

# Balancing Stress

---

Paradoxically, many things in life that can hurt us can also help us. Stress is one of those things. Stress motivates change. Exercise is the process of stressing the body to force it to adapt and grow healthier. Emotional stress, like losing a job or being criticized, was designed to also force us to adapt and grow emotionally healthier. What we do AFTER

the stress, or how we respond to it, holds the key to whether we benefit from or are hurt by stress.



When it comes to exercise, proper rest and nutrition for recovery allows your body to benefit from exercise. The famous bodybuilder and actor Arnold Schwarzenegger and his friends would workout and then take naps to promote maximum recovery. The rest of their day was very laidback (some of them didn't work) and was a stress-free contrast to the typical person's hectic schedule and lifestyle.

This focus on resting as hard as they worked, allowed bodybuilders to build above average bodies and it can allow you to build an above average life!

## Out of Balance

The issue with stress is not about trying to eliminate it, but rather a lack of balance between feelings of stress and feelings of peace. In specific scientific terms, it's a balance between activation of your Sympathetic Nervous System (SNS) and the activation of your Parasympathetic Nervous System (PNS). The issue is too much SNS and not enough PNS.

## Approaches

I like to think of what I do to cut down on my SNS activation as "defense" and what I do to increase my PNS as my "offense". The actions, both offensively and defensively fall into two categories:

1. **Physical approaches**—anything you do with your body to reduce stress or increase relaxation.

2. **Non-physical approaches**—anything you do with your mind to reduce stress or increase relaxation.

## Physical Approaches

Your body and your thinking are innately attached. When you think depressing thoughts, your body will show it with your posture (slouched), where you look (down), the rate and depth of breathing (shallow and fast), speed and tonality of your voice (slow and monotone). When you think exciting thoughts your body will show it in your posture (shoulders and chest up), where you look (ahead), the rate and depth of your breathing (deep and slower), the speed and tonality of your voice (faster and multi-tone). Over time your negative thought patterns can get you to form the habit of slouching, looking down, breathing shallow and speaking in a slow and monotone voice. Interestingly, these physical SYMPTOMS of depressed thoughts, now becomes the CAUSE of depressed feelings. You literally cause yourself depressed feelings by your habitual physical habits!

Now if you force yourself to do the opposite—the physical habits of a person who is happy and confident, the old association between your body and your depressed feelings will be interrupted.

Get in the habit of checking your:

1. **Posture**—are you slouching with your shoulders rolled forward? Sit up straight and lift up your shoulders and chest. Puff your chest out and pull your shoulders back in an exaggerated position just so your brain can feel what it feels like to be totally out of the depressed body position.
2. **Gaze**—are you looking at the ground when you walk somewhere? Tell yourself to: *“Look up and look others in the eye and greet them! I don’t care about my feet, I care about people!”*
3. **Breathing**— are you breathing like you’re trying not to be heard? Check your posture and take 3 big loud deep breaths—blow out the mouth. You’ll feel an instant surge of energy and confidence. This one is very effective both for your mindset and your body. More to come on this.
4. **Tone of voice**—are you talking like a monotone robot? In your car alone, practice talking out loud like an expressive actor. Talk in an excited tone of voice. For some



people this actually feels “weird” to talk with tone variance. Have fun speaking with a new tone of voice that will broadcast to people that you are no longer spreading your depressing tones! You will find people listening to you more because people love to be around confident people. You simply can’t be slouched, looking at your feet and breathing shallow when talking in an expressive confident manner...it is simply impossible. Your new tone of voice will MAKE you confident even when you don’t feel it. Just start talking about nothing in a confident tone and you’ll feel a surge of confidence overcome your mindset! Try it now and prove it to yourself.

### More about breathing

Habitual shallow breathing not only makes you feel self-doubting and causes a depressed/negative filtered view of life and circumstances; it also starves your body’s 50 trillion cells of what it needs most. What can you go the least amount of time without—water, food or air? Well you can go without food for weeks, water for days, but air for only a few minutes! Air is the most important thing your cells need to stay healthy. Lack of cellular oxygen causes cellular stress which then causes premature cellular aging and a higher risk of cellular malfunction causing deadly diseases like cancer and heart disease as well as other problems like asthma, allergies, ulcers, migraine headaches, insomnia and digestive problems just to name a few. A healthy body is made up of healthy cells so a proper supply of oxygen is the most important factor in having a healthy body!

### Exercise

Exercise attacks stressful thoughts in several ways:

- ✓ **Moving your body in strong ways makes you feel strong.** Lifting weights and feeling strong makes you feel strong and able. Stress is often just caused by the internal feeling of being weak and unable to handle life’s challenges (stress).
- ✓ **Focusing on exercise takes your mind off issues.** Going to the gym and seeing other people and getting into your routine takes your mind off the things causing you stress.
- ✓ **The strong deep breathing makes your feel strong.** When you feel strong, your perception of life changes drastically. Thoughts that were “stressful” disappear.
- ✓ **Your body naturally wants to do something physical to alleviate stress.** It feels good to move your body. Your body is wired to alleviate stress through physical action. You’ll feel “stress” just because you haven’t moved your body (exercised).

