



HOW TO COMBAT  
STRESS AND GET ON  
WITH YOUR LIFE

by David Lightbody

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## Introduction

I'd like to start by thanking you very much for taking the time to read this book and I hope you find it to be both an interesting and enjoyable read. Above all I hope you find the information contained in here to be beneficial and a help to you in dealing with stress in your life.

For most people a certain amount of stress is a completely normal part of everyday life. Indeed, it can even be argued that a certain level of stress can actually be good for us.

Too much stress however can have adverse effects on your health, both physically and mentally. Your everyday life, both at home and in work may be affected and your relationships with friends, relatives and colleagues may suffer.

Stress can be caused by numerous events in your life. The life events which have the highest stress rating are: Death, Divorce/Separation, Jail, Serious illness/injury, marriage, loss of job and moving house.

I'd like to briefly share with you my own experiences of stress in my life and how I went about dealing with them.

A few years ago now, my first marriage ended in fairly bitter circumstances. I found myself having to leave my house and children and move into rented accommodation.

To compound this situation, shortly after this my employer informed me that they were selling the business where I worked and that I would lose my job with them shortly after Christmas!

It's bad enough to have one high stress event in your life but all of a sudden, I had three of them in quick succession!

Everybody responds differently to stress.

I can remember that some of the reactions I had at the time were feeling tense, unable to relax, mentally drained, frustrated and helpless. I also suffered from sleep problems, headaches and a sort of sick or "butterflies" feeling in my stomach.

I lost nearly a stone in weight in the first few months – well, every cloud has a silver lining I suppose!!

I won't bore you with the details of my personal problems except to say that as the weeks wore on I found my stress symptoms getting worse and worse. I realised that it was starting to have a major impact on my health.

And that's why I set out to do something about it. I made it my goal to learn everything I could about stress, from what causes it to what are the best ways to deal with it.

Now that I have found the best ways for me to deal with it I want to help others to do the same. In this book I am going to share with you the ways that I have personally found to be most effective in relieving stress.

These are what worked best for me but I realise that no two people are the same and so I have also spent a lot of time looking at as many other stress relieving techniques as I could find.

In the pages of this book I have written about some of the stress relieving technique that I believe can be used to effectively combat stress. I sincerely hope that you find something here which will benefit you too.

## About the Author

My name is David Lightbody and I am a Community Pharmacist from Northern Ireland. I got my degree in pharmacy from Queens University in Belfast and I have been a fully qualified pharmacist since 1995. I worked in a number of pharmacies as a locum pharmacist before becoming manager of a fairly large pharmacy in a shopping centre.

My main reason for working in the healthcare field is because I enjoy helping people to find solutions to their health problems. I regularly run workshops in my community on a range of health topics and I also enjoy writing about them.

I also run the websites [www.life-methods.com](http://www.life-methods.com) and [www.rookie-entrepreneur.com](http://www.rookie-entrepreneur.com) . I also have a YouTube channel – also called Life Methods where I talk about a range of personal development topics

## Chapter 1: All about stress

### What happens to your body when Stressed?

The way you feel when under stress is a direct result of some chemical changes happening within your body. Now please don't worry that I am about to start some boring lesson on biochemistry. It's not important that you know any of this.

I am simply going to provide a little bit of background which will hopefully help you to understand why the stress management techniques I will talk about later actually work.

Your body reaction to a stressful situation can be traced back to our caveman ancestors. It is a sort of defence mechanism which prepares your body to respond to danger.

Imagine you were a caveman and were about to be attacked by a wild animal – a pretty stressful situation I'm sure you would agree.

It is sometimes known as the "fight or flight" reaction. Basically, the chemical changes in your body prepare you to either fight the danger or run away from it.

Your body will produce a number of chemicals called hormones when faced with a stressful situation. The most important one is called adrenaline or epinephrine.

This causes your heart rate to go up, your blood vessels to open up and with a decrease in your body's metabolism, extra glucose surges into your blood stream to give you extra fuel for the fight.

Another chemical produced is called cortisol and strangely enough your body actually stops producing sex hormones (just in case you started getting any romantic ideas in the midst of battle!)

