

“A Must-Read For All College Students!”

The Real Truth About Stress That Can Change Your Life

College Stress Relief

**What Every Student Should
Know (And Spread Around)
ASAP!**

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Published by: TRO Productions, LLC, Sparks, MD, 21152

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First Printing, January 2012

Printed in the United States of America

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Sleep Well Again—How To Fall Asleep Fast, Stay Asleep Longer, And Getter Better Sleep Like You Did In The Past

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What You Will Gain From Reading This Book

NOTE: This book is NOT a substitute for professional medical or professional mental health evaluation and treatment, should you need these.

If you are in college right now, or if you'll soon be entering, this book is for you.

It also may be for your friends, your classmates, and anyone else you know who could benefit from having less stress in their life—so please feel free to copy this book and spread it around.

My name is Mort (Doc) Orman, M.D. and I am one of the leading experts on stress today. You may have seen some of my advice about dealing with stress on my website www.docorman.com, where I publish a blog, featuring stress relief tips and other coping insights.

At the time of this writing, I am 63 years old. This means I am far removed from your world today, as well as from my own college years at Duke University (1969-1973). I was there during the Viet Nam War and the assassination of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I also vividly recall having a good amount of stress during my four years as an undergraduate.

My freshman year at Duke was extremely difficult for me. It was my first time away from home. It was also my first time being on my own. I was sad about having to separate from my high school girlfriend. We tried to keep things going, but it didn't work out.

I also found it difficult to fit in socially in my new environment. This got a little better when I joined an on-campus fraternity, but I never truly felt comfortable in my own skin, during the entire four years of my college career.

There were many other stressors, as I'm sure you can imagine. But more importantly, there was very little help available to assist me with my personal struggles. There was certainly no book like this one to guide me, and while I could have started seeing a therapist, I couldn't afford one. And I didn't want to have to deal with perhaps another stigma, in addition to all the other social disadvantages I believed I had.

So I was left trying to figure out how to deal with my stress on my own. Needless to say, I wasn't very successful. Not only did my stress continue all throughout college, but it got even worse once I graduated and entered medical school. As a medical student, I was anxious, tense, and irritable much of the time. I also felt seriously depressed from time to time, and my relationships with other people were often strained as well.

Eventually, my stress got so bad in medical school that I did go into therapy. While these weekly sessions did help, to some degree, they never gave me the complete relief I was seeking from my anger, frustration, anxiety, lack of self-confidence, or interpersonal failures.

Maybe you're thinking right now, "gee, how'd this guy ever become a world-class stress expert?" And I couldn't blame you, if you've already formed this impression.

But this is my history, so I thought I'd share it with you. Also, knowing exactly what I had to go through to eventually overcome my stress is helpful for you to understand just how much this book could benefit you, and how it differs from any other book about stress you may have already read—or possibly ever will.

Getting back to my story (please bear with me—it won't take too long), despite continuing in therapy for seven years, including my three years of Internal Medicine residency and first few years in private practice, I continued to feel extremely stressed.

Nothing I tried made any real, lasting difference. There was nothing I learned in college that helped me deal with my stress. There was nothing I learned in my four years of medical school or my three years of medical residency that made things easier for me. And as I've already explained, therapy sessions helped me up to a point, but I never learned much about dealing with stress, per se, from my therapist (who was actually pretty good).

In addition, the following strategies I tried also didn't work:

- Trying to manage my stress;
- Trying to avoid stressful situations;
- Trying to avoid difficult people;
- Reading books about how to cope with modern day stress;
- Exercising more or trying to change my diet;
- Going to seminars about stress management;
- Going to lectures by various "experts" about how to deal with stress;
- Trying to think more positively when I was emotionally upset;
- Trying to stop myself from feeling angry, frustrated, or anxious just by sheer willpower;
- Using alcohol or drugs to deal with my stress;
- Seeking advice from friends;
- Seeking advice from my fellow practicing physicians;
- Seeking advice from relatives (certainly not my parents);
- Trying to figure out how to deal with stress on my own.

In other words, nothing helped very much at all. And perhaps you've found the same to be true, yourself.

If so, then you are in exactly the right place.

I Finally Did Discover How To Master Stress

Eventually, I did stumble upon the keys to relieving my stress, and I'll be sharing many of these secrets with you in this book.

Now, if I thought you could just take a few psychology courses in college, or take a course on stress management, and get this valuable information, I wouldn't have written this book.

You see, I got lots of training on how to manage stress in medical school. I also got lots of input about managing my stress once I graduated and started seeking solutions on my own. The insights that finally ended up helping me the most, however, weren't taught in these courses at all. And they're not being taught in most colleges or other courses on stress today. That's why this book is so important.

You are at college to get a good education (and maybe to get away from your parents and to party just a little). And you also are there to get prepared to be happy and successful in life, once you graduate.

Now wouldn't you think learning how to understand stress—what it really is, what causes it to occur, and what your best coping options are for dealing with it—would be one of the primary things college would educate you about?

Well, I'm sorry to tell you that it probably won't. Not only will you continue to experience much more stress than you need to while you're in college, but once you graduate, you'll be no more prepared to deal with it than I was.

That's why the title of this book is "College Stress Relief: What Every Student Should Know (And Spread Around) ASAP. The last part means "as soon as possible."

If you are just starting out in college, and you are still in your freshman or sophomore years, this book can be of immense value to you. The earlier you read it, the better off you will be. But even if you are a junior or senior, it's not too late. After all, this book is not just about relieving stress in college—it's about how to reduce stress all throughout your adult life!

This Book Will Challenge You

I want to be very honest...this book will definitely challenge you. It will force you to question some of your deeply held beliefs about stress (and about life). And it's not going to give you a bunch of simplistic steps you can follow to magically make all your stress suddenly disappear. That's not how things work.

This book is also not going to give you tips about how to manage your stress, like: get clear about your priorities, make to-do lists to organize your daily activities, or set aside 15 minutes twice a day to meditate or otherwise engage in relaxation exercises.

Not only will these strategies not make a big difference in how much stress you experience, but one of the things you will hopefully learn from this book is that giving people tips, and encouraging them to manage their stress, is a big part of why stress education is so weak and ineffective today.

In order for you to achieve a major breakthroughs in your ability to deal with stress, both in college and for the rest of your life, you're going to need to make changes in the whole way you think about and understand human stress. You'll need to take a very deep (and honest) look at the assumptions you already have, and the specific beliefs that you (and most of your friends) have already bought into.

You see, the real problem with stress today is not that you (or I) lack the ability to deal with our stress effectively. The real problem today is that you and I live in a society where stress is horribly misunderstood. We live in a world where myths and misconceptions about stress rule the day, and where a host of popular, but false, ideas keep us from accessing our natural abilities to live stress free, and to be as happy, confident, and successful as we could be.

One of the main purposes of this book is to correct these incorrect beliefs about stress, and to introduce you to better ways of thinking about this very common human problem. It will build you a new foundation for understanding human stress that will benefit you, both now and for many years to come.

Trust me, I wish someone had shared the wisdom contained in this book with me when I was in college or in my early 20's. I can't tell you how much pain, suffering, relationship failures, and other emotional distress I could have avoided.

I didn't discover the truths about stress I'm going to share with you in this book until I was in my early 30s. But when I did, boy did they make a huge and lasting difference.

For the past 30 years of my life, despite having many more professional and personal responsibilities than ever before, I've had very little stress or tension to speak of. I rarely get angry, frustrated, or anxious anymore. And even when I do, I know how to make these and other negative emotions quickly disappear, within minutes or hours, whenever I want.

I've been happily married to my wife, Christina, for 27 years, and I have a wonderful daughter who just graduated from college.

I've also written several popular books about stress, including *The 14 Day Stress Cure*, which won a non-fiction book of the year award from the National Association of Independent Publishers for the year it was published (1991).

I'm also the creator and sponsor of **National Stress Awareness Month** in the U.S., every April since 1991. And I've given seminars and workshops about stress for thousands of individuals, including doctors, nurses, medical students, college students, college athletic coaches, psychologists, business executives, the clergy, and even the F.B.I.

So, I'm not just some "chump" off the street, who's read a few books and now thinks he's a new-age expert on human stress. I've been actively working in this field for the past 30 years, and I've gained special knowledge and skills about dealing with stress that very few experts today even know about, much less possess.

I wrote this book for you, and for all college students, to share some of my 30 years of accumulated knowledge about how to relieve stress with you, so you can benefit from it yourself and hopefully share this knowledge with your classmates and friends. I also wrote this book because I strongly believe that this new type of stress education should be part of every student's undergraduate training.

Hopefully, if enough college students like you start obtaining this type of solid, practical, real-life, stress relief education, from outside the traditional education channels, some college administrators and faculty may eventually start teaching it themselves.

How This Book Is Organized

This book is organized into **four main sections**:

Section 1: This first section will teach you how to recognize the 9 biggest myths (i.e. lies) about stress, and what is incorrect about each of them. It will then introduce you to some new ways of thinking about each of these myths that may take you a little while to get used to, but once you do, you'll probably be very grateful.

Section 2: This section explains why managing stress is not your best coping option. It also will introduce you to a very powerful three-step coping method that I call "The Ultimate Method For Dealing With Stress."

Section 3: This section will introduce you to a whole new way of thinking about the causes of human stress. As you learn more and more about how to identify the real causes of stress in your life, many of which have been hidden from your view, you'll be able to start applying this knowledge immediately, to whatever college stress you are experiencing. You'll also be able to keep benefiting from, and adding to, this new perspective, well after you graduate...and for the rest of your life.

Section 4: This section will show you how you can easily obtain even more advanced training of how to relieve your stress than I am able to include in an introductory level book such as this. It will also inform you about an extremely powerful way for you to gain more control over your emotions, especially your negative ones.

In this final section, I'm going to show you a great way to understand the causes of human anger, and I'll also give you a simple tool that will enable you to always remember these causes, whenever you feel angry (about anything). Then, I will show you how you can go online and access a series of downloadable mp3 audio

files, recorded by me, along with accompanying downloadable PDF study guides, that will teach you the secrets of making anger (and other negative emotions) quickly disappear, whenever you want, without needing to use cigarettes, alcohol, illegal drugs, relaxation procedures, or any other stress management techniques.

