

Freedom from Feeling S.A.A.D

(Stressed, Anxious, Addicted, Depressed)

***A GUIDEBOOK TO OVERCOMING THE
LIFE STRESSORS THAT MAKE YOU FEEL MOST BEAT UP***

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INTRODUCTION

Given all the COVID-19, Coronavirus concerns and uncertainty, there is certainly a lot of stress we're all facing right now which can lead to a feeling of overwhelm. We thought we'd would update this e-book with an intro on this topic.

We all like a degree of control and certainty/predictability in our lives and with this virus its kind of like watching a train wreck happening in slow motion without being able to do anything about it (low control) AND not sure exactly how it's all going to play out in the near (or distant) future, yet knowing it's probably going to be a bumpy ride, how bumpy, how long? We're just not sure, which creates uncertainty.

All else being equal, low control and low predictability... is stressful.

It's a good reminder to know, we all handle stress differently, some with calm, or denial, or at times panic etc. or a combination thereof. One can be overwhelmed with all the news and reminders of uncertainty, it's useful to be educated about what's going on and getting updates. However, it can overwhelm us emotionally and even physically if we are inundated by the news.

Allow the news to educate you, not inundate you

This is important to remember, because **stress as we know can effect overall health and the ability of our immune system to ward off unwanted invaders**. The more stress our mind, body deals with, the more need of self-care to offset that stress, to keep ourselves and keep our immune system as resilient as possible.

With "social distancing" being the new buzz word lately, it is important to connect with others as social connections produce the hormone oxytocin, which helps inhibit the stress hormone cortisol (a hormone which does negatively impacts our immune response).

Connecting with others in whatever way we can, and that technology allows us, can help us also to debrief and make more sense of what's going on, not just in the news, but how we are responding to it. Additionally, sleep, hobbies, exercise, meditation or journaling are also beneficial to keep stress at bay.

A little more about journaling, especially as it may be difficult to connect with others (at least in person) at this time. Multiple studies have attributed health benefits to "expressive" writing i.e. journaling—writing about stressful or even traumatic life events.

Students at the University of Texas were asked to write about life events for 15 minutes for four consecutive days. Some were told to do expressive writing and others to write about trivial matters.

Six months following, students who wrote about their stressors and traumas took fewer pain relievers **and visited the health center less frequently** than those who wrote about trivial

subjects. Lasting effects occurred 6 months later, not bad for such a short investment of time.

Similar studies have recorded physical benefits for conditions including sleep apnea, asthma, migraines, HIV, and cancer. Initially writing (or even talking) about stressful events, emotions is stressful. However, when we do so, we are essentially purging thoughts, feelings out on paper, which helps produce human growth hormone and helps engage with things like improved immune efficiency and wound healing.

Expressive writing has been found to lower stress and anxiety. A University of Chicago study found anxious test-takers received better grades on exams when they wrote about their feelings before the test, compared to their peers who did not write beforehand.

“The process of writing may enable them to learn to better regulate their emotions,” suggests researcher Robb-Nicholson. “It’s also possible that writing about something fosters an intellectual process—the act of constructing a story about a traumatic event—that helps someone break free of the endless mental cycle more typical of brooding or rumination.”

Writing/journaling is an easy, low-cost technique to ease stress and improve health both mentally and physically (including of course our vitally important immune system).

Consider the following tips

- You can begin by asking yourself questions: What one good thing happened yesterday? What am I afraid of? What am I needing most in life, or the day ahead right now?
- Write whatever comes to mind and just let your thoughts flow onto the paper. The faster you write, the less censored you tend to be and the truer your thoughts are.

Help detox your mind and body

I personally do a lot of writing and call it my “Mental Detox” as the research indicates above it helps to externalize, organize the noise and chatter that goes on in our heads and we can then purge them on paper. This also helps with developing “Meta-Cognition” i.e. taking a step back from our flood of thoughts, getting off auto-pilot and being able to think more clearly.

When I ask clients, or when doing a presentation to groups if there are those who journal, usually about a third of people respond “yes”. I then ask, “What do you get from journaling?” The most typical response I get is **it helps people to be more calm, relaxed, focused.**

You don’t need to review what you’ve written, unless you want to. Just the act of externalizing thoughts, feelings etc. on paper, or electronic device etc. is what creates the benefits research is supporting.

