

# Three Principles Of Stress Resilience

## What is stress?

Stress is what we commonly call the combination of the body's emotional and physiological reactions to perceived threat, in other words, its reaction to anything that throws it off balance.

When stressed out, the body-mind goes into a kind of alarm mode. This is adaptive; it enables the body-mind to respond and then repair itself.

## What's the matter with Stress?

Because it is adaptive, the body-mind's stress reaction itself is not a problem, but chronic stress—being in a constant alarm state without a rest-and-digest cycle—is a problem.

Without the rest-and-digest cycle, your body is constantly mobilizing to provide exceptional resources. This drains the body and nervous system, and causes dysregulation.

You know what this is like: you feel like you're on your last nerve; every little irritant seems like a big deal; your fuse is short; your mind races and you can't shut it off; you have trouble sleeping.

If your body never gets to rest and digest so that it can assimilate fuel and nutrients as well as emotional experiences and thereby repair itself, you get depleted. Then, as you start running on empty, you begin to experience more and more symptoms that just won't go away.

## Symptoms of stress

Chronic stress affects all the systems in the body-mind. To begin with, the sympathetic nervous system kicks into gear and activates all the systems listed below, and you will experience related symptoms.

- **Cardiovascular**
  - heart pounding or beating fast; flushing or blushing; cold hands and/or feet, or sweaty palms.
- **Respiratory**
  - rapid, shallow breathing
- **Gastrointestinal**
  - indigestion, nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and/or constipation
- **Endocrine**
  - the hormones released will make you feel jittery, jumpy, nervous,
- **Musculoskeletal**
  - muscle tension, headaches, muscle aches, chest pain
- **Mind**
  - racing thoughts; can't relax; can't shut down; worry; anger; irritability; short fuse; can't enjoy the things you used to.

### Three principles for stress resilience: discharge, soothe, nourish

Because of the way the human brain is structured, when it's in alarm mode, logic and language don't work well.



@the\_entrepreneurs\_therapist

You know what this is like.  
Telling yourself to relax  
doesn't help you relax.

Telling your mind to shut up  
doesn't stop the endless  
looping of thoughts.

Saying to yourself "This is  
really no big deal, what's  
your problem?" doesn't help  
to put the problem into its  
proper perspective.

The body-mind responds to experience, so what works well are actual, lived experiences of relaxation, a calm mind, and a proper perspective, among other things.

You can think of stress resilience in terms of these three key principles: **discharge, soothe and nourish.**

The body-mind has been mobilized to run. It literally thinks like a rabbit facing a bear, except you're not a rabbit and there's no bear from which you can run. But the body-mind still needs to discharge its "running" energy.

The body-mind is in an alarm state. It's like the fire alarm is stuck in the 'on' position. Stress-inducing phenomena are everywhere (including in your thoughts), so your body-mind is constantly barraged by alarm messages. To de-activate the alarm, the body-mind needs to be soothed.

The body-mind's stress reaction has depleted it. It has used all its resources to sound the alarm and mobilize itself, so it needs to be nourished.

## **Applying these three principles to reduce stress and become more resilience**

These three stress resilience principles are simple, although not always easy.

In order to discharge, the body needs to move. For some people, this will mean an aerobic workout; for others it could simply be a walk. The trick is finding *your* way of moving that helps you feel better.

Soothing the body-mind means offering it opportunities that make it, metaphorically speaking (and maybe quite literally, too) heave a sigh.

For some people, this might mean a hot bath, but for others, it might mean watching a funny movie or having a massage, or even having a good cry. Again, in order to apply this principle effectively, you must find *your* way of sending yourself soothing messages.

Nourishing the body-mind means offering it experiences that mentally, emotionally and physically recharge your batteries. Afterwards, you feel renewed and refreshed (although not necessarily rested).

Nourishing experiences often involve what's called a 'flow state'. If you can remember a time when you were a kid, so fully absorbed in what you were doing that you lost track of time—maybe you played sports or were an artist of some kind—then you have experienced being “in the zone” or in a flow state, where you were focussed and concentrated, in an enjoyable way, on the activity in which you were engaged. Those are the kinds of experiences that nourish the body-mind.

Inspirational activities are also nourishing. For some people that may mean reading inspirational literature, scriptures or poetry. For others it might be listening to or maybe even singing a specific song. Some people find inspiration in a Yoga class or a religious service.

For all three of these principles, I invite you to think of old activities you could pick up, or maybe new ones you've always longed to do. Don't limit yourself to the examples above. Experiment with a variety of activities and see how they make you feel.

### **Once is not enough**

In applying the three principles, there are four keys to keep in mind: repetitive, simple, enjoyable and with awareness.

It is important to remember that, in order to counteract months, years or lifetimes of stress, engaging in one activity one time will not be sufficient to experience results.

The discharge, soothe and nourish “treatments” need to be administered regularly, and the more frequently the better.

### **Simple, small and doable**

In order to be able to do these things frequently, it helps if they are simple, in other words, small and doable. In fact, frequency is more important than duration.

For example, five minutes every day is more effective than 35 minutes once a week. You can ask yourself, “What is a teeny weeny, itty bitty, doable step I can take?” and try that one thing every day.

## **Enjoyable**

Most importantly, engaging in the activities you have identified to discharge, soothe and nourish your body-mind can't feel like punishment.

For example, if you're saying to yourself "Working out is like banging my head against a wall: it feels so good when I stop." that's not likely to be a helpful activity. If it feels like just one more chore on your endless and stressful to-do list, you have my permission to let it go! When activities feel like punishment and aren't enjoyable, then they're adding to your body-mind's stress reaction, not counteracting it.

## **Mindful**

Finally, in order to enable the body-mind to receive the benefits of the activities in which you are engaging, it's important to put all your attention on the activity itself. If you're having a cup of tea, Appreciate the hot water as it pours into your cup. Watch the tea steep. Feel the heat of the cup in your hands and the warmth approaching your face and you lift the cup toward your lips. Inhale the scent and savour that before you drink.

This key is a bit like the precautions you get when taking medication. For example, when you take an antacid, it interferes with the absorption of other medications. Stress and lack of attention interrupt the body-mind's ability to absorb the benefits of stress reduction practices. When you pay attention, you reap the benefits.