As I'm sure you can image, this would be an enormously useful skill to have, both during the remainder of your college years, and beyond.

Are You Interested?

I hope I've given you enough of a glimpse about what this book can do for you, and the many ways it can benefit you, so that you'll take the time from your busy academic and/or social schedule to read it.

They say a college student's attention span is so short today, that its unlikely they will sit down and thoroughly read through a book such as this. Well, I don't agree. I think that college students' attention span is short today because there's so much worthless crap being thrown at them, that it doesn't make good sense to pay close attention to it. However, when something truly valuable does come along, I believe most students will want to avidly consume it, and will give it the attention it truly deserves.

Hopefully, that's how you will choose to view the opportunity this rare type of book presents to you. And once again, if you do find it rewarding, as I believe you will, please copy it, email it, post in on your own personal website, talk about it on Facebook, talk about it on Tumblr, or otherwise find ways to share it and discuss it with your classmates and friends.

Wishing you much future happiness, good health, and success, during the rest of your college years...and beyond.

Mort (Doc) Orman, M.D.

Section 1—The 9 Big Myths About Stress That Are Keeping You Stuck

In this first section, I'm going to introduce you to a whole new way of thinking about stress that can make you much better able to deal with it—both in college and for the rest of your adult life.

In order to introduce you to this new way of thinking, I will break it down into chunks, because there are 9 big myths about stress today that are keeping you from grasping these deeper truths. I'm going to debunk each of these myths, one by one, in order to build you a new foundation of understanding.

So, be prepared to have some of your most cherished beliefs about stress become shattered in the next few pages. Also, if you truly grasp the beauty (and wisdom) of this new way of thinking about stress that I'm going to share with you, you will never want to go back to your old way of thinking. So, take one last romantic look at your current beliefs about stress, and then kiss them goodbye.

You're about to get an education in understanding human stress that few people alive today have. I can assure you that your parents don't have this understanding, nor do most of your college professors. I've been teaching these principles (and using them successfully in my own life) for the past 30 years. And it's amazing how many well-educated people are walking around today with almost zero appreciation for them. But the ones who do finally grasp this new understand are far better able to cope with their stress than they were before.

NOTE: Remember how I warned you this book was going to challenge you and encourage you to re-examine your most basic beliefs about stress? Well, this starts right now, with the very first myth I'm going to address. Now, if you don't immediately agree with everything you're going to read about in this Section, hang in there. Don't be too quick to abandon ship. As you keep reading on in this book, it will all make sense to you eventually. And when it does, you'll be living in a whole new world of possibilities for eliminating stress that are probably not open to you right now.

STRESS MYTH #1: Stress Is Something That Actually Exists

If you've read anything at all about stress (books, magazine articles, newspaper stories, etc.), you've no doubt discovered that most conventional stress experts take two things for granted, right from the start. The two things they all take for granted are:

- 1) stress is something that actually exists, and
- 2) stress is something that human beings commonly suffer from.

These two points seem pretty reasonable, right? I mean who in their right mind would dare argue with either of them?

Well, what if I told you that neither of these widely held beliefs about stress is actually true! I assume you probably don't believe me, but that's alright, because I'm about to show you that they are both entirely false.

I used to believe strongly in both of these common sense notions about stress. However, I eventually discovered there are better ways to think about stress—what it really is, and also how to best cope with it.

But for now, let's just focus on the first of these two popular beliefs. What is stress really, and is it truly something that actually exists?

What Is Stress Really?

Whenever I conduct a seminar or workshop about stress, I usually start off by asking participants to share their thoughts about what stress is. I go around the room and ask people, one at a time, to tell me (and the other participants) what stress means to them.

I've done this several hundred times, and the result is always the same. When you ask people to tell you what stress is, they will usually give you answers like this:

- Stress is being mentally or physically overwhelmed by too many external pressures or demands;
- Stress is not being able to sleep well or concentrate during the day;
- Stress is feeling anxious, angry, frustrated or depressed;
- Still others will point to physical symptoms in their bodies, such as muscle aches, headaches, indigestion, excessive perspiration, or rapid heart beats;
- And some will say stress is the inappropriate activation of the body's "flight or fight response," which results in excessive stress hormones being released into the bloodstream.

You probably have your own personal definition for stress, which may or may not be similar to the ones above.

I could have listed other responses, but the important thing to notice is that there are many different definitions of stress around today, and all of them do have merit.

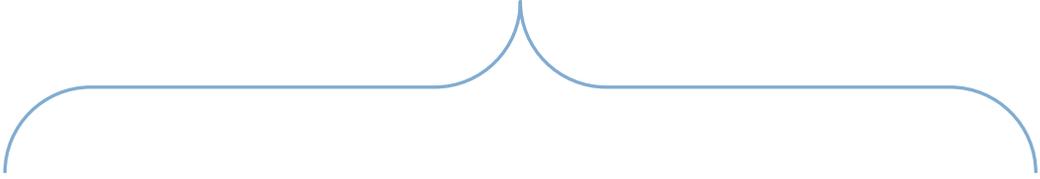
However, none of them gets to the heart of what stress really is. None of them adequately captures its true essence.

You see, the real truth about what stress is turns out to be very different from what you and most other people have been taught to believe.

In other words, it's not what you've been told.

The Real Truth About Stress

The real truth about stress is this....



**“STRESS”
IS JUST
A
WORD**

Doc Orman, M.D.

That's right. Stress is not some "thing" or "condition" that actually exists in the real world.

The only place stress exists is in human language.

It's just a word—an abstract concept—that someone invented years ago to stand for many **other things in life that really do exist** and that really do bother us from time to time.

While this basic truth about stress may seem silly or even inane to you at first glance, I assure you it has profound implications. I will explore some of these implications with you as we debunk other myths in this Section.

Now, if you doubt that "stress" is just a word—and that's all it is—all you have to go back and research what the inventor of the term originally said about it.

Origin Of The Term "Stress"

The term "stress" was first introduced in its modern day context by Hans Selye, an Austrian-born physician, who did much of his pioneering research on stress in Montreal, Canada during the 1930s and 1940s.

In his 1956 book *The Stress of Life*, Selye clearly states:

“If we are to use this concept (stress) in a strictly scientific manner, it is important to keep in mind that stress is an abstraction; it has no independent existence.” (p.43)

Selye knew quite well that he was standing at the forefront of a new branch of scientific research. He also understood that a new vocabulary would be needed to communicate about this new field of research within the existing scientific community.

He actually borrowed the term "stress" from the field of engineering, where it had been in use for many years. Engineers used this term to describe experiments where various non-living materials were subjected to extremes of heat, pressure, tension, weight-bearing, etc. The term "stress" was used to denote the external

forces impinging upon the inanimate object being studied, and the term “strain” was used to describe the internal disruptions that occurred within the material itself.

Selye had begun to do the same type of studies with laboratory animals, and later with humans, so the “stress-strain” conceptual model that engineers had long been using seemed to him to be very well suited to describe the type of research he was pioneering.

But at the same time, Selye was clear that “stress” was just an abstract concept that only existed in language. Strong wind shears, extremes of heat and cold, thousand pound weights, and blow torches are all things that really do exist in the world. And while you could use the term “stress” or “stressor” to refer to them, the label “stress” was not what was real, but the specific external forces this term referred to actually were.

So Selye tried his best to warn us not to make this critical mistake in our thinking. But as time went on, most people forgot his warning.

As a result, we’ve all been taught to believe that stress is a “thing” or a “condition” that actually does exist, and that we actually do suffer from.

Now, I’m not saying that just because stress is just a word, that everything we experience when we say we’re feeling stressed is imaginary or doesn’t exist for us. That really would be crazy talk.

Stressful things really do happen to us, and we really do suffer at times when we say we are “suffering from stress”. I’m in no way trying to deny that. All I’m trying to point out is that whenever we say we are suffering from “stress,” we are not. **We are actually suffering from something else.** And we need to be very clear about exactly what that “something else” is if we ever hope to deal with our stress in a masterful way.

In order to become a master at dealing with anything in life, you first must understand the fundamental nature of whatever it is that you’re trying to master. You need to know exactly what it is—and exactly what it is not.

That's why if you really want to get good at freeing yourself from stress, the very first thing you must get clear about is that there's no such "thing" as stress. Stress is just a word we use to stand for something else that truly does exist and that we truly do want relief from.

We'll take a deeper look at what this "something else" is in just a moment.

The Body's Stress Response

Now, some people will argue fiercely that stress is not just a word, but that it's a well-documented pattern of physiological responses that occur within our bodies. In other words, they will insist that it's an objectively verifiable biologic "condition" that truly does "exist."

I would totally agree that there are indeed well-known physiological changes that occur within our bodies—called the body's **stress response** or the **flight or fight response**—and these physiologic responses really do exist.

However, this is not all that stress really is, and it is not the best way to define it.

The measurable changes that occur within our bodies are just the results (or after effects) of what we mean by the word "stress"—and so they are only one part of the story and not the entire thing.

Therefore, it is just as big a mistake to define stress in purely physiological terms as it is to define it in any other limited way.

STRESS MYTH #2: Human Beings Frequently Suffer From Stress

At the beginning of this Section, I pointed out that most stress experts, and most ordinary people as well, simply take it for granted that stress is something that actually exists, and that stress is something that most human beings commonly suffer from.

We've already seen that "stress" is just an abstract concept that doesn't really exist (except in human language). Now, I'm going to show you that human beings never, ever suffer from stress.

Stress Is A Word That Stands For Something Else

When I suggest you consider that "stress is just a word," I am not asking you to reject the notion that human beings (including you) frequently suffer in their lives.

All I'm saying is that whenever you think you are "suffering from stress," you are not. You are really suffering from something else. And that something else can take many forms.

For example, when we say we are **suffering from stress**, we often mean:

- We are suffering from anxiety.
- We are feeling frustrated or angry.
- We are excessively tired or feeling overwhelmed.
- We have tense muscles in our body.
- We just lost something important to us.
- We just lost someone dear to us.