What are some of the ways that help with your coping and outlook with recent events? What's helped you weather some of your life's storms in the past?

There are more resilience tools and resources in this program and e-book.

Also, there is information in this e-book to help identify symptoms of anxiety, depression and addiction patterns of behaviour. If this does not resonate with you, please feel free to skip this part and you can jump to the tools to help address stress etc. found on [page 12](#)

The introduction and conclusion of this eBook may be the most important introduction and conclusion you will ever read regarding you or the ones you care about.

It seems like you hear it all the time from nearly everyone 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, depression and other feelings that can make us sick. Literally, sick.

The statistics are staggering. One in eight N. Americans age 18-54 suffers from an anxiety disorder. One-quarter of all N. Americans met the criteria for having a mental illness within the past year, according to the largest and most detailed government survey of the nation's mental health, the National Comorbidity Replication Survey.

The survey focused on four major categories of mental illness: anxiety disorders (such as panic and post-traumatic stress disorders); mood disorders (such as major depression and bipolar disease); impulse control disorders (such as attention-deficit/hyperactivity disorder); and substance abuse. Almost half of Americans meet the criteria for such an illness at some point in their lives, the survey found.

With such a great prevalence of these mental health concerns, it is no wonder they are often referred to as “common colds” of mental health. But one must be careful, extreme ongoing stress, depression, anxiety and addiction unlike a real common cold, can kill you. Research has shown that **90 percent of people who suicide have depression or another diagnosable mental or substance abuse issue** (not to mention what these conditions can eventually do to your physical health as you will soon find out).

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.**

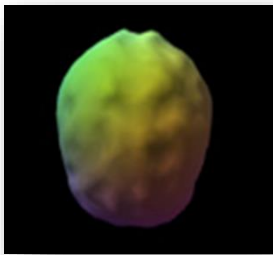
Women suffer from anxiety and stress almost twice as much as men. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illnesses in America, surpassing even depression in numbers. Anxiety is the most common mental health issue facing adults over 65 years of age. Anxiety

disorders cost the U.S. \$46.6 billion annually. Anxiety sufferers see an average of five doctors before being successfully diagnosed.

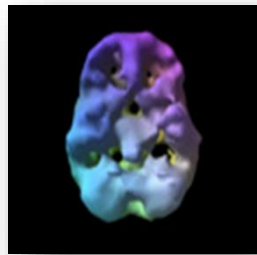
Unfortunately, **stress, anxiety and depression go hand in hand**. In fact, one of the major symptoms of stress is anxiety. It has been said that **depression is exhaustion from anxiety**. And that stress accounts for up to 90% percent of all illnesses either directly or indirectly, often as a result of negative and toxic thoughts. Toxic thoughts and emotions disrupt your body's homeostasis (balance) and cause structural changes down to the cellular level.

In fact, **stress is more concerning than we thought**. You've probably heard that it **can raise your blood pressure, increasing the likelihood of a stroke or cancer** in the distant future. According to the American Institute of Stress, between 75-90% of visits to primary care physician's result from stress related disorders. Some studies have suggested that around 87% of illnesses can be attributed to a toxic thought life and approximately 13% of illness is attributed to diet, genetics and environment.

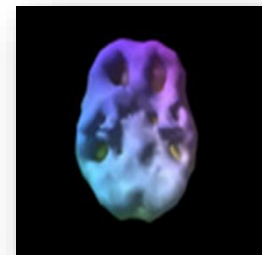
An Impaired Brain is an Impaired Person; Mental Health is about Brain Health



Healthy Brain



38yr old
17 yrs. Alcohol
heavy weekend use



Stressed Out Brain
e.g. 2yrs. Severe
Depression

Source: Brain SPECT Imaging in Complex Psychiatric Cases: An Evidence-Based, Underutilized Tool- M.Trujillo et al (2011)

“Belief becomes biology”, said Norman Cousins, author of “Anatomy of an Illness.” Change your mind (for better or worse) and you change your biology. This being the case, the good news, is that you have more control over your stress and health than you may have thought? The challenging thing is.... ***you have more control over your stress and health than you may have thought!***

An inclusive definition of addiction is "Any behaviour you cannot stop, that results in destructive consequences."

