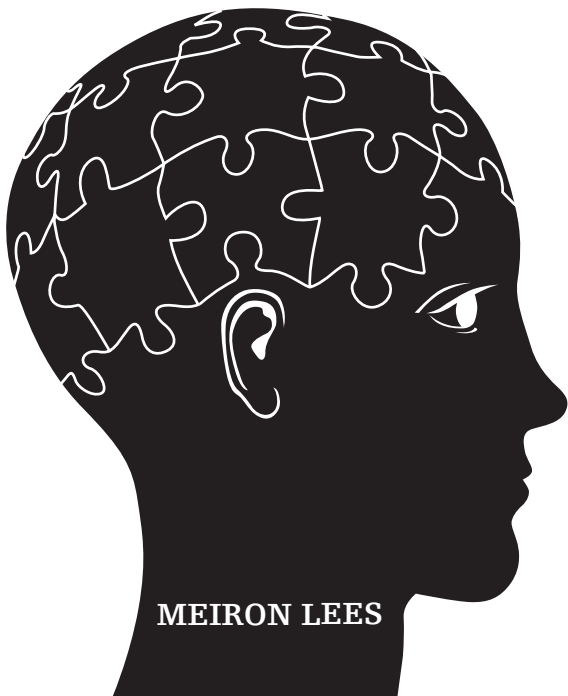


FREE EXTRACT &
STRESS HEALTH CHECK

D-STRESS

Building Resilience in Challenging Times
7 Simple Techniques



MEIRON LEES

D-STRESS

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7 Simple Techniques

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InnerCents

DEVELOPING PRODUCTIVE, LOYAL PEOPLE



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Section 5

Stress Health Check

What causes us to feel Stressed?

The notion of stress is extremely subjective; what may be stressful to one person may not seem stressful to another.

What is important is that most of the stress we feel, regardless of what causes it, is harmful.

If we can reduce it we'll not only live happier, healthier and more contented lives, we'll also be able to carry out our work with more focus, performing closer to our highest potential.

So what causes us to feel stressed?

We often feel stressed in a situation when we are not in control of the outcome or when we feel that we have limited or no options available to change it.

Here's an example to illustrate this.

Mike, a business owner, is about to board a train to a client meeting where they will make their final decision whether or not to sign his proposed \$1,000,000 contract.

Business has been tough for Mike and this contract could determine whether he continues with his own business or starts applying for employment. He has been working day and night for months on the proposal and there's a lot at stake. Two senior executives have flown in from out of town and he has been told that the meeting can be no longer than one hour long.

The arrival time for the train approaches and an announcement is made informing passengers that the train has been delayed by 20 minutes. Mike realises that he will never make his meeting on time and begins to feel extremely stressed.

His stress is caused by the fact that he feels he has no control over the arrival of the train and limited options at his disposal to resolve the problem.

We often believe that the events in our lives are responsible for our feelings of stress and that our circumstances determine the way we feel.

To challenge this notion picture this:

You are driving down the street and someone speeds past and cuts you off. You may think to yourself:

What an idiot! How dare they drive so dangerously? They should be taken off the road!

You may even start to feel angry at this person, curse them or stretch out a finger or two.

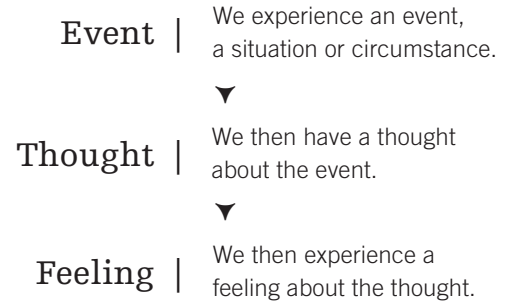
If I stopped you at this point and asked you why you were feeling so worked up you might say:

This idiot just cut me off! How else would you like me to feel? I almost had an accident!

