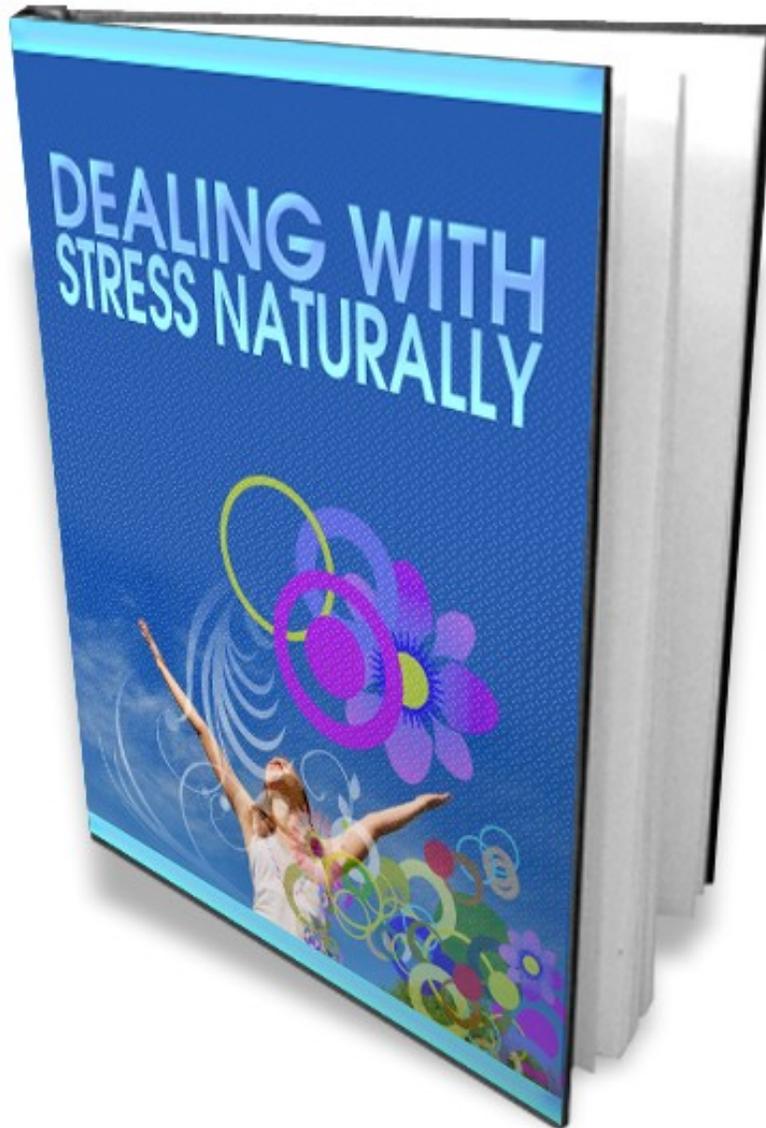


DEALING WITH
STRESS NATURALLY



Dealing With Stress Naturally





DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

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Table of Contents

[Introduction.....](#)4

[What is stress?.....](#)6

[Recognizing your stress triggers.....](#)12

[Why do these changes occur?.....](#)15

[What does stress do to you?.....](#)17

[Before seeking medical attention.....](#)18

[Medical stress solutions analyzed.....](#)20

[The importance of stress management.....](#)24

[Other things that might help.....](#)34

[Herbs and supplements for stress relief.....](#)36

[Conclusion.....](#)39





DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

Introduction

Anxiety, tension and stress are immutable facts of modern life. As the pace at which we fly through every day seems to become increasingly hectic, it becomes ever more difficult to find the time and space to relax, to take things easy every once in a while.

And yet, stress is a recognized killer, a condition that is known to be a contributory factor to many fatal conditions such as heart attacks and strokes. As these two conditions are respectively the number one and number three killers in the USA every year, the importance of dealing with stress cannot be overestimated.

Most of us have our own ways of dealing with or handling stress but it does not necessarily follow that we are all good at dealing with the anxiety and tensions that are part and parcel of everyday living. No matter who we are or what we do, there are always situations or times when things seem to get on top of us, when life throws us a curveball that we just can't deal with.

In those situations when life seems almost too much to bear, we all have different ways of coping with what is going on around us. Whilst a few resolute stoics might be to handle things through nothing more than strength of character and willpower, the majority of people need some kind of 'prop' to get through times like these.

For some folks, it's alcohol whilst others turn to cigarettes. For many however, times of great stress and tension immediately send them scurrying to the doctor's office or surgery to get a prescription for something that can calm them down and make them feel less stressed.

In all of these scenarios, it is a fact that drinking, smoking or even taking prescription drugs may not necessarily be the best thing for you. Of course, they may bring a temporary respite from the stressful situation that you found yourself in, but unfortunately, this respite is only a temporary. Moreover, more often than not, the stressful problem comes back with a vengeance all too soon.

Stress is a problem for everybody from time to time but the good news is that there are plenty of different things that you can do to reduce stress problems that are completely natural. The purpose of this guide is to look at as many natural ways of dealing with stress as possible,

DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY



whilst also highlighting how each particular natural stress treatment can be fitted in to your hurry-scurry daily existence.

Before beginning the quest to find natural ways of dealing with stress that everyone can use, let's start by considering what stress is, and what causes it.





DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

What is stress?

What causes it?

There are plenty of different dictionary definitions of what stress is but perhaps the easiest way of categorizing stress is to describe it as the emotional and physical strain that is placed upon us by pressure from the outside world.

When we are under stress, every one of us reacts in a different way, but it is most common for those who are stressed to be tense and irritable, finding themselves unable to concentrate or focus on the job in hand. Moreover, many people suffer from headaches, increased heartbeat and perhaps even dizziness or light-headedness as a result of being under stress.

Now, the first thing to understand is that whilst a book like this is focused on 'bad' stress, there is such a thing as good stress as well, as for many people, positive stress of this nature is an essential requirement in their lives.

For example, there are thousands of people all over the world who spend a significant proportion of their life doing things that the majority of us might suggest are completely crazy. Total amateurs who are not getting paid a single cent climb the tallest buildings in the world, strap a parachute to their back and jump off whilst everyone knows someone who has been bungee jumping.

When they are stood at the top waiting to go, you can bet your bottom dollar that there is a huge amount of stress and tension involved but in a situation like this, that is the very point of doing it.