Are you addicted to toxic thoughts and stress? Do you thrive on chaos and conflict? Feeling chronically exhausted? Are you constantly doing a hundred and one things at a time? Can't seem to slow down your own thoughts let alone your hectic pace? Stress isn't necessarily a "bad" thing, it can provide great motivation and energy... but if things are breaking down for you emotionally, physically, your relationships etc. and you can't stop it... you may be headed for trouble.

Research reveals that there are over **1400 physical and chemical reactions occurring to the human body when someone is having a major stress reaction and that chronic stress will actually shrink your brain!**

The brains of patients who have experienced severe stress, emotional trauma or depression suffered "significant reductions" in the size of their hippocampus. The hippocampus is a small area in the center of the brain that helps process critical learning and memory functions. A shrunken hippocampus is linked to cognitive problems and memory loss, akin to premature aging.

If you are not able to stop, or at least take a break from some of your stress activities and behaviours, or you are actually constantly seeking things/events/people to create stress and drama (perhaps as a distraction?) and yet you believe there is no destructive consequence, then I ask... **how long can you run your car at 10,000 RPMs, before something breaks down?** Something is eventually (if not very soon) going to break down!

For some, stress itself can be an addictive pattern of behaviour. If you can't stop it, it's destructive and you crave the rush, drama etc., then it's a problem.

Stress often prompts people to respond in unhealthy ways such as smoking, drinking alcohol, eating poorly, or becoming physically inactive. The Journal of the American Medical Association tells us that the 3 leading preventable causes of death to North Americans are smoking, obesity and alcohol use and the related illness that result i.e. cardiovascular disease, hypertension, cancer etc. This of course damages the body even further in addition to the wear and tear of the stress itself. Talk about a double whammy!

Anger like stress, is like the energy or flame of a fire. A little may warm, sustain and provide us with that spark of motivation that empowers us to do something different with our lives; however, a lot of anger can destroy the very foundation that you stand on – your life. Anger and stress are part of a fear-based survival mechanism. If they are however left unchecked, they can negatively affect your overall mood, health (e.g. blood pressure, cell tissue damage) and every single one of your relationships.

It's no wonder that there is such an ongoing weight loss craze. The stress chemical cortisol causes blood sugar levels to rise and triglycerides and cholesterol to increase in the

blood stream causing the body to gain weight. The sad reality is according to the National Eating Disorder Association, 95% of all dieters will regain their lost weight in 1-5 years time, if the underlying issues are not addressed. If your mind believes it's at war (through trauma, stress, anger, toxic relationships etc.)... then the body will store (fat). This again is part of our survival response.

It may seem pretty obvious why someone would be addicted to substances like alcohol or drugs, but how does it work with a "behavioural addiction" i.e. shopping, gambling, self cutting, anger etc.? Research has found some amazing facts about behavioural addictions that just might surprise you.

Did you know that some of the latest brain imaging techniques suggests that the brain/body and its "reward circuits" can't really tell the difference between whether you're getting "fired up" with booze/cocaine, or, whether you're getting "fired up" from overdoing it at the casino, or at the shopping mall?

Stress is a part of daily life. It's often how we react to it that makes the difference in maintaining our health and well-being. fngbhy

WHY ARE WE SO STRESSED OUT?

Day by day the world seems to be more chaotic and a more uncertain place to live in, not to mention stressful. Things don't appear as 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. 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.

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 or getting bullied into the mix and you have a veritable pressure cooker!

Because of technology e.g. mobile, iPad, social media etc. – we are always on the go and always reachable. We don't make time to relax and enjoy life any more. Why not?

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.

Stress is an ongoing, normal part of everyday life. Only when it appears to take over our lives does it then become a problem.

BLOCKING BEHAVIORS KEEPING YOUR STRESS ALIVE

One of the main blocking behaviours is denial of one's stress, anger, addictions or lack of coping skills.

