



# STRESS LESS

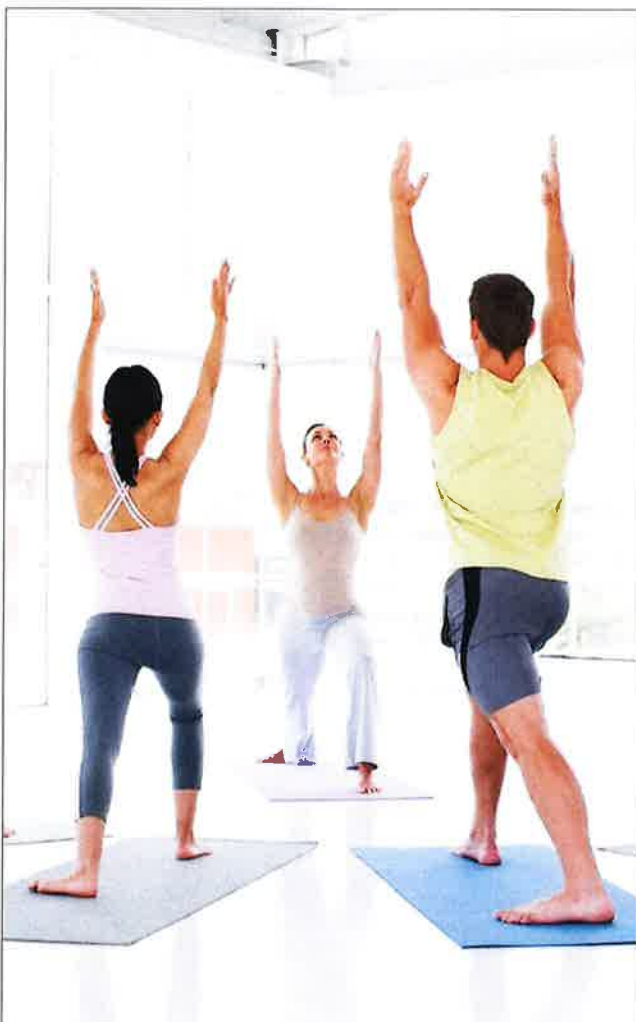
*Being in the moment*

## Stress

Stress is an expected human response to challenging or dangerous situations. Experiencing stress is part of being alive. A small amount of stress, such as meeting a challenge or deadline can actually be helpful. It can lead to increased alertness, energy and productivity. A complete lack of stress can lead to reduced motivation and performance.

Stress triggers off the 'fight or flight' response, preparing the body to take action against potential danger. Hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol are released, causing the heart rate, metabolism and breathing rate to speed up.

This works well for short-term threats but if the stress response goes on for too long, it can have damaging effects on the mind and body. It can also lead to anxiety and/or depression



## Anxiety

Anxiety is more than just feeling stressed or worried. While stress and anxious feelings are a common response to a situation where a person feels under pressure, it usually passes once the stressful situation has passed, or 'stressor' is removed.

Anxiety is when these anxious feelings don't subside. Anxiety is when they are ongoing and exist without any particular reason or cause. We all feel anxious from time to time, but for a person experiencing anxiety, these feelings cannot be easily controlled.

People with anxiety may be unable to stop worrying about seemingly unimportant things, and they can perceive situations as much worse than they actually are. It interferes with the enjoyment of life and disrupts work, relationships and self-perceptions, sleep and the ability to concentrate. Physical symptoms are common, such as shortness of breath, a pounding heart and shaking hands. It is important to know that anxiety is treatable.

The treatments for anxiety that works for you depends on you and the type of anxiety you are experiencing. Common treatments for anxiety include:

- Breathing, relaxation, meditation and mindfulness techniques are especially important for relieving and managing physical symptoms.
- Exercise – even a short 10 minute walk can improve how you feel. Exercise helps boost serotonin levels – these are feel-good hormones. Getting involved in activities and pastimes you enjoy is also very beneficial. Making sure you have something to look forward to. Tackling small tasks that you may have been avoiding may help you to feel better about yourself.
- Reducing Caffeine because caffeine can increase anxiety. It can alter your sleep patterns so you are not fully rested. It also speeds up your heartbeat, which can make anxiety worse. Reducing caffeine in your diet; so not only cutting back on tea and coffee but also chocolate, cola and energy drinks.
- Alcohol consumption in moderation is very beneficial, as with caffeine it negatively affects sleep, heartrate and general wellbeing.
- If you smoke; you need to stop. Quitting smoking is one of the best ways to improve your overall health and wellbeing. It can also help reduce anxiety
- Using professional psychological support such as counselling or psychotherapy to talk and explore how you feel and the life events that are causing the anxiety is very effective in finding solutions, feeling supported and gaining wellness.

