

The Stress Mess

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How to Thrive
in Turbulent Times

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in Turbulent Times

Kelsie Kenefick

Roots and Wings Publishing

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Disclaimer: The author of this book recommends that all persons with physical or mental symptoms of stress see their doctor for an accurate diagnosis before beginning this program. This book is meant to be used in conjunction with your doctor's supervision. The author and publisher accept no legal responsibility for any actions that you may choose to take relating to matters contained in this book. This book is sold with the understanding that you are choosing to take responsibility for your well-being and for mastering the skills necessary to eliminate your stress induced symptoms.

Names and identifying details of all patients' stories have been changed to protect confidentiality.

To my mom and dad for giving me life

*To my spiritual teachers for teaching me how to celebrate life
and to live it with joy and grace*

*To the doctors in Colorado who believed in my work and sincerely wanted
to see their patients come to a place of living naturally pain free*

*To my patients throughout the years who were a delight and inspiration
to work with and taught me so much about everything*

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Creating a book is a team effort, and I was blessed to have an amazing team. I appreciate each of these people for their unique contributions.

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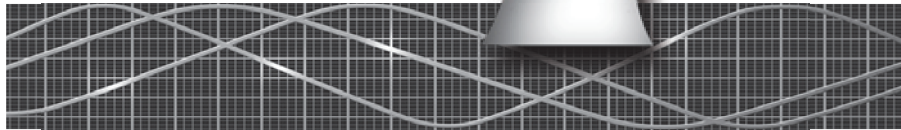
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STEP

1

**Make a
Commitment**



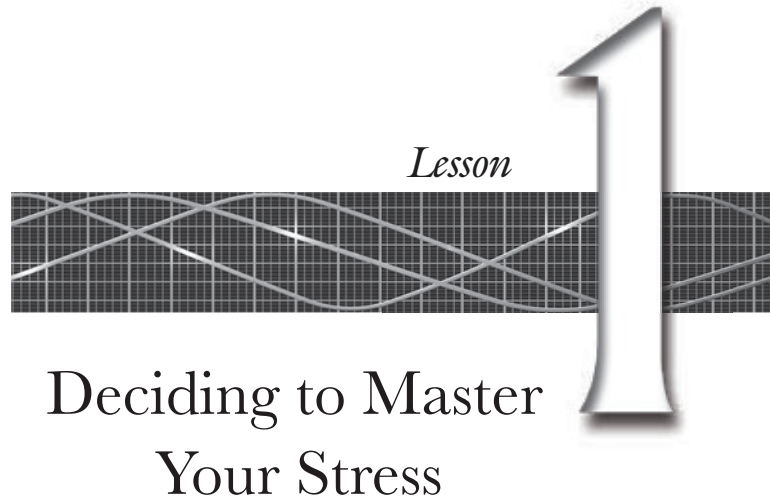
Introduction

The program presented in this book was carefully developed after years of successful work with patients in my clinical practice as a certified biofeedback therapist. It is with gratitude to my patients and to the doctors in Colorado who believed in my work that I am able to bring this program to you.

This book teaches you how to control symptoms which are either stress induced or exacerbated by stress. The following are just some of the physical and mental symptoms which were successfully brought under control with the techniques presented in this book: headaches, irritable bowel syndrome, anxiety, panic attacks, cancer pain & nausea from treatment, TMJ disorders, insomnia, high blood pressure, chronic pain, epileptic seizures, and fibromyalgia.

Your ability to control your stress response will be very empowering. Patients regularly report to me that they experience a sense of empowerment upon completing the steps of this process that carries over into many other areas of their lives. Once you realize just how much control you have over your physiology, you will begin to realize how much power you have in other areas of your life as well. If you can gain control over your stress, and the resulting physical and mental symptoms, imagine what else you can do in your life!

Congratulations to you for embarking upon this exciting and powerful journey. Your choice to move through this time of global turbulence with a clear mind and strong body will serve us all. My hope is that you enjoy the process as much as the results.

A graphic for Lesson 1. It features a horizontal rectangular bar with a dark grid background and several overlapping, light-colored wavy lines. The word "Lesson" is written in a serif font above the bar. To the right of the bar is a large, white, stylized number "1" with a drop shadow effect.