Did you know that most people let things slide, or even get worse before they make any changes? In fact, did you know that less than half of those in need of services regarding mental health actually seek help? And those who do seek treatment typically do so after 10 or more years of denial or delays in getting any help at all, during which time they are most likely to develop even more problems (National Comorbidity Survey).

So how destructive does it have to get before you acknowledge and take control of your stress, circumstances or behaviour?

Children and youth are especially vulnerable to some of the "common colds of mental health".

There is a theory called the "**diathesis stress**" theory. Diathesis stress is another way of saying that some of us are born with a predisposition (diathesis) towards developing a mental condition such as anxiety, depression, bi-polar, addiction issue etc.

Therefore, if certain environmental conditions known as stressors (i.e. trauma, violence, death of a family member etc.) occur within a critical window of time (early adolescence to early adulthood), then the illness will manifest itself. In fact, **half of all life-long mental disorders start by 14 years of age, and three-quarters by 24 years of age!**

If a person who is predisposed to certain mental condition(s), **does not** experience negative stressors within this critical time period, then it is unlikely that the diathesis or illness will manifest itself.

Consequently, it is crucial that during this critical window of time, young people are given preventative options to decrease the stressors that could result in negative mental health outcomes.

In any event, I certainly don't encourage you to wait ten or more years for things to get really bad and break down before you take charge of your life.

There are also three obsessive behaviors that you are likely to be engaging in that impede your recovery process and stops 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.

Q-T.I.P. = Quit Taking It Personally (i.e. others, life circumstances, etc.)

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 depression or 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?"

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.

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

STRESS, ANXIETY or DEPRESSION?

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.

Some people are more susceptible than others to stress; for some, even ordinary daily decisions seem insurmountable. Meanwhile, others seem to thrive under stress by becoming highly productive being driven by the force of pressure.

Anxiety 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, but the good news is that all of this is manageable!

Attempting to treat stress or addiction issues without treating the underlying, co-occurring mental health issue (anxiety, depression, trauma etc.)... is akin to putting a band-aid on a burn without properly removing the person from the fire that provided the burn in the first place.

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

QUIZ TIME!

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 a while 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 professional whether that be a doctor or a therapist. There are many medications out there that can help with depression.

Many try to deny their depression and don't believe in getting any help and/or medication, believing that these things are just a crutch for “weak” people. I then ask, “if you experienced a broken leg, would a crutch not be in your highest interest to have with you for a while”? Medication can “take the edge” off of the being in a “black hole” kind of feeling.

Therapy, especially Cognitive Behavioural Therapy will give you the skills to address and remove the distorted thought patterns that lead to anxiety, stress and depression. I don't believe in “giving pills without skills” as this can make people dependent on medication without learning alternative, healthier ways of long-term coping. So, if you think you are depressed, ACT NOW! You deserve to be happy!

To 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 have this book and will learn 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, so how about now.

Stress and anxiety effect 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; it's about discipline, having a proper schedule and attitude. 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.

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.

CALM YOURSELF WITH VISUALIZATION

The purpose of visualization is to enable you to quickly clear mental stress, tension, and anxious thinking. The visualization can be used when feeling stressed and is particularly useful when your mind is racing with fearful, anxious thinking. An example of visualization is imagining yourself in a calm scene, like on a beach or perhaps visualizing being bathed in a soothing light.

Visualization is simply a tool you can use to overcome anxious thoughts and feelings. Let's look at various ways that you can combat excessive stress – beginning with music.

USING MUSIC TO BEAT STRESS

Listening to music does wonder to alleviate stress. Everyone has different tastes in music. We should listen to the music that makes us feel comfortable. Sitting down and forcing yourself to listen to relaxation music that you don't like may create stress, not alleviate it. Music is a significant mood-changer and reliever of stress, working on many levels at once.

STRESS MANAGEMENT

As we've said before, stress is a part of life. There's no getting away from it. In fact, some stress is good stress. You may not believe that, but sometimes stress can motivate us to do things we may not normally do in a relaxed state. Stress can make us brave enough to go forward when normally we might hesitate.

We have to be resilient in order to effectively cope with stress and help it enhance our life instead of control it. How do you get strong and resilient? By learning how to take control of your stress and make it work FOR you instead of AGAINST you.

