

**ELIMINATE
STRESS AND
ANXIETY
FROM
YOUR LIFE**

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INTRODUCTION

It seems like you hear it all the time from nearly every one you know – “I’m SO stressed out!” Pressures abound in this world today. Those pressures cause stress and anxiety, and often we are ill-equipped to deal with those stressors that trigger anxiety and other feelings that can make us sick. Literally, sick.

The statistics are staggering. One in every eight Americans age 18-54 suffers from an anxiety disorder. This totals over 19 million people! Research conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health has shown that anxiety disorders are the number one mental health problem among American women and are second only to alcohol and drug abuse by men.

Women suffer from anxiety and stress almost twice as much as men. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in America, surpassing even depression in numbers. Anxiety is the most common mental health issue facing adults over 65 years of age. Anxiety disorders cost the U.S. \$46.6 billion annually. Anxiety sufferers see an average of five doctors before being successfully diagnosed.

Unfortunately, stress and anxiety go hand in hand. In fact, one of the major symptoms of stress is anxiety. And stress accounts for 80 percent of all illnesses either directly or indirectly.

In fact, stress is more dangerous than we thought. You've probably heard that it can raise your blood pressure, increasing the likelihood of a stroke in the distant future, but recently a health insurance brochure claimed that 90 percent of visits to a primary care physician were stress-related disorders.

Health Psychology magazine reports that chronic stress can interfere with the normal function of the body's immune system. And studies have proven that stressed individuals have an increased vulnerability to catching an illness and are more susceptible to allergic, autoimmune, or cardiovascular diseases.

Doctors agree that during chronic stress, the functions of the body that are nonessential to survival, such as the digestive and immune systems, shut down. "This is why people get sick," he says. "There are also many occurrences of psychosomatic illness, an illness with an emotional or psychological side to it."

Furthermore, stress often prompts people to respond in unhealthy ways such as smoking, drinking alcohol, eating poorly, or becoming physically inactive. This damages the body in addition to the wear and tear of the stress itself.

Stress is a part of daily life. It's how we react to it that makes all the difference in maintaining our health and well-being. Pressures occur throughout life and those pressures cause stress. You need to realize that you will never completely get rid of stress in your life, but you can learn coping techniques to turn that stress into a healthier situation.

When I first got the assignment to write this book, I immediately thought, "Sure, you can eliminate stress and anxiety by locking yourself into a room and never talking to anyone ever again". But that wouldn't make a very informative book, now would it?

I have suffered from anxiety disorders caused by stress for years. I have learned somewhat how to cope with that although I'm always learning new things and dealing mechanisms. So what I've done in this book is taken some of my own experiences and combined them with advice from

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experts to give you tools that will help you in stressful situations.

I've also outlined different ways you can face debilitating anxiety and panic attacks that many people suffer from. While researching this book, I've come across some amazing information and can't wait to share it with you. I've learned so much myself, so let's look at how to eliminate stress and anxiety from your life!

WHY ARE WE SO STRESSED OUT?

We're living in very trying and difficult times and things don't seem to be getting any easier. Sometimes life can seem terribly painful and unfair, yet somehow we manage to struggle on, day after day, hoping and praying that things will soon get better.

But day by day the world is becoming a crazier and more uncertain place to live in, not to mention stressful. Nothing seems safe anymore. Millions of people are in record levels of debt. Many are losing their jobs, their homes, their health and sometimes even their sanity. Worry, depression and anxiety seem to have become a way of life for way too many people.

We seem to have entered the Age of Anxiety. In fact, in 2002, the cover of Time magazine proclaimed this loud and clear on one of their covers as the featured story in that issue. The constant stress and uncertainties of living in the 21st century have certainly taken their toll, and as a result many of us seem to live a life of constant fear and worry.

When the terrorist attacks happened on September 11, this constant stress and worry seemed to just be magnified. In fact, many people even now four years later report they

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are still scared that something of that magnitude could happen again – perhaps closer to them.

Turn on the news or open up a newspaper and we are bombarded with disturbing images and stories. We begin to wonder if we are safe anywhere. In this, the information age, never before have we had so much access to so much data.

The economy is another stressor. Our country is in debt and so are many Americans. Soaring gas prices, outrageous housing costs, even the cost of food has sent many Americans to work in jobs that are unsatisfying and tedious. They work these jobs because they need a paycheck. Today, it's more important to bring home the bacon rather than work in a dream career.

Having more women in the workplace adds to the stress. So many women feel the need to be everything to everyone and that includes a paycheck earner, house keeper, mom, wife, daughter, and sibling. The only problem with that is some women just don't make any time for themselves thus contributing to their stress levels being at an all-time high.