These same chemical reactions, which are designed to prepare you to fight, occur in your body when you experience stress in everyday life; whether that be an argument with your partner, a meeting with the boss or being stuck in traffic on your way to catch a plane at the airport.

In summary, the following are some of the things that your body does when you are stressed:

1. Chemicals, such as adrenalin/epinephrine start pumping
2. Heart rate goes up
3. Blood vessels open up
4. Breathing becomes faster
5. Sweat production increases
6. Metabolism slows down
7. Muscles become tense
8. Pupils enlarge
9. Sex hormone production goes down

OK so now you have a basic idea of what goes on inside your body when you are stressed. But what does this all actually mean and what are the implications of the above?

To help you to understand I'd like to give you a little analogy.

Think of yourself as a strong brick wall. Now every time you become stressed imagine a little hammer and chisel being used on the wall. Each little blow of the chisel on the wall knocks a little chip out of the wall.

In itself it's not enough to do any great harm to the wall but if it's repeated enough times or continuous these little chips start to weaken the wall and eventually could cause it significant damage.

In your body this damage takes the shape of things like:

- heart disease
- chronic fatigue
- anxiety attacks
- mood swings
- psychological distress
- depression
- sleep problems
- high blood pressure
- eating disorders
- peptic ulcers
- headaches and migraines

Have a read through the above list again. If you are stressed, it is highly likely that you are suffering from one or more of the above. I know I was!

There's also a fair chance that you may be taking a variety of drug treatments to combat these conditions too.

Many people see stress as a condition in itself. Can you see that dealing with your stress is also going to improve your health?

By following some of the techniques I am going to share with you shortly, you will start to notice your health improve too. You will sleep better, have fewer illnesses, have more energy and feel more relaxed and positive.

## Know Your Stress!

Ok, so now we know a little bit about what happens inside our body when we are suffering from stress. The next stage is obviously to deal with the problem. There are two stages to this.

The first is to recognise that you are suffering from stress and identify what exactly is causing the stress.

The second is to relieve it.

I can't emphasise this next point enough. You must get out a pen and paper and write everything down. Things seem so much clearer and are much easier to deal with if you can see them there in front of you.

The first thing to do is to write down a list of all the possible causes of stress in your life. In many cases it is obvious, such as a recent bereavement or losing your job but sometimes it can be a series of seemingly minor irritations such as your partner squeezing the toothpaste tube in the middle rather than at the end or not changing the toilet roll when it is finished.

Don't rush this job. Spend time and write down everything you can think of.

The next thing to do is to divide these into two categories.

One is a list of things which have a practical solution (i.e. there is something you can do about it).

The other is a list of things that will either get better with time or that you can do nothing to change.

Anything that falls into the second list can be a real source of prolonged stress but having identified it you should hopefully be better able to minimise its impact by using some of our stress management techniques.

Everything on the first list however is a problem that you should focus on resolving.

Take each item on that list and make a plan for how you can deal with it. Then having made a plan – follow through with it. The more sources of stress you can eliminate the better you will feel.



You should be prepared for the fact that some of your solutions will upset others. Clearly, I am not suggesting that you should set out to do this and in many cases planning what you say and do can minimise this. Always look for a win-win scenario as this creates the best long-term solutions.

Let's have a look at a few examples of stress in the workplace. Perhaps you are having a clash of personality with a colleague. If you do nothing then it will eat away at you. You have to take action, be that either talking to the person to try to resolve your differences or asking to be transferred elsewhere.

Or perhaps you have a big project and a deadline to meet which you are falling behind with. Perhaps, in this case, you are just going to have to accept that you are going to be under stress and pressure between now and that deadline.

The key here is to recognise that you are going to be stressed and to plan to use some of our stress management techniques to minimise its effects on you.

What if the person or whatever is stressing you is not going to go away? In this case you have to ask yourself how long you are willing to put your health at risk.

I know you have to put food on the table at home and pay your bills but at what cost to yourself? Perhaps now is the time to plan a change of workplace.

The key here is to write everything down and make plans to deal with it. You will probably surprise yourself at how easy it will be and how quickly things can start to improve.