Lesson

Deciding to Master Your Stress

Moving Beyond the Stress Mess— Getting Started

Do you feel anxious about the economy? Does your mind race out of control? Are you feeling like your stress has become unmanageable?

We are all going through enormous changes right now. Many of us who previously believed that we had control over our lives and destiny suddenly feel overwhelmed. With the uncertain economy and global changes affecting our jobs, homes, and even our ability to buy groceries, how can we manage to remain happy and healthy as individuals and in our relationships?

There are things we can control in life, others that we can at least influence, and still others that we have absolutely no control over. Especially in times of upheaval and uncertainty, it is helpful to identify those things we do have control over and build upon them. Making

this our focus will help us stay positive and empowered through the changes and challenges we face.

Although many of us feel stress in reaction to these growing challenges, the good news is that we can actually take control of stress by choosing to take responsibility for it. Responsibility means “to respond with ability.” Taking responsibility for our stress, or responding to it with ability, is very different from reacting to it. To react usually implies acting in opposition to something. Instead of having a knee-jerk reaction when we experience stress, we can learn to respond to it with calm and clear-headed awareness that keeps the stress within our control. .

You have probably heard that over 90 percent of doctor visits are “stress related.” What does this mean? We certainly do not mean that stress is “all in your head.” But you can be sure that if it is in your head, it will be in your body as well—and vice versa.

We’ve learned through research that when stress is left unchecked numerous damaging changes occur in both the body and the mind. We will look at many of these changes in chapter two. If the stress is not managed, it can lead to physical symptoms such as high blood pressure, headaches, backaches, irritable bowel syndrome, heart disease, and countless other symptoms. On the mental and emotional levels, unchecked stress can lead to insomnia, anxiety, panic attacks, inability to focus, and even violence.

Technological and medical advances have led us to believe in the possibility of quick fixes. We want to go to the doctor and have him or her fix us. But even if that were possible, by not participating in our own wellness, and instead relying solely on others to “fix us,” we are giving our power away to them.

Learning to take control of your stress is a vital first step in taking that power back. While outside events over which you have no control may lead you to react with stress, the stress itself occurs within

you and is also within your control. But to gain that control requires you to take a deep look within as a first step on your way to freeing yourself of the tension.

In becoming the master of your body and mind, you will be able to affect your reaction to external stressors. Typically, people let their minds control them instead of using the mind as the magnificent tool it can be when used properly. When you let your mind run rampant, you are likely to create unnecessary stress for yourself. Conversely, by learning to bring awareness to the mind, you can make constructive choices in response, rather than reaction, to external stressors.

The amount of stress people feel today is unprecedented. We're suddenly aware that we can no longer rely on external comforts to help us feel good. Many of us don't know how to cope with the magnitude of what is happening around us. Yet even amidst the major challenges we as individuals and our planet are facing, we can—and must—learn to calm the body and still the mind in order to think clearly and maintain our health.

With awareness you can bring yourself into balance. Eventually, perhaps the earth will come back into balance as well. But it is essential to begin with yourself. This book is not about changing external circumstances.

This program may seem too simple, at first, to have a dramatic impact on your life, but don't be deceived! Stick with it, even when you don't feel like doing it. You will find a sense of peace in your life when you learn to relax from within rather than counting on the external world to deliver the calm you're yearning for.

Are you ready to start on this great inward journey? Today is the day to begin learning to thrive from within—to move beyond the stress mess!

New Habits

This book is essentially about creating new habits. Did you know that everything you do in life is a habit? The new habits and skills you will bring into your life with this program will actually allow you to create a shift in your autonomic nervous system (ANS). This is the part of the nervous system that is not usually consciously controlled. What we think of as “automatic” functions, such as our blood flowing through arteries or our heart beating are regulated by the autonomic nervous system. Your ANS functions do occur automatically unless you consciously take control of them. When you have successfully made the proper shift in your autonomic nervous system by following the steps outlined here, and are able to maintain that shift, you will be able to control, or prevent, stress related symptoms.

