

Stress for Success

Redefining your relationship with stress

BY KIMBERLEE BETHANY BONURA

STRESS CAN LEAD to a range of health issues, like high blood pressure, cardiovascular disease, insomnia and anxiety. You may have tried to reduce your stress, and ended up stressed about stress itself.

New research shows that, rather than reducing your stress, you need to transform your relationship with stress. If the story you tell yourself about stress is that stress is bad for you, your health will suffer.

One large analysis of longitudinal data by researchers at the University of Wisconsin-Madison found that people with high stress levels who believed stress was unhealthy had an increased risk of premature death. The people who had high stress levels and believed that stress was a normal part of life actually had a reduced risk of stress-related death compared to people with lower stress levels. Collaborative research from Florida State University and Stanford showed that people with higher levels of stress report more meaningful lives.

Shift your perspective

Absorb that as your new story about stress: Being stressed means your life is meaningful. You are feeling stressed because you care about the people and activities in your life.

Consider the perspective that Costco member Nina Spadaro, licensed psychologist and a faculty member at Walden University, teaches in her parent-child kung fu classes in Bellingham, Washington. Spadaro has noticed that, for children, stress often comes from fear of failure. She encourages parents and children "to treat mistakes as opportunities for celebration of a child really trying to do something challenging."

This shift in perspective is helpful at



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any age. Whenever you are stressed, remember that you are feeling stressed because you care and are challenging yourself. Become aware of what you're feeling.

Master mindfulness

Mindfulness strategies offer a way to stop and notice how you are feeling in the moment. Grace Bullock, a research scientist, psychologist and author, suggests that you pause for a moment each day and ask yourself, "How stressed am I really feeling?"

Once you acknowledge the feeling, focus on your ability to address the situation. Mindfulness strategies help you cope, because they teach you how to focus your attention in the present moment, where you may actually solve the problem.

Mindfulness practice is essentially the simple decision to pay attention to where you are, what you are doing and what you are feeling in the present moment. One research study found that washing dishes in a mindful way—paying attention to the bubbles and the scent, for instance—reduced stress levels.

Research with MRIs shows that mindfulness practices change the neurological structure of the brain. People who practice mindfulness strategies become more adept at managing stress, are better able to regulate difficult emotional experiences and have lower levels of anxiety, depression and chronic pain.

Other techniques

Mindfulness strategies can be effective even after extreme life-or-death stress. Costco member Nicole Lovald, life coach and owner of Spirit of the Lake Yoga and Wellness Center in Excelsior, Minnesota, serves as regional director for the Veterans Yoga Project. According to



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Lovald, practicing yoga teaches "resiliency by calming the nervous system, helping veterans to reconnect with their bodies and minds, and regain their abilities to self-regulate. [It] can help them feel more comfortable in their own skin."

Your new story: You're strong. You're resilient. You're comfortable in your own skin. You are good at stress. **C**

Kimberlee Bethany Bonura's course, "How to Make Stress Work for You," will be available via DVD and digital streaming in February 2017 (drkimberleebonura.com).