The adrenalin rush, the huge buzz that comes with the leap into the unknown and the consequent release of tension and stress makes the whole thing totally worthwhile. This is why there are undoubtedly many people who are addicted to this kind of stress, and to a certain degree, all of us need a little of this kind of stress and excitement in our lives to make living a truly worthwhile experience.

But leaving aside this positive or 'good' stress, it is an unfortunate fact that for most of us, there are times when stress and tension get out of hand. These are situations where our emotions take over in an



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

essentially negative way which can become dangerous and harmful to your relationships, your health and to your everyday life.

No matter how confident you are that your life is under control, there are always situations that arise every day that represent a natural breeding ground for stress to creep in.

As examples, maybe you can recognize yourself here somewhere?

- Both you and your spouse work a full-time job, and yet you have a demanding family to bring up at the same time. To complicate matters still further, other members of your family are often sick with some ailment of one form or another, meaning that the demands on your time (you are expected to look after them, after all) are even more pressing.
- How about the all too common (and increasingly familiar) scenario where you and your spouse are separated and have joint custody of the family? Although as grown adults in this situation, it is likely that you will try to keep the relationship with your ex as amicable as possible, it is almost certain that there will be tensions which only ever seem to get worse.
- You hate your job, and despise your boss. Each and every day in the office is a living nightmare, but with work becoming increasingly difficult to find, now is not the time to start job hunting. Hence, you are just going to have to put up with the tension, anxiety and stress that you start to feel almost as soon as you get out of bed every morning Monday to Friday.
- Maybe you love your job but things are just not going the way you wanted or expected them to go. You are not climbing the corporate ladder anywhere near as quickly as you expected and your salary just about covers the basics of life. You have no spare cash to go out to let off steam with the inevitable result that you never manage to lessen the stress that you feel every day.

According to the [Holmes-Rahe Social Readjustment Scale](#) (a system for measuring stress levels attached to various events in life that was first published in 1967), there are events in life that have a quantifiable stressful effect, with various events accorded a score measured in 'Life



change units' which are essentially points of potential stress that might be caused by this event.

The higher the score, the more stressful the event is likely to be, with the 'Death of a spouse' top-scoring with 100 'Life change units':

Life event	Life change units
Death of a spouse	100
Divorce	73
Marital separation	65
Imprisonment	63
Death of a close family member	63
Personal injury or illness	53
Marriage	50
Dismissal from work	47
Marital reconciliation	45
Retirement	45
Change in health of family member	44
Pregnancy	40
Sexual difficulties	39
Gain a new family member	39
Business readjustment	39
Change in financial state	38
Change in frequency of arguments	35
Major mortgage	32
Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
Change in responsibilities at work	29

Divorce is next with 73 points, ranging down to Christmas which not unsurprisingly scores a fairly low 12 points and committing a 'Minor violation of the law' with 11 points (it's odd that breaking the law is less stressful than Christmas!).





DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

No matter who you are or what you do, there are stressful situations in your life and you need to learn how to deal with them quickly and effectively.

And whilst the information produced by the Holmes-Rahe study is generally helpful, it is also a fact that everyone gets stressed by completely different things.

For instance, I have already highlighted the fact that many people choose extreme hobbies as entertainment which the majority of people would tend to avoid like the plague.

Some people thrive in situations where the stress or pressure is on, whereas others seem to fall to pieces in exactly the same scenario. As an example, some high-powered individuals work best when under pressure with an unbreakable deadline that is looming ever larger, whereas other people would find such a situation intolerable.

Some folks would have no problems whatsoever complaining in a restaurant about the appallingly bad service, whereas others would just eat the meal, pay the bill and promise themselves never to visit the same restaurant again without actually mentioning anything. There are those who are excellent public speakers that are completely comfortable with standing up on a stage in front of thousands of people whilst there are many others would never dream of doing such a thing.

You get the picture, I'm sure. This list could go on and on, but the point is, what makes you stressed as an individual is likely to be completely different to the events or circumstances that will make your friends or even close family members feel stressed out.

The first step to dealing with stress effectively is to recognize this fact. Only once you have done so can you start to investigate and analyze what it is that causes you serious stress, without which you cannot hope to address the problem.

How do you deal with stress?

As already suggested, everyone has their own way of dealing with stress and tension and in many cases, this results in people turning to 'props' that can often lead to a form of addiction.

For instance, doctors generally suggest that many addictions such as drinking too much, using drugs, overeating and smoking are all



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

addictions that can be directly linked to living a stressful lifestyle. All of these are used as a temporary escape or a way of switching off that enables you to forget your cares, stresses and tensions for at least a few hours.

And stress is not a small scale problem either. According to information from the [American Academy of Family Physicians](#), perhaps as many as two thirds of all visits to family doctors offices or surgeries are made as a result of stress-related problems.

In short, the majority of people do not deal with stress particularly well and the effects of not being able to handle stress effectively can be very serious indeed.

For example, the results of a study conducted several years ago suggested that middle-aged men who were suffering severe stress and had no one to turn to for emotional support were five times more likely to die within seven years than those who suffered a similar amount of emotional turmoil but also someone to discuss their problems with.

Another study indicates that learning effective stress management strategies and tactics and being able to apply them successfully can reduce the risk of heart attack and other associated cardiac problems by up to 75%.

A combination of these study results can only lead to one conclusion. Stress is a killer but if you learn to manage it properly, you can reduce the chances of it causing significant physical health problems by a massive margin.

Learning to deal with stress is therefore an essential skill but it is unfortunately one that the majority of us do not naturally possess.

Learning to manage stress is however a notion or strategy that you can learn, something that becomes far easier if you do so on a step-by-step basis.

In order to be able to manage stress effectively, you need to learn about:

- How and why your mind and body are affected by stress;
- Recognizing the warnings signs that you are in a potentially stressful situation and that stress levels are beginning to increase;



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

- Developing effective stress management strategies and techniques and
- When to seek professional advice if the homoeopathic and natural ways of dealing with stress that you read of here do not enable you to get over your problem.

People react to stress in many different ways...

Stress affects different people in very different ways, so whilst there are a broad range of 'symptoms' that could be attached to a situation where you are suffering stress, it is not necessary for all of these symptoms to be present to prove that you are under duress.

Indeed, as everyone does react to stress in a completely different way, you may be a person who suffers none of these symptoms, but nevertheless, you could still be suffering from a stress problem.

Stress can be seen in both emotional and physical symptoms, with people who are under stress often being unable to sleep, consistently tired, irritable, unable to concentrate and permanently tense or anxious.

