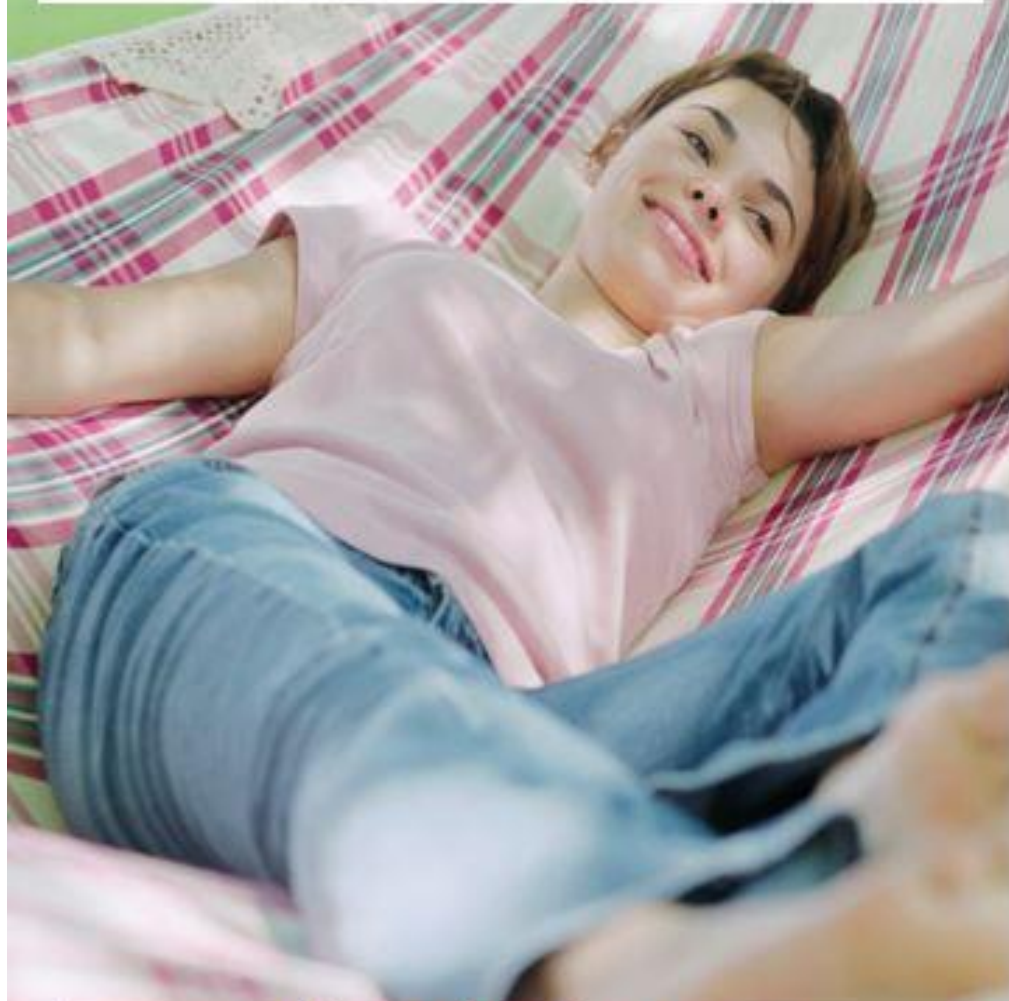


The ABC's of Stress Busting

9 Tools for Releasing the Pressure of Daily Stress



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Standing in Your Power

A Guide for Living Your Life Fully Awake

The ABC's of Stress Busting

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No matter how aware you are of stress and what it does to your body and patience level, you will still experience it. In fact, it is an important part of life – providing motivation for change and a much needed desire to get things done. It can also put you at risk for illness; rob you of energy and limit your ability to problem solve effectively.

**While a comfortable amount of stress helps you think clearly and efficiently,
too much stress can actually shrink your brain!**

I like to think of stress as if it is an elastic. Without any stress at all, that elastic is just a lump of rubber with plenty of potential, but no real purpose at the moment. Some stress is required for the elastic to be useful...

BUT, even an elastic can only stretch so far!

