

Coping with Stress, implies containing or controlling stress, which can be damaging when energy input is excessive, or more than is required for dealing with a situation. The causes of stress are many and all forms of stress are constraining in some way. The word stress is from a Latin root *strictus*, from *stringere*, to draw tight. There are strings attached to most that we become contracted to in this world, whether it is a mortgage or a pay day loan.

Commitment without consideration as to cost will most likely mean commitment to mental, emotional and physical tension. Not all commitment is arduous or stressful, as it is possible to be committed to freedom; self-response-ability and a life lived in accordance within one's means.

Energy as life-force, is expressive at many levels, whether mineral, plant, animal or human; this when fulfilling its purpose can be called good energy, or energy that is suited to purpose, and when destructive and inimical to purpose, bad energy, not suitable to purpose. Energy in itself is neither good nor bad; it is how that it is directed is the key; we would all like to live a harmonious life and when stress becomes excessive we need ways of dealing with it.

Coping methods can be at either physical emotional or mental levels, such as exercise, like going for a walk and if possible in open countryside or by the sea. Listening to soothing music, calming the breath, or even a short nap as worry can be emotionally draining. Thoughts are energy formations with direct links to the way we feel, and deep feelings of anxiety can be persistent and difficult to let go.

The practice of mindfulness is taking control by steadying the mind and breaking the inertia of a train of thought that is worrying. Train yourself to stop serial thing by focussing on the immediate and present moment; if at home try removing your footwear and earth yourself, by affirming your contact with the ground. Become aware of the things in your immediate vicinity as it is possible to be rushing to solve problems and forget the space you occupy.

Sub consciousness and deep seated fears are the most difficult as on the surface they may seem irrational, and yet there is always a reason lying

somewhere behind the fears we experience. The yoga class and yoga *nidra* can be of help; particularly if we can hold ourselves at the edge of sleep and observe impressions that rise to the surface when deeply relaxed. One technique, when guided by an experienced yoga teacher, is to first relax and then present a series of images to the mind, some pleasant and some unpleasant e.g. a cottage with roses around the door, an endless burning dessert, with repetition so as to re-enforce the image. Then letting the image go and watching what comes to the surface when deep seated tension is released. A not dissimilar auto-suggestive relaxation technique, in which helpful words and sentences are used to create positive feeling changes, is Autogenic training. The words if carefully chosen can help bring a positive re-orientation and support when dealing with a variety of life's difficulties.

Meditation also helps to put life back into perspective, by creating space between you and the problem to be solved. Stress intensifies a situation and exaggerates; and creating space between you and the problem, opens the mind to fresh ideas. Creating space is the basis of Zen meditation, starting with the focussed mind then letting go completely, and letting go whatever has captured the mind, as if into limitless space, so that it disappears completely. Then returning back to the point, as you will discover, always with new ideas and a fresh perspective.

Stairways to Heaven is a similar meditation for outdoors on a summers day or by use of the imagination and starts by just listening to the sounds of nature, bird song, and even sensing the world around as if seeing with the skin surface.; then by stepping upward from each sense impression, reach upward as if into limitless space, until mind and heart are filled, as if with blue sky. Blue is a refreshing and healing colour and is only a step away from the clear untroubled mind of a self-realised yogi.

The breath and the emotions are closely related and calming the breath, calms' the emotions. There is a close relationship between breath and spirit and when agitated in body and mind, the breath is likely to reflect the emotional tone present in that moment. When stressed breathe deeply and slowly as if the breath were rising and falling, from and into an oasis of peace. Then retain this peace at the centre of your being.

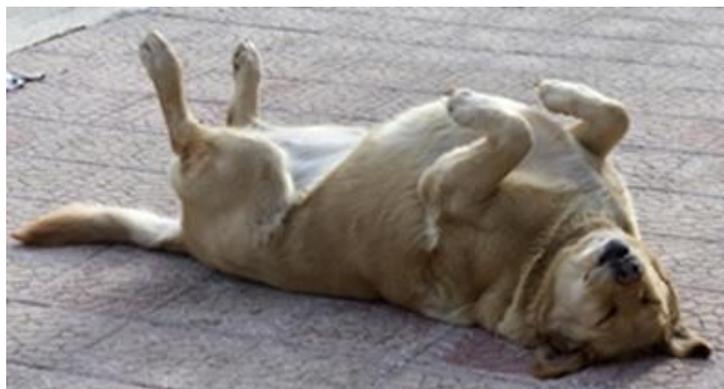
***"Nothing can bring you lasting peace ...
You have it already ...
If you would just stop disturbing it ..."***

Swami Satchidananda

Dreamtime and Dreaming is an important part of sleep patterns; as dreaming is a safety valve that helps relieve stress; by dramatising and forming new relationships, between deeply hidden fears and emotions. Without the release of tension and anxiety during dreams, the hidden stress would manifest in illness and many stress related conditions. A stress driven mind is not conducive to sleep, and one way in which to induce dreaming and restful sleep, is with eyes closed, practise peaceful relaxed breathing, at the same time watching with interest the images that drift through the mind. These images can arise from different levels, from day to day emotional attachments, to hidden anxieties carried to us from childhood. If you observe these images without attachment, as they drift idly by, sleep will soon follow.

Occasionally we may need to make a more positive impact upon dreamtime, such as when disturbed by stress or a mind struggling with an unresolved problem. This is where sincere heartfelt prayer can be of help, such as the 'Lord's Prayer', with focus on its meaning and its relevance to you. The Yogi can also use words in the form of a repetitive mantra, such as mentally repeating "Let all that is irrelevant to the healing of this being, be banished", or "Let all that is contrary to my peace of mind and tranquillity be banished". Whatever the form of words, it is important that you feel comfortable with them and then carry the associated feeling into sleep.