These are all things that really do exist. They are not just words (although we still need to use words to describe them). Rather they are very specific emotions, body sensations, physical processes within our bodies, specific external events, tragedies, losses, etc. that really do happen and that really do exist.

Stress” Is A Word That Stands For...

You see, the real truth about “stress” is that it is a word we use to stand for many different **problems** in our lives.

We use the word “**stress**” to stand for:

- Emotional problems
- Physical problems
- Financial problems
- School problems
- Work problems
- Interpersonal problems
- Self-esteem problems
- And hundreds and hundreds of other problems

Therefore, whenever we say we are “suffering from stress”—we are not. What we are really suffering from instead is very real **problems** in our life.

And, these problems are not just words...they really do exist.

KEY PRINCIPLE:

Stress is a word that stands for
problems in our lives.

Is There Really Such A Thing As “College Stress”?

Think about the term “college stress” for just a moment. What are you really suffering from when you say you’re having college-related stress?

What are the specific problem or problems you are actually struggling with?

Well, it could be many things, and it could mean different things for different college students:

- Feeling exhausted
- Not getting proper sleep
- Having loud or obnoxious roommates
- Being worried about failing out
- Uncertainty about your choice of major or career
- Uncertainty about getting a job, once you graduate
- Trouble adjusting to being on your own
- Fear of growing up
- Fear of assuming adult responsibilities
- Overeating or overusing alcohol, drugs, stimulants, etc.
- Social difficulties and/or anxieties
- Being bullied or otherwise made fun of
- Having low self-esteem or low self-confidence
- Getting angry or irritated more than you should
- Feeling depressed, lost, or hopeless
- Possibly even having thoughts of suicide
- Resenting your parents
- Having conflicts with teachers or administrators
- Being around individuals you hate, or who hate you
- Not liking your appearance
- Thinking you’re not smart enough
- Thinking you’re not worthy of being loved
- And on, and on, and on.....

Now, you might be thinking, at this point, there's not much difference whether you say you are suffering from stress, or you say you are suffering from problems.

You might be thinking this is just a trivial and meaningless semantic point.

Well, it's NOT a trivial point at all.

It can make all the difference in whether you're able to deal with "stress" successfully in your life, or not. I'll have more to say about this in just a moment.

What's most important for you to understand right now is that if you truly want to become a master at relieving stress in your life, you must be clear that "stress" is just a word, and that human beings never, ever suffer from stress.

What we do suffer from is very real--and very specific--problems in our lives. And it is these specific problems (not "stress") that we actually want relief from, not some mythical, non-existing entity call "stress" that no human being can deal with.

How We Benefit From Knowing "Stress" is Just a Word

If you think that knowing "stress" is just a word is merely a trivial semantic point, you are way wrong about this.

It can make a HUGE difference in your ability to cope with stress successfully.

Here are just some of the benefits we gain from remembering stress is just a word:

Benefits

1. You'll stop making the mistake of thinking your problem is **stress**.
2. You'll start focusing instead on **the real problems** in your life. This will force you to define your problems more specifically.
3. Instead of asking "How can I deal with my stress?" you'll begin to ask more focused, **problem-specific questions**.

4. Your answers to these problem-specific questions will be much **more useful** in helping you deal with your “stress.”

Problem-Focused Questions

Look at the difference between asking yourself “How can I deal with my stress?” and asking yourself the following types of problem-focused questions:

1. I seem to be getting angry all the time. I wonder how I can learn to better understand and deal with my anger?
2. I seem to be worrying quite a lot. I wonder how I can learn to deal with worry?
3. I seem to be having recurring academic problems. I wonder what’s not working with the way I’m thinking or studying?
4. I seem to be having little success in my social relationships. I wonder what’s going on? And how can I improve my ability in this area?
5. I’m feeling anxious all the time, my heart keeps racing, I feel sweaty, nervous and tense much of the time. How can I better understand and deal with each of these emotional and physical problems?

The benefit of asking these more focused questions is they are much more targeted on the real problems you might be struggling with.

Asking “How can I deal with my stress?” on the other hand, immediately puts you at a **big disadvantage**. So this is not just a meaningless play on words.

STRESS MYTH #3: The Best Way To Deal With Stress Is To Manage It

A third thing most stress experts do, once they indoctrinate you into the two false beliefs that stress exists, and that you really can suffer from it, is they go on to tell you all the many bad things that can happen to you from high levels of stress, so you'll be motivated to protect yourself by learning how to manage it.

This is another big myth that has most of the world bamboozled today. There's no truth to the notion that managing stress is our best coping option. In fact, there are a whole bunch of negatives that come along with managing stress, but you probably won't hear about these unless, that is, you were fortunate enough to stumble upon a book like this.

What is Stress Management?

The term "stress management" refers to a wide range of relaxation techniques and other life coping skills, such as:

- Taking deep breaths
- Meditation
- Biofeedback
- Yoga
- Relaxing massages
- Tai Chi/Eastern body exercises
- Listening to music
- Physical exercise
- Dietary changes
- Time management skills
- Assertiveness training
- Learning to avoid stressful situations
- Taking regular vacations

You can certainly gain many positive, health-enhancing benefits from most of these stress management techniques. All of them have psychological, physical, emotional, and even spiritual rewards. They are also healthier and safer than

turning to cigarettes, alcohol, food, illegal drugs, or other chemical substances to cope with your “stress.”

These positive benefits of managing stress are very well-known and have been widely publicized.

Unfortunately, most experts never talk about the disadvantages of managing stress.

Disadvantages of Stress Management

If you've ever tried to manage your stress, you've probably discovered that:

- Stress management techniques are often very time-consuming.
- They often require long-term commitment to daily practices (sometimes several times a day) to be effective.
- Even if you start out in the beginning with great determination, your commitment may begin to weaken after several weeks or months.
- Many stress management techniques offer only limited benefits. For example, If you are stuck in a bad relationship, or are facing increased academic demands, you can punch a punching bag all you want, or jog around the block several times each day. While this might help you feel a little better, your relationship is unlikely to improve. Similarly, your academic pressures are not going to magically lessen.

The Biggest Disadvantage

This brings us to the biggest, and most important, disadvantage of managing stress.

Despite all the good things stress management can do for you, it's an approach mainly addresses just the symptoms of your problems.

Stress management techniques rarely help you identify and deal with the underlying causes of your day-to-day difficulties.

Warning Light Analogy

If the engine warning light on the dashboard of your car suddenly started flashing, would you take your car to a mechanic and ask him or her to disconnect the wire to the bulb?

Of course you wouldn't.

But isn't this exactly what we do when we focus on reducing just the **symptoms of our stress**, without ever learning how to identify and deal with its underlying **causes**?

This is why I believe managing stress is NOT our best coping option.

For me, if I'm trying to achieve long-term stress relief, I want to get at the root causes of my difficulties. I don't want to spend the rest of my life in an endless battle to simply manage just the symptoms of my problems.

In order to achieve real stress relief, therefore, you've got to become good at recognizing and dealing with the underlying causes of your problems.

And in order to do this, you've got to get very specific about the exact nature of your problems. You can't just lump them all together into one mega-problem—called “stress”—and then say “OK, now what do I need to do to deal with my stress?”

This is why it is so very critical to always be clear that stress is just a word that stands for specific problems in your life, and that you never, ever suffer from stress.

By changing the way you think about stress from being a “thing” or a “condition” that exists, and can be dealt with itself, to one or more specific problems that you need to focus on and figure out how to solve, this will force you to get much more specific about the problem or problems you really are having.

On the other hand, if you mistakenly believe that “stress” is your problem (which it never is), you won't take the time to get more specific.

And this lack of specificity (and focus) will cost you dearly. For without getting more specific about your problems, you can't very well zero in on their underlying causes.

I'll have more to say about this very important issue, when we take a closer look at the disadvantages of managing stress in Section 2 of this book. Right now, however, we've got a few more popular, but wrong-headed, myths to slay.

STRESS MYTH #4: Some Stress Is “Good” Or “Healthy” For Us

There is also no truth to the widespread belief that some degree of stress may be “good” or “healthy” for us. This is another price we pay for failing to recognize that stress is just a word. Since stress is just a word, we are free to apply the word to anything we want, whether it appropriately applies or not.

We can also make up new terms, such as “good stress” and “bad stress,” just as we can use words to make up other mythical entities like Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy.

There’s No Such Thing as Good or Healthy Stress

One of the harmful consequences of forgetting that stress is just a word, and that this word has come to be used very indiscriminately, is that we can end up believing that we have to put up with avoidable problems in our lives, because some “expert” may have convinced us that a certain amount of stress is “good” or “healthy” for us.

Many stress experts unfortunately promote this false idea that there are two types of stress: “good stress” and “bad stress.”

For example, since stress is just a word, you could say that happy or joyous moments, like going to an exciting sporting event or a stimulating horror movie, are examples of “good” or “healthy” stress.

While we are certainly free to do this, in all of the 23 years I practiced internal medicine, I never once had a patient walk into my office and say “Doc, I got real excited at the football game on Sunday. Is there anything you can do to help me deal with this?”

Don't Fall Prey To The Good Stress Myth

The problem with believing in the myth of “good” or “healthy” stress is that you can easily be misled into thinking that:

- some degree of **anxiety** must be good or healthy for you
- a modest amount of **anger** or **frustration** might be good for your health
- stress might be necessary for you to be maximally **productive** in school or at your job

Don't fall prey to this very common trap. None of these mistaken notions about stress are really true!

The medical, psychological, and business productivity literature supports the opposite conclusion—that the less stress you have, the healthier, happier, and more productive you will be.

STRESS MYTH #5: We Easily Recognize The Most Important Causes Of Our Stress

Another area where we have many false beliefs about stress is in correctly understanding what is causing our stress to occur. The main reason for this is that we've all been trained, by the society in which we live and grow up, to focus only on some of the causes of our stressful problems in life—and ignore all the others.