Taking decisive action to deal with some of your stressors, is a great first step to combat stress and get on with your life.

## Dealing with Stress

Ok, we have spent some time looking at how stress affects our body and tackling whatever is causing us to be stressed. Now I want to look at what you can do to combat stress and lessen the impact that it can have on your body.


To understand why these methods work I want you to think back to what I told you about what happens in the body when we are stressed.

Remember the body reacts to stressful situations by using the fight or flight response and releasing hormones such as adrenaline.

Stress symptoms occur because we don't use these hormones and they are still coursing around our body.

Does it not make sense then that if we were to do something to eliminate these hormones then we will significantly reduce our feelings of stress and its associated illnesses?

Read on and I will share with you the secrets of how to combat stress and get on with your life!

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## Chapter 2: My 2 personal favourite Stress Management Techniques

### Stress Management technique 1: Exercise

Now please don't grumble at the mention of the word exercise. I can assure you that I am not going to suggest that you should start training for the Olympics.

Even the most avid couch potatoes among us can do some form of exercise. The important thing is to find something which you enjoy doing.

During my own period of stress, which I mentioned earlier, I was also trying to lose weight and become fit.

During my youth I was quite a keen sportsman and also quite fit but due to a combination of knee and ankle injuries and work commitments I became less and less active and more and more unfit. I decided to try to remedy this by doing some regular exercise and my own chosen form of exercise was cycling.

I started cycling at least three times a week, either in the evenings after work, on days off or at the weekend. I also started increasing the distances I cycled as I became fitter.

What I noticed was that on the days when I had cycled I slept much better at night and felt that I had more energy and enthusiasm the next day. I also felt a sense of achievement when I had completed each cycle and generally felt healthier.

Let's look at what was going on here.

The stress I was suffering at the time was causing adrenalin to flow in my body which wasn't being used. The exercise however was now putting those hormones to use – if you like I suppose you could say I was using the 'flight' part of the fight or flight response.

The effects of the adrenalin – increased heart rate, opened blood vessels, faster breathing, sweating and glucose surge are all useful when you are exercising and so rather than lingering in your body causing harm you eradicate them and immediately feel better for it.

We all know that exercise is good for us.

The current position of most doctors is that thirty minutes of exercise done three times a week will significantly improve your health and from experience I can also say that it will significantly reduce your stress levels.

As well as ridding your body of the harmful hormones of stress, exercise also makes your body fitter and therefore more able to cope with future stressful episodes.

One more very important effect of exercise is the production of chemicals within the body called endorphins.

The word "Endorphin" comes from the two words, "endogenous + morphine." What this basically means is morphine which is produced within the body, in other words they are a sort of "happy hormone".

Endorphins are believed to produce four key effects on the body and mind: they enhance the immune system, they relieve pain, they reduce stress, and postpone the aging process.

Endorphins are what cause people who exercise to experience things like the "runners high" or "second wind".

I noticed this myself when I was cycling. After only a short period of time after leaving home on my bike I actually felt quite tired but if I kept going then a short time later I suddenly felt full of energy again. This was the endorphins kicking in.

The blissful feeling you often experience after making love is due to the body's production of endorphins: in fact, endorphin production can increase 200% from the beginning to the end of sexual activity.

The good news is that sex is just as good a form of exercise as cycling, running or anything else!

If you are seriously seeking a way to reduce stress, exercising is a very potent way of doing it. Each period of exercise will help you feel better there and then and in a few short weeks you will feel healthier and be able to handle stress better.

Each time I feel stressed now, exercise is the first thing I turn to, to relieve it. I have even now joined a gym which I go to two or three times a week.

Sometimes, after a busy day at work, I think to myself that going on to the gym is the last thing I want to do. I have learned however, that if I make myself go, I will feel so much better afterwards.

My daughter now also goes to the gym. She is in a period of her life when stress levels can be high due to things like exams, peer pressure and all the other stresses of the younger years. Exercise is a great release for all these stresses and she really enjoys exercise classes such as "Zumba", "Boxercise" and "Step aerobics"

Don't say you don't have time to exercise. Make time!!