Five quick steps you can take toward relieving stress:

1. **Don't just sit there.** Move! Motion creates emotion. You might notice that when you are idle, it's easier to become depressed. Your heart rate slows down, less oxygen travels to your brain, and you are slumped somewhere in a chair blocking air from reaching your lungs.

Exercise is a great stress buster. People with anxiety disorders might worry that aerobic exercise could bring on a panic attack. After all, when you exercise, your heart rate goes up, you begin to sweat, and your breathing becomes heavier.

Don't panic – it's not an attack! Tell yourself this over and over while you're exercising. Realize that there's a big difference between the physical side of exercise and what happens when you exercise. And the best type of exercise you can do is...., the one that you *actually* do on a regular basis!

2. **Smell the roses.** How do you smell the roses? When's the last time you stared out at the sky and noticed the clouds, the direction or sensation of the breeze? You need to detach from your daily activities now and then to be mindful and venture a little bit.

3. **Help others cope with their problems.** It is very therapeutic when you at times engross yourself in helping others. You will be surprised how many people's problems are worse than those you may be facing. You can offer others assistance in countless ways.

Don't curl up in your bed and let depression and stress take hold of you. Get out and help somebody. But be careful. Don't get caught up in other people's problems in an attempt to forget about your own.

4. **Letting it go with Prayer** For many, if there were one sustainable remedy that is offered when the going gets tough, it would be prayer. Many people, depending on their faith, might call it meditation. It doesn't matter to me what you call it if you have a place to turn to. It's better to meditate than to medicate by indulging in overeating, food, spending or drugs
5. **Make stress your friend** Acknowledge that stress is good and make stress your friend! Based on the body's natural "fight or flight" response that burst of energy will enhance your performance at the right moment. I've yet to see a top sportsman totally relaxed before a big competition. Use stress wisely to push yourself that little bit harder when it counts most.

STRESS BUSTERS!

1. Yell! That's right, scream at the top of your lungs – as loud as you can. While this may not be feasible in your home, it works great when you're in your car with the windows rolled up. Let out a guttural yelp from deep down inside. Stress is tension in the body, so allow your body to release some of that tension.
2. Sing. As we said previously, music can be extremely beneficial when getting rid of stress. Think how much better you can feel when you belt out "Copacabana" at the top of your lungs! Who cares if you can't carry a tune? You're doing this for you!
3. Take up a new hobby. Don't worry about being good at it. It's the process that's beneficial. Sitting still while performing repetitive movements is calming and stabilizing for many people. It can be time to collect your thoughts.
4. Start a garden. Even apartment-dwellers can do this. Tending plants, fruits, vegetables, flowers and watching them grow, bloom, or yield food is rewarding. Avid gardeners say working a garden is the best way to control stress and worry. An added benefit is the creation of a more beautiful, restful environment.
5. Play with a dog or cat. Studies say pet owners have longer lives and fewer stress symptoms than non-pet owners. Playing with your pet provide good vibrations – for

you and for the pet! It's a form of social interaction with no pressure to meet anyone's expectations!

6. Look at the stars and the moon. It can be a very humbling experience to lay on a blanket with your hands behind your head and gaze up into the night sky. It's more than humbling; it's downright beautiful and relaxing!
 - a. When you look at the vastness of the sky, you realize that our problems are small compared to that.
 - b. When my best friend's mother died, we got out of the car after coming from her visitation and my friend's eight-year old and I stopped to star gaze. She pointed out one particular star and said "That's my grandma. She's our guardian angel now." Every time I see that star, I know she's there and she'll help get me through anything!
7. Swing. Remember the feeling of sitting inside that little piece of leather on the playground as you sway back and forth and feel the wind whipping through your hair? Do that! If you don't have a swing in your yard, go to a playground and remember to pump your legs back and forth to see how high you can go. It's liberating!
8. Take a candle lit bubble bath. Even you guys out there can benefit from a warm bath bathed in the soft glow of candlelight. Lay your head back, feel the bubbles and the warm water, and let your stress go right down the drain when you pull the plug! Bathing with Epsom salts will also help remove toxins from your body.
9. Eat, drink (water), sleep and be merry! Lack of sleep, poor diet and no exercise wreaks havoc on our body and mind. Kind of obvious, but it's worth mentioning as it's often ignored as a stress management technique. Surprisingly, de-hydration can put the body into a "fight or flight" stress response. Drinking water is an overall stress buster that is also essential for proper lymphatic function which helps remove waste and toxins from the body. It also provides an instant boost to the brain that heightens energy, improves concentration and mental and physical coordination.