We Tend To Focus Mainly On Obvious Causes

If you ask people who are experiencing stress what they think is causing their stress to occur, you will usually get answers like these:

- Traffic jams
- Having tight deadlines to meet
- Having too many duties or responsibilities to fulfill
- Dealing with difficult people
- Conflicts with parents or relatives
- Losing something or someone important to you
- Dealing with illness or injury in yourself
- Dealing with illness or injury in a loved one
- Financial pressures
- Being let down or betrayed by friends or family members

While this way of thinking about stress is commonplace, it is not entirely correct. Most stress we experience is caused by a combination of two types of causes:

- 1) Obvious causes
- 2) Non-obvious causes.

Non-Obvious (i.e. Hidden) Causes

Obvious causes, like those listed above, are the ones almost everyone easily notices. They are usually **external** to us, and they often make it appear that our stress is entirely caused by “outside” forces or circumstances.

Non-obvious causes, on the other hand, are **internal** causes of stress in our lives. They consist of certain thoughts, judgments, interpretations, assumptions, attitudes, beliefs, personal philosophies, habitual behaviors, and other factors—**within us**—that are typically hidden from our view.

These **internal causes** are just as important (sometimes even more so) than the more obvious external situations we often find ourselves in—and that we blame exclusively for causing our stress to occur.

Even mundane problems, like traffic jam stress, are always caused by a **combination of internal and external factors**. And even the most horrible external events, like floods, earthquakes, fires, and other major disasters are often made worse (i.e. more stressful than they already are) by internal factors that some people are better able to recognize and defend against than others.

The Key To Stress Mastery

The best way to achieve stress mastery (i.e., high levels of stress relief in your life) is to become expert at recognizing and then dealing with **internal causes** of your day-to-day difficulties. You’ll never be able to achieve high levels of stress relief by struggling to control just your external circumstances alone.

People who know how to pinpoint (and then deal with) the hidden, internal causes of their stress have much less stress and tension in their lives than people who don’t.

And while stress mastery skills may not be very prevalent today, more and more people, including some college students, are now beginning to acquire them.

I’ll have much more to say about these hidden, internal causes of stress in Section 3 of this book.

STRESS MYTH #6: There Are Only Three Ways To Deal With Strong Feelings Of Anger

There is also a great deal of confusion and misunderstanding today about what we can do about our strong negative emotions, such as anger, fear, embarrassment, loneliness, etc.

Express Anger? Suppress It? Or Manage It?

Most people, for example, believe there are only three ways to deal with strong feelings of anger.

One way is to express them. This usually means “venting your spleen,” which usually takes the form of not very calmly (or respectfully) communicating your anger to the person or person’s you are upset with, or alternatively hitting the closest thing near you. You could also express your angry feelings simply by sending a nasty email or text message, or if you are really old-fashioned, you could sit down and write out a lengthy letter (often an excellent choice, especially if you end up never mailing it).

The second option is to try to ignore, deny, medicate, or simply stew over your angry feelings, without communicating them to anyone. Sometimes this coping strategy leads to harmful extremes, such as drug abuse, alcoholism, serious overeating, or to other unpleasant self-destructive behaviors. It can even lead to certain types of health problems.

In recent years, a third popular option has emerged. This is to use stress management techniques to help reduce or release any pent up anger or hostility you might be feeling. While anger management strategies, such as physical exercise, relaxation, meditation, yoga, listening to soft music, and many others can be helpful in this regard, they still mainly deal with just the symptoms of our upset.

Why Not Simply Make Your Anger Disappear?

There's a fourth coping option, but few people today know that it exists, much less know what is required to bring it about. This option is simply to make your angry feelings quickly **disappear**, whenever they might be bothering you.

In order to master this little-known coping skill, you'll need to become expert at recognizing the hidden (i.e., internal) causes of your anger.

I've been using this very powerful coping skill in my own life for the past 30 years, and during this time I've also taught it to many other people. Almost anyone can learn to make their anger quickly disappear in this way, but there are very few teachers around who can show you how to do this.

The Advantages Are Impressive

The advantages of this fourth coping option are quite impressive:

- You don't have to worry about expressing your anger, once you know how to make it quickly and easily go away;
- You won't have any anger left to suppress, deny, medicate, or otherwise push down inside of you, only to come out later in perhaps a destructive way;
- You won't have to worry about punching any punching bags, or taking deep breaths, or using any other time-consuming stress management techniques (unless you want to use them for other beneficial purposes).

In other words, learning how to make feelings of anger (and other negative emotions) quickly and easily disappear is a handy coping skill that everyone should know how to master. Later in Section 4 of this book, I'll tell you how you can learn to make anger and other negative emotions (such as guilt, fear, worry, frustration, and sadness) quickly disappear whenever you want. I only wish I had known about this extremely useful coping skill when I was your age and in college.

STRESS MYTH #7: Stress Makes You Motivated And More Productive

In this discussion, I'm going to explain why it is a myth to believe that stress is necessary to motivate you and to make you productive.

Stress Makes You Less Productive!

While many people think that being under stress helps them to be more productive, the reverse is actually true.

Whatever level of productivity you achieve when you are seriously under stress is not being achieved because of that stress. It is being achieved despite being under stress.

And while it may be true that many people, including many college students, use anxiety, or types of external pressures, to motivate them to buckle down and study, they could be just as productive, or perhaps even more so, if they didn't rely upon these external motivators, but motivated themselves from within instead.

Misery Needs Company

Unfortunately, most people who believe in this myth are so afraid to abandon it, that they never find out they could be just as effective without all the external motivators they believe are so essential. Their fear of not being productive keeps them from exploring other possibilities, and it blocks them from discovering how well they could do without depending upon stress to motivate them.

Also, the more people you have around you who believe in this popular myth, the more difficult it will be for you to let go of this faulty notion. The more you see other friends and classmates depending upon heightened levels of anxiety to finally settle down and get some task done, the more you will assume you need to do the same thing as well. Also, you may be fearful that others who use this method will leapfrog ahead of you, if you don't.

Thus, this myth keeps getting propagated not because there is any truth to it, but because it's so difficult for people to let go of it long enough to test the theory and find out that it doesn't hold water.

Numerous studies have shown that highly-stressed, highly-productive people do not stop being productive when they learn how to reduce their levels of anxiety and stress. In fact, many of them become even more productive, because their energy is freed up from having to manage their worry, guilt, anxiety, or any other emotions that they were previously depending upon to motivate them.

Next, we will tackle another big myth that almost everyone believes to be true. This is the myth that stress is an inevitable, unavoidable part of modern life. This could actually be the biggest and most damaging myth of all we've identified so far. And you may have to work very hard to remove it from your mind.

STRESS MYTH #8: Stress Is An Inevitable, Unavoidable Part Of Modern Life

I want to take serious issue with this popular, but mistaken, notion that stress is an inevitable, unavoidable part of modern life.

Please be clear, I am not the only stress expert who considers this a tragically flawed and damaging idea. There have also been others who have spoken out about it, but our voices are so few in number that we are constantly drowned out by the millions and millions of other voices who fiercely argue for this mistaken point of view.

There's a very wise saying, "Argue for your limitations...and they shall be yours!" which couldn't apply more to this popular, misguided notion about stress. After all, if stress really is inevitable, then we are more or less "off the hook."

We don't have to waste our precious time trying to learn how to overcome it, because this would be a foolish goal that only a moron would pursue.

And while it may be very true that there are many aspects of modern life that we do find stressful—24/7 access to computers and cell phones, overcrowding, crime, terrorism, a weak job market, financial insecurity, international competition, etc.—not all people are equally "stressed" (and some may not be stressed at all) by these same external factors.

There are many people alive today who are living in potentially high-stress situations, yet they have little or no significant amounts of stress in their lives at all. And if they do become stressed, they know how to quickly and effectively deal with it, so there is minimal impact upon their health, happiness, or their personal sense of well-being.

Our Education System Has Failed You

Most people might agree that our education system—the one you are still in—is failing in many ways. People are fond of pointing out that we are lagging behind other nations in the way we educate our students about science and math. Others

would argue that most college campuses feature very “liberal” left-leaning political points of view, and don’t give much credence to other legitimate political perspectives.

But I think our system is failing us (and you) in another very important way. I think our system is even worse at educating students to understand themselves as human beings, and at preparing them to successfully navigate life’s many ups and downs, without being horribly stressed in the process.

This is one of the big reasons why I decided to write this book, and to make it easily available to all college students (and to those about to enter college). It’s also why I decided to make some of my more expensive, advanced stress mastery training programs available to all college students at a very low price, and to also give them a way to obtain these trainings for free, by sharing this valuable stress relieving information with other college students they know.

NOTE: I’ll explain more about what these advanced training programs are and how you can take advantage of them, in Section 4 of this book.

What Should You Know About Being Human?

There are far too many things about being human that you should be learning from your high school and college educations for me to go into in great detail about in this book.

However, I don’t think any student should be allowed to graduate from high school (or college) unless they can tell you exactly what causes any human being to become angry (i.e., what the hidden, internal causes of anger are).

Similarly, they should not be allowed to graduate until they can demonstrate they know exactly what causes people to feel anxious or what causes people to feel sad, guilty, worried, or frustrated. This is absolutely essential information that you need to know to deal with life successfully, and it’s extremely sad that this knowledge is not being taught today, even though it’s very easy to teach.

I also believe that no one should be allowed to graduate from high school or college today, unless they can pass a lie detector test to prove they fully understand that using alcohol, cigarettes, illegal drugs, and even prescription medications (and

stress management techniques) only deals with the SYMPTOMS of their problems. They do nothing to help you learn how to identify and deal with underlying CAUSES.

I believe it would be great if every graduating high school and college student had to formally take an oath in order get their diploma. They would have to stand up and clearly state, with honesty, sincerity, and conviction, “I fully understand that dealing with just the symptoms of any problem I might have in life will usually not make my problem go away. I also understand that the best way to deal with any problem in life is to identify and then deal with its underlying causes, even if I might not know how to do this at first.”

Now I may have gone a bit over the top with both the lie detector and the formal oath requirement, but what do you think the world would be like today if the educators in my era had actually instituted such requirements 30 or 40 years ago.

I think the world you grew up in would have been very different, don't you?