The exercises in this program do not need to take a lot of your time every day. Eventually, you will have the skills well-integrated into your life, and you won't even need to set aside special time for practice. You will have created new habits. I have set up this process so that, even in the learning stages, it will take a minimal amount of time and still be effective.

Change does not always come easily, but you will find that the changes you make throughout this program are ones you will enjoy. These changes will leave you feeling stronger physically, mentally and emotionally. As your health, well-being and happiness grow, you will want these new habits to be a part of each day. They will become effortless.

Take a small sheet of paper now and write the following:

Everything I do is a habit.
I choose to create new habits.
I choose to be relaxed & at peace.

Now, place this reminder on your bathroom mirror, in your day planner or anywhere that it will help you remember this important point.

How to Use This Program Successfully

The steps for freeing yourself from the symptoms of stress have been set up in a specific order so that the skills build upon each other. You might think that controlling blood flow through your arteries is the most important part of the training and therefore feel tempted to skip right to that lesson. Don't do it! There are reasons why controlling blood flow is the last step in this program, just as there are reasons each step is included in the order it appears in the book. You will be much more effective learning each skill if you do it in this order. If you attempt to do the steps out of order, you may become frustrated when you find that you cannot do what you are being instructed to do or don't reach the level of success you had hoped for.

The program is divided into seven primary steps and 12 lessons supporting those steps. You will find the process most effective if you do one each week. There are two lessons that you will need a bit more time to work on: using your thoughts to heal (Lesson 10) and dilating your arteries (Lesson 11). Each lesson provides specific activities that you will need to practice daily. It is important to get into the habit of practicing and mastering one skill before moving on to a new one. Remember, you are forming new habits. Give yourself time for each new habit to take hold.

This is an *experiential* program—a program in which you make changes by participating in activities. At the end of each lesson, you will find a section titled “Practice” that contains a summary of what you will need to perform successfully before moving on to the next

lesson. Reading the book without doing the exercises will not help significantly, if at all.

A Partner for Support

Many people find it helpful to have a partner for support when doing a program such as this. If you have a friend or relative with stress induced symptoms you might want to invite them to join you in doing this program. Moving through the program with another person can help both of you to stay on track and make the process more fun.

If you choose to move through this process with a partner, set aside a time once a week when you can check in and share your successes. This could be a phone date or you could get together in person. Be sure to decide each week which lesson(s) you will be doing during the following week.

The author of this book is available for coaching and support. For further information go to NaturallyStressFree.com and click on Consultations.

Staying on Track

You will find the changes you make in your life as you move through this book to be both enjoyable and empowering. People love integrating these positive new habits into their lives. Still, some people find themselves slipping back into old patterns at times. If you do get off track, simply be accepting of yourself and get back on track again.

Occasionally people will find themselves making excuses for why they go off track from the program. For example, they might say, “I

am relaxed today, so I don't need to do it," or "I'm too busy today. I can't take the time to do it." If you find such thoughts filling your mind during the program, stop and notice the excuses running in your mind. Then, acknowledge what your mind is doing and say to yourself, "Thank you for sharing! I am going to complete this lesson and its practice steps anyway!"

Remember, everything is a habit. In creating new habits, you may experience some resistance at times. Be aware of the resistance, but do not let it stop you from moving forward.

This journey to a more relaxed life is about taking responsibility for your health, well-being and happiness. I have found that people with stress-induced physical symptoms are usually highly motivated and are very good at taking responsibility. By committing to this program, you are taking the empowering steps to creating a pain-free and more joy-filled life.

Many people find that a good way to develop these important new habits and stay on track is to work with the *The Stress Mess Workbook*. This hands-on workbook is a good reminder of the skills you need to practice daily and gives you forms for tracking your progress. All the worksheets and charts you need are included. You may purchase the workbook at the website listed at the bottom of the page.