This is a good example of how situations can determine the way you feel. In this example a reckless driver caused you to feel angry and stressed. You have allowed yourself to become a victim to the actions of others. So why are you placing your feelings at their mercy? When do the situations or actions of others stop becoming the cause for the way you feel and at what point do you start to take control of your feelings and emotions?

The answers to these questions lie in your understanding of how your feelings and emotions come about.

The process most often works like this:



Sometimes it works the other way around and we may experience an emotion before we even have time to think about what's happening to us.

Event ► Feeling ► Thought

Let's use our driving example to see how it fits into the **event ► thought ► emotion** process:

Event | You are driving and someone cuts you off
▼

Thought | You think: This person should be taken off the road
▼

Feeling | You start to feel angry

Now think about this:

It's your thought about a situation that determines the way you feel.

Let's continue our driving story.

A few kilometers down the road our reckless driver does the same thing to someone else. That person gets a fright but thinks: Thank goodness they didn't crash into me! I hope there is no emergency that has caused this person to be in such a dreadful rush. She continues her journey feeling grateful and appreciative that she wasn't harmed and feels a sense of compassion for the driver.

Let's think about these two events for a moment. Both people have experienced the same event but have had two very different responses.

What was the reason for these different responses? What made one person respond with anger and the other with appreciation and compassion?

It wasn't the event itself, otherwise they both would have had the same response. What differed were the thoughts they had about the event. One had thoughts that fuelled anger while the other had thoughts that generated gratitude. It was the choice of thought that made the difference to the way they felt.

So how does stress relate to your choices of thought?

Stress is a feeling and what causes that feeling is what you're thinking. Generally, you don't have a stressful feeling without first having a stressful thought. I know what you're thinking. If it's that easy why do we have stressful thoughts in the first place? Why can't we just think happy and positive thoughts all the time?

Section 05

To know the answers to these questions you first need to understand a little bit about the mind and how it works. Here is an interesting fact. Every day you think approximately 60,000 thoughts. That's 60,000 bits of information, ideas, opinions, judgements and beliefs streaming through your mind every day. Amazingly, about 90% of these thoughts are the same thoughts you had yesterday. So that's about 54,000 of the same thoughts flowing through your mind every day. (And we wonder why it's difficult to create new ideas!) Even more interesting is that most of these 54,000 thoughts are negative in nature.

So let's recap:

You have about 60,000 thoughts a day. 90% of these thoughts are the same ones you had yesterday and the majority of them are negative.

No wonder it's so challenging for us to remain positive and keep our stressful thoughts at bay! So how can we manage and control our thoughts so that we sponsor positive emotions in our lives?

The next chapter provides the answers.

Stress Health Check

This informal stress health check will help you to identify your current levels of stress and their causes. Please tick the boxes that apply to you and add the number of boxes ticked for each section. Total your scores for each section and find out which stress category you're in.

Workplace Stressors

Are you affected by any of the following work related stressors?

- | | |
|---|--|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Promotion or demotion | <input type="checkbox"/> Retirement |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in pay | <input type="checkbox"/> Communication difficulties |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in working relationships | <input type="checkbox"/> Cultural challenges |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Inadequate training | <input type="checkbox"/> Challenges in managing people |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insufficient work-breaks | <input type="checkbox"/> Unresolved health and safety issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Excessive noise in workplace | <input type="checkbox"/> Change in working hours |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Bullying or harassment | <input type="checkbox"/> Starting a new job |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Restructuring, merger or acquisition | <input type="checkbox"/> New management, team or boss |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes resulting in job insecurity | <input type="checkbox"/> People management |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in workload | <input type="checkbox"/> Managing workplace conflict |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Project deadlines | |

No. of boxes ticked ____

Physical Symptoms

Do you have any of the following physical symptoms?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Headaches or migraines | <input type="checkbox"/> Lack of concentration |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Depression | <input type="checkbox"/> Increased use of smoking, alcohol or drugs |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Ulcers | <input type="checkbox"/> Heart palpitations |
| <input type="checkbox"/> High blood pressure | <input type="checkbox"/> Feeling fearful |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anxiety | <input type="checkbox"/> Skin rashes |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Anger | <input type="checkbox"/> Forgetfulness |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Insomnia or sleep disturbances | <input type="checkbox"/> Sweating |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Constant tiredness | <input type="checkbox"/> Teeth grinding or nail biting |

No. of boxes ticked ____

Personal Stressors

Are you currently affected by any of the following personal stressors?