Stress Will Be Inevitable For You...If You Don't Know How To Deal With Internal Causes

The fact that so many people today believe in the myth that stress is an inevitable, unavoidable part of modern life is more of a testament to our lack of proper understanding (and education), than it is a statement about stress (or about life) in general.

Here's a news flash for you—life itself, is not really stressful.

It is we human beings who generate most of the stress we experience today, just as human beings did thousands of years ago. However, when you don't know exactly how you are generating stress in your life...well, then I guess you might conclude that it has nothing to do with you...and everything to do with an external world that is just unfairly stacked against you.

On the other hand, once you begin to understand exactly how you are participating in generating specific types of stress in your life, the world around you suddenly changes in a big and important way. At a certain point, a light goes on in your

head, and you begin to realize that what you now understand more clearly about yourself, and about where your stress truly comes from, is a total game changer.

I want you to know that I've spent the past 30 years of my life teaching people how to eliminate stress from their life in just this way. This is what I didn't know about stress—and didn't know that I didn't know it—for the first 30 years of my life. But now that I do know about it, my life, with regard to stress, has transformed dramatically.

I invite you to take on the goal of learning as much as you can about the internal causes of your stress. I know you probably have many other things to focus on right now, just to fulfill your formal academic requirements. But any time you can spend learning about these life coping and life mastery skills will make your life, both current and future, so much better.

And the more you take on this self-education challenge, the more you will begin to realize that you really can avoid or eliminate much of the stress in your life that you once thought was unavoidable.

STRESS MYTH #9: Your Mind Plays A Huge Role In Most Of The Psychological Stress You Experience

The final myth I want to discuss with you is also a difficult one for most people to embrace. Once again, we've been so indoctrinated to think in certain ways, and to accept certain premises as being incontrovertibly true, that it's hard to let go of some of our cherished beliefs, even when they turn out to be false.

When most people start turning their attention to look within themselves to discover certain causes of their stress that were previously hidden from them, instead of totally blaming their parents, their teachers, their classmates, their skin color, or any other external factors, their first impulse may be to assume that any internal factors they identify exist primarily in their mind.

And while it may seem that this is exactly where they do exist (don't worry, we'll get into what some of these internal factors are later in this book), they really exist within your entire body, not just your brain or your mind.

Again, it might seem that this is another trivial semantic point, like the difference between calling your problems "stress" as opposed to actually clarifying the exact specific problems that are bothering you.

I can't really develop this point for you right now, because we haven't talked yet about what some of these hidden, internal causes are. But once we do that, I'll come back to this popular myth and show you why it makes a difference to think differently.

So there you have a very quick overview of the 9 biggest myths about stress that exist in our society today. You've also gotten a glimpse of what is flawed or misleading about each of them.

Don't worry, at this point in the book, if you're not buying in to my suggested corrections for each and every one of these myths. As we delve deeper into the nature of human stress, I think the overall picture will become much more clear for you.

Remember, if our education system hadn't failed you on this score, you would have already been exposed to these key points, by the time you were 12 or so. If that were the case, there wouldn't be a need for a book like this, and you wouldn't be sitting here reading one—and hopefully having your mind stretched in good and beneficial way.

Have Reasonable Expectations

As you continue reading on in this book, it's important that you have reasonable expectations about what this book can and can't do for you:

- The primary purpose of this book is to introduce you to some new ways of thinking about and coping with stress that you may not have been exposed to before.
- This book is not a training in how to quickly reduce any college-related stress you may be having right now. In my opinion, there are no “quick fixes” to solving most of the stress-related difficulties most people have.
- If you truly want to learn how to lessen or eliminate most of your college (and future) stress, you first have to begin by changing your entire way of thinking about stress. Once you've freed yourself from the 9 popular myths about stress that I briefly touched on in this first section (and that we will continue to explore throughout the remainder of this book), then...and only then...can you expect to have any meaningful breakthroughs in your ability to deal with stress more effectively.
- While this book is not designed to teach you how to immediately relieve any stress you might have in your life now, it will give you a new foundation for understanding what is really going on. And you can continue to build upon that new foundation time goes on (I'll give you some specific recommendations for how to do this later on).
- Also, if you like what you learn about stress in this book, I will offer you some more advanced training opportunities in Section 4. These are high-powered training programs that I have personally developed and make available to the general public through my Stress Mastery Academy. And they really do teach you the nuts and bolts of how to make certain common types of stress, that all human beings experience, quickly disappear.

- Please don't assume that just because this book won't give you specific instructions for how to immediately relieve your stress, that you won't be able to benefit from it immediately. There are still many ways that reading this book, all the way through, can help you deal with your current stress problems...sometimes very significantly. There is a great deal to be gained simply from improving your understanding about what stress really is, where it really comes from in your life, and what your best options are for dealing with it. So when you finish reading this book, you will know more about stress than most other people alive today. And you'll also be able to put some of that new knowledge to use in your life immediately, without any additional training.

Section 2: Don't Settle For Managing Your Stress...Banish It Instead!

In this section, I'm going to explain in more detail why managing stress is not your best coping option (Myth #3). I'm also going to briefly introduce you to a very powerful three-step coping method that I call "The Ultimate Method For Dealing With Stress," and that I believe is far superior to stress management.

I'm also going to show you why knowing **stress is just a word** (Myth #1) really is a big deal. This is because you can't even begin to use the Ultimate Method successfully, until you are totally grounded in this way of thinking.

Stress Management Isn't The Answer

Let's be honest, most of us experience stress from time to time. I don't care if you are a teenager, a college student, a graduate or professional student, or even a sixty-something year old physician and stress coach like myself.

Perhaps you have family problems at home, conflicts with friends, classmates, or teachers at school, or just too many pressures on you to handle easily.

Maybe you feel tense, anxious or irritable much of the time. Or you suffer from headaches, backaches, indigestion, insomnia or some other physical problem that is either caused by or aggravated by stress.

I'm going to assume that if you've been struggling with stress for any amount of time, you've probably already tried to manage it.

If you're like me, however, or like most of the patients I treated in my medical practice, you've also probably discovered that using stress management techniques can be a losing proposition.

Why? Because, no matter how much you try to relax, how many miles you run, or how much music you listen to, stress just keeps on happening in your life. And using stress management techniques rarely gives you the long-term stress relief you're truly looking for.

You Are Not The Problem!

I've got some news for you...if you've been struggling to manage your stress and have not been successful... YOU are NOT the problem!

As I pointed out in the first section of this book, the primary reason why stress keeps happening in your life (and in the lives of most other college students) is not because you are unable to get rid of it.

It's because you and I live in a world where stress is **deeply, profoundly, and widely misunderstood**.

As you've already seen, we have many myths and misconceptions about stress that cloud our thinking and keep us from discovering that we are indeed capable of coping with most of our stress successfully.

Here's an example of one of the 9 widespread myth about stress that we just discussed, that I found in a book called *The Stress Myth*, by Richard Ecker:

“We like to believe that stress is inevitable—that life is so much more complex these days, that we're being dragged around by a runaway world which offers us less and less that we can depend on.

But this belief is nothing but a myth, a myth that is at the core of the stress problem....This myth....has done more to perpetuate unwanted stress in our society than any other single factor.

Ironically, the main proponents of this myth are the very ones who claim to be teaching people how to deal with stress.”

Richard Ecker: The Stress Myth

As we've already seen, **Stress Management** refers to a wide range of relaxation techniques and life coping skills.

Common Stress Management Techniques

- Deep breathing exercises
- Meditation
- Biofeedback
- Yoga
- Relaxing massages
- Tai Chi/Eastern body exercises
- Listening to music
- Physical exercise
- Dietary changes
- Time management skills
- Assertiveness training
- Learning to avoid stressful situations
- Taking regular vacations

All of these can have psychological, physical, emotional, and spiritual benefits. They are all also healthier and safer than turning to cigarettes, alcohol, prescription drugs, illegal drugs, or food to relieve “stress.”

But as I've already alluded to, there are some serious disadvantages to managing stress that haven't been widely publicized.

Here's part of a report I wrote, some time ago, that describes the ten most important reasons why you shouldn't rely upon stress management as your primary coping strategy.

NOTE: Please be clear—I'm not saying managing stress is bad for you or that it's something you should never do. All I am trying to point out is that there are even better ways to deal with stress, and if you know how to take advantage of these more advanced coping strategies, you will probably find them to be even more desirable and beneficial than stress management. But if you don't know how to use these other coping strategies right now, managing stress is certainly better than doing nothing. It's also much better than using potentially harmful coping strategies, like the ones mentioned above.

10 GOOD REASONS WHY YOU SHOULDN'T MANAGE STRESS



A SPECIAL REPORT BY
DOC ORMAN, M.D.
WWW.DOCORMAN.COM

10 Good Reasons Why You Shouldn't Manage Stress

Here are ten good reasons why you might not want to manage your stress.

Let me be clear that I am not advising you to suddenly stop managing your stress, especially if you've been relying upon this approach to keep your stress at bay.

My goal here is simply to point out some of the weaknesses of managing stress that don't get much attention. There are better ways to deal with stress than just managing it, but until you know how to master these more advanced approaches, you shouldn't drop your current stress reducing strategies.

Personally, I've never found stress management all that satisfying. By the end of this discussion, I think you'll understand why.

1. Time-Consuming

A number of stress management techniques require time from your schedule each day for regular practice. Some even require 15-30 minutes or more, two or three times every day, to be effective.

Many people who are stressed are much too busy to devote 15-30 minutes two or three times each day to do relaxation exercises or to use other stress management techniques. Hence, time constraints is one big drawback of trying to manage stress.

2. Commitment And Discipline

To be effective at relieving stress, physical exercise, meditation, yoga, relaxation, and many other stress management techniques must be practiced continuously, over a long time period.

This requires commitment and daily discipline which many people lack.

Even if you start out well, with high hopes and strong intentions, your commitment to continue practicing these techniques may wane after several weeks or months.

Thus, the need for long-term commitment and discipline is another major drawback to managing stress.

3. Limited Benefit

It's important to recognize that stress management techniques are often limited in the benefits they can afford you. For example, stress management isn't very helpful for stressful problems such as the death of a loved one or loss of one's job.