Using a number system, where 10 equals enough stress to snap the elastic and 0 makes it a purposeless pile of rubber, your goal is to discover the sweet spot somewhere between the two. This spot is where you want to be most of the time, but it will require both awareness and commitment to do so.

It is important to know what it feels like when you are being stretched too thin and have plenty of easy tools you can pull out to release the pressure before reaching your breaking point. The time to try new strategies is not while dealing with a crisis – in crisis you will reach for one of your most common tools, even when you know that tool doesn't serve you well. The trick is to learn and practice new techniques in times of calm so that they are familiar, comfortable and easy to reach for in times of need.

Warning! Being Proactive Can Cause Stress

Busy, proactive, motivated people have the potential to experience a lot of stress in their lives. This is because they are constantly pushing themselves out of their comfort zone, working to learn new things and making important decisions. This is not a problem unless you see it as a problem. The goal is not to eliminate stress from your life, but to become skilled at dealing with it effectively!



Stress is caused by living life. Relationship disagreements, accidents, health challenges, traffic jams, disrupted sleep, watching the news, skipped meals or even the weather can sneak stress into your life. Armed with knowledge and a variety of tools to help you adjust your elastic as needed, you can take charge of your journey and allow stress to serve you rather than undermine you at every turn.

It's not the amount of stress, but *how you perceive that stress* that actually causes the problem.

Whether you are new to constructively dealing with your stress or a seasoned stress buster, I hope this booklet serves to remind, validate, guide and instruct you on simple things you can do to make a difference when it comes to stress.

The ABC's of Stress Busting

A = Awareness

Awareness is a very important life topic. In fact, it is the critical starting point to all change, overall life satisfaction and to great health and relationships. The challenge with self-awareness is it's not enough to just talk about it – you have to actually use what you learn for it to make a difference.

Self-awareness is also an area of continual growth. When it comes to dealing with stress it might start with recognizing feelings, thoughts, and self-talk, but then expand to include hormones, survival patterns, gender differences and even the influence of your monthly cycle. As a result, it works best for you to recognize this area as one of constant growth that will likely continue as long as you live.

Too much stress causes excess cortisol (a critical hormone in the body) to be stored in your belly...creating a layer of fat that exercise and diet can not eliminate!

For this booklet let's focus on becoming aware of how stress presents in your body, what kind of self-talk accompanies it and what messages you are sending to your brain as a result.

Your body: Notice where you hold tension in your body and find stretches or exercises that help you release it. The jaw, face and shoulders are common areas for tension to appear. Make it a habit to relax your shoulders, stretch your jaw and consciously feel your face relax many times throughout the day.

Yoga, Tai Chi, progressive relaxation and stretching are all wonderful ways to reduce stress, so start with whatever method feel best for you. The more aware you become of how your body feels relaxed versus full of tension, the easier it will be for you to release some of your stress. You can even soften your gaze as a way to release tension from your eyeballs!



Your mind: Notice your self-talk or messages that are playing in your head on a regular basis. Most people will have negative sound tracks playing in their mind, reminding them of short fallings, stopping them from moving beyond their comfort zone and criticizing their behaviour when they do. This is not a defect, but a common challenge in a society that uses comparison and competition as ways to encourage personal development. It can also be a byproduct of an over stimulated brain. By [noticing your self-talk and taking steps to quiet it](#) you can decrease stress and tune into your inner wisdom more easily.

Your responses: There is another conversation going on with your brain that is even more critical when it comes to stress. Your brain does not have access to the outside world, so when a challenge arises it asks your external sensors (eyes, ears, nose, skin...) to assess the danger level and report back. If you respond that a malfunctioning photocopier is a definite danger with thoughts like: *this can't be happening, I'm already late, just work you #\$#@% thing!* – you are telling the danger is real. Your brain takes this response as seriously as if you told it a saber tooth tiger was about to gobble you up and will continue to sound the alarm (and therefore release hormones) until you tell it everything is okay. Of course, by then there is so much cortisol in your system, everything is not okay.

B = Break free

Breaking free is about disrupting patterns, taking charge of your responses and challenging your beliefs. This allows you to change how you perceive stress, deal with it head-on and heal any damage. As you might imagine there are many tools and strategies for doing this and it will be up to you to choose which will be most effective at each stage of your journey.