## Depression

Depression is more than just a low mood – it's a serious illness that has an impact on both physical and mental health. Depression is often a numb feeling rather than sadness. Often it's not something you can control or just get over like the 'blues'. It is important to know that depression can be treated.

While the exact cause of depression isn't known, a number of things can be associated with its development. Generally, depression does not result from a single event, but from a combination of recent events and other longer-term or personal factors.

There's no one treatment for depression and often a combination of treatments are most effective. Interestingly the same common treatments for anxiety (as listed above) work equally as effectively for depression.

## Self Compassion

So what is self compassion and why is it useful? Having compassion for yourself is really no different than having compassion for others. Think about what the experience of compassion feels like. First, to have compassion for others you must notice that they are suffering. If you ignore that homeless person on the street, then you can't feel compassion for how difficult his or her experience is. Second, compassion involves feeling moved by another persons suffering so that your heart responds to their pain (the word compassion literally means to "suffer with"). When this occurs, you feel warmth, caring, and the desire to help the suffering person in some way. Having compassion also means that you offer understanding and kindness to others when they fail or make mistakes, rather than judging them harshly. Finally, when you feel compassion for another (rather than mere pity), it means that you realise that suffering, failure, and imperfection is part of the shared human experience.

Self-compassion involves acting the same way towards yourself when you are having a difficult time, or there is a failure, or notice something you don't like about yourself. Instead of just ignoring your pain with a "stiff upper lip" mentality, you stop to tell yourself "this is really difficult right now," how can I comfort and care for myself in this moment?

Why is Self-compassion important?

- It lowers stress
- We become more resilient
- It is likely that we will more frequently practice health promoting behaviours
- We become more adaptive at coping with our illness and our life in general.

Dr Kristin Neff is a pioneering self compassion researcher, author and teacher. On her web page <http://self-compassion.org> She has made available her audio programs. I highly recommend viewing her site and practicing the meditations. The 7 minute self-compassion meditation is particularly special.

## Mindfulness

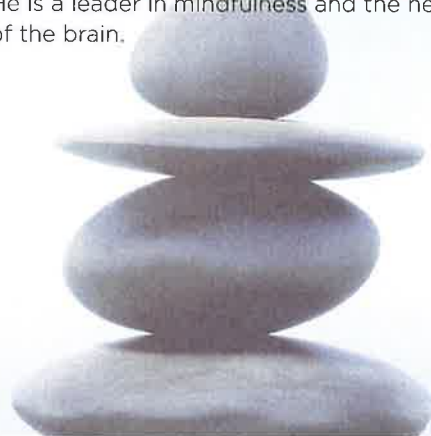
Let's start with the breath. The breath naturally regulates the nervous system, it is profoundly simple and fundamental to use as well as to create change.

The simple act of changing the way we sit with an intention to concentrate on our breath is already starting to send the brain signals to think and to do things differently.

Our breath is the fast track to our nervous system. If we create awareness around our breath it initiates a relaxation response in our parasympathetic nervous system. When we move into the parasympathetic nervous system we are allowing our body's to more easily access the healing, rejuvenating activities; it slows the heart rate, increases digestive system, it is the parasympathetic nervous system that the body moves into when we are sleeping.

Through practicing mindfulness of the body and relaxed attention, you learn to be with whatever sensation is arising in the body, regardless of whether it is pleasant or unpleasant, without trying to hold on to or push away the experience. When you are more able to be with the sensations in your body you are able to turn your attention to your mind states, all of which register in the body. As a result, your mind can then become spacious, alert, curious, and equanimous.

There is a huge choice of mindfulness techniques available on the Internet. I highly recommend Rick Hanson's site <https://www.rickhanson.net/>. He is a leader in mindfulness and the neuroplasticity of the brain.



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