Some Tips for Healthy Sleep Hygiene

- Keep regular bedtimes and wake up times. Our brains and bodies like routine
- Keep bedroom quiet, comfortable & dark
- Do a relaxing activity/technique 10-30 minutes before bed
- Get regular exercise
- Don't nap after 3pm and "power naps" (30 minute or less) only
- Don't lie in bed for long periods of (non-sleep) time
- Restrict of alcohol, caffeine, nicotine (especially in the evening)
- Turn off your television, cell phone, computer etc.

These are just some ways to relax and de-stress. You can come up with your own ways as well. The key, really, is to find something that makes you feel better when you are overwhelmed and practice that method faithfully. You'll be a healthier person overall as a result.

JUST SAY NO!

One huge problem people who are overly stressed out have is the inability to say "No" when they need to. There's no reason why you have to say "Yes" to everyone. If you find yourself agreeing to do things when you really don't want to, you're a people pleaser. In general, this isn't a bad trait to have, but it can be a huge stressor.

Constantly trying to please other people is draining and many people pleasers feel anxious, worried, unhappy, and tired a lot of the time.

Practice saying NO. This is a very important word! Say it as often as you can, just to hear the word come out of your mouth. Say it out loud when you are alone. Practice phrases with NO in them, such as, "No, I can't do that" or "No, I don't want to go there". Try it for simple things first, and then build your way up to harder situations.

Stop saying YES all the time. Try to pause or take a breath before responding to someone's request.

Take small breaks, even if you feel guilty. Remember that your mental health is well worth the aggravation you may have to take from others.

Figure out what gives you pleasure.

Ask someone to help you with something.

Check in with how you feel and what you are thinking.

Many people pleasers believe that nobody will like them if they stop doing things for other people. If someone stops liking you because you don't do what they ask, then you're being used by them and probably don't want them as a friend anyway.

People will like you for who you are and not simply for what you do. You deserve to take time to yourself, to say NO, and to take care of yourself without feeling guilty. It's within your reach to change - one small step at a time!

You're worth it and you deserve it!

TAKE A BREAK, BEFORE YOU BREAK

So often, we know inside ourselves that we need a break. That break might be a full-fledged vacation or a weekend staycation. Either way, getting out of the daily grind can be amazingly liberating and a huge way to get rid of stress and anxiety.

Whatever way it best suits you, take a break, before you break!

RELAXING AT WORK

Some of the suggestions we've given you in this book can certainly be practiced at work, but, unfortunately, others cannot. Here's a tried and true method to help you relax at work.

First and foremost, find a place to sit. Sit up straight with your back against the back of your chair, your feet flat on the floor, and your hands resting lightly on your thighs.

If possible, close your eyes. You may do the exercise without closing your eyes, but closing your eyes will help you relax a bit more. Do not clench your eyes shut. Let your eyelids fall naturally.

Breathe in slowly through your nose, counting to 5. Hold the breath for a count of 5. Breathe out slowly, counting to five. Repeat.

This exercise is performed by tensing and holding a set of muscles for a count of 5, and then relaxing the set of muscles for a count of 5.

When you tense each muscle set, do it as hard as you can without hurting yourself. When you release the hold, be as relaxed as possible.

Begin by tensing your feet. Do this by pulling your feet off the floor and your toes toward you while keeping your heels on the floor. Hold for a slow count of 5. Release the hold. Let your feet fall gently back. Feel the relaxation. Think about how it feels compared to when you tensed the muscles. Relax for a count of 5.

Next tense your thigh muscles as hard as you can. Hold for a count of 5. Relax the muscles and count to 5.

Tighten your abdominal muscles and hold for a count of 5. Relax the muscles for a count of 5. Be sure you are continuing to sit up straight.