At the same time, many people who are under stress suffer physical symptoms such as an upset stomach accompanied by nausea, vomiting or diarrhea. They may suffer from headaches, a dry mouth, an increased need to go to the bathroom almost every few minutes, tight muscles that can sometimes become painful and persistent headaches.

Whilst it is extremely unlikely that you are going to suffer all of these symptoms when you are stressed out, it is likely that some of them will affect you.

However, even if none of these symptoms are present, you must still learn to recognize when you are under stress.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

Recognizing your stress triggers

Perhaps the first question to answer is, are you a person who is by nature inclined to feel stressed out because of your basic character?

The fact that some people seem by nature or character to be more predisposed to suffering stress is an important factor to recognize. Your occupation also plays a significant role in dictating how stressful your life is likely to be.

As an example, it is often suggested and accepted that people who are always on the go, folks who drive themselves hard by setting barely possible deadlines and are impatient are more likely to suffer stress than people who adopt a far more relaxed, laid-back attitude to life in general.

Some occupations such as surgeons, air traffic controllers and firefighters are naturally in a position where significant levels of stress are a part of their everyday occupation. It is therefore no surprise that individuals who do these jobs are often subject to higher levels of mental problems than people in less demanding positions such as clerks and ice cream vendors.

What are the signs?

In order to master the art of recognizing stress, there are four types of changes that might take place that could indicate a situation that is stressing you out. These are:

- Changes in the way you feel on an emotional level;
- Bodily or physical changes;
- Changes in the way that you are thinking and
- Alterations in the way you are behaving physically.

In order to assess each of these different stress indicators, the first thing to do is to find some time and space in your busy schedule to assess your current life and everyday existence as objectively as possible.

You cannot do this properly on the move or when your mind is full of other 'clutter'. You had to find a suitable window of an hour or two when you can be completely undisturbed and therefore totally focused



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

on analyzing your life to assess just how stressful it is and how you react to the stressful stimuli with which you are faced every day.

Taking each of the four 'stress indicators' in turn (and emphasizing again that you have to be as objective as possible to make this a valid and valuable exercise), these are the kind of signs you should be looking out for:

Emotional signs: Are you more irritable than you used to be or 'snappier' with friends and loved ones than you know you should be?

Do you get angry far more quickly than previously, or are you on the other hand persistently sad or worried?

If so, write down what causes you to be irritable and snappy because the fact that you are irritable suggests that you might be prone to stress attacks. Therefore, it is essential to identify what brings on this irritability or snappiness. These are the triggers that make you stressed and the first step towards being able to handle stress and tension naturally is to identify these triggers.

Physical changes: Are you suffering far more aches and pains than you were six months or a year ago? Do you always feel tired and listless, without energy or enthusiasm for doing anything outside of your daily routine? How about headaches, dizziness or light-headedness?

All of these could be signs of stress, so try to analyze what you believe is causing these changes.

However, this may not always be that easy to do as physical changes of this nature can often come on gradually or slowly. Because of this slow, onset, there may not be any one event or situation that you can identify as being the starting point of your headache or backache problem, but you should be able to come up with an approximation of when you first noticed that you are suffering more aches and pains than previously.

If you can pinpoint the exact time when you first noticed that you seem to be suffering, so much the better, but if not, an approximation of when you first became aware of your problem is better than nothing. From this 'best guesstimate', you might be able to backtrack to assess whether there was something particularly stressful that might have caused it, so even this is not a waste of time.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

Different thoughts: Do you find it harder to concentrate or remember things than you did in the past? Although it is a fact that as we get older, all of us find that our memory is not as good as it used to be, if you can't concentrate and find it difficult to remember things, it could be indicative of a stress problem, particularly if you are still a relatively young person.

Again, try to identify when you first became aware of these changes so that you can then try to extrapolate whether there was any particular event or situation that caused it. This may not be that easy to do (I know, you can't remember!) but this kind of advanced self-analysis is nevertheless still critical and absolutely necessary.

Behavioral changes: Have you started to drink a lot more than you used to or perhaps your 20 cigarettes a-day habit has now become a 40 a-day habit?

Perhaps you've started using recreational drugs, or you find that you sleep too little or too much? The same might apply if you have started eating considerably more or considerably less than you used to consume.

All of these behavioral changes could be a reaction to stress, a way of escaping by indulging or denying yourself the right to indulge.

Once you have spent an hour or two going through this process, you will hopefully have a list of factors that could represent a broad cross-section of your own personal stress triggers.

Next, you need to sort these triggers into some kind of priority list, with the factors or criteria that you think you are most susceptible to, those that cause you the most problems or upsets at the top of this list.

What you now have is a personal 'checklist' of the triggers or everyday situations or events that seem to trigger your own personal stress attacks.

Armed with this trigger list, you're ready to move on.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

Why do these changes occur?

If you are to have any chance of reducing or eradicating stress from your life, you need to understand why these changes take place as a result of suffering stress.

Stress is in fact a primeval human reaction that dates back to man's very first footsteps on planet Earth. At that time, the world was ruled by thousands of ferocious beasts, creatures that man was ill-equipped to deal with at first. Consequently, we developed the ability to react quickly and decisively in moments of high danger, developing the much clichéd 'fight or flight' reaction to an instantly stressful situation.

Nowadays, it is far less common to have to fight saber toothed tigers, dinosaurs or mammoths, but the same type of stress reactions still form an essential part of the human character.

In effect, not being able to get a job completed before a deadline or having a boss shout at you as soon as you arrive in the office is the modern equivalent of facing down a saber toothed tiger, or at least the closest most of us will ever get to having to do so.

And herein lies one of the most important problems with modern day stress. The extreme situations for which the ability to run or fight do not occur nowadays whilst on the other hand, there are a million more situations which might potentially cause pressure. After all, our cavemen forebears very rarely had their toes stood on during their morning subway ride to the office and the majority of them didn't have a boss to answer to.

Whenever you feel that you are threatened on a mental or physical level, your body switches up a notch and starts to pump out hormones that make you ready to stand and fight or run away to fight another day.

The blood flow to your brain and muscles increases by anything up to 400% so that you can think and react more quickly, your heart starts to be faster and your breathing rate accelerates noticeably as you automatically try to pull in as much oxygen as possible.

DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY



So, the next time you feel a stress attack coming on, try thinking of those caveman fighting off herds of rampaging mammoths or a group of very angry saber toothed tigers.

Your situation might be bad but you have to be honest, it could be an awful lot worse!





DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

What does stress do to you?

On a purely mental level, stress is obviously a condition that causes a great deal of upset and emotional torment. However, the physical effects of suffering stress on a regular basis are also extremely noticeable and potentially dangerous as well.

- Stress can weaken your immune system, meaning that you have less ability to fight off infections and diseases.
- It is a condition that is known to increase blood pressure, which in turn is a major contributory factor to heart attacks and strokes.
- It increases headaches, muscle pains, backache, tiredness and chronic fatigue.
- If you suffer from asthma, stress can often bring on an attack and make those attacks far more severe and potentially dangerous.
- Stress has the ability to trigger behavior which ultimately becomes dangerous such as drinking to excess, smoking and consuming recreational drugs.
- It could also lead to a decrease in sexual desire and lowered ability to 'perform' as and when required.

These are many more problems can be caused by stress and as is obvious, many of these conditions are killers.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

Before seeking medical attention...

It is a fact of modern life that each and every one of us has less time available than we would have had a few decades ago and that with less time available, it is natural that all of us look for 'quick fixes' or shortcuts to get things done as quickly as possible.

This is probably the main reason why most of us will immediately rush off to the doctor at the first sign of any kind of medical problem. As soon as we suspect that we have some kind of malady or ailment, we understandably want to know what it is as soon as possible but perhaps even more importantly, we want to 'cure' whatever is ailing us as quickly as possible as well.

After all, most people who are still fortunate enough to have a job cannot afford to take a week or two off – there are plenty of other people who will be more than happy to step into their shoes at a moments notice. Moreover, if you take too much time off work, it almost inevitably means that there is a huge backlog to be made up when you eventually return, which is a recipe for a great deal more stress in any event!

Nevertheless, despite the fact that it is human nature to think that you are the only one who suffers the problems that you do, everyone else that you deal with on a daily basis is busy as well and that includes your doctor. Hence, it is natural for your doctor to seek the quickest and easiest 'cure' for any problem that you take to him (or her).

This almost inevitably involves the prescription of chemical-based pharmaceutical drugs and this is no less true when you ask your doctor to 'do something about' your stress problem than it is with any other kind of ailment which might see you visiting the doctor's office.

If by compiling your own stress trigger list you have convinced yourself that you are a person who is prone to stress attacks, it might be tempting to seek immediate medical advice. Before you do so however, you should take a moment to consider whether this is the most appropriate action.

If you visit your doctor because you suspect that you suffer from stress, the chances are that he or she will prescribe medication, most commonly anti-anxiety or antidepressant drugs.

DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY



Whilst we will examine the kind of drugs that doctors most commonly prescribe for stress in more detail later, the important point to note here is that these drugs are only capable of calming the symptoms of your stress problem. They do not attack it at the root by helping you to analyze what it is that is causing stress in your life, nor do drugs help you to understand what you need to do if you want to minimize or eradicate the stress you suffer on a daily basis.

Instead, the drugs that you will be prescribed are most likely to calm you down when you are in a situation which might otherwise cause you stress. Hence, the beneficial effect of these drugs is only going to be temporary after which your propensity to suffer stress attacks will return unabated.

But the most scary thing is that doctors in the West are aware that anti-anxiety and antidepressant drugs are the prescription drugs that are most commonly abused and misused. Whilst these drugs can provide temporary relief from the worst effects of stress, anxiety and depression, they are open to harmful abuse and can be highly addictive as well.

For all of these reasons, it makes far more sense to study the list of stress triggers that you compiled earlier in an effort to firstly identify exactly what it is that is causing your problems. Doing so means that you can come up with a long-term lifestyle change plan that will minimize or banish whatever it is that causes stress from your life. In this way, you reduce the need to resort to pharmaceutical drugs to 'treat' stress, thereby limiting the possibility that these drugs will eventually become as big a problem as stress itself.

And all this is before even beginning to consider the potential side-effect risks that many common anti-anxiety and antidepressant pharmaceutical drugs problems pose. We will consider some of the most commonly prescribed drugs and their potential side-effects in the next chapter.





Medical stress solutions analyzed

As you can see from this screenshot from [Drugs.com](https://www.drugs.com), most of the leading drugs that are prescribed for anxiety and stress are SSRI Antidepressants amongst which you will note are some of the best-known antidepressant drugs such as Prozac and Effexor:

Drugs associated with Anxiety and Stress

The following drugs and medications are in some way related Anxiety and Stress.

This service should be used as a supplement to, and NOT a substitute for, the skill, knowledge and judgment of healthcare practitioners.

Drug Name ▼▲ (View by: Brand Generic)
Elavil (More...) ↳ generic name: amitriptyline class: tricyclic antidepressants
Effexor (Pro, More...) ↳ generic name: venlafaxine class: SSNRI antidepressants
Paxil (Pro, More...) ↳ generic name: paroxetine class: SSRI antidepressants
Prozac (Pro, More...) ↳ generic name: fluoxetine class: SSRI antidepressants
Celexa (More...) ↳ generic name: citalopram class: SSRI antidepressants
Effexor XR (Pro, More...) ↳ generic name: venlafaxine class: SSNRI antidepressants
Zoloft (Pro, More...) ↳ generic name: sertraline class: SSRI antidepressants
Luvox CR (More...) ↳ generic name: fluvoxamine class: SSRI antidepressants

Using Prozac as an example of Selective Serotonin Reuptake Inhibitors (SSRIs), the first point to make is that antidepressants of this nature were originally adopted because they apparently presented a far safer alternative to many other treatments for anxiety, stress and depression.





DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

For instance, SSRIs replaced the older tricyclic antidepressants to a large extent, which were in some cases extremely toxic.

However, what is becoming increasingly obvious over the years (Prozac was first licensed and launched onto the market in 1989) is that no antidepressant drugs are entirely benign and that in many cases, it is questionable whether these drugs serve the purpose for which they are being prescribed. For example, SSRIs are called antidepressants for a reason, which is because they are designed to combat depression.

However, they are commonly prescribed for anxiety and stress, which are not at all the same thing as depression.

Consequently, a significant percentage of people who are prescribed drugs like Prozac for anxiety or stress will find that they do little to improve their condition. In fact, because of some of the acknowledged side-effects of SSRIs, they may even make matters worse rather than better.

For example, it is acknowledged that SSRIs can cause headaches, dizziness and light-headedness, which in any person who is suffering from anxiety or stress is likely to make them feel considerably worse. Not unnaturally, if they are already anxious and distressed, suffering constant headaches or dizziness is going to exacerbate their condition rather than improve it.

