

COPING WITH STRESS

David Ott, M.Ed., April 2000

Everything that has an impact on us from within or without is stressful. Heat, light, sound, job and relationship expectations, change, etc. all create a certain amount of stress. Only when this stress builds to the point of **DISTRESS** within an individual is the **FEAR (Fight- Flight-Freeze) RESPONSE** triggered resulting in **Reflex Muscle Tension and Breath Constriction**. This fear or adrenaline response, if extended over long periods of time, will cause both physical and emotional breakdown.

When we are overwhelmed with stress, when our energy is not sufficient to handle or balance the pressures and demands (stress) of our environment, we begin to feel distressed, fearful and defensive. Our Physical, Emotional and Mental Defenses are our warning signs that we are overstressed and need to withdraw to build our energy resources to better balance the stress of our environment. Our physical defense warning signs include muscle tension (headaches, backaches) fast heart beat and shallow breathing. Crying and anger are the major emotional defense signs together with depression for those who will not allow themselves to express either anger or tears. Our mental defense warning signs include criticism, judgment, worry (poor sleep), and analyzing. When we find ourselves buried in any of this defensive behaviour for long periods of time, we need to withdraw and work on building up our energy level. We must realize that when our energy is tied up in fear and defense response, our potential for emotional growth, happiness and love is blocked. We may survive; we are not really alive, growing or joyful.

Even though anything that we experience is stressful, cumulative and highly individual in its strength of impact, certain stresses tend, in general, to be higher in fear impact and therefore much more likely to overwhelm and distress us. These **Super Stresses** include all **Changes**, especially major ones which mean loss of support; for example, death, divorce, separation, change or loss of job, change of home and moving. Diet problems, including things like food allergies and blood sugar imbalance can often be a major cause of distress. Defensive anger and arguments just before mealtime are most often the result of low blood sugar. Forcing ourselves to remain in relationships, careers and situations against our heart-felt feelings creates extreme inner conflict and stress. This forced split, being where we feel uncomfortable, threatened or unhappy, develops largely out of our fear of change and failure, and a lack of trust that if we were to let go and move on things would improve. If this unhappiness and tension persists, even after we employ Stress Management Skills, we must come to recognize we are **Off Our Path** and develop the courage to Let Go. Then we must breathe, focus on the Here and Now, relax, and allow our **Deeper Will** to guide us through the fearful, future unknown. Like the Ugly Duckling, we will discover, much to our surprise, our true place and family, together with a deeper feeling of happiness and peace.

When we feel overwhelmed and bound up in defensive responses, some change to our stress coping strategy is called for. First, we must withdraw as soon as possible and take a look at all the stresses in our life, especially the major ones. Obviously the easiest way to deal with too much stress is to avoid or eliminate it in some way. Perhaps we can cut out the coffee that over stimulates, the alcohol that messes up our blood sugar balance, the food we may be allergic to, the friends? who are negative and destructive, the extra job we may not need. Next, we must learn ways to **Mobilize (Release) Our Energy** in order to help us deal more effectively with and better balance our environmental demands and stress. This increased energy will eventually allow us to cope with added stress and live a more exciting and fulfilled life .The more energy we have, the less likely we are to be overwhelmed by stress. The key to Mobilizing Our Energy is to realize that we bind it up and block it off with our defenses, mental, physical, and emotional. Imagine our energy as the Sun Within Us being blocked by three layers of clouds, the outer layer, the mind, the next layer, the body, and the inner layer the emotions (See Layers Of Self diagram). To mobilize or release our energy, we need only learn methods that will help us to give up or let go some of our defensive cloud layer.

The following are some methods, passed down through the ages that have proved successful in unlocking energy through ego defense surrender:

1. Learn to **STILL** the worrying, thinking mind (mental defense) through **Now Awareness**: see, hear, touch, taste and smell in the **Here & Now**. Stop and smell the roses. Prayer and meditation are effective here too.
2. Relax body muscle tension by exercise and relaxation techniques. (body defenses).
3. Increase and improve abdominal, relaxed and rhythmic breathing by aerobic exercise and breath training. Yoga classes might be considered.
4. Change diet to **Reduce** toxic waste, fats, sugar, artificial colours, flavours, preservatives, stimulants, depressants, salt, white flour & meat protein.
5. Be aware, accept, surrender into and express outward emotions (emotional defense) example, crying out and through sadness, emptiness or aloneness into Joy and Peace.
6. Finally, create a more **Grounded** and focused consciousness through standing firmly (knees slightly bent) and heavily into the floor. Centre on your breathing, relaxing downward with every out breath. Then **Be In The Here And Now.**

Remember that all electrical energy needs a good ground and a good conductor relatively free from resistance to transmit energy effectively. Similarly we must establish a good **Here and Now Ground** as well as be relatively free from ego defense resistance in order to release our own **Energy Self** and transmit its power effectively.

After we become aware of our Distress (Defense Signals), it will take some time and major life style changes before we get back in balance, our energy being able to more comfortably handle the stress and demands of our environment. Remember that **Withdrawing** is the first step followed by the **Reduction or Elimination** of unnecessary stress. Work must then be started to Release Our Blocked Energy through the surrender of ego defenses (cloud layers) that restrict our energy. Stress Counselling can often speed up the process and lend support and training in the necessary life style changes and ego defense surrender.