For this booklet we'll talk about using breathing techniques to shift from surviving to thriving; using mindfulness to connect with your immediate experience and releasing the pressure through creative expression.

Breathing: How you breathe actually determines whether your body goes into fight, flight or freeze (F3) versus rest and digest (RD) mode. As you can imagine F3 takes a lot of energy and keeps your body alert and ready to fight off the tiger. RD, on the other hand, is where all healing, building and cleansing takes place. It is also where creativity is allowed to flourish and one can open up to the deliciousness of receiving.

Tip 1: Breathe deep into your belly rather than shallow breaths to your chest. This stimulates sensors that tell your brain all is good and you are safe. Simply breathing in and letting your belly expand as the diaphragm pushes down, is enough. Create reminders to do this several times throughout the day.

Tip 2: Use the Oxytocin Breath to get the life affirming hormone, Oxytocin, flowing so it can help you shift out of F3 and burn off stress. This process opens your heart, energizes you and is critical for good health.

Tip 3: Plug your right nostril and breathe in for a count of 5 through your left, hold for 5, exhale for 5. This stimulates the right side of the brain, calming you and shifting out of F3. It is an awesome way to calm busy brain and fall back asleep.

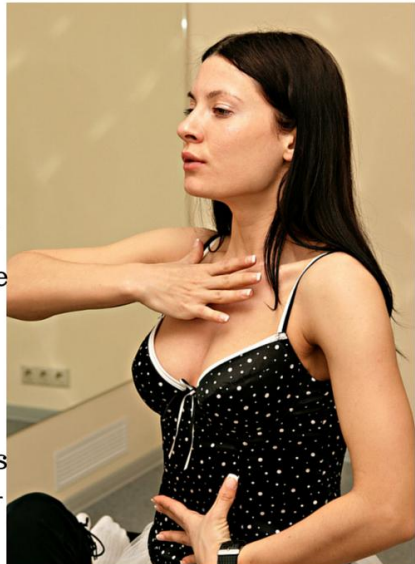
The more you practice these breathing tips, the easier and more responsive your body will become to them. Your brain loves oxygen! I typically do at least three rounds of the first two tips and four or five of the nostril breathing.

Oxytocin Breath

Breathe into your belly...on the exhale make a 'pleasure' sound while saying HAhhhhhhhhhhh

This stimulates the Vegus Nerve, raises your vibration, shifts you out of fight & flight and produces the love hormone - Oxytocin

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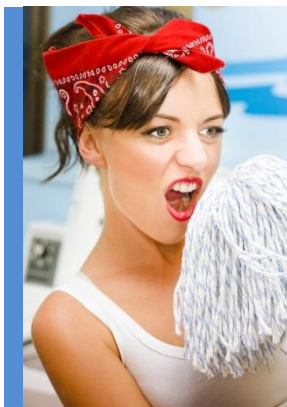


This tool was taught to me by Dr. Ellie Drake, founder of BraveHeart Women

Mindfulness: Mindfulness is about being aware and present in any given moment. It is about shifting out of autopilot and doing things on purpose. Being in the moment – really focusing your attention on what you are currently doing without thought of what you need to do when you are done, or how you will pay the bills, etc, is one form of mindfulness. You get so much more from any task when you draw on all your senses, quiet your mind and allow yourself to be fully present. [See the appendix for a 'living in the moment' tip sheet.]

Meditation falls under the category of mindfulness and has been proven to reduce both stress and the negative affects stress can have on your body. There are many different ways to meditate, so choose one that feels good to you and add it to your self-care practices. If you are brand new to it, I suggest trying a guided meditation (search 'free guided meditations') as this will help you relax until you learn the process. If this feels like too much (or too weird) try just closing your eyes, taking a couple of deep breaths and stopping all thought for one minute (set a timer the first few times or you will keep wondering how long you have and that defeats the purpose). Try doing this a few times a day and see how much better you feel.

Release: Movement mixed with creativity is a wonderful way to release stress and recharge your batteries. Here are three tips you can try to help you with this process.



