

Proven Techniques to Reduce Stress

By Dr Angus McLeod – Champion, Personal Growth

Our bodies need a level of stress to perform but if our stress level causes loss of wellbeing, nervous habits and loss of concentration then the stress level is too much. Also, if work or life-related stresses prevent you from relaxing and sleeping then the roll-over effect of stress is also unacceptable for a healthy life. Now you can do something about it!

At the root of stress is one thing that starts the stress build-up creates further problems - that is irregular breathing. So the first thing to notice is your breathing and to practice breathing slow and normally rather than quickly, shallow or erratically. Why is this important? Rapid, shallow breathing has the effect¹ of reducing the proper concentration of carbon dioxide in the blood-stream. Low levels of carbon dioxide affect the heart making the stress symptoms worse and creating further anxiety. Because stress reduces your ability to concentrate you will need an effort of will to keep returning your attention to your breathing and improving it.

Once your breathing is near normal, it is worth considering whether you have thought through the cause of the stress and considered all options. And I mean in three ways by asking yourself:

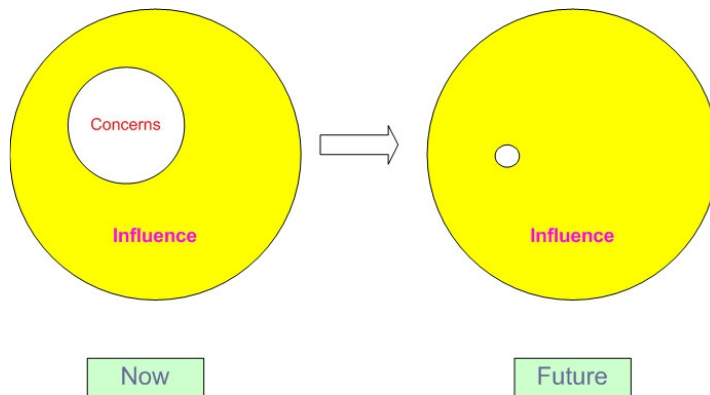
- **What is anything can I do to reduce the external origin of the stress?**
- **Is this really my problem or someone else's?**
- **What choices do I have to about how I react internally to the situation?**

In each case, it may help to have someone who cares about you to help you work through these questions fully. If you are stressed, it is because the thinking you had was inadequate to deal with the situation. And that means you need to change the way you think! So a close friend or wellbeing-practitioner can help you explore these questions and reduce your anxiety about the situation.

Sometimes there are situations where you have no real control and little chance to make the situation any better. For example, where a partner is dying. Mostly though, we do have another way to reduce stress and that has to do with how we focus our attention – please see the diagram.

The left side of the diagram shows how some people think about things in their lives by having too much of their concentration on concerns and issues where they have little or no control at all. When they concentrate on those things it means they spend less time thinking about (and doing things) where they can have impact in their lives. This is 'wellbeing thinking'. If these same people change to 'wellbeing thinking' then they switch their concentration to those impact areas. This has immediate and longer term benefits. Immediately the person's attention is focused on something useful to them. And in the longer term, success brings more self-confidence, more wellbeing and an improved ability to deal with stress using that same strategy.

¹ McLeod, A. (2003), Performance Coaching, Crown House, Carmarthen & New York



Concerns and Influence

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If we are often stressed it is possible that we become habituated to the feelings and behaviours of stress and forget how to be relaxed! For that reason it is important to re-programme your body to experience relaxation often during each day. Make times available to be secluded without interruption, put in ear plugs if necessary or gentle music (without speech or singing). Daydream to a time when you felt most relaxed, most happy, most secure and try and be in that place, and in that mental state, as well as you can be. Repeat this as often as possible and you will get better and better at it!

Lastly, if you are not regularly getting aerobic exercise then I recommend that you put this into your programme for personal wellbeing. Once you start, it is difficult to stop because the body craves oxygen and the 'endorphins' that are the feel-good chemicals that active bodies create. Power-walking, running, gym-work, cycling, swimming, group work-outs to music and/or the motivating effect of a well-being personal-trainer will all help to balance your life and reduce the effect of stress. Remember that stress starves the tissues of oxygen, it ages the tissues, and it increases the chance of disease and accident. Act now and make unhealthy stress history. We at the well-being network are here to help you to make that journey faster!

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