Furthermore, the list of potential side-effects of SSRIs (as a general group of drugs) is quite long, including constipation, blurred vision, sleep disruption, weight gain, abnormal bleeding, abdominal pain, gastrointestinal disturbances or diarrhea and sexual problems (loss of libido, inability to attain or maintain an erection etc).

On top of this, it is a well established fact that in terms of misuse and abuse, antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs are by far and away the most 'popular' prescription drugs. For instance, there is plenty of evidence to suggest that an overdose of antidepressants has always been the most popularly favored method of committing suicide.

This in fact highlights one of the reasons why SSRIs are so popular, particularly in comparison to earlier antidepressants such as the tricyclic drugs.



SSRIs are far safer in an overdose situation than were the earlier antidepressants, which is extremely important given the propensity of people to use antidepressants as an overdose 'drug of choice'.

Unfortunately however, this does not tell the full story because there are two very real dangers associated with SSRIs that are often ignored or perhaps entirely misunderstood.

Firstly, because of their [pharmacodynamic](#) and [pharmacokinetic](#) qualities, SSRIs can be extremely dangerous when taken at the same time as other drugs. For example, a combination of SSRIs and [Monoamine oxidase inhibitors \(MAOIs\)](#) could prove lethal under certain circumstances.

Whilst they are undoubtedly safer in an overdose situation than other antidepressants like the tricyclics, there [is strong evidence](#) to suggest that SSRIs make [suicidal thoughts](#) or considerations of self harm far more likely than they might otherwise be. And if any further proof was needed, this fact is categorically confirmed on the Prozac page of the [Drugs.com](#) site:

Important information about Prozac

Do not take Prozac together with pimozide (Orap), thioridazine (Mellaril), or a monoamine oxidase inhibitor (MAOI) such as isocarboxazid (Marplan), phenelzine (Nardil), rasagiline (Azilect), selegiline (Eldepryl, Emsam), or tranylcypromine (Parnate).

Drugs.com	
User Reviews	Avg User Rating
27 Reviews	<div style="display: inline-block; width: 76%; height: 10px; background-color: #4CAF50;"></div> 7.6 Rate it!
Review this Drug	

You may have thoughts about suicide when you first start taking an antidepressant, especially if you are younger than 24 years old. Your doctor will need to check you at regular visits for at least the first 12 weeks of treatment with Prozac.

As suggested at the beginning of this chapter, antidepressants are designed to treat people with depression which is a psychological condition that is very different to anxiety or stress.

In effect, using antidepressants to treat stress or anxiety is like taking a very large sledgehammer to a relatively small walnut, as it is at least questionable whether taking SSRIs antidepressants is the correct way of dealing with your stress problem.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY



Add this to the fact that there are obviously some very serious potential adverse side-effects attached to SSRI antidepressants and you cannot avoid the conclusion that trying to deal with your stress with potentially lethal pharmaceutical drugs is not necessarily the smartest of ideas.





DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

The importance of stress management...

Once you have created a list of factors, events and situations that you recognize as being the primary causes of your stress problem, you are faced with two options when it comes to what you are going to do about the problem.

Option one is to remove yourself from any situation where you might suffer stress. This may be relatively easy to do (although not always practical) if the primary trigger for your stress can be readily identified.

If for example your own self-analysis indicates that the primary cause of your stress problem is a boss who you absolutely loathe, then you can get rid of your problem in one fell swoop by quitting your job to work elsewhere. However, this of course assumes that there are other jobs available and as you have no idea what your new boss is going to be like if you do change jobs, it might be a case of jumping out of the frying pan and straight into the fire.

Nevertheless, in a relatively 'cut and dried' situation like this, your solution is fairly clear and obvious.

For most people who suffer stress however, it is far more common for their problems to be a result of a combination of several different factors. In this case, taking one action (like quitting your job) is not going to provide the solution you are looking for. Whilst it might remove one major source of stress from your life, it still leaves other factors that you have identified as being a source of stress for you.

In this case, you fall back on the other option, which is learning to manage your stress levels by changing your attitude or approach to the stress causing factors that you cannot remove from your every day existence.

For instance, whilst you can walk away from a job, you cannot walk away from an ex-spouse with whom you have joint custody of your children. In this case, if the ex-spouse is causing you stress and upset, the 'flight' option does not exist and as choosing the 'fight' option will only lead to more tension and upset, you need to learn how to deal with what you are going through.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

In effect, neither 'flight or fight' is a realistic alternative here so you have to seek a third way, which is to teach yourself to deal with the triggers that have hitherto caused you stress in a way that minimizes the depth of your emotional reactions.

Turning off the alarm...

As previously suggested, stress is as old as mankind itself, a chemical reaction in your body to real or perceived danger which has been passed down through the generations for thousands of years.

In effect, in the days of our Neanderthal ancestors, stress was a warning system or an alarm that told our ancient forebears that urgent action was imperative, an alarm that suddenly changed their whole metabolism to prepare for the fight or flight that inevitably followed.

Given that it is very rare indeed for modern man to be in a situation where such dramatic or drastic actions become imperative, it is a fact that stress is nowadays something akin to a false alarm. Whilst there are hazardous situations that need quick and decisive actions (for example, if you are [base jumping](#), you need to make sure your chute opens), there is no real need for most of us to get stressed out in general, everyday situations.

Another thing that you have to understand that might help you deal with stress is that it is not always the situation or event that we perceive as causing stress that is the real cause. It is often the way that we deal with the situation that causes the stress levels to rise, rather than the situation itself.

This happens because it is a basic feature of human nature that we are always harder on ourselves than we would be on other people. When we make a decision or attempt to do something that goes wrong, most people immediately tend to become super self-critical. They give themselves a good 'dressing down', internally explaining why they should never have attempted to do what they were trying to do in the first place, how they have just made a fool of themselves and so on.

If a friend or family member had tried what we have just tried, we would console them with the thought that these things happen, that if you never try, you never know and that it is just one of those things.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

When we are telling ourselves off however, we tend to be far more critical and sharp. Hence, most of us have the capability to create a stressful situation out of something that was not at all inherently stressful a few brief moments before.

This is effectively a double-false alarm because there was not need to get stressed in the first place but we did, only to aggravate our stress levels considerably further by giving ourselves a hard time about it.

Negative thinking of this nature is extremely destructive because not only does it damage your potential to perform to your maximum capabilities by undermining your self-confidence, it also distracts your attention away from the main task to focus on your internal emotional strife.