Therefore, when a big stressful problem occurs, managing stress, even if you do it very well, may not bring you all the comfort and relief you want.

Say you just had a valued relationship end, and you're feeling down, or you are facing increased academic pressures at school. In response to this stress, you could decide to work out more or run several miles each day. And while these coping strategies might help you feel a little better, they might only relieve a small amount of the stress you may be feeling. Similarly, your academic pressures would not be reduced at all.

So while using stress management techniques might enable you to bear your stressful problems a little better, unless you apply some other coping strategies, your problems will likely continue to bother you.

4. Short-Lived Benefit

Even when stress management gives you the immediate relief you want, this benefit is often short-lived. After a brief period of time, your stress may come back again, and you'll once more have the same need for managing it as you did before.

Now, if these first four drawbacks to managing stress aren't bad enough, there's one **whopper of a disadvantage** that almost everyone intuitively understands.

This is the granddaddy of all weaknesses of stress management. And this is the primary reason why I believe managing stress is not your best coping option.

5. Deals With Symptoms—Not Causes!

With few exceptions, most stress management techniques deal **only with the symptoms** of your problems. They don't really help you identify and deal with the underlying causes of your day-to-day difficulties.

In my mind, this is the main disadvantage of managing stress.

Think about this for a moment—If the engine warning light on the dashboard of your car suddenly started flashing, would you ask a mechanic to disconnect the wire to the bulb?

Of course you wouldn't do that.

But isn't this exactly what you are doing when you focus on only reducing or masking the symptoms of your stress?

Wouldn't it be much better if you were able to learn how to identify and deal with the underlying **causes**?

After all, when all we do is deal with just the symptoms of our problems, these problems rarely get resolved. Thus, our stress keeps coming back, over and over again.

This one drawback alone should make everyone think twice (or more, if needed) about relying upon stress management as their primary coping strategy.

6. Doesn't Resolve Problems

For precisely the reason noted above, managing just the symptoms of stress guarantees, for the most part, that your stress is going to come back, over and over again.

This is likely to happen no matter how good you become at managing just its symptoms.

Anyone who looks at this coping strategy objectively will recognize that it lacks wisdom. However, when we are feeling stressed, and we are struggling just to keep our head above water, we tend not to notice how flawed this popular coping strategy really is.

7. Little Self-Empowerment

Symptom-oriented stress management techniques, such as physical exercise, relaxation, listening to music, yoga, meditation, etc., do very little to raise our self-awareness about the underlying causes of our problems.

They also do little to empower us to deal with these causes effectively.

There are a few stress management techniques, however, such as certain types of meditation practices, that do seem to have a dual benefit. While providing some stress relief in the form of relaxation, they also can “retrain” our minds, and expand our conscious awareness, so that we may not be generating quite as much stress as before.

However, even these dual-purpose techniques don’t end up empowering us anywhere near as much as we are capable of.

8. Stops Exploration

Another major problem with managing stress is that it keeps us from searching for, and discovering, even better ways of coping with stress that are also available to us.

This same drawback is seen in many people who develop alcoholism, drug addictions, and other addictions to chemical coping methods. Since these chemical coping “solutions” tend to work, in the short-run, to help people feel better, when a person relies upon this approach, they may never become motivated to search for better coping strategies, even though such strategies are available and are safer and have greater long-term rewards.

9. Creates Dependency

Like other symptom-oriented approaches (such as using cigarettes, alcohol, illegal drugs, overeating, etc.), the more we rely upon stress management techniques, the more we become dependent upon them.

Such dependencies on stress management techniques can be good for us in certain ways, as the harmful effects of stress on our bodies may be somewhat mitigated.

However, this same dependency may be keeping us from searching for, and mastering, even better coping options. So in this sense, it can have potentially damaging effects as well.

10. Perpetuates Myths and Misconceptions

Here's a final drawback to consider, which most people don't give much thought to.

In order to become an advocate of stress management, not only do you have to force yourself to deny all of the many drawbacks and limitations noted above, but you also have to endorse many myths and misconceptions about stress (like the 9 big myths we discussed in Section 1) that are necessary to maintain this flawed coping rationale.

These popular myths include widespread false beliefs such as:

- Stress is an unavoidable, inevitable part of modern life.
- The very best way human beings can deal with stress is to manage it.
- The causes of stress are mostly beyond our direct personal control.

When we promote the use of stress management, therefore, we are also promoting, at the very same time, many false beliefs that are also necessary to maintain this coping mindset.

Thus, promoting stress management can be harmful on a much wider scale, since if large numbers of people are convinced to believe in myths about stress, they may have trouble recognizing that there are indeed much better ways to cope with their stress than simply managing it.

So What Is The Answer?.....What's The Alternative?

There is a good alternative to managing stress.

I've already alluded to it—make your stress quickly and naturally go away (or lessen significantly) by **directly addressing its underlying causes**.

Now, I know you're probably thinking..."that's all well and good, but I don't have much control over the main causes of my stress."

I used to think like this too. And you know what? As long as I thought about stress in this way, I didn't have much control over it either.

Remember, if you think you don't have much control over stress in your life, you are not alone.

Most of us are much more capable of dealing with stress than we realize. That's because the real problem we have today is that most of us have been terribly misinformed about stress. As I've already pointed out:

- We've been badly misinformed about what stress really is.
- We've been misinformed about where stress actually comes from in our lives (i.e., its true causes).
- And we've also been misinformed about the best ways to cope with it.

Sadly, we are living in a world today where myths and misconceptions about stress rule the day, and where our lack of understanding is costing us our health, our happiness, our emotional well-being, our ability to create harmonious relationships with others, and much, much more.

The Ultimate Method For Dealing With Stress

The very best method for coping with **stress**, or any other problems in life, is to address your **problems** as follows:

- 1) Identify each problem specifically;
- 2) Identify the main causes of each problem;
- 3) Deal with the causes effectively.

Human beings have been using this Ultimate Method successfully all throughout recorded history. In fact, even at your age, you've probably used it hundreds of times yourself.

But we don't often use it when we're trying to cope with our stress.

Granted, some underlying causes may not be under our direct personal control, and some may not be easy for us to identify.

But when they are under our control, and when we do take appropriate steps to identify them and correct them, our problems almost always get better, or they may even go away entirely.

You Can Learn To Use This Ultimate Method Successfully

Now, wouldn't you love to know how to eliminate any type of stress in your life, quickly and easily, without having to manage it?

You may think this is impossible, but it's not.

In fact, thousands of people are successfully dealing with stress in just this way. And you can learn how to do this as well.

It all starts with adopting a new type of mindset, like the one I am sharing with you in this book.

Why Listen To Me?

Now why should you listen to me when I tell you that you can learn how to use this Ultimate Method expertly and that you have much more natural ability to deal with stress than you (or your friends) might believe? Why should you listen to me at all, since I'm just a medical doctor? Do physicians really understand stress all that well?

The answer is no, most physicians don't.

Most doctors know a good bit about the consequences of too much stress, especially its effects on our bodies and the many health problems it can produce. But when it comes to helping people eliminate stress, or dealing with their own personal or professional challenges, most physicians are no more knowledgeable than anyone else.

I know this is true because I practiced Internal Medicine for 23 years, and during that time, I encountered a large number of stressed out colleagues. Also, I was a highly-stressed physician myself, until I learned how to change my whole way of thinking about stress.

Not A Typical Doctor

So don't listen to me just because I went to medical school and have the letters M.D. after my name.

I invite you to listen to me because I am not a typical medical doctor. About 30 years ago, I recognized that most of what I was taught about stress in medical school wasn't really true. I then spent several years researching better ways of thinking about and understanding human stress, and this eventually enabled me to have major breakthroughs in my ability to deal with stress successfully.

And the benefits were truly amazing.

After many years of hopelessly struggling to control my emotions, especially strong negative emotions like anger, guilt, frustration, fear, worry, and sadness, I finally discovered what was really causing these emotions to occur. And these new insights enabled me to get rid of these bothersome emotions faster than ever before.

I was also able to dramatically improve the quality of my relationships. Virtually every area of my life, where I previously experienced high levels of stress, quickly turned around. And as I kept learning and discovering many new things about stress, **that I never correctly understood before**, I decided to teach what I had learned to others.

In 1981, I taught my first stress mastery course to employees at the hospital where I completed my medical residency. Since then, I've conducted many additional seminars and workshops for thousands of other individuals.

I also went on to author several books and special reports about stress, including one of the best books about stress ever written, *The 14 Day Stress Cure*, which received a non-fiction book-of-the-year award from the National Association of Independent Publishers.

So don't listen to me just because I am a physician. Consider listening to me because I've learned how to master stress in my own life, and because I've successfully taught others to do the same.

You Too Can Learn How To Master Stress

I wrote this book to let you and other college students know that you too can learn how to master stress in your life, no matter how much you may have struggled to deal with stress in the past.

The only problem is, you won't be taught how to do this in any of your college classes. Nor will you be exposed to the information you need in any of your extra-curricular activities during your college career.

How do I know this?

I know this is true because in order for me to finally learn how to master stress in my own life, I had to overcome much of my formal education. I had to give myself permission to think differently about stress than almost everyone else around me.

It wasn't easy for me to finally free myself from many of the myths and misconceptions about stress that were given to me by others.

And it won't be easy for you either, but you absolutely can do it. And you've got a great guidebook like this, which I didn't have, to get you started on the right path.

Unfortunately, like most things of great and lasting value in life, there is no "quick fix" or magic formula that will enable you to do this. It will take some work and some dedication on your part, but not as much as you might think.

It will also require you to have an open mind, and to be willing to challenge much of what you currently believe to be true about stress.

Congratulations! You're Now On The Path

Your new path to stress mastery begins right here...with this book.

In Section 4, I'm going to give you a roadmap to follow. And if you are interested in becoming expert at relieving stress in your life, or even if you just want to know a little more about it, I think you'll find this guidance very helpful.

But just by simply reading this book, you're already well on your way.

Don't be in a hurry, however, to have your stress quickly disappear. Yes, it would be great if I could show you how to do this instantly, but I can't.