It will stop the "chips being knocked out of your wall", it will combat the aging effect of bad stress and it will give you more energy, more focus, more health!

As I said earlier it is important to find forms of exercise which you enjoy. Try lots of different things – there are bound to be some that you like.

Here's just a few examples of stress-relieving exercises which almost anyone can do:

- Walk with a friend.
- Join a gym.
- Sign up for an aerobics or step class.
- Try yoga or Tai Chi.
- Dance, dance, dance!
- Buy an exercise video for home.
- Look for guidebooks at the library.
- Surf the Internet for workout plans.

You don't need to spend a lot of money – walking is free and is one of my favourite forms of exercise. Spending time walking my dog is a fantastic stress reliever.

You can make weights just by refilling drinks bottle with water and don't forget that jobs that need to be done around the house such as washing the car and gardening can be made into a sort of exercise routine.

Taking exercise and getting fit makes everyone feel and look great. It's an incredible weapon in your personal battle against stress. Use it!

## Stress Management technique 2: Laughter

I'm sure you have probably heard the expression that "Laughter is the best medicine".

Well, when dealing with stress that is certainly the case. In fact laughter is one of the best stress management techniques because as well as being free it has a number of health benefits too.

Going back to my own period of stress, I was also at the time working with a couple of friends to write a script for a comedy show which we were planning to put on stage later that year.

We met once a week to write the script and as we worked together, bouncing ideas for jokes and comedy routines off each other we spent the evening roaring with laughter at times. It was great fun.

So how does laughter work as a stress management tool?

Firstly it has an effect on our hormone levels. It reduces the level of stress hormones such as adrenalin and cortisol and causes a release of the health improving endorphins that we mentioned earlier.

It also provides us with a physical release. If you think back to the last time you had a really good belly laugh then you will know what I mean. You simply feel better after a really good laugh.

Laughter helps to take your focus away from stress and other negative emotions. It can help to change your perspective on things and perhaps view things as a challenge rather than a threat

Laughter is also contagious. If you laugh more you will find that those around you will laugh more.

This will in turn make the people you interact with less stressed and possibly improve your environment. Can you see how this might be beneficial in a stressful workplace perhaps?

There are many ways to bring more laughter into your life.

One of the best is to spend regular time with friends where you just let your hair down and have fun together.

That could be just having a few drinks in your local bar or something a bit more adventurous like an evening go-karting. Having friends over for a party or game night is also a great setup for laughter.

Another way is to watch comedy shows either on TV or live in theatres or clubs. Watching funny movies and shows is an easy way to get laughter into your life whenever you need it.

My job as a pharmacist means that most of my working days are very busy and often quite stressful. My wife also has a busy and stressful job as manager of a large retail outlet.

One of the things we do on a regular basis is to watch comedy shows on TV together in the evenings after a hard day at work.

I have recorded hours of our favourite TV comedies such as “The Big Bang Theory” and “Modern Family” and most evenings we will watch an episode of one of them before bedtime.

It’s great to just laugh out loud and feel the stresses of the day just melt away. It also helps with relaxing before bedtime and getting a great night’s sleep.

Try looking at your situation from another perspective and see if you can laugh at it.

I am sure you have seen some stand-up comedians who can spend time talking about subjects which would normally be serious or perhaps depressing and just by the way they talk about them can make it seem absolutely hilarious.

If you try to approach life in a less serious way you'll find you're less stressed about negative events, and you'll achieve the health benefits of laughter.

Exercise and laughter are my two personal favourite ways to relieve stress. Both help your body to “burn off” those stress hormones that might have built up during the day which of course is the key to dealing with the harmful effects of stress on your body.

In my opinion these are the first two things you should try to help relieve your own stress.

### In Conclusion

Dealing with stress is not easy but if you don't take steps to control it then it will start to take control of you.

This eBook is not intended to be a comprehensive manual for stress relief but rather to provide you with a starting point in your own battle with stress.

I hope you have enjoyed reading this eBook and found it to be of some benefit. I know that if you put the information in it into practice then you will reap the rewards, just as I did.

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