If you can therefore learn or teach yourself how to turn off these false alarm situations so that you do not react to challenging and difficult events by getting stressed, you have taken a significant step towards reducing stress levels in your life. In this way, you have minimized the possibility of suffering the attendant medical side-effects that can be so critically dangerous.

So, how do you set about turning off these false alarms when they occur? There are many different tactics or strategies that you can try that have been successful for many other sufferers before you, most of which are focused on learning to relax rather than reacting when faced with a situation which might otherwise become stressful.

Deep breathing: Whenever you are faced with a situation that has the potential to become a stress filled moment, it is extremely effective for reducing the impact if you have mastered the art of breathing deeply and slowly on command.

Taking slow, deep breaths under complete control rather than the fast and shallow breaths that we automatically tend to take when we are stressed is a highly effective way of making sure that stress never gets its foot into our emotional 'door'. Teaching yourself to react to stressful situations by conscious command of your breathing is a superbly effective way of minimizing the possibility of stress taking control of the moment.

DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY



There are many different ways that you can teach yourself to breathe deeply and slowly at those moments when stress seems imminent, such as the classical 'stand back, count to ten, in and out' strategy. Anxiety or stress attacks both tend to hit you quickly and suddenly, so if you make a conscious effort to take a step back (physically or metaphorically), slowly count to 10 and force yourself to breathe deeply and slowly, the stressed moment will almost always pass.

Sometimes however, even though you know what you should do, it can be difficult to actually physically do what you are supposed to be doing at those times when stress or anxiety hits hardest and deepest. As this is obviously the time when controlling your breathing to keep your stress or panic under control is most critically important, this can be a major downside of having to make a conscious effort to breathe deeply.

For this reason, my favorite method of learning deep breathing is to follow a training method that was first used around 100 years ago with dogs!

You may have heard of Pavlov's dogs, a phrase which refers to an experiment carried out by an eminent Russian scientist named Ivan Pavlov.

He wanted to establish whether it was possible to prompt what might otherwise be seen to be involuntary reflex reactions on command. Hence he carried out his experiment into what he called 'conditioned reflexes' with dogs.

After ringing a small bell, he would feed the dogs and he continued this process of ringing the bell, then feeding them for some time.

One day, he rang the bell but did not feed them. Nevertheless, the dogs became attentive, began to salivate and Pavlov noted that the digestive process also seemed to start at the same time.

In effect, by ringing the bell he had conditioned their automatic reflexes to react in a certain way on command.

By following [this adaption of the Pavlov method](#), you can teach yourself to do the same thing with deep breathing and stress. Through a process of self education (which is explained in detail in the article), you can condition your reflexes so that every time you're faced with a stressful





DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

situation, you have already trained your metabolism to slow down your breathing as an automatic response.

In effect therefore, by learning this version of the Pavlov method, you put yourself in a position where you will automatically avoid almost every stressed situation without even having to think about doing so.

Not only this but just having the knowledge that whenever stress appears to be imminent, you are capable of banishing it automatically has another significant advantage. As you know that your Pavlovian conditioned reflexes will 'kick in' whenever stress raises its ugly head and that through deep breathing, you have the power to neutralize stress automatically will make you a far calmer and more relaxed individual. Hence, by adopting this particular deep breathing training idea, you reduce the possibility of stress in two different highly effective ways.

Muscular relaxation: As mentioned before, one of the effects of stress is to make you tense-up, knotting all of your muscles into a tight ball as an inadvertent reflex action to the stressful situation you are facing.

Tense muscles release chemicals into your body that exacerbate your stress levels and ensure that the stressed feeling itself lingers considerably longer than it might otherwise. Hence, if you can learn to relax your muscles at times of imminent stress rather than tensing them, you can reduce the severity of your stress and the length of time it lasts as well.

One of the best ways of doing this is to consciously move from the top of your head to the tips of your toes, tensing and then relaxing every individual muscle group as you go. When you feel stress coming on, start by tensing and then releasing your forehead and eye muscles, before moving on to the jaw muscles, then on down to the neck and shoulder muscles and so on.

For each individual muscle group, tense and relax for a few seconds before moving on to the next muscle group.

This works well on its own as a way of both relaxing you and turning your mind to matters other than the one that was just about to start stressing you out.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

However, relaxing your muscles in this way works even better when used in combination with deep breathing, so try the two at the same time. Again, you could teach yourself to include muscle relaxation in your conditioned reflex training so that the whole combined program became automatic.

And if you are a person who suffers stress to a very high level, there are more advanced muscle relaxation programs that you can learn about that might be more effective for you than the basic program highlighted above. Perhaps the best known of these is [Progressive Relaxation](#) (follow the link for a description) whilst you can learn how to use this particular form of muscle relaxation by following [this link](#).

Visualization: Wherever you are when stress starts to hit you, you can be as certain as anyone ever could be that you probably don't want to be where you are, in that situation at that very moment. [Visualization](#) develops this idea by taking you away from that situation or event through the power of your imagination.

For example, imagine that you are on a beautiful sunny beach, sat next to a wonderfully serene and peaceful harbor or strolling purposefully across a stunning snow clad hill. It really doesn't matter what kind of place you visualize or even if the place that you are visualizing is real or a figment of your imagination. The point is, you must visualize a place of wonder and beauty before trying to involve all of your senses in enjoying and soaking in the atmosphere and experience of 'being' in this marvelous place on both a mental and emotional level.

As suggested by the name, you can see everything in the scene, but what exactly is it you see? What do you hear or smell? Is it hot or cold, sunny, raining or snowing? Mentally reach down to touch the earth beneath your feet or the bench on which you are sitting. What does it feel like?

The more you can involve all of your senses in visualization, the more deeply you will be pulled into your visualized world, taking you further and further away from your potentially stressful reality.

Hence, you should try to master the art of visualization when you are relaxing, at times when you have a few moments to spare. If you can teach yourself how to visualize in this way before finding yourself in a



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

potentially stressful situation, it is going to be far easier to call up your visualization skills as they are needed.

Learning to visualize 'on your feet' is going to be far harder, so learning visualization skills is something you should start right now.

Other things that help: Deep breathing is an essential element of both yoga and certain forms of meditation, and learning more about both of these ancient disciplines will help you to apply a far higher degree of control to your emotions, thus making it less likely that stress is going to be a problem for you.

