

Stress Management Recommendations - Part One

Hey, everybody. In this presentation, we're going to cover some basic recommendations for stress management.

There are two different approaches to minimizing the impact of stress. The first is to reduce the amount of stress you experience, and the second is to manage the stress you can't avoid.

In terms of reducing the amount of stress you experience, one way to do that is to avoid unnecessary life stress. I mean, let's face it. There is a lot of stress that we can't avoid and that is necessary just in the living of our lives, so inviting unnecessary stress is probably not a good strategy if we're concerned with optimizing our HPA axis function. Learning to say no is a really important part of this, knowing our limits and not taking on projects or commitments that we can't handle, which is more difficult for some personality types than others. If we were raised in an environment where pleasing other people was important to our safety or well-being, then that is certainly going to be harder for us than if we didn't have that orientation, but learning to be able to say no is crucial. Avoiding people who stress you out—again, this isn't always possible, especially if they are family members, but certainly, if they are acquaintances or even friends in your life who really cause a lot of stress in your life, then you could either work on improving that relationship, or you could withdraw from those relationships if they are not necessary and an integral part of your life.

Going on a news fast or at least significantly reducing your exposure to news is also another strategy for reducing unnecessary stress. This includes TV, internet, print, and radio. Newspapers may be one of the least stressful news sources because you can pick and choose what you read, especially now with mobile applications. You don't even need to get the full newspaper, and you can just quickly scan headlines and only read stories that you want to read. I'm not advocating total withdrawal from society. I like to stay up to date on what is going on. At the same time, there is a lot of stuff that we're exposed to that we don't necessarily need to be exposed to, and the news likes to report on tragedy, violence, and things that aren't working. You rarely see stories in the news about people who are helping each other, taking care of each other, or positive events. They don't get as many clicks, and that's not typically what the media is interested in. Just recognize that, that there is a certain bias of the news, and a lot of the things that are reported on can be stressful to take in, and they may not necessarily enrich or improve your life in any way.

Another important strategy for reducing unnecessary stress is giving up pointless arguments. Certain conflicts are unavoidable, and conflict is a necessary part of getting our needs met in life, so I'm not suggesting that we can live a conflict ... or even should live a conflict-free life because that would be one where we don't actively try to get our needs met, but at the same time, there is a difference between a conflict that is actually moving toward needs getting met, either our own or other people's needs, and a conflict that is only going to create stress and even potentially ensure

that needs are not met. That is probably the definition of a pointless argument—when two sides are so firmly entrenched in their viewpoint, there is very little chance of change or resolution occurring. It's just an exercise in frustration. Internet debating is one really good example of this, arguing with a troll in the comment section of a blog post, for example. If you're of the Paleo persuasion and someone who you interact with on Facebook is a committed, die-hard vegan, trying to get them to see your point of view and change their diet is probably very unlikely, just as it would be for them to try to get you to adopt a vegan diet. Spending your time on these kinds of arguments is not only a waste of time from a productivity perspective, it is stressful, and it's unnecessarily stressful.

Regarding other forms of conflict, educating yourself, improving your communication skills, and even studying conflict resolution, finding other ways to get your point across that are more likely to create connection than conflict, learning to listen with empathy, and then knowing when it is time to just be silent and not engage are all important parts of reducing unnecessary stress.

Removing unimportant tasks from your to-do list is really important, and this has been big for me. One of the first steps in productivity, time management, and stress reduction is just having a list and then organizing that list so that you're focusing on maybe two or three primary tasks that you need to accomplish each day. We talked about that in the Busy-to-Balance productivity course. The next step from there is actually pruning things from your to-do list that don't actually need to be done, or at least don't need to be done right now or don't need to be done by you. This could mean delegating a less important task to staff members who can help, if you have staff. This could mean just completely letting go of tasks that you don't need to do. It could mean moving them to your someday list, meaning things that you might get to at some point, but you're not going to devote mental energy to right now. If you have a really long to-do list that you pull up every day, that is going to cause stress, especially if you're not able to get through those things through the day. In the Busy-to-Balance course, we talked a lot about planning on a monthly basis, looking at your month, and seeing what the most important things are that need to happen, then on a weekly basis writing down the tasks that will get you closer to completing those two or three monthly goals, and then on a daily basis the tasks that will get you closer to completing those weekly goals. There are other things in life, of course, that are just part of your daily rhythm that need to be there, but otherwise, letting go of tasks that are not important can be a big stress reducer.

We kind of covered this in the pointless arguments section, but reducing your exposure to online stress, whether it is through email or social media, is a good idea. Avoid reading negative blog posts that you know are going to trigger you unless you really feel like you're going to benefit from that. I personally rarely check comments on my website now. I have a team of people—I'm fortunate to have a team of people who help with that. If somebody sends me a video that says, "Hey, you should check this out. This vegan is really ripping you here and saying you don't know what you're talking about," I just don't even click that link. I don't watch it. I know it's pointless. I've learned through experience that those critiques are mostly ad hominem personal attacks. They are not really research based or evidence based. I'm always willing to look at studies and things that may contradict my current viewpoint and to change my mind if necessary, but I know the difference between constructive discussions and disagreements and these kinds of just purely

stressful ad hominem type of situations. I will have my staff just let me know if there is a comment that is legitimate that needs my attention. Before I had a staff, I would just quickly scan comments and make that determination on my own. Internet debating is a huge waste of time, and it's a huge energy suck, and it rarely leads to any kind of productive outcome. There actually have been studies on this, believe it or not—studies on trolling, internet comments, and whether people feel like those discussions ever lead to positive outcomes, and the answer is almost always no.

Minimizing your physiological stressors is important as well, so addressing things such as anemia, thyroid issues, blood sugar swings, gut inflammation, food intolerances, essential fatty acid deficiencies, toxins, under-eating, or overtraining—all the stuff we're talking about in ADAPT. Remember that stress is not just emotional or psychological. That's only one category of stress—that's perceived stress. You recall we also have inflammation as a stressor, and circadian disruption is another big stressor. If you're independently wealthy, living on a beach, just lying on the beach in Thailand, and you've got all of these issues that I just mentioned, physiological issues, your body could still be under enormous stress.