

Stress Slaves

How stress imprisons you

How to break free



Pamina Mullins

Stress Slaves

Contents

Dedication	4
Acknowledgments	5
Preface	10
• Do you know why your stress levels become elevated?	10
• You risk becoming a stress slave when:	14
Chapter One – The Prevalence of Stress	16
• Are you one of these statistics?	17
Chapter Two – Seeking the Source	19
• Are you surrounded by a constant barrage of potentially stressful stimuli like these?	20
Chapter Three – Extreme Expectations	24
• What do all these bizarre expectations do for your sense of self-esteem?	25
• Brenda's Story	26
Chapter Four – Psychophysiological Profile	30
• Why not stop to analyse it?	31
• In Zimbabwe	32
Chapter Five – Knee Jerk Responses	44
• Pat's Story	46
• Are you aware that stress triggers simply have the potential to cause you stress?	48
Chapter Six – Stress Immunization	50
• Is one or more members of your company constantly stressed?	51
Chapter Seven – Exceptional Solutions	55
• Why didn't you get tense about this exercise?	56
Chapter Eight – Emotional Forensics	61
• Jenny's Story	62
• How well developed are your emotional forensic skills?	63
Chapter Nine – The Healing Highway	71
• How emotionally mature are you?	77
Chapter Ten – Limiting Labels	84
• Are you polluting your life with limiting labels?	87
• Alan's story	88

Chapter Eleven - Ultimate It	97
• Have you divorced your DNA?.....	99
• Wendy's story	100
Chapter Twelve - Mobility Ability	115
• Do you know that exercise is one of the most effective ways to pull yourself out of stress induced depression?	115
Chapter Thirteen - Painful Posture	122
• Do you realise that tense body positions create more cumulative tension?	124
• Annette's story	124
Chapter Fourteen - Reinstalling the Art Relaxation	129
• Are you aware of what your hands are doing?	130
• Jerry's Story.....	135
Chapter Fifteen - Dead or Alive?	146
• What ultimately determines whether you are alive or not?	146
Chapter Sixteen - Chronological Compasses	151
• Are you as demanding as a doormat on a rainy day?	153
• Tom's Story.....	156
Chapter Seventeen - Emotional Enemas	170
• How can you avoid an emotional holocaust?	171
Chapter Eighteen -Weapons of Mass Destruction	178
• What pulled your pin?.....	179
• Kate's Story.....	180
• Karen's story	181
Chapter Nineteen - Weapons of Self Destruction	190
• What about hereditary depression?	191
Chapter Twenty - The Futility of Fear	199
• Marie's Story.....	201
• Fear is parasitic!.....	220
• What is the link between addictions and fear?.....	203
• How does fear imprison you?.....	208
Chapter Twenty one -The Importance of Pitstops	219
• Do you know that sleep is as necessary to life as breathing?.....	220
Chapter Twenty Two - Relationship Roller-Coasters	227
• Do you constantly repeat the rap sheet?.....	229

Stress Slaves

Chapter Twenty Three – Communication Crises	241
• What messages are you emitting?	243
Chapter Twenty Four – Tasty Toxins	249
• Do you often feel overwhelmed, irritable, anxious, depressed or tired?	250
Chapter Twenty Five – Fuel for Life	256
• Are you aware of the power of plants?	258
Chapter Twenty Six – Lifestyle Alchemy	264
• Are you clear about your goals?	269
Chapter Twenty Seven – Designa Destiny	284
• Stay motivated toward your goal!	287
Chapter Twenty Eight – Abolishing Stress Slavery	295
• When did you last see a baby killing itself to fulfil someone else's demands?	297
About the author	300



Preface



“**S**tress” is one of the most commonly used (and abused) words in any language. Yet how many people actually know what it means or what causes it? Are you familiar with even the most basic symptoms of stress in your life? What causes a tension headache; stiff neck and shoulder muscles; poor concentration; eating disorders; diminished libido; heartburn; insomnia; depression; compulsive confrontations; fatigue; hypertension or heart disease?

Do you know why your stress levels become elevated?