Skeptical? The Program Will Work Anyway

It is okay to be skeptical! Perhaps you have suffered from an over-aroused nervous system for decades, and your mind simply cannot believe that you can control it. You may feel discouraged or feel like you have tried everything with little or no success. If you have not done this program, you have not tried everything. You can be successful with this program even if you are skeptical. My skeptics have

always become my strongest supporters. You can notice your skepticism and acknowledge it. *Just don't let it stop you!*

I had one patient who suffered for more than 30 years from incapacitating migraines that she was having about three times a week. Her migraines made her completely nonfunctional. Mary* had tried many things over the decades—from herbs to acupuncture to chiropractic. She tried everything that anyone would suggest. Just before I saw her, Mary was going to the emergency room three times a week to get shots of morphine for her migraine headaches. As you may know, the more medication one takes the more tolerance the body builds up requiring higher and higher doses to achieve the same effect. One day Mary walked into the emergency room and said, “I need a higher dose of morphine; this isn't working anymore.” At that point the doctors finally said, “If we give you a larger dose it will kill you. Why don't you try biofeedback?”

Mary came to me to learn the skills that you are about to learn in this book. Although skeptical, she was highly motivated. Mary was able to eliminate her muscle tension headaches in five sessions and her migraines in ten sessions. I tell people with migraines to plan on twelve to sixteen sessions to gain complete control of their migraines. When she got to the tenth session, Mary could not believe that her migraines were gone. Her mind had a hard time grasping this fact so she opted to do six more sessions. By the time she finished the training, her mind finally believed that it was true!

The program contained in this book will work whether or not you are skeptical of it. The key is to simply follow the program as it is set up, and you will be on your way to being healthier and more relaxed.

* Patients' names have been changed to protect their privacy

Working with Your Doctor

If you already have physical or mental stress induced symptoms an accurate diagnosis is medically essential. If you have high blood pressure, headaches, pain, IBS, depression, anxiety, panic attacks, insomnia, or any disorder caused, or exacerbated by stress please see your doctor. Furthermore, you need to have a doctor oversee the reduction of your medications as you move through this program, if that is appropriate to your situation.

If you do not currently have a doctor, you will want to find one who is caring and knowledgeable and who is compatible with you. Neurologists specialize in diseases that affect the brain and therefore are highly qualified to diagnose and treat headaches and other nervous system disorders. They tend to have a very good understanding of the autonomic nervous system and the use of biofeedback skills to make internal shifts. Osteopaths (D.O.s) also have a good understanding of the autonomic nervous system and the learned skills that can regulate it. Most neurologists and osteopath physicians will be able to support you through this program with understanding while overseeing your medication reduction.

If you have symptoms other than headache or a neurological disorder, find the appropriate doctor for your situation. When selecting a doctor to work with in this process, ask yourself the following questions:

- Does this doctor often treat people with my symptoms?
- Does he/she listen to me and take the time I need?
- Do I feel that I can talk honestly with this doctor without feeling that I am being judged?
- Is this doctor knowledgeable about using non-drug treatments like biofeedback for these symptoms?

Contraindications

Learning to make shifts in your nervous system to eliminate your stress induced symptoms will create changes in your body, mind and emotions. *The skills presented in this book should be considered contraindicated for the following disorders:*

- acute or fragile schizophrenia
- some paranoid disorders
- some dissociative disorders

If you have any questions about whether or not you should do this program consult your physician or a psychiatrist.

Declaring Your Commitment

Are you ready to make a commitment now to take control of your stress? Remember, you don't have to believe it; you just have to *do* it. You can choose to look forward to this program with excitement and a positive attitude. By making a commitment in writing, you strengthen your positive intention.

Write by hand the following statement:

I _____ (name) on this _____ day of _____, 20____, commit to the program, *Moving Beyond the Stress Mess*. I agree to follow the program as it is structured. I agree to have my doctor oversee the reduction of my medications, if applicable, as I move through this program. Finally, I declare that I am willing to create new habits.

Good! Now tape this declaration of your independence from stress to your refrigerator or somewhere you will see it every day.

If you want to give your intention and commitment even more power, speak them aloud to another person. You could voice your intent to your program partner, a significant other, a friend or relative. Tell them what you are going to do, what your intentions are and what your commitment is. Voicing your commitment out loud gives it strength. Let your word be law. Speak with power and affirmation

Practice

Below is a summary of activities to complete before moving on to the next lesson.

1. Put your commitment in writing and post it somewhere you will see it every day.
2. Find a partner to do the program with if you want this kind of mutual support.
3. Discuss this program with your doctor, if appropriate.