What I can do, however, is teach you how to fundamentally change the entire way you think about stress. And this will naturally, over time, lead you to newer and better ways of coping with it.

I can help you build a new foundation for understanding your stress that will serve you well for many years to come. And once you have this new foundation in place, you'll be able to begin making use of it to discover how to make many types of stress in your life quickly disappear.

Have patience. The stress relief you so dearly want will eventually come to you in time. But first, we need to continue building your new foundation of understanding.

Stress Management Vs. Stress Mastery

The main difference between **stress management** and **stress mastery** can be summed up as follows:

- Stress management mainly deals with just the **symptoms** of your recurring problems in life;
- Stress mastery is the art of knowing how to eliminate your recurring problems by identifying and then dealing with their underlying **causes**.

That's the main difference...in a nutshell.

I don't know about you, but I'd rather know how to deal with the causes of my problems, than spend my time trying to "manage" just their symptoms alone.

Now don't get me wrong, many stress management techniques, such as adopting a healthy diet, getting regular physical exercise, meditating, practicing yoga, or using other relaxation strategies have positive, health-enhancing benefits.

And there is absolutely nothing wrong with taking advantage of these.

But when it comes to choosing the very best option for dealing with stressful problems in your life, I think most people would agree that it's usually better to deal with underlying causes than to simply attend to symptoms alone.

First, You Have To Get Specific

If you want to be able to deal more effectively with the underlying causes of your "stress," many of which may be hidden from your view right now, the first thing you need to do is to retrain yourself to **get more specific**.

NOTE: In the next Section of this book, I'll explain just what these hidden causes are. Identifying these hidden causes of your stress (along with the more obvious ones) is the second key step in the Ultimate Method, and it is very important to know how to do this correctly. However, I want to focus on the first step in the Ultimate Method right now, because if you get this first step wrong, it won't matter very much if you know how to complete the other two steps.

As I pointed out in Section 1, once you correctly understand that "stress" is never your problem, this will naturally require you to get much more specific about the exact problem or problems that are troubling you.

- Are you getting angry all the time?
- Are you feeling frustrated?
- Are you having difficulty getting to sleep or staying asleep?
- Are you having physical or health problems?
- Family problems?
- Social problems?
- Academic problems?
- Substance abuse problems?
- Money problems?
- Self-esteem problems?
- Self-Confidence problems?
- Other problems?

This is the critical **first step** if you want to use the Ultimate Method successfully.

Unfortunately, the stress management mentality, that is so prevalent in our society today, teaches us to lump all our problems together and then think of them as one composite problem called "stress."

This misguided way of thinking robs us of the clarity we need to focus on our problems individually, which is absolutely essential if we want to identify and deal with their underlying causes.

No wonder why so many people find eliminating stress so difficult today, and why they believe (quite incorrectly) that achieving mastery over stress is not really possible for them.

Why Do You Need To Get More Specific?

If you are interested in managing just the symptoms of your problems, you don't need to bother with getting more specific.

But if you want to go for stress mastery, and learn how to identify and deal with underlying causes instead, you will absolutely need to develop this skill.

The reason is because **specific problems** usually have very **specific causes**.

And once you become good at learning how to identify these specific causes (once again, many of which are hidden from your view), you'll be able to make most types of "stress" in your life quickly disappear, without needing to use drugs, relaxation exercises, or other time-consuming stress management techniques.

You'll Be Amazed How Easy This Is!

As I'm sure you can agree, the very best way to cope with stress (i.e. problems) in your life is NOT to manage just their symptoms, but rather to:

Step 1: Specify the problem or problems you are having.

Step 2: Identify the major causes of each problem.

Step 3: Deal with those causes until your "stress" either improves or completely disappears.

I've spent much of the past 30 years teaching people how to accomplish each of these three steps. And the results people have achieved, once they learn how to do this, are truly remarkable.

Most people today, however, including most highly-educated people, find it very difficult to cope with stress in this way. Not because they lack the ability to do so, but rather because **they haven't been trained** to deal with stress in this fashion.

Most importantly, they haven't been trained to correctly understand where stress really comes from in their lives. In other words, they haven't been trained to recognize the true causes of their reoccurring problems. This will be the topic of the next, and perhaps most important, section of this book.

Section 3: How to Correctly Understand The Causes of Human Stress

KEY POINT: Being able to recognize and deal with underlying causes of common problems in life is the **critical difference** separating people who are good at dealing with stress from those who are not.

In this section, I'm going to introduce you to some new ways of thinking about the causes of human stress. This is perhaps the most important section of this book, because as you learn to correctly identify the real causes of stress (i.e. problems) in your life, you'll begin to benefit immediately from this new awareness, and you'll be much better able to solve your problems more quickly and effectively.

The catch here is that many of the key causes of stress in your life, including any stressful problems you are struggling with in college, are often **hidden from your view**.

Unless you know how to identify these hidden causes, even your very best efforts to free yourself from stress will usually be unsuccessful.

Why Don't More People Make Use Of The Ultimate Method?

The main reason why people don't use the Ultimate Method for coping with their stress more often is that we haven't been taught to correctly identify the causes of our everyday problems. Again, in my opinion, this is a major failing of our educational system today.

But you can learn to do this, and that's what this section is all about.

The good news is you don't have to be a psychiatrist, psychologist, or even a high school graduate to understand these common causes.

They are actually quite simple, as you will soon discover.

Brief Review of Key Concepts

Before we move on to this very important topic, let's review what you should have learned so far.

Here are some of the key concepts I've covered in this book, up to this point:

- 1) "Stress" is just a word.
- 2) "Stress" is a word that stands for hundreds of different problems in our lives.
- 3) When you think you are suffering from "stress," you are not. What you are really suffering from are very specific problems in your life.
- 4) If you only deal with the symptoms of your problems, and never identify or deal with their underlying causes, your problems will likely persist and may even get worse.
- 5) Stress management techniques, such as meditation, physical exercise, and listening to music, mainly deal with just the symptoms of your problems.
- 6) The best (i.e. ultimate) way to deal with problems in life is to identify them correctly, then identify their causes, and then deal with those causes effectively.
- 7) While this may appear to be a simple method to follow, it is actually quite challenging. Otherwise, everyone would be using it already.

Correctly Understanding the Causes of Your Stress

When it comes to recognizing causes of our “stress,” we are good at identifying certain causes and not very good at identifying others.

Missing Puzzle Pieces

Consider the following example of John, a 35-year-old sales executive, who frequently experiences traffic jam stress:

John: “I have a terrible time coping with traffic jams. I’ve got a very busy schedule, and I really get steamed when some jerk doesn’t keep his eye on the road and causes me to miss an important meeting. Sure, I know what’s causing my stress to occur, but most of the time, it’s beyond my control.”

John thinks he understands the causes of his stress: poor drivers. But he’s only identifying **half the puzzle pieces**.

Poor drivers are just part of reason John gets so upset by traffic jams. There are other causes involved, but John doesn’t recognize these causes, because they’re not obvious to him.

However, if John did have all the puzzle pieces (causes) available to him, he would more correctly (and more fully) understand why he gets so “stressed” in traffic jams.

He might even find that he has **much more control** over his reactions to traffic jams than he gives himself credit for.

Obvious and Hidden Causes

One important point that you need to be very clear about is that stress in human being usually results from two main types of causes:

- **Obvious Causes**
- **Hidden Causes**

Obvious causes are the ones everyone usually notices. Hidden causes are the **missing puzzle pieces** most of us typically fail to recognize.

Look at the following list of obvious causes of stress for a moment, and note any of these that have been associated with stress in your life: .

- Traffic jams
- Making a speech to a group
- Having a tight deadline to meet
- Having too many duties or responsibilities to fulfill
- Dealing with difficult people
- Conflicts with parents or relatives
- Being worried about getting good grades
- Dealing with an illness or injury
- Dealing with illness or injury in a friend or loved one
- Financial pressures
- Getting into trouble with the law

Now, how much of a role do you think these **obvious causes** played in causing any of the stress you may have experienced?

- 90% or more?
- 50%?
- 10% or less?

If you answered 90% or more, you probably have lots of company. This is how most of us, since early childhood, have been taught to think about the causes of our problems.

If you answered either 50% or 10%, you are much closer to the truth.

While obvious causes usually do play some role, **hidden causes of stress** are also likely involved in each of these types of problems. And these hidden causes are often equally important, or sometimes even more so, than the obvious causes that most people easily see (and tend to blame exclusively).

So what are these hidden causes? And where do they come from?

The Role Of Language In Human Stress

One of the unique things about human beings is that **we live our lives in language**.

Some of the unique linguistic behaviors that only humans are capable of include:

- Making promises and requests
- Imagining future events
- Judging and interpreting what happens to us
- Asking questions about the world in which we live



Some other animals, such as porpoises, whales, and chimpanzees can engage in rudimentary forms of “linguistic” interactions. But we are the only species capable of complex linguistic behaviors, such as those above.



Human Conversations

When trying to understand why we have so much stress in our lives, it's important to recognize that we are all born into--and live our entire lives within--a virtual sea of past and present human conversations. Many of the conversations we live in today are the result of thousands, even millions, of previous conversations.

For example, many of our contemporary thoughts and ideas can be traced back to **Plato, Aristotle**, and other early Greek thinkers. As Americans, we can trace many of our modern beliefs to **Benjamin Franklin, Thomas Jefferson**, and other founding fathers, who established certain core values for our society.

I know that the societal and cultural conversations I was born into 63 years ago were very different than those you were born into only 20 or so years ago. When I went to college, we didn't have discussions about texting, cell phones, or even the internet. We did have conversations, however, about segregation, civil rights, and how to avoid getting drafted and going to Viet Nam.

Human conversations are sometimes called:

- Thoughts
- Beliefs
- Opinions
- Attitudes
- Etc.

I prefer the term "conversations" because it more accurately describes all these cognitive events as being functions of language, which they all are. But by whatever names we call them, they affect us profoundly. They also play a huge, but usually hidden, role in how much stress we experience.