Tip #1: Dancing around a room, shaking your hips, stomping your legs (think African Dance), banging make believe drums or allowing your body to flow freely, all help to get your energy moving in a positive way. If you can add singing into the mix (or any sounds) you'll get an even greater release of stress. So add some dance into boring old chores, play some drums, swing around with your kids (mop?), pets or partner...

movement + creativity = decreased stress

Tip #2: True laughter is another wonderful way to release stress (as are tears, but they don't usually feel as fun). Find things to laugh at – watch a show or video, read a comic, or enjoy a laugh with a friend, family member or colleague. This is not about laughing at another's distress, but about allowing your heart to expand through merriment.

Many women have learned to hold back their laughter as ways to punish (similar to a cold shoulder) or because they have been taught to control this beautiful release to be socially appropriate. When used as punishment, this hurts you because you lose the benefit of the tension release at a time of obvious stress. It also hurts your relationship because often times a good laugh is exactly what you need to open your heart and work through the disagreement.

When it comes to being socially appropriate, while there are times when a full out belly laugh might not be the best idea, these times are actually quite rare. So I suggest you release this social limitation and

allow yourself to enjoy this life affirming release. I believe those who are upset by genuine laughter are dealing with battles of their own.

Laugh with abandon...

"because those who mind don't matter and those who matter don't mind."

Dr. Suess



Tip #3: Shift your perspective to one that feels good. We all know that when we are looking at one side of a mountain we are only seeing one piece of the picture...yet often when it comes to situations in our lives, we take one perspective into view (ours) and respond as if we've seen it all. The interesting thing with this practice is not only are you missing a lot of what's really going on, but your perspective will typically be based on your feelings which are assigned meaning from past experiences and are therefore coated with judgment and bias. The end result, not only are you missing the whole story, but you have also chosen your common path (a pattern) which will create a lot of repeat challenges in your life.


When you take the actions of others personally, you close your mind to learning the truth and open the door to hurt, blame and accusations. Relationship discord creates stress!

There are many different ways to shift your perspective, but all of them require you to release the hold you have on what you think is your current reality and open your mind to a new point of view. This can be hard to do, especially when strong emotions are present. Unfortunately until you do this, new information will not be able to get through the blocks your subconscious mind puts up to protect you, which means a shift will not occur. If your emotions are really strong you can try one of the following to break free of it:

- **Notice your breathing** – breath deep counting to 10 while you do so. Empty your mind of all other thought and just focus on breathing and counting. If your heart rate doesn't go down your mind is still engaged and telling the brain you are in danger.
- **Focus on the bottom of your feet.** Rock back and forth on your feet, side to side, really notice the feel of your shoes or the floor – by shifting your focus to your feet you actually move out of your emotional state, allowing new information to come in.
- **Choose a word or signal** (an anchor spot) during a time of calm that you will use to signal to yourself you need to calm down. Say the word or touch the anchor spot in a heated moment - this will often put you into the 3rd person where the emotion can be witnessed rather than felt.
- **Pretend you are a fly** on the wall watching your situation. This might sound strange, but getting out of your head and onto the wall, also gives you a 3rd person perspective.
- **Take a break.** There is no shame in recognizing your emotions are running the show and that you need some time before an intelligent conversation can occur. Often the very act of telling someone you are too angry and need a moment to calm down will be enough to cause a shift to happen.

Not surprisingly, the more you learn about the reason for another person's behaviour, the easier it becomes to understand their actions. Even if you discover they were striking out at you, it's still up to you whether or not you're going to react. If you truly want to decrease your stress, it's a good idea to notice troubling feelings as they arise and learn to shift them to a feeling that will bring you relief rather than more angst. Becoming curious about your own response is a great way to do this as it shifts you to an objective viewpoint taking the heat out of the emotion and allowing you to see more clearly.

For example, imagine your teenager is out past curfew and you feel angry, if you allow your thoughts to fuel your anger you will increase your stress and tell your body to prepare for battle. If instead you notice the anger and shift to curiosity, you will shift out of the angry emotion, releasing stress and taking your body out of the fight, flight or freeze nervous system. With practice and an ability to stop negative self-talk, you will find communication easier and experience less stress on your elastic.