## Other physical approaches

**Massage.** No doubt about it, a massage is a super PNS activator. I can't think of one better. However, most people can't afford a professional massage on a frequent enough basis to balance out the inflow of stressful thoughts in their life. This is not to say a monthly massage is a waste of time. I highly recommend getting as many massages as you can fit into your budget. A weekly massage would be ideal.



**Naps.** I'm a huge proponent of naps! Look at the animal world. They are guided by natural intelligence. Your dog and cat nap all day long. Naps produce high levels of PNS activation. Just a 10-20 min nap each day can do wonders to your stress and physical health. Some people say they are "too stressed to take a nap". This is a giant warning sign that they need to settle their mind by taking a short break!

**Sex.** Sex can produce stress for some people as it is tied heavily to our emotions. But good loving sex is a fantastic PNS activator for both women and men. As long as the sex makes you feel highly loved and appreciated, allowing you to enjoy the physical aspect of it, it is a fantastic PNS tool that you should use as often as possible. Detach yourself from issues of guilt and other conditions for sex with your partner and do it regardless of feeling like it. If you don't feel like it, it means you are experiencing stress that is blocking your loving feelings and therefore need a PNS activator. Waiting until you feel good enough to have sex is like waiting to join the gym until you're thin enough. You need sex to fight stress so that you can release your good feelings.

If you're single, well you know what to do. 😊 Put aside old beliefs about self-satisfaction. Consider how the belief system we have all been trained in makes self-gratification something "wrong" when our bodies and minds can benefit greatly from it.

Exercise and other physical approaches work well for small to moderate levels of stress. These are your offensive measures to activate your PNS. But without having a strong defensive strategy to lower the amount of SNS activation in your life, stress will continue to negatively affect you.

## Non-Physical Approaches

There are two non-physical or thinking approaches to stress relief. The first is training your brain to respond rather than react, and the other is to choose a new belief that changes how you see life's events.

**Respond vs. React.** As you've learned, your brain is designed to kick into the "fight or flight" response when it perceives a threat. For us humans that includes any feelings that would threaten us. We are always perceiving our world. Everything we experience every minute of our life is going through the "**what does that mean to me?**" filter of our own individual perception.

**[YOU] ← → what does that mean to me? ← → [LIFE]**

Your brain is constantly subconsciously asking "**what does that me to me?**" with everything you experience. Everything!

- The car won't start...what does that mean to me?
- The dog puked on the carpet....what does that mean to me?
- The mail is late....what does that mean to me?
- I think it is my turn to host Thanksgiving this year....what does that mean to me?
- I feel hungry....what does that mean to me?
- It's cold outside...what does that mean to me?
- My boss gave me a complement...what does that mean to me?
- The light ahead just turned yellow...what does that mean to me?

**When you are experiencing stress, your brain answered the question "What does that mean to me?" in a negative way.**

Because this is under the lightning-fast control of our subconscious brain, it only uses past events--predominately negative, because it is designed to protect you. The more past negative events you have stored in your subconscious memories, the quicker and more easily your brain will place negative meanings to the question "what does that mean to me?" and thus you experience more stress!

The only way to stop this automatic stress response is to take conscious control back.

But how do you do this?

When you are operating subconsciously, it's like you are hypnotized or sleep walking—you don't know you're doing it. So, to wake yourself up, you need what's called a "pattern interrupt".

A pattern interrupt interferes with your thinking habit. Anything that draws your thinking away from its automatic course and allows your conscious thinking to catch up or take over the subconscious reaction, is an effective pattern interrupt.

Here's one that works really well for most people: Say out loud: **"STOP!.....the INsanity"**

Again: **"STOP!.....the INsanity"**

This statement stops your reactionary subconscious in its tracks and motivates your conscious and subconscious to avoid doing something "insane"! This is very effective because the reason your subconscious is sending you negative signals is to PROTECT YOU FROM THREATS. When you tell your subconscious (yourself) that what it's doing is "INsanity", you confuse your subconscious...force it to pause and rethink its approach. It's now open for suggestion. You now have time to insert your conscious will and redirect your subconscious in a less stress-inducing way.

This is a VERY POWERFUL technique when you master it. The problem is you'll have a lot of subconscious resistance in using this stress-reducing tool because your subconscious likes to keep things the way they have always been. New things are a threat, so when you try this technique, your subconscious is going to send strong signals of discomfort that will make you feel like not using the tool, or forget to use it or just not get into it. DON'T ALLOW YOUR SUBCONSCIOUS TO DO THIS TO YOU!