Even children can feel the pressure of stress and anxiety. Teenagers who want to go to college find themselves pushing themselves during their studies to try and obtain scholarships so they can attend schools that have ever increasing tuition costs.

They find themselves having to hold down part-time jobs on top of all that to earn money for extras that their parents can no longer afford. Add peer pressure into the mix and you have a veritable pressure cooker!

Cell phones, internet, palm pilots, blackberries, i-pods – we are always on the go and always reachable. We don't make time to relax and enjoy life any more. Why not? We certainly should!

We feel pressure to do these things because we think we HAVE to, not because we WANT to. All too often, it's difficult for people to just say "No". Not saying that one little word piles up un-needed expectations and obligations that make us feel anxious.

All of us will experience situations that may cause us to become stressed or feel anxious. The reasons are too many to note but can include, buying a property, having guests stay over (in-laws!), being bullied, exams, looking after children, managing finances, relationship issues, traveling etc.

Stress is a 'normal' function of everyday life. Only when it appears to take over our lives does it then become a problem.

Everyone will have different reasons why a situation causes them pressure. As a rule it's usually when we don't feel in control of a situation, then we feel its grip tightening around us causing us to feel worried or 'stressed'.

If stress is caused by us not feeling in control of a situation, the answer is to try and reverse this, and regain that control. The good news is: YOU CAN!

You have everything inside you that you need to overcome your stress and the accompanying anxiety. The problem is, often we don't realize that we are in control because we feel so out of control at time. But the tools are there, you just have to use them.

Let's first look at the barriers we put up that are preventing us from becoming healthy and getting rid of our anxiety and stress.

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BLOCKING BEHAVIORS KEEPING YOUR STRESS ALIVE

There are three obsessive behaviors that you are likely to be engaging in that impeded your healing process and stop you from enjoying a stress-free life. Recognizing these barriers can be a great first step toward getting rid of the problems that go with being too stressed.

The first is obsessive negativity. When you are obsessively negative, it means that you have a tendency toward being "negative" about people, places, situations, and things in your life.

Perhaps you find yourself saying things like "I can't do this!" or "No one understands!" or "Nothing ever works!", for example. You may be doing this unconsciously, but essentially you have what's known as a "sour grapes" attitude, and it holds you back from knowing what it's like to view life from a positive lens and enjoy the beauty in yourself and people around you! There's a whole world out there for you...with happiness and positive thinking.

Then you have obsessive perfectionism. When you engage in obsessive perfectionism, you are centered on trying to do everything "just so" to the point of driving yourself into an anxious state of being. You may find yourself making statements such as, "I have to do this right, or I'll be a failure!" or "If I am not precise, people will be mad at me!" Again, this behavior may be totally under the threshold of your awareness, but it interferes greatly with your ability to enjoy things without feeling "uptight" and "stressed."

Finally there is obsessive analysis. When you are obsessed about analyzing things, you find yourself wanting to re-hash a task or an issue over and over again. For instance, you might find yourself making statements such as, "I need to look this over, study it, and know it inside and

out...or else I can't relax!" or "If I relax and let things go without looking them over repeatedly, things go wrong!"

While analytical thinking is an excellent trait, if it's done in excess you never get to stop and smell the roses because you're too busy trying to analyze everything and everyone around you. Gaining insight into this type of behavior is one of the most important keys to letting go of stress, and getting complete power over your anxiety.

If you find yourself engaging in any of the above "Blocking Behaviors", there are two things you can do to help yourself. First, ask the people you know, love, and trust, "Am I negative about things?", "Do I complain a lot?", and "Am I difficult to be around?"

This may be hard for you to listen to, as the truth sometimes hurts a great deal. But the insight you will get from others' assessment of you is invaluable, and you'll know precisely how others see you. Accept their comments as helpful info, and know that you will gain amazing insights from what you hear.

Second, keep a journal to write down and establish patterns of when you are using "blocking behaviors." Even if you are not thrilled with the idea of writing, you can make little entries into a note book or journal each day. The great part is that you'll begin to see patterns in your behavior that reveal exactly what you're doing to prevent yourself from curing your anxiety.

We'll give you some great stress busting techniques later in the book, but you need to recognize these blockages first so you can move into the "healing" stage and conquer your stress and anxiety.

Many people think that stress and anxiety are the same thing. This couldn't be further from the truth!