Tense your arm and hand muscles by squeezing your hands into fists as hard as you can. Hold for a count of 5. Relax the muscles completely for a count of 5.

Tighten your upper back by pushing your shoulders back as if you are trying to touch your shoulder blades together. Hold for a count of 5. Relax for a count of 5.

Tense your shoulders by raising them toward your ears as if shrugging and holding for a count of 5. Relax for a count of 5.

Tighten your neck first by gently moving your head back (as if looking at the ceiling) and holding for 5. Relax for 5. Then gently drop your head forward and hold for 5. Relax for a count of 5.

Tighten your face muscles. First open your mouth wide and hold for 5. Relax for 5. Then raise your eye brows up high and hold for 5. Relax for 5. Finally clench your eyes tightly shut and hold for 5. Relax (with eyes gently closed) for 5.

Finish the exercise with breathing. Breathe in slowly through your nose, counting to 5. Hold the breath for a count of 5. Breathe out slowly, counting to five. Repeat 4 times. And that's it!

Perform this exercise whenever you need to relax, whether it's on a plane or in a car or anyplace else you may be sitting. Because this exercise may be very relaxing, it should not be performed while driving.

Over time, if performed regularly, this exercise will help you recognize tension in your body. You will be able to relax muscles at any time rather than performing the entire exercise. Perform at least twice a day for long-term results.

You may develop your own longer relaxation exercise by adding more muscle groups. Pinpoint your own areas of tension then tense and relax these areas in the same way.

Maximize the relaxation benefits of this exercise by visualizing a peaceful scene at the end of the exercise. Visualize a scene - a place where you feel relaxed - in detail for at least 5 minutes. Remember the happy place? Go there and enjoy it!

Cognitive Behavioural Therapy

Research shows that engaging in **Cognitive Behavioural Therapy** (CBT) or taking prescribed medications (i.e. anti-depressants, anti-anxiety meds) will BOTH work on the basal ganglia of your brain (i.e. the area in your brain that controls motor control and learning).

CBT- Cognitive Distortions

Share and do these with a loved one:

<p>All or Nothing Thinking Seeing everything as black or white, right, or wrong. If your performance falls short of perfection, you see yourself as a total failure. Using words such as “always” or “never” in your self-talk or vocabulary is all or nothing.</p>	<p>Overgeneralization You see a single negative event as a never-ending pattern of defeat.</p>
<p>Disqualifying the positive Insisting that positive experiences don't count</p>	<p>Jumping to Conclusions: Arriving at negative interpretations of events without evidence to support the conclusions</p>
<p>Mind Reading: Randomly concluding that someone is reacting negatively without investigating. i.e. “I KNOW my boss gave me that strange look because they KNOW that I was playing poker late last night”</p>	<p>Fortune Telling: Anticipating negative outcomes then acting as though they are already established fact. This is also known as “negative outcome expectancy”. i.e. “What’s the point in even trying for that audition, there’s no way I’ll get the part”</p>
<p>Magnification or minimization: Exaggerating your errors and belittling your successes or exaggerating other people’s success and minimizing their flaws.</p>	<p>Emotional Reasoning: “I feel it; therefore, it must be true.” This is assuming that negative emotions reflect the way things really are.</p>
<p>Shoulds: Trying to motivate yourself because you think you “should” “must”, “ought to” or “have to” do something.</p>	<p>Labelling: Attaching a label to yourself instead of describing the error. Instead of thinking “I left the water running” you think, “I’m such a loser”.</p>
<p>Personalization: Seeing yourself as the cause of a negative event you did not cause</p>	

Suggestions:

What are your top 3 Distortions? Often the more distortions we have or the more intense they are, the more beat up you will feel.

- **Step 1:** Write down negative thoughts rather than let them dart about in your mind (writing them down will help you really catch them and more objectively see them, so you can then more objectively challenge them).
- **Step 2:** Read over the cognitive distortions and note which ones apply to you.
- **Step 3:** Replace cognitive distortions with objective thoughts.

Let's run through an example... this is where your TFABs help because you already would have some skill at identifying and countering some of these distortions. You may find yourself with the thought or attitude of....