### **A new better belief.**

You know that strain produces gain. In the gym, if you don't lift a weight that is challenging, your muscles will not grow stronger. If you don't walk on the treadmill at a pace that is challenging, your heart, lungs and circulatory system will not get stronger. When we send our kids to school, we expect the teachers and lessons to challenge our kids so they learn.

### ***Why then do we get upset about anything challenging (stressful) in our lives?***

For some reason we have this expectation that everything should go perfectly in our lives every day. It should never snow. It should never rain. We should never get criticized. We should never make a mistake at work. We should never get a late fee. We should never expect our spouse to be crabby and snap at us. We should not have to deal with kids that do something stupid.....and the list could go on for 100 pages!

My point is this: We should first start expecting the rain and a few flat tires in our lives and not get "stressed" over it. Rather WELCOME the rain in life because we take a better belief that

every event we call stress is a **learning opportunity to make us better, wiser and healthier people.**

Choose this new belief:

**I choose to see all of my life's "problems" small or large as HOW I learn, grow and become the better person I really want to be!**

Choose this secondary belief:

**I choose to believe in a higher intelligence that is working in my best interest when my expectations are not met.**



A majority of your stress is caused just by your expectations of what you "think should be" not being met. The newspaper should have been here by now. The car should have started like it always does. You didn't get the job you thought you did a great interview for. Your child didn't join the sport you wanted her too. Your sister should have returned your phone call by now. Your family isn't helping clean the house like you think they should. Your spouse should listen to you more.

You and I create dozens of big and small expectations every day. When these expectations are not met, you experience negative feelings or "stress". Getting upset over YOUR EXPECTATIONS not being met means you believe your expectations are in your best interest. But what if a higher intelligence had a different better plan? The car that wouldn't start actually saved you from a head on crash with a sleeping driver. What if the job you didn't get allowed you to meet a person who later could help you open the business you thought would never become a reality. What if that spouse who doesn't want to listen to your emotions is actually doing you a favor by not making them worse and hurting you more?

**Can you surrender to the belief that unanswered prayers and expectations often lead our lives to much better outcomes?**

This takes a great deal of maturity and uncommon wisdom. We've all been taught to try to CONTROL, CONTROL, CONTROL everything to produce the outcomes we want.

Believing that there is a GREATER plan that will work out in YOUR FAVOR for the best interest of all, rather than feeling stress because it's not happening like you think it should, takes a higher level of mental maturity most folks find very difficult to get to.

But I know YOU can!

### Other non-physical approaches

Most other non-physical approaches involve basically the practice of slowing the speed in which a thought turns into an emotion. Meditation and Mindfulness are the practices of training the brain to basically slow down and see our own thoughts and thinking processes, rather than just letting it run free and react automatically. Both these practices will be covered in detail in another lesson.

**Mastering Forgiveness.** When you get good at forgiving yourself and others, you don't have much to stress about. Kids are really good at this, but our adult brains become more prone NOT to forgive and to store destructive memories in our heart (subconscious) that continue to hurt us unconsciously. Learning the divine skill of forgiveness is TRUE maturity and will release you from the source of nearly all the destructive stress in your life—GUILT.

**Daily Reading.** Not only does reading take your mind off thinking thoughts that could upset you, it also can educate you about your thinking—so you get better at controlling it for your benefit. Reading can also educate you on some subject you'd like to become an expert on and make a difference sharing this knowledge. Reading should be a daily practice of introducing thoughts into your thinking process that counteract the negative thoughts that surround us every day.

### ASSIGNMENT:

Stress causes destruction in our lives and is the core cause of your eating and weight issues. To get to permanent weight loss, you must increase PNS activation and decrease SNS activation. This requires a plan. All the issues of your life have to do with stress. Begin to reduce your stress and you open the door to success in EVERY area of your life—your health, your relationships, your career, your finances, etc. Use the following worksheet to create your plan!

# My Balancing Plan

---



The goal is a healthy balance between SNS and PNS activation. You won't ever eliminate stress, but if you have a job that is particularly stressful (emotional), you'll need to increase the activities that activate your PNS. When you're out of balance, your brain will want Oreo cookies and Doritos more than anything else.

## PSN activation (physical approaches)

- Power breathing
- Change my posture, gaze and tonality habits
- Walking
- Naps
- Massage
- Sex

My plan:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

## SNS de-activation (non-physical approaches)

- Use of **“STOP....the INsanity”** statement to stop emotional reaction and stress response
- Adopt this belief: **I choose to see all of my life's “problems” big and small as opportunities for me to learn.**
- Adopt this belief: **I choose to believe in a higher intelligence when my expectations are not met**
- Daily forgiveness of self and others (process my feeling rather than suppress them)
- Daily Reading

My plan:

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.