- | | |
|---|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Weight issues | <input type="checkbox"/> Any substance abuse |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Changes in financial status | <input type="checkbox"/> Death of family member or close friend |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Work-life balance | <input type="checkbox"/> Illness of family member |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Spouse not working | <input type="checkbox"/> Family member leaving home |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Change in self worth | <input type="checkbox"/> Family interpersonal issues |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Personal injury, illness or handicap | <input type="checkbox"/> Sexual concerns |
| <input type="checkbox"/> End of a relationship or marriage | <input type="checkbox"/> Personal health changes |

- Pregnancy
- Birth of a child
- Managing children's educational pressures
- Conflict with spouse, partner or family member
- Marriage

No. of boxes ticked ____

Environmental Stressors

Are you currently affected by any of the following environmental stressors?

- Moving to a new country or city
- Experiencing a new culture
- Moving to a new house or apartment
- Cultural difficulties
- New climate
- Issues with crime
- Damage to property
- Loss of property
- Noise disturbances
- Pollution
- Changes in financial status of friends or family
- Neighbourhood changes
- Council issues
- Traffic & commuting issues
- Political changes
- Economic changes
- Managing technological advancements

No. of boxes ticked ____

TOTAL BOXES TICKED ____

Results:

If you scored 0 - 15:

Stress level is low

You seem to be handling your life situations constructively and have an ability to be resilient to the challenges you experience. Your confidence and self esteem enable you to manage your stressful situations and you don't usually allow people or circumstances to get the better of you.

When you feel stressed you have the ability to get back on track quickly. If this score is low due to a particular occurrence e.g. if you've just got married, received a promotion or arrived back from a holiday, take a moment to reflect that you have the tools and techniques to cope if things change. Generally though you are at ease and contented with your life and mostly feel positive and optimistic.

If you scored 15 - 25:

Stress level is normal

Everyone has some degree of stress in their lives and although you may be experiencing some challenges, your stress is not at a level that you need to be concerned about. Use the stress you feel as a positive in your life. See it as a motivator to reach the goals you are striving towards.

Overall you are generally satisfied with your current life situation however there is some work to be done in managing your stress more effectively. Become familiar with the D-Stress

resilience builders in this book as they will help you to better manage and reduce your stress as and when it arises. By practicing these techniques you will start to feel calmer, contented and at ease.

If you scored 25 - 35:

Stress level is above average

There are certain situations that are challenging for you and you may feel burdened by them and find it difficult to manage stress. Assess the main areas that are causing you to feel stressed and explore potential changes to those areas that are in your control.

Try as much as possible to minimize the minor stressors and not allow them to add additional pressure to your life. Start to focus on the way you would like your situation to be and work towards that goal. Ask your spouse, partner or friend to help keep you on track and you won't feel alone in making those important changes.

Commit to practicing the D-Stress resilience builders in this book as they will help you to reduce your stress levels and give you the tools to better manage any stressful situations in the future.

If you scored 35 and above:

Stress level is high

It is likely that you are feeling overwhelmed and anxious. You may also be experiencing some physical problems as a result and it is important for you to keep your health in check. Get help from someone that you can depend upon to advise you on how to overcome your feelings of stress and assist you in how best to manage your situation.

There are solutions to your problems so make a commitment to change the situation you're in. It's not making you happy and it's up to you to make some changes even though they may be difficult to carry out. Ensure that you practice the D-Stress resilience builders in this book as they will help you to cope more effectively with your stress. Remember that you have the choice to change the way you think about any situation.

Commit to thinking better about your life and start to focus on the way you want it to be. Be courageous, take action and things will get better.

AVAILABLE IN NOVEMBER 2008

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