Words and sentences can help influence the energy of dreamtime, such as those which include Truth, Love, Goodness, Happiness, Strength and many similar words representing important functions that give rise to a feeling of stability. Many of the words and images that appear on TV prior to retiring can adversely influence our dreams, therefore before sleep, take control and allow a little time, either to count your blessing, listen to music and enjoy the space which is your own.



Stress and Renewal – keep up the practice of Savasana:

A couple of days ago I was minding my own business, lying in Savasana enjoying some relaxation. My husband (Maurice for those of you who know him), was busy listening to an on-line lecture on his computer in the room next door. I could not help but overhear part of the lecture and was intrigued by what I heard.

" also pulls blood from the capillaries in your brain, the net effect is that when you're under this build up of chronic annoying stress you don't have access to all of your neural network ..."

After finishing my Savasana I went to ask Maurice what he was listening to. It turned out to be a set of lectures about 'Inspiring Leadership through Emotional Intelligence'. I decided to listen to the lecture I had overheard. It was geared to helping those in senior management positions deal more effectively with their stress levels, thus helping those who work alongside them to attain optimum levels of positive working ability.

It struck me that this also applies to each and every one of us who may not necessarily be in senior managerial positions but nevertheless, have to cope with the day-to-day stresses that life throws at us. We all need a certain amount of stress in our lives to function and this is no bad thing. The problems start when we encounter a build-up of annoying chronic stress.

It is estimated that many of us experience 8 to 12 of these episodes each day, which may only be brief in their make-up, to accumulate what is known as an 'allostatic load'. According to Wikipedia, allostatic load is:

"the wear and tear on the body" which grows over time when the individual is exposed to repeated or chronic stress.

This can begin as soon as we wake up in the morning. Ideally we need to be thinking 'what a fantastic day' or something similarly positive but very often we immediately start to think about the 'to do list', what we didn't finish at work the day before etc. This is enough to send the body into the flight or fight response, taking only approximately 48 milliseconds to become conscious thought having triggered the Sympathetic Nervous System.

At this point a cascade of chemical reactions take place in the body all of which prepare the body to fight or run away. Vasoconstrictors decrease the

size of the blood vessels; blood travels about seven and a half miles around the body and once this is compromised by the decrease in the size of these vessels, the available space for blood to flow is reduced by about one mile. It is easy to understand from this why the heart has to beat harder and the blood pressure goes up. It also includes blood flow to the brain, thus lessening access to the neural network.

In addition, our immune system is surprisingly quickly compromised, lowering the output of killer 'T' cells. It also inhibits 'neurogenesis', which is the growth and repair of brain tissue. This process is not so efficient in adults and is more active in the foetus, young children and teenagers, so we certainly don't want to be interfering with what neurogenesis we have left available to us!

In this state of chronic stress we tend to be more closed to new ideas and to people we don't know. Our peripheral vision is also reduced and we are more inclined to higher incidences of infectious diseases, heart attack, strokes, type two diabetes and sexual dysfunction. Not a good place to be.

Provided the Parasympathetic Nervous System is able to counter the effect of the flight or fight syndrome, our bodies return to a more relaxed and healthy state. The immune system kicks back in and we are at our cognitive best and our most creative. It is also in this state that neurogenesis occurs and we need to maintain all the neural connections we can!

It struck me as ironic that I was lying in Savasana feeling relaxed and at ease when I overheard this lecture and how important it is to maintain a regular practice of deep relaxation, preferably on a daily basis, to be sure that the '*Allostatic Load*' is kept to a minimum. I wonder how many high-powered managers would benefit from such a practice?

So, all you Yogins and Yoginis, keep up the good work of regular Savasana and soothing pranayama exercises to help keep the body in a calm state of wellbeing so we may ride the crest of the wave with ease – rather than be swimming against the tide! (by Barbara Tomkinson).



Happiness as a way of life affirms the positive and adopts an approach to life in which one sees one's glass as being half full; it is a good will that affirms life in all its forms. Nothing is entirely bad as the negative affirms the positive and gives direction to the will. The yin and yang, the positive and receptive flow together and between them awaken the creative and dispel the gloom associated with the static and unchanging.

Happiness is heartfelt and therefore life-giving and is aware of the futility of wandering in the graveyard of past sorrows. To live in the light of happiness is a choice that has to be made and arises out of the wisdom that comes from glimpsing the meaning of life, overcoming difficulties, meditation and study.

Your own body is the temple of the spirit and a positive outlook creates the chemistry that is conducive to health. To break the bonds of inertia try some exercise and let the inner spirit of freedom guide you. Inertia is the enemy and will tend to repeat what has gone before; let the light of happiness illumine the way forward and choose movements which are refreshing, transcend the old ways and give joy to the body.

Pain is a no saying, it says no to the absolute and the intelligence that gives rise to life. Choose exercises which are flowing and life affirming and can be done without strain, with Head, Heart and Will, co-operating to produce the inner tonal qualities that harmonise the entire body. Happiness as a way of life has respect for all life, and reaches beyond the superficial to an awareness of the life-force; which is free of impedances that make life less than perfect.

Happiness arises out of a natural level of being where the Self posits and integrates its intuitive knowledge in accord with its highest nature. Light and Consciousness are closely related as both bring clarity to the world in which we live. This is not the bomb happy world induced by drugs or alcohol or the fantasy produced by an overwrought imagination, as it is the happiness of the ideal that is guided by the clear insightful mind of the yogi, their love of life and their actions and intent to subserve the highest good.

'The joy of Being, which is the only true happiness, cannot come to you through any form, possession, achievement, person or event – through anything that happens. That joy cannot come to you – ever. It emanates from the formless dimension within you, from consciousness itself and thus is one with who you are.'

From Eckhart Tolle's 'A New Earth' page 214