Step 1: Cognitive Distortion - "It's my fault my partner is depressed"

Step 2: What fits from the list? - Personalization

Step 3: Introduce objective thought - "I'm not in control of my partner. I'm not able to "force them" into a depression"

Challenging your automatic, distorted assumptions will change the neuro-circuitry and neuro-chemistry of your brain. Meaning, it will help you overcome depression, anxiety, stress etc. where you won't feel hijacked by your thoughts and feel more in control of your life and better about yourself.

CONCLUSION

If you've learned anything from reading this book, we hope you realize and understand that there is NO WAY to completely eliminate stress from your life. What you can do is to learn how to make that stress work FOR you.

Stress management isn't as difficult as it might actually seem. However, we can't emphasize this next point enough.

If you think you have too much stress in your life, it may be helpful to talk with your doctor, spiritual advisor, therapist or mental health clinic. Because reactions to stress can be a factor in depression, anxiety, addiction and other psychological and/or physical disorders, they may suggest that you visit with a psychotherapist, psychologist, social worker, or other qualified counselor.

The aim of this book is to get you started on your stress recovery program and give you some tools to implement in your life to help you cope in a much better way with those things that make you feel overwhelmed and out of control.

Stress is a normal part of life. In small quantities, stress is good -- it can motivate you and help you be more productive. However, too much stress, or a strong response to stress, is harmful.

It can set you up for general poor health as well as physical or psychological illnesses like infection, heart disease, or depression. Persistent and unrelenting stress often leads to anxiety and unhealthy behaviors like overeating, chronic anger and abuse of alcohol, drugs or other addictions.

Just like causes of stress differ from person to person, what relieves stress is not the same for everyone. In general, however, making certain lifestyle changes as well as finding healthy, enjoyable ways to cope with stress helps most people.

Remember, less than half of those in need of mental health services get help. And those who do seek treatment typically do so after 10 or more years of denial or, during which time they are most likely to develop even more problems.

So, "Imagine your life 10 years from now, you've done nothing to change your circumstances, in fact things have gotten worse! Now, "Imagine you did do something right now that began to turn your life around for the better, improved your health, relationships, finances and self-esteem."

Please contact your doctor, counsellor (or school guidance counsellor), clergy, psychotherapist, Employee Assistance Provider (EAP) etc. for help. If nothing else, an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.

This e-book explained the function of stress and some of the “common colds” of mental health.

To assist you in understanding this lesson more thoroughly, please fill in the following reflective questions:

- 1) What are some of the “symptoms” of stress and what are some of the long-term health consequences that can result from it?
- 2) How do you know when chronic stress is starting to “break you down”? What are some of the signs (“warning lights”,) you start to get when stress has become overwhelming and/or unmanageable for you?
- 3) Are you possibly struggling with a *behaviour that you cannot stop that also has destructive consequences*? If so, what are some of these behaviours and some of their consequences?
- 4) What is the difference between anxiety and stress, and which one do you typically feel first?
- 5) What important message can you take from understanding the “Diathesis Stress” Theory? Do you or someone you care about fall within the “critical window” (early adolescence to 24 years of age)? How does this change some of the decisions you now make knowing this information?
- 6) What are some ways you have coped with stress in the past? What are some healthier ways you can now cope with stress?

What are the biggest lessons I have learned from this book?

What can I now do differently with what I have learned?

The Life Recovery Program is easy to use and comprehensive

Our goal is to put tools in your resiliency toolbox.

Stigma and accessibility are the key barriers that we've worked on overcoming through our innovative mental/behavioral health and wellness platform.

Our award-winning platform has proven to be highly effective and is accessible 24/7 from the anonymity of your home which is a game changer for individuals struggling with stigma and accessibility issues. Due to its self-directed program setup, it's easy for organizations to implement and easy for individuals to use. The Life Recovery Program has helped thousands of individuals and families successfully manage & monitor these issues. It's like having your own personal wellness coach 24/7.

We help people and the organizations they work in, by taking the next step of:

- Getting support,
- Getting better and
- More focused becoming.
- Inward Strong at <https://liferecoveryprogram.com/>