

## **No More Stress**

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### *A Feeling*

Stress is a feeling. It is a signal that forces are applied to the organism which are greater than what the organism is usually accustomed to. Over the long-run the forces exerting stress can lead to the breakdown of healthy physical and mental mechanisms. But they can also lead to a strengthening of the organism. Much depends on whether the organism needs to change in a direction that is suitable for the organism, or whether it does not. In human parlance, 'suitable to the organism' means that one sees meaning in one's actions, one's job, one's relationship and one's goals, that they are in sync with one's values and fundamental interests. If I spend a lot of resources on something I do not value, I will feel stress.

### *Good versus Bad Stress*

There are many different kinds of stress and a general distinction is between 'good' (positive) and 'bad' (negative) stress. Which kind of stress we are faced with is contained within the feeling. Unfortunately, one actually has to be attentive to the information the feeling of stress contains. Many people say they are 'stressed' without looking at more closely what is encapsulated within this feeling. If they did that, they would see what is out of sync, and begin thinking about ways to become better connected with oneself and do the things one really values.

### *The feeling is individual and subjective*

When we say that we are under a lot of stress, what we really mean is that we are in a situation where we experience this feeling of stress. People can perceive vastly different situations as

stressful. Since it is a feeling it depends on how one as an individual perceives the world and processes this information, which in turn depends on one's biological endowment, social environment and mental processes. Imagination, self-confidence and self-confidence play a role, as well as one's values, interests and aspirations. But most importantly it depends on how we communicate with ourselves and others.

### *A Result of Various Emotions*

Stress is a result of various other emotions, such as anger, hurt, loneliness or loss, that drive us to do engage in certain behaviours and communicate in a certain way with ourselves and our environment.

### *A Loss of Flexibility*

Stress often causes a narrowing of one's perspective as flexibility and openness are decreased. The focus is increasingly on accomplishing narrowly defined objectives in life. If these objectives are not congruent with one's basic values, interests and aspirations, one's actions lack meaning, which often results in negative stress. Change is no longer constructive, but leads one away from the desirable goals in life.

### *'Must' versus 'Want'*

If tasks on the job or relationship activities are just performed because they 'must', they can over time lead to the negative kind of stress. So, the first step of doing something about stress requires finding out what various activities mean to you. This involves shedding some light on one's values and interests, which in practice shows to be a very effective approach against stress. This is often not easy, often out of a fear of the necessity for a sudden change to one's direction in life. Instead the process often needs to be more gradual, making changes in little steps with a view to change in the medium- to long-un. Knowing about one's values, interests and aspirations at the least helps improve decision-making in the long-run. Once our compass works, we are less likely to get caught up in irrelevant things.

### *Indecisiveness*

Indecisiveness in itself can be very stressful. As long as one is uncommitted there are still a number of options that need to be kept ‘open’, which requires additional effort and information. Taking decisions and assuming responsibility for these decisions is usually effective in reducing stress. If a decision needs to be modified later, often there is the option to modify the course of events later. Usually, we do not have all the information we would like to have before we make a decision, especially if the outcome depends on other people’s reactions and unknown future events. All one can do is to collect a reasonable amount of information and decide in a practical way. Accepting this means that one cannot blame oneself for a ‘wrong’ decision. One tried one’s best at the moment the decision was made, based on the information that was available at the time. People usually try to act in their best interest, which also includes the welfare of others. If others do not feel good, we do not feel good.

### *Discovering one’s values and fundamental interests*

Making better decisions in the face of stress also requires the information, that is unlikely to change much over time, one’s fundamental values and interests. If I make a decision with these in mind I am unlikely to consider my decision ‘bad’ in the future, even if it turns out some facts were different. Doing things with one’s fundamental values, interests and aspirations in mind reduces stress. On the other hand, if a path does not sync with one’s core values, it will not be a happy journey.

### *Improving Communication*

Stress can also be a result of problems communicating with the world around. Oftentimes people have difficulties telling others about how they see things or what they want, whether out of fear that they lose a job or relationship or hurt someone. However, the result often is that vital information does not get shared and the stress on oneself, the job or relationship gets even worse. Sometimes there might be a valid reason not to share and to withhold information, but such instances are very rare. Communication generates feedback, and this information can be helpful in getting a situation resolved.

*Living by one's values and fundamental interests to reduce stress*

I have lined out in my other work on how to best explore one's values. The deep values are the most important ones, on top of which derivative values can be build. For example, financial fortune is usually not an end in itself, but a means to satisfy needs. Pursuing financial gain without knowing why and what for leads to stress, because there is potentially no end to it, and one accumulates the means to satisfy a need, but ultimately never satisfies it.

*Happiness*

Money buys goods and services. Some want security, others a house for their family, and again others the ability to create something in the world. In the second case, for example, it is not the money but having a family which is the deeper value. Knowing this makes it easier to stay on course, take pride in one's achievements and be happier. The deeper values tend to be more stable than the more derivative ones, which are more likely to depend on the situation one is in. Feeling safe, also financially, or being seeing as someone who is caring may be deeper values, getting a plaque for being the employee of the month is a more derivative one. To eliminate stress, it is important to identify the deeper values and to find the most efficient and rewarding ways to pursue them. This increases happiness, because if we pursue what we value we are happier.

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