What impact does continuously being in stress mode have on your health? Do you have any idea how your psychophysiology reacts to stress triggers? What your individual stress triggers are? Whether you have any control over these reactions and if so how to stem the energy haemorrhage? Are you aware that your hypothala-

mus gland (part of the brain's limbic system) transforms your emotions into physical responses? That it controls the function of your blood-sugar levels, body temperature, appetite, heart, lungs, circulatory and digestive system? That it triggers the release of adrenaline, cortisol and other 'stress' hormones? That these hormones have an impact on your heart rate and digestive system?

Many of us assume that stress is *inevitable* in our everyday lives – and if you believe in the inevitability of interplanetary anal probes or being mashed by a stray meteor on your way to work, then perhaps it is. According to many movies and TV programmes, being severely stressed and out of control is cool. Well, it can be good for a laugh as a spectator sport, but does it make you *feel* cool to be constantly out of control? More importantly, what are you accomplishing, other than test driving your body under extreme conditions? Well, that is what happens when we live our day to day lives unconsciously. Do you seriously wake up in the morning and think “Oh, great! I can get really stressed today! It makes me feel good, communicate well and be immensely successful?” Stress is *big business*.

Are you one of the millions of people seduced by the advertising spin doctors' misleading mythology?

Are you helping to insure that the profits keep multiplying and that stress and its by-products continue to control every aspect of your life – career, health, finances and relationships? Sure, maybe this pill will indeed help you chill, that drink may cause your problems to shrink, this potion could improve your motion, the equipment you

Preface

require might increase your desire – but only temporarily. Unless these quick fix prescriptions are applied in partnership with personal change, lowering your stress levels will remain an illusion.

When I see an advertisement peddling the latest miraculous stress panacea, I am stunned by how many people are deceived by these myopic marketing strategies. Do you really believe you're going to become slimmer, fitter, healthier, smarter, happier, hornier, younger, or more successful overnight; that the dude with the solid steel six-pack got them lying on the couch with a vibrator Velcroed to his belly; that driving a car shaped like a dildo will increase your allure; that fifty something chick hasn't had her wrinkles digitally adjusted or the cellulite saddlebags airbrushed off her bum? How about stopping to question what is CAUSING your stress levels to soar? Isn't it logical to assume that if you eliminate the causes of your stress, it will no longer have the power to pervade your life? That YOU can reclaim your power without a constant supply of indispensable crutches?

Your body, mind and emotions (psychophysiology) are so intimately linked that whatever impacts on one, automatically has an impact on the whole. Every thought you think, every minute of every day is having a direct and immediate impact on your cellular structure.

What you see in your daily life is a manifestation of the self fulfilling prophecy your thoughts have created!

If you like these manifestations, you're obviously on the right track. If you don't, why keep repeating habitual patterns that are painful? It's like constantly beating your

head against the wall and wondering why you keep getting headaches and bruises! “Oh well, I’ll just pause long enough to pop a pain pill, and carry on demolishing the brickwork!” Could it be that your cranium wasn’t designed as a particularly effective sledgehammer and that’s why using it inappropriately hurts!?

Habits are unconscious behaviour patterns. They are just a repetition of learned or instinctive behaviours. The outcome is always going to be the same; but if you created the old patterns, you can create new ones; behaviour patterns which serve you more productively. Yes, I know that for 99% of us, the thought of change in any form is about as appealing as kissing a cobra, but from what I see daily in my work, insisting on exploring every anti-stress quick fix, rather than reprogramming personal patterns, simply prolongs the pain. Sadly, some have travelled so far and for so long on the pain train, by seeking quick fix solutions, that it is almost impossible for them to try a more productive path. Their energies are simply too depleted. This book is my attempt to offer simple explanations and productive solutions to the subject of stress, before you reach that stage.

Allowing yourself to become a victim of stress slavery will eventually ruin relationships, play havoc with your health, sabotage parenting skills, derail careers and seriously handicap your potential for success and prosperity. Managing Stress is common sense. The principles are simple to understand, logical to learn and relatively easy to implement on a daily basis. Becoming immune to stress will enable you to remain calm and effective in the most demanding situations, transform and quite possi-

bly save your life. Stress can only be managed successfully in the long term, through a paradigm shift; attempting to do so with crisis management and quick fix techniques, will simply keep the stress cycle operating in your life. It is within your power to manage stress and make it a productive ally – or you can allow it to enslave you, and risk becoming ineffectual, ill and unhappy. The choice is yours!