STRESS OR ANXIETY

Contrary to popular belief, there is a difference between stress and anxiety. Stress comes from the pressures we feel in life, as we are pushed by work or any other task that puts undue pressure on our minds and body, adrenaline is released, extended stay of the hormone causes depression, a rise in the blood pressure and other negative changes and effects.

One of these negative effects is anxiety. With anxiety, fear overcomes all emotions accompanied by worry and apprehension, making a person a recluse and a bagful of jitters. Other symptoms are chest pains, dizziness, and shortness of breath and panic attacks.

Stress is caused by an existing stress-causing factor or stressor. Anxiety is stress that continues after that stressor is gone. Stress can come from any situation or thought that makes you feel frustrated, angry, nervous, or even anxious. What is stressful to one person is not necessarily stressful to another.

Anxiety is a feeling of apprehension or fear and is almost always accompanied by feelings of impending doom. The source of this uneasiness is not always known or recognized, which can add to the distress you feel.

Stress is the way our bodies and minds react to something which upsets our normal balance in life; an example of stress is the response we feel when we are frightened or threatened. During stressful events our adrenal glands release adrenaline, a hormone which activates our body's defense mechanisms causing our hearts to pound, blood pressure to rise, muscles to tense, and the pupils of our eyes to dilate.

A principal indication of increased stress is an escalation in your pulse rate; however, a normal pulse rate doesn't necessarily mean you aren't stressed. Constant aches and pains, palpitations, anxiety, chronic fatigue, crying, over or under- eating, frequent infections, and a decrease in your sexual desire are signs you may notice which indicate you may be under stress.

Of course, every time we are under stress, we do not react to such an extreme and we are not always under such great duress or fear every time we are confronted with a stressful situation.

Some people are more susceptible than others to stress; for some, even ordinary daily decisions seem insurmountable. Deciding what to have for dinner or what to buy at the store, is a seemingly, monumental dilemma for them. On the other hand, there are those people, who seem to thrive under stress by becoming highly productive being driven by the force of pressure.

Research shows women with children have higher levels of stress related hormones in their blood than women without children. Does this mean women without children don't experience stress? Absolutely not!

It means that women without children may not experience stress as often or to the same degree which women with children do. This means for women with children, it's particularly important to schedule time for yourself; you will be in a better frame of mind to help your children and meet the daily challenge of being a parent, once your stress level is reduced.

Anxiety, on the other hand, is a feeling of unease. Everybody experiences it when faced with a stressful situation, for example before an exam or an interview, or during a worrying time such as illness. It is normal to feel anxious when facing something difficult or dangerous and mild anxiety can be a positive and useful experience.

However, for many people, anxiety interferes with normal life. Excessive anxiety is often associated with other psychiatric conditions, such as depression. Anxiety is considered abnormal when it is very prolonged or severe, it happens in the absence of a stressful event, or it is interfering with everyday activities such as going to work.

The physical symptoms of anxiety are caused by the brain sending messages to parts of the body to prepare for the "fight or flight" response. The heart, lungs and other parts of the body work faster. The brain also releases stress hormones, including adrenaline. Common indicators of excessive anxiety include:

- Diarrhea
- Dry mouth
- Rapid heartbeat or palpitations
- Insomnia
- Irritability or anger
- Inability to concentrate
- Fear of being "crazy"
- Feeling unreal and not in control of your actions which is called depersonalization

Anxiety can be brought on in many ways. Obviously, the presence of stress in your life can make you have anxious thoughts. Many people who suffer from anxiety disorders occupy their minds with excessive worry. This can be worry about anything from health matters to job problems to world issues.

Certain drugs, both recreational and medicinal, can also lead to symptoms of anxiety due to either side effects or withdrawal from the drug. Such drugs include caffeine, alcohol, nicotine, cold remedies, and decongestants, bronchodilators for asthma, tricyclic antidepressants, cocaine, amphetamines, diet pills, ADHD medications, and thyroid medications.

A poor diet can also contribute to stress or anxiety -- for example, low levels of vitamin B12. Performance anxiety is related to specific situations, like taking a test or making a presentation in public. Post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) is a stress disorder that develops after a traumatic event like war, physical or sexual assault, or a natural disaster.

In very rare cases, a tumor of the adrenal gland (pheochromocytoma) may be the cause of anxiety. This happens because of an overproduction of hormones responsible for the feelings and symptoms of anxiety.

While anxiety may seem a bit scary, what's even scarier is that excessive anxiety and stress can lead to depression. Suffering from depression can be a lifelong struggle as I well know, but the good news is that all of this is manageable!

So, let's take a few little quizzes to see if you are suffering from too much stress, excessive anxiety, or depression.