Broad Influence

Conversations determine such things as how we:

- Feel
- Perceive
- Experience life
- Behave
- Understand our identity
- Evaluate our self-worth

How Our Own Internal Conversations and Action Patterns Cause Stress

Our own thoughts and behaviors (or **conversations** and **action patterns**) play a central role in causing much of our stress.

These are the **hidden causes of stress**, or **missing puzzle pieces**, that we often fail to recognize.

But all hope is not lost—you can learn to recognize these hidden causes, if you just know what to look for.

And once you know how to do this—once you have all the causes, both obvious and hidden, of any problem in front of you—you will immediately see many more options for dealing with your problems and stress than you will see if you are only working with just the obvious causes.

KEY PRINCIPLE:

ONE OF THE MAIN PURPOSES OF THIS BOOK IS TO HELP YOU BETTER UNDERSTAND, IDENTIFY, AND THEN DEAL WITH THE HIDDEN CAUSES OF YOUR STRESS.

WHY?

BECAUSE THIS IS THE SECRET TO MAKING STRESS NATURALLY DISAPPEAR, WITHOUT HAVING TO USE DRUGS, RELAXATION, PHYSICAL EXERCISE, OR OTHER STRESS MANAGEMENT TECHNIQUES.

How Do Our Internal Conversations Cause Stress?

Let's return to John and his traffic jam problem.

What John didn't realize was that there was much more contributing to his traffic jam stress than just the obvious traffic congestion. For John, getting stuck in traffic immediately triggered certain internal conversations (and action patterns) within him that he mostly was unaware of.

His attention was so automatically focused on just the obvious causes, that he never paid any attention to these internal patterns that were also contributing to his stress.

Take a look at the following list of conversations that typically get triggered for people when they unexpectedly find themselves delayed by a traffic jam. Notice if any of these **internal conversations** have ever occurred for you:

Internal Conversations Commonly Triggered By Traffic Jams

- “This shouldn't be happening to me.”
- “Terrible things will happen if I don't get to my destination on time.”
- “I should always be able to go where I want, whenever I want.”
- “Whoever caused this mess to occur must have been an imbecile.”
- “Somebody should have warned me about this tie up.”
- “Sitting in a traffic jam is a stupid waste of my time.”

These usually unconscious, or semi-conscious, internal conversations can add extra layers of **emotional distress** to an already bothersome situation.

John believed his traffic jam stress was caused primarily by other motorists. He never considered that his own **internal conversations** might be playing an even bigger role.

KEY PRINCIPLE:

IT IS RARELY EXTERNAL EVENTS ALONE (SUCH AS TRAFFIC JAMS) THAT CAUSE US TO GET UPSET.

RATHER, IT IS THE COUPLING OF EXTERNAL EVENTS WITH OUR OWN INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS (AND ACTION PATTERNS), THAT TOGETHER CAUSE US TO EXPERIENCE STRESS.

WE ARE NORMALLY VERY GOOD AT NOTICING EXTERNAL EVENTS. HOWEVER, WE HAVE NOT BEEN WELL-TRAINED TO RECOGNIZE OUR OWN INTERNAL CONVERSATIONS AND ACTION PATTERNS.

How Action Patterns Cause Stress

Let's now examine some typical **action patterns** that might also contribute to traffic jam stress.

Notice if any of the following **action patterns** have ever caused you to end up in a traffic jam:

- Failing to listen to traffic reports or check for delays before venturing out.
- Choosing a route that's quicker and more direct, but leaves you fewer escape options if traffic should come to a halt.
- Blaming yourself for being "stupid" enough to get stuck.
- Leaving only enough time for your journey if everything goes smoothly, but no extra time to allow for unexpected problems.
- Complaining and getting more and more upset, instead of creatively finding something of value to do while you are waiting.

Each of these action patterns frequently plays a role in contributing to any traffic jam stress people experience.

NOTE: Sometimes you may engage in these behaviors and be aware of them **consciously**, like when you start blaming yourself. At other times, you may be engaging in these behaviors **unconsciously**, such as when you fail to check traffic reports.

Don't be concerned, at this point, about how to deal with these **hidden causes**. I'll eventually discuss how to cope with them later on.

NOTE: This way of thinking about stress is consistent with approaches advocated by leading cognitive and behavioral psychologists and rational emotive technique practitioners.

Automaticity And Triggering

Two key concepts that can help you to think more clearly about the causes of human stress are **automaticity** and **triggering**.

Automaticity

Automaticity refers to the way **our bodies** typically respond in automatic (i.e. predictable) ways to certain external or internal stimuli (triggering events).

Triggering

Triggering simply refers to the external (or sometimes internal) **events** that initiate our automatic body responses.

In the well-known knee-jerk reflex, for example, a doctor may tap a particular spot just below your kneecap with a small rubber hammer.

When this is done, most people will notice that their leg automatically jerks upward, without any conscious intent.

In this example, the hammer tap would be the trigger, or triggering event, and the sudden jerking movement of your leg is your body's automatic response, or pre-programmed automaticity.

In life, our bodies are constantly being triggered by both external and internal events. Consider the following triggers:

- People interrupting us
- Traffic jams
- Bad weather
- Things not going as we planned
- Our own thoughts
- Advertising messages on TV

Here's another example.

Many people automatically experience fear whenever they see a snake.

For these individuals, just seeing a snake is the **trigger**, and the fear response that reflexively occurs in their bodies is their **automaticity**.

It's very important to notice, however, that not everyone responds to seeing a snake in exactly the same way. A zookeeper or a park ranger, for instance, might have a completely different internal body reaction—or no reaction at all—to the sudden appearance of a snake.

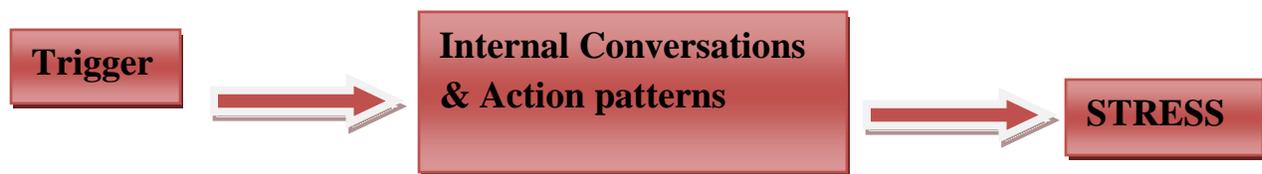
KEY PRINCIPLE:

HOW YOUR BODY GETS **PROGRAMMED** TO RESPOND AUTOMATICALLY TO SPECIFIC TRIGGERING EVENTS IS A FUNCTION OF YOUR UNIQUE **LIFE HISTORY** AND YOUR INDIVIDUAL **PAST EXPERIENCES**.

More About Internal Conversations and Action Patterns

One useful way to think about how internal conversations and action patterns contribute to our stress is to adopt a conceptual model similar to the one illustrated below.

In this model, specific **triggers** or triggering events cause specific **internal conversations** and **action patterns** to become activated within our bodies. These internal conversations and action patterns then combine with external events to cause any **stress** we might experience:



When adopting this model, it is important to keep in mind:

- Our bodies are constantly bombarded by external, and sometimes internal, triggers or triggering events.
- Each trigger or triggering event can cause specific conversations and action patterns to automatically (i.e. without our intent) arise within us.
- The specific conversations and action patterns that automatically become triggered within us may not be the same as those that become triggered within others by the same or similar triggering event.

- Sometimes, the automatic conversations and action patterns that become triggered within us are helpful to us, like automatically looking both ways before crossing a busy street.
- At other times, however, they can get us into trouble, causing us to experience problems (stress)

Assess Your Progress So Far

If you've been following the concepts in this book so far, you should be able to agree with each of the statements listed below. See how many you actually do agree with:

- 1) The best way to deal with specific problems in life is to start by correctly identifying all of the main causes, both obvious and non-obvious.
- 2) Some people could have difficulty dealing with problems in this way, especially if they fail to identify the main causes correctly, or if they continue to focus only on obvious causes.
- 3) While it's very tempting to assume that stress is primarily caused by external situations and events, internal causes within us are usually playing a prominent role as well.
- 4) The internal causes that contribute to our stress are best thought of as "conversations" and "action patterns" that become automatically activated within our bodies by specific external or internal triggering events.
- 5) When we become consciously aware of these internal causes, as well as the obvious causes that are more readily apparent to us, our chances for successfully dealing with our problems in life increase dramatically.

- 6) One reason why many people falsely conclude that stress is an inevitable part of life, or that they can't do much to eliminate it from their lives, is that we have been mainly focusing on just the obvious causes of our problems. If we were always able to recognize the hidden causes (within us) as well, we might actually discover that we do have much more control over our stress than we ever imagined.

If you agree, or mostly agree, with each of the statements above, congratulations. You are well on the way to improving your ability to deal with all sorts of problems in your life—small and large.

If you had difficulty agreeing with some of these statements, don't be too concerned. It's still early in the game. If you continue to read through the material in this book, the principles discussed so far will probably become more clear to you.

Barriers You May Encounter

Here are some common barriers people sometimes run into that may keep them from embracing the principles discussed so far in this book:

- 1) While it is certainly possible to deal with problems in life by not analyzing and identifying underlying causes, I think most people would agree this skill is helpful. Perhaps you are concerned you won't correctly identify all the key hidden causes, and therefore you might get frustrated. I agree this could happen. However, if you hang in there with this book, until the end, you might discover that identifying the hidden causes of most types of stress is not all that difficult.
- 2) If you are having difficulty accepting the principle that internal causes play a role in most types of stress we experience, you are probably not alone. This is not an easy notion for everyone to embrace. (I struggled with it myself for a long while, until it finally began to make sense to me.) All I can say is hang in there with this book, and by the end, you may find some aspects that you can get behind.

3) It's not essential that you accept my use of the terms "conversations" or "action patterns" in order to benefit from this book. You can choose any other terms that you like, as long as they relate to human thoughts and behaviors. If you are opposed, however, to the basic premise that thoughts and/or behaviors contribute to human stress, well then you may have difficulty getting value from this information. All I can do is encourage you to keep going, as you may change your mind once you see some concrete examples that I will share later on.