Internal Conversation Example

How dare he be late again! [anger]
 I wonder why I feel so angry when he is late? [curiosity]
 Because he's always disrespecting me and my rules! [anger]
 Okay, take a deep breath, I'm not in danger here. [calming]
 What if he's hurt? [worry]
 I have no way of knowing if he is hurt or being disrespectful, I will remain curious until he comes home and can provide the details. [curiosity/calm]

Feelings are signals – it is your thoughts that give them meaning. Remember your goal is to release stress which shifting to a more positive feeling will do. It will also allow you (if you continue controlling your self-talk) to have a calm conversation when your loved one gets home which decreases relationship stress and models respect.

C = Create it

Most people have heard about intention setting, the law of attraction and the power of the mind, but very few actually make the connection between these ideas and the stress levels in their lives. Human beings are made to create – in fact, this is how we make the impossible (flying, telephones, skyscrapers), possible. So, I suggest you use this ability – which we all have – to influence your stress level and help you be successful, happy and evolving.

Here are some ideas for how you might begin:

Create a support team: Surround yourself with people you trust and enjoy. When your support team is a major part of your stress in life, something important is at play. Every person in your life is there on purpose, so you can't just throw away those who make your life unpleasant, but you can figure out what they are here to help you learn and focus on learning it. When you accept people as they are while creating healthy boundaries about how you react to them, how much you interact with them and what kind of influence they have in your life, you reduce stress and increase connection. You start this process by becoming clear on your needs, sharing your expectations with others, and enforcing your

boundaries assertively. When you have people around you that you like and trust, you will find that your elastic relaxes and your stress feels more manageable.

Create a self-care protocol: We've all heard that we need to put our oxygen mask on first if there's a problem on an airplane, yet for so many self-care falls into a 'when I have time' category in regular life. Stress accumulates and without intervention will continue to do so until a tipping point is reached and your body can no longer easily recover from the damage that has been caused. Your self-care protocol needs tools for burning off stress on a regular basis as well as ideas for recharging your batteries.

Make a list of the things you enjoy doing that decrease your stress, relax you and bring pleasure into your day. Pleasure is a necessity, not a luxury, so if you struggle with guilt when you try to experience it, you need to figure out a way to get over that. Pleasure recharges our batteries, burns off stress and makes us more productive!

An important point to keep in mind for this section is that this is your self-care protocol you are creating. What works best for you might not be what works best for me or your kids or your neighbour. Fill your protocol with ideas that are appealing to you, that make you feel stronger and help you be the kind of person you truly want to be. Be sure to include simple things you can do anywhere in less than a minute (breathing techniques, stretches) all the way through to those escapes that really fill you up (travel, quality time with a friend...)



Create your story: Many of us have experienced negative situations in life that feel like defining pieces of who we are and what we are capable of achieving. The truth is actually the opposite – what we are capable of becoming has no limits, except for those we place upon ourselves.

Your previous experiences do not define you, but can hold you back from really living your life. Every time you share your story you give off a vibration that attracts other things vibrating at that frequency to you. This means when you tell your story from a victim perspective, you become stuck at an energy point that won't allow you to move on. This creates stress because this is not where you belong.

Rewriting your story is about standing in your power regardless of previous situations and sharing your story from that perspective. This raises your vibration, helps you reconnect with your natural resiliency, releases unnecessary stress or negativity and attracts higher vibrations to you.

This doesn't mean your life will no longer have challenges, but it does mean you will enjoy the adventure much more easily and release a lot of the unhealthy stress the old story was causing.



This booklet provides a starting place for living in a stress laden world. Re-writing your story, creating a healthy self-care protocol, building strong, positive relationship skills or learning how to change your mindset might require some help – which plenty of us are willing to provide.

Women in their thirties to fifties experience the greatest amount of stress of any group in our society. Knowing what you can do to ensure you are dealing with it in healthy ways is critical.

I hope you will use the ideas you have learned in this booklet to help you bring out the best in yourself in ways that decreases your stress and allows you to enjoy the adventure you have come here to live. I would love to hear some of your favorite tips (from here or elsewhere) or answer any questions this booklet might have raised and can be reached via email at mail@empoweringnrg.com.

