice, for some, leads to burn out. If we are suddenly confronted by an actual life-threatening situation such as a car hurtling towards us out of control, our response is immediate. The body goes on an emergency full alert and prepares for physical activity. This is often referred to as the fight or flight response.

Any so called 'negative emotion', be it fear anxiety, worry, depression or guilt holds a wonderful potential for learning, growth and getting out of the way of a head on collision.

Therefore I'm going to outline in my article 7 ways of dealing with stress to make it work positively for you. These are ideas that I've learnt and work for me, I know they'll work for you too.



Lets look at a weekly personal care plan.

1. First of all take a look at your life and make a list of all the unnecessary stressors, - they may not be obvious!

Use the following list as a prompt.

- Threat of redundancy
- Poor relationships with colleagues
- Financial difficulties
- Living or working in a noisy area
- Change of job or living conditions
- Current life events requiring change
- Poor health
- Too much responsibility
- Unhappy relationship
- Lack of stimulation, boredom
- Not enough time
- Expectations too high or too low
- Poor self image

Now make yourself a chart, writing down all the stressors in the left hand column.

stressed.

2. Change your attitude

Start by looking at your life as a school for learning.

It is vital you hold a space in your mind where you accept the possibility that if I look at something differently, I will see something different. Three of my favourite phrases are:

"There's another way of looking at this"

"I could see peace instead of this."

"I am determined to see things differently."

Choose one of these phrases/sayings each day. So today when that woman on the bus starts to annoy you again by humming that irritating tune under her breath, say one of these phrases to yourself and the likelihood that she stops bothering you so much or ceases to bother you at all. She becomes an object of pity or amusement and no longer one of your stressors.

Choose one of these say-

feel your whole body relaxing, releasing and letting go.

Listen to mellow music.

Treat yourself to a massage, an aromatherapy treatment.

Take a bath with 5-6 drops of lavender oil added.

During the evening, light a few candles and turn off the lights. You could even take a relaxing bath by candlelight.

If you have problems sleeping, put a few drops of lavender oil on your pillow.

Finally, take a walk in the countryside, among the flowers, trees and nature.

Think of at least one thing that makes you feel relaxed and treat yourself at least once a week; you may even want to try something new.

5. Quality Time

So often when we find time for ourselves we simply collapse in front of the T.V.

Instead plan for these moments and fill them with quality - hobbies, interests,

communication, intimacy and other enjoyable activities for instance, then this time will be even more valuable to you.

6. Eat a healthy, balanced diet  
Eat sensibly.

Cut down on all

refined and processed foods, sugar, fried fatty foods, additives and all stimulants like tea, coffee and alcohol. Instead eat more wholegrains, vegetables, fruit, pasta, seafood, poultry and dairy products. Water is also essential for cleansing the body so try to drink at least 4-6 glasses a day.

In addition see Lynda's High Energy Eating.

7. Laugh Alot

Take time to laugh. Watch a good comedy on television, go out to a comedy show or alternatively meet up with those amusing friends of yours.

When it comes to stress, if you can laugh at it you can live with it. Laughter can help us see things differently, make us feel happy, inspire us. What nourishment!

No one can ever be immune to close encounters of the stressful kind.

Remember it's how you handle it that counts.

| Stressor                       | My response to stressor                     | How can I change my response | Positive outcome                  |
|--------------------------------|---|------------------------------|-----------------------------------|
| eg. Too busy. Not enough time. | Frustration, not able to get anything done. | Organise myself more.        | More quality time with my family. |

Next write down your responses to the stressor, how it makes you feel. Then decide how you could change and finally the best bit, the Positive outcome.

Now don't you feel better already.

Actually knowing we can do something to change and improve the quality of our lives is an important step in helping us become less

ings each day and see it work for you.

Unless you are prepared to think differently, you will experience no difference.

3. Exercise

Start an exercise programme - running, swim aerobics, dancing or yoga and follow it regularly 2 or more times a week.

Medical research indicates the better shape you are the

easier you will find it to handle stress.

4. Relax

Make time to relax.

Learn a technique for conscious relaxation such as meditation or relaxed breathing.

When feeling stressed take deep breaths and