QUIZ TIME!

Before you begin here, let us tell you that we are not medical professionals. This information has come from reliable sources and isn't meant to be a complete diagnostic tool in any way. These quizzes are simply guidelines to help you recognize any problems you might have and be able to effectively deal with those problems.

Because depression can be the most serious of our topics, let's start by seeing if you may be depressed. Keep in mind that everyone has their "blue" days. The thing that separates clinical depression from simple melancholy is that the symptoms occur over a period of time. They don't come and go, they stay around for awhile and can affect your life adversely.

Ask yourself the following questions. Answer yes if you've been feeling this way consistently over a period of two weeks.

1. Do you find yourself constantly sad?
2. Are you un-motivated to do simple things like shower, clean up the house, or make dinner?
3. Do people tell you you're overly irritable?
4. Do you have trouble concentrating?
5. Are you feeling isolated from family and friends even when they are around you?
6. Have you lost interest in your favorite activities?
7. Do you feel hopeless, worthless, or guilty for no reason at all?
8. Are you always tired and have trouble sleeping?
9. Has your weight fluctuated significantly?

If you can answer "Yes" to five or more of these questions, you could be suffering from clinical depression. It is important for you to seek out the help of a medical professional whether that be a doctor or a therapist. There are many medications out there that can help with depression.

I always tried to deny my own depression, but once I began taking an anti-depressant, I couldn't believe what a difference that one pill a day made! It gave me freedom from the "black hole" I had fallen into and helped me enjoy life again, so if you think you are depressed, ACT NOW! You deserve to be happy!

But this book is about stress and anxiety, so let's see if you are overly stressed out. Ask yourself the following:

1. Do you worry constantly and cycle with negative self-talk?
2. Do you have difficulty concentrating?
3. Do you get mad and react easily?
4. Do you have recurring neck or headaches?
5. Do you grind your teeth?
6. Do you frequently feel overwhelmed, anxious or depressed?
7. Do you feed your stress with unhealthy habits-eating or drinking excessively, smoking, arguing, or avoiding yourself and life in other ways?
8. Do small pleasures fail to satisfy you?
9. Do you experience flashes of anger over a minor problem?

If you can answer "Yes" to most of these questions, then you do have excessive stress in your life. The good news is that you've bought this book and will learn many valuable techniques to cope with that stress. But we'll get to that later!

Let's move on to anxiety.

1. Do you experience shortness of breath, heart palpitation or shaking while at rest?
2. Do you have a fear of losing control or going crazy?
3. Do you avoid social situations because of fear?
4. Do you have fears of specific objects?
5. Do you fear that you will be in a place or situation from which you cannot escape?
6. Do you feel afraid of leaving your home?
7. Do you have recurrent thoughts or images that refuse to go away?
8. Do you feel compelled to perform certain activities repeatedly?
9. Do you persistently relive an upsetting event from the past?

Answering "Yes" to more than four of these questions can indicate an anxiety disorder.

Suffering from depression, too much stress, or excessive anxiety can endanger your overall health and it's time to take steps to overcome this – RIGHT NOW!

Stress and anxiety affects many factors in our body not only in our mental state. Cancer and other deadly diseases are related to stress and anxiety because of the changes in the chemical composition in our body due to stress and anxiety.

You don't have to be a victim of stress and anxiety, its just all about discipline and having a proper schedule. Not

taking in anything you cannot handle will be a lot of help. Learn your limitations and stick to it. Do not over exert yourself. Just try to go over the border an inch at a time.

You can lead a productive successful and fulfilling life and career without the need to endanger your health. If not, you are not only killing yourself, you are also sending your family and friends and all the people around you away.

Stress is a natural part of life. It can be both physical and mental and much of it can come from everyday pressures. Everyone handles stress differently, some better than others.

Left unchecked, however, stress can cause physical, emotional, and behavioral disorders which can affect your health, vitality, and peace-of-mind, as well as personal and professional relationships.

As we've said, stress and anxiety can lead to panic attacks. Speaking from experience, I can tell you that having a panic attack can be a serious situation. Let's explore that subject a little more.

PANIC ATTACKS

One of the unfortunate outcomes from suffering from excessive stress and anxiety is a physical reaction of your body to the situation. It's like your body is telling you that you need to rest for a moment. Except when you're having a panic attack, it's anything BUT restful.

I had my first panic attack while my husband and I were driving home from a St. Louis Rams football game. We were about 30 miles from our home when I began to feel a bit "off". I was having trouble breathing, my body felt disconnected, and my heart was beating at what seemed like 90 miles an hour.

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