Of course, if you find yourself in a potentially stressful situation on the way to work or in the office, you are not going to drop down to the floor to adopt a yogic asana (pose) or sit crossed legged humming! These are not therefore disciplines that you will use to rebuff the onset of stressful moment as and when it happens.

However, by mastering either yoga and/or meditation, you will acquire a far higher degree and level of mental control because in both cases, these disciplines are focused on learning or heightening the levels of control that you apply to your everyday existence.

For example, as suggested on this [eHow yoga page](#) (which is a very good place to start learning about yoga), it is stated that yoga is all about 'disciplining yourself to balance your mind, soul and emotions', which is exactly what you need to be able to do if you want to turn off the false alarms in your head generated by stress.

In a similar fashion, many of the different forms of meditation focus on positive thinking and how you acquire the ability to think positively each and every day of your life. As suggested earlier, negative thinking is one aspect of human nature that tends to elevate the most damaging effects of stress, so learning to think positive is a very beneficial thing to do.

For example, if you practice [Raja Yoga Meditation](#), the idea is that you spend 15 minutes every morning teaching yourself to have only positive thoughts throughout the coming day. Every morning, you tell yourself over and over again that you are a peaceful person and that your objective is to radiate peace to everyone you encounter.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

If you can entirely adopt this philosophy by constant training, it really will make a difference to how much people that you come into contact with can annoy you or stress you out. You will remain calm, collected and at peace with yourself, thereby ensuring that the stress alarm remains wonderfully silent.

Learning to turn off these false alarms is a major step forward, but it is dealing with the symptoms of stress, not attacking your problem at the roots. In order to do this, you have to take one further large step into the unknown.

Don't turn the alarm on in the first place!

It is all very well learning to turn off the stress alarm once it starts ringing in your head, but it is obviously far more effective if you can prevent that alarm starting before it does so. In other words, it is more effective if you can attack the root cause of your stress problem rather than simply dealing with the symptoms as we have done so far.

Fortunately, once you know how, this is not particularly difficult to do, with its genesis in the idea of visualization that we looked at in the previous section.

By learning to visualize, you both increase your ability to relax and take yourself away from the situation that was threatening to make you stressed.

This latter point is extremely important, because it highlights a basic premise of which all cognitive psychologists are aware, the idea that all of our behavior and also our feelings are largely caused by our own beliefs and thoughts.

Of course, [cognitive psychology](#) is a very complicated and involved science that focuses on some incredibly complex areas of human behavior such as problem solving, language and memory. Hence, my 'snapshot description' of the connection between feelings and thoughts in the previous paragraph is massively oversimplified and simplistic but for the purposes of understanding this concept in relation to stress, this description is adequate.

In essence, the basic idea is almost an extension of the Raja Yoga Meditation principle, that by thinking peaceful thoughts, you engender a



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

feeling of innate calm and peace, whereas by thinking stressful thoughts, you naturally create stress.

In essence therefore, the reason that we suffer stress is nothing to do with what is happening to us, nor is it directly related to what has happened in the past. On the contrary, stress in this scenario is caused by how we are currently thinking about what is going on rather than by events themselves or by memory of previous occurrences of a similar event.

Whilst of course any past experience that we have already accumulated of similar events or situations will influence how we react when it happens again but it is still our thoughts or beliefs about that experience and the current situation that makes us react in the way we do.

A couple of examples may help to illustrate this observation a little more clearly.

We have already established that the most traumatic experience that any human being can go through is to lose a spouse but as the vast majority of us are never going to lose more than one spouse in our lifetime, few younger people have previous experience in this situation.

And for the majority of us, whilst we might believe that the unbelievable shock we feel is directly related to the death of our closest loved one, it is in fact far more to do with our own confusion, our lack of direction and understanding allied to a general inability to cope with such a situation on a mental level. In other words, it is all about our own feelings and probably also a subconscious belief that we were always going to stay together forever that causes the stress, rather than the event itself.

As another example, it is common for adults that were abused as children to grow up feeling as if they have no value or as if they are worthless. From this it follows that this adult feels depressed or stressed because of their feelings of worthlessness and lack of value rather than because of what happened when they were a youngster.

The strength of this notion is that we are not prisoners to our past experiences or to our reactions. Because we know that our feelings control what will happen, we have the power to apply that control in a



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

positive rather than a negative manner. In effect, whatever happened in the past to cause stress or what is happening now to do the same cannot 'win' if you apply positive thinking to everything you encounter on a daily basis.

Instead of being anxious, focus on being concerned because whilst the first focuses on taking an idea or a situation and worrying about it, the latter is all about analyzing that idea or situation in an effort to find a solution or an answer.

Take care of the real problems in your life by never allowing them to get you down and instead of getting anxious or stressing about them, address them head-on and look for solutions and answers.

Learn the strength of positive thinking, adapt this positive thinking to every situation that you come across and you will go some considerable way to silencing the stress alarm bells in your head for ever.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

Other things that might help...

Many people who have previously suffered stress find that adopting a hobby or a pastime helps to relieve their condition. For example, rather than slumping in front of the TV for a few hours every evening, it is far more relaxing and therefore stress relieving to involve yourself in a hobby or interest, something in which you can immerse yourself for many pleasurable hours.

One of the reasons that many people suffer stress is that they have little in their life that is enjoyable upon which they can focus their attention and effort. Consequently, it is far too easy to become self-centered and self-absorbed, completely wrapped up in the minutiae of a life in which there is nothing to shift their focus away from the things that cause stress in the first place.

Hobbies such as photography, gardening, painting, collecting or even carpentry may not be something you have ever considered before, but they are all highly relaxing pastimes that give you something else on which to focus. The fact that all of these hobbies require a degree of concentration and attention means that if you want to be good at what you are doing (and you will), you need to forget your everyday stresses to focus on the task in hand.

Another thing that you might consider as a way of dealing with stress is by using [biofeedback](#), a non-medical process by which you learn what your body is doing. If you can for example learn about your muscle tension and heart rate, you will become more attuned to what your body is doing so that at times of potential stress, you have something far more important and useful to concentrate on rather than getting stressed.

And many doctors and stress management specialists emphasize that having a sense of humor, being able to laugh at situations rather than getting stressed by them is one very effective way of fighting stress. We have all had experiences of situations that seemed dire or extreme at the time which eventually became funny, so instead of waiting until later, why not make an effort to see it as funny from the beginning?

DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY



It may not be easy to do so in every situation but if you can learn how to see the funny side of life, you will naturally lower the amount of stress you feel by a very significant margin.