"We can't always control how fast our life spins, but perhaps we can influence how dizzy it makes us!"

Debbie Pokornik

Debbie Pokornik ([@debbiepokornik](#), [empowering.NRG](#)), a mother, social worker and entrepreneur who believes we all have a light to shine in this world, is the chief empowerment officer of [Empowering NRG](#). She is the author of bestseller *Standing in Your Power* as well as multi-award winning *Break Free of Parenting Pressures* and *Family Booster Shots* (cards).

As a [professional speaker](#) some topics she loves to talk on are:

- Standing in your power, how to move out of your shadow and into your spotlight
- How stress affects your hormones and steals your life energy
- How to execute a TUCK'N ROLL when life knocks you down



Appendix:

ABC's of Stress Busting – Cheat Sheet

Oh My Goddess – One Moment Please

Simple tips for living in the moment, one moment at a time

Appendix

ABC's of Stress Busting – Cheat Sheet

1. Do stretches that release tension from your body on a regular basis, especially in those places where you feel tension. Yoga, dance, tai chi and regular stretches are all great ways to do this. You don't need to wait for a class, just find a private place/moment and stretch.
2. Become aware of your self-talk and notice how it adds to your stress level. Find tools to help you [quiet your self-talk](#) (click to read an article on this topic) so you can hear your inner wisdom instead.
3. When something stressful is happening, do a quick assessment of your situation and when it turns out you are not really in danger, respond appropriately to your brain i.e. *I'm okay, I've got this, Relax, All is good.* ***Remember whining kids, grumpy bosses, malfunctioning computers and traffic jams are not dangerous...just annoying.**
4. Notice your breathing and make a conscious effort to have it help you relax. Deep belly breaths, Oxytocin breaths and left nostril breathing are three ideas for doing this.
5. Turn down your brain chatter and make an effort to be fully present in the moment a few times a day. Meditation can be as simple as closing your eyes and emptying your mind for one minute.
6. Use movement and your own imagination to release your stress – dance, laugh, look at the situation a different way. It's all good!
7. Notice who you are spending your time with and whether they help you reduce your stress or add to it. You can't always choose who you are around, but you can figure out creative ways to limit their negative impact on you.
8. Make it a point to practice self-care every day. Figure out what is pleasurable for you and bring more of that into your life. This doesn't have to be big things (although those are nice too), but even a short walk in the sun or a hot cup of tea can make a difference.
9. Pay attention to the story you are 'writing' about your life and use creative license to adapt it so it raises your vibration and attracts good things to you.

Oh My Goddess! One Moment Please

Living in the moment is about being present for whatever you are doing. There is no room in this moment for regretting the past, worrying about the future or scrolling through your never-ending tasks. The more you practice living in the moment, the easier it becomes. It can be hard to stay in the present for long periods of time, so here are some ideas that take only a moment:

- While in the shower, immerse yourself fully in your senses; feel the touch of the water on your skin, hear the water hitting the ground, smell the fragrances and breathe in the steam. For one moment, think of nothing else but the pure pleasure of that shower.
- Sitting down with a fresh mug of coffee or tea, empty your mind and feel the warmth of the mug in your hand. Breathe in the aroma, close your eyes and savour the taste.
- Go for a walk in nature and take a moment to listen to the crunch of your footsteps. Take your shoes off and feel the ground beneath your feet. Notice the sun, rain or wind on your exposed skin. Listen for the many layers of sound. Breathe in deeply and feel your breath go all the way down to your toes.
- Make chore time your time! Let go of all the lists running through your head, any resentment that you have towards cleaning or any worries about the future. Play some music, put on your jingly skirt or whatever gets you moving and immerse yourself in the pleasure of the moment.
- For tasks you really dislike, set a timer to focus only on that task for 15 minutes or whatever amount of time seems right to you. Then allow yourself 5 minutes to stretch, go outside, enjoy a beverage or read a chapter in a book. In other words, you are giving the task your full focus and then getting pleasure from the time off guilt-free.

Adapted from *Standing in Your Power; A Guide For Living Your Life Fully Awake* by Debbie Pokornik