Another recommended strategy for dealing with stress is massage therapy, which is widely recognized as being one of the oldest healing arts for the very good reason that it works extremely well in many different situations and circumstances.

It is well established that massage can help to relax your whole body, and that it generates new levels of energy which stay with you long after your massage session is over.

Many research studies have been carried out over the years as to the efficacious benefits on massage, with results showing that it helps to reduce your heart rate, lower blood pressure, increases blood circulation and prompts the production of endorphins which are your own natural painkilling chemicals.

At the most basic level, most people find that massage is an incredibly relaxing experience, and the fact that enjoying a good massage can also help to reduce stress levels is almost a bonus.





DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

Herbs and supplements for stress relief...

St. Johns wort

As suggested earlier, there are many well-established reasons why taking a SSRI antidepressants to deal with stress is not a particularly smart move. However, there is absolutely no reason why you should do so because [St John's wort](#) is widely believed to provide exactly the same benefits as leading antidepressant brands like Prozac without the side-effects.

Indeed, in some countries in Europe (particularly Germany), St John's wort is prescribed as a treatment for anxiety, stress and depression far more commonly than SSRI antidepressants for this exact reason.

Whilst it cannot be said that there are no potential side-effects taking St John's wort, it is noticeable that almost all of the side-effects quoted are those that might occur if this particular substance is ingested at the same time as antidepressants or stimulants.

As it is a widely recognized replacement for the first of these, there would be no logical reason to take the two at the same time, whilst taking stimulants at the same time as a herb that is known to have antidepressant qualities would simply make no sense.

Consequently, whilst you should be aware that there are potential side-effects, it is still fair to suggest that taking St John's wort to treat anxiety or stress is far safer than using chemical-based SSRI antidepressants.

Passionflower

[Passionflower](#) in herbal form is a substance that is believed to have been used for hundreds of years to treat anxiety and insomnia.

In more recent times, studies have indicated that the effects of passionflower are very similar to those of [benzodiazepine drugs](#), although using passionflower tends to prompt a far higher improvement in job performance and less drowsiness than leading drugs such as [Mexazolam](#).

Some possible side effects of using passionflower may include nausea, vomiting and drowsiness, whilst the safety of using passionflower during



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

pregnancy has not been extensively tested. Furthermore, passionflower should not be taken at the same time as sedatives either.

Nevertheless, for those who do not suffer side-effects, using passionflower is an extremely effective way of combating the worst effects of anxiety and stress completely naturally.

Valerian

Whilst the herb [valerian](#) is most commonly known as a treatment for insomnia, there are indications that it can also help to relieve the worst symptoms for patients who suffer from stress or anxiety as well.

As a general rule, valerian should be taken an hour or so before retiring for the night and you will need to take your dose for two or three weeks before you start to feel any appreciable beneficial effects. However, because valerian is considered to be a fairly strong herbal remedy, you should not take it for more than three months at a time.

Both capsules containing valerian extract and teas are available, but most people who use valerian prefer to take it in capsule form as the smell of the tea can apparently be somewhat off-putting.

Possible side-effects that you should be on the lookout for are mild indigestion, slight light-headedness or palpitations and possible headaches. However, as it is best to take valerian before going to bed, the majority of people suffer no adverse side-effects whatsoever. They do however enjoy significant benefits in terms of anxiety reduction and a better night's sleep, so valerian is a herbal option worth considering if you suffer from anxiety or stress.

Calcium and magnesium

It is generally believed that you are more likely to suffer from stress if you do not have enough of certain trace minerals in your regular diet. In particular, most stress experts agree that having sufficient calcium and magnesium in your diet is essential to limit the possibility of becoming a stress victim.

Of course, you can use dietary supplements to make sure that you consume enough of the necessary trace minerals, but it is generally a far better idea to try to increase the amount of foods or liquids that you consume which contain these essential trace elements. By doing so, you effectively ensure that there is no way in which you can take an



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

overdose of minerals, which is not something that can necessarily be said if you are supplementing your diet with pills or capsules.

There are plenty of websites where you can find information about both calcium and magnesium rich food and liquids, with [this page](#) as an example of the former and [this of the latter](#). However, if you want to find more information, run a Google search for 'calcium rich foods' or a similar search for foods that contain plenty of magnesium.

Aromatherapy

As avoiding stress is all about learning to relax more effectively, aromatherapy can be a big help in reducing your tendency to suffer stress.

By adding essential oils to your bath, infusers or as a massage oil, you can limit your susceptibility to stress and anxiety by regularly increasing your capacity for relaxation and serenity. Oils that can be of great assistance in aromatherapy for stress reduction include lavender, jasmine, geranium, cypress and sandalwood.



DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY

Conclusion

As you will no doubt understand by now, dealing with stress and anxiety in a completely natural way is more about changing your lifestyle and your attitude to life than it is about any particular form of treatment.

Although some of the herbs highlighted in the last chapter may help to reduce your susceptibility to stress and anxiety, in order to tackle your problem in the most effective way, you have to do so by dealing with the causes of your stress and anxiety rather than by dealing with the symptoms or signs of it.

As highlighted, this is one of the reasons why seeking medical treatment for stress and anxiety is never likely to be the most effective way of dealing with the problem. Leaving aside for the moment the fact that many medical treatments prescribed for dealing with anxiety and stress could cause adverse side-effects that range from being unpleasant to lethal, these medical treatments will only reduce the severity of the symptoms rather than attacking the root cause of your stress problem.

It is a little like the weeds growing in your garden. If you want to get rid of them once and for all, you have to pull them up from the roots, because if you cut them down with a mower or a blade, the only thing that you can be absolutely certain of is that those weeds will grow back again, probably twice as strong as before.

In the same way, if you attack stress on a peripheral level, you can be sure that your stress problem will come back time and again. If however you attack the root cause of your problem, you can be equally certain that barring a disaster, your stress problem will probably go away for good.

And as you have seen, in order to deal with stress at the roots, you have to spend some time identifying what it is that causes you to be stressed. It may be one thing, but it is far more likely to be a combination of several situations or circumstances. You need to identify and isolate all of these factors to come up with your own personal 'stress trigger mix' in order to be able to tackle the problem head-on.

Do things in the way that you have read of in this book and I have little doubt that you will be able to get rid of your stress problem once and

DEALING WITH STRESS NATURALLY



for all. However, there is no denying that there is some work involved and that a little time is also going to be absolutely necessary as well. And now you know what to do, it is time to start doing it.