You risk becoming a stress slave when:

- ★ Perfection becomes an obsession
- ★ Rules become absolute
- ★ Minor issues assume major proportions
- ★ You habitually do things 'tomorrow' instead of 'today'
- ★ It's always someone else's fault
- ★ Your definition of 'the right way' is the only way
- ★ You've forgotten how to laugh; particularly at yourself
- ★ Your expectations of yourself (and therefore others) are unrealistic
- ★ Your present is determined by your past
- ★ Change is threatening instead of exciting
- ★ Your desire for revenge or self pity is stronger than forgiveness
- ★ You've become divorced from your psychophysiology
- ★ Your need for approval overrides your need to be yourself
- ★ You instinctively focus on problems instead of solutions
- ★ You have no idea what your goals are

Stress Slaves

- ★ Communicating becomes complicated
- ★ You don't set personal boundaries
- ★ You avoid or sabotage relationships
- ★ You're totally co-dependant
- ★ Commitment scares the shit out of you
- ★ Self-discipline is a dirty word
- ★ Pain and fear are your primary motivators
- ★ Everyone else's needs are more important than yours
- ★ Your life is a media make-over
- ★ Your need to be right, is more important than your need to be healthy
- ★ You're a walking hand grenade; with the pin removed
- ★ Your 'want' list is much longer than your 'have' list

If you really want to step off the stress treadmill and beat your adrenaline addiction, this book will show you the way. I have walked every step of this talk. I find it hard to believe, that for so many years I was stress personified. Even tsunamis and starvation have only the slightest potential to plunge me into panic mode now. Hundreds of people I have worked with, overwhelmingly agree that their stress-less quality of life bears no resemblance to their previously stressed existence.

Managing stress is like learning to drive — a lifetime investment, the best insurance policy you will ever have!

Chapter Seventeen

Emotional Enemas



For

(Emmanuel's Book III)

Give yourself an emotional enema; it may save your life! When you are feeling physically ill and you vomit, you feel better don't you? So if you are emotionally ill, you need to get these toxic emotions out of your system so that you can feel better. Some people express their emotions naturally. Some find it supremely difficult, while some are more introverted personalities than others. Your personal history can create or magnify emotional suppression. Most of you don't even realise you're doing it. Remember, your destructive coping mechanisms are *unconscious*. Your genes are programmed to avoid pain. So you keep anything you think will cause you pain inside and close the lid. The problem is that one day something will trigger the release of that nuclear de-

vice you've been incubating, leaving a wasteland in its wake.

Burying your child is obviously one of life's major ordeals. It's a gaping wound that never completely heals. It goes against nature. But it happens. It happened to me. And my whole world was sucked into a deep, dark pit of depression. Disembowelled and buried in a mountain of molten lava for what seemed like eons. Sometime during that deadly ordeal, I realised that my child's death was a catalyst. I had learned very young not to acknowledge my pain. So I kept it all inside, put on a brave face and soldiered on. The myth grew over the years and even I believed it. I was the ultimate survivor – strong, capable, always in charge; taking care of those who were frailer. The force of that emotional dam that had been building over the years, when engulfed in a deluge of grief, finally flattened the dam walls completely causing devastating damage. Many people I work with have had similar experiences. Dealing with your emotions *is* painful initially – sometimes extremely so, but not as excruciating as denying your pain and prolonging your agony. Like most things the ability to express emotions can be learned. Constant suppression or estrangement from your emotions is extremely stressful and hazardous to your health.

How can you avoid an emotional holocaust?

Cultivate your creative clout! You could express grief or anger through gardening; transform tension or trauma through art; process panic through painting or express sadness through singing. Heal heartbreak or betrayal in writing; or deal with depression through dancing. There are *countless* forms of creativity. If you don't try them, you will never know what works for you.

Emotional Enemas

Verbalise it! talk, laugh, cry, to family, friends or a professional. In one study, people of both sexes who had the most friends over a 9 year period cut their risk of premature death by more than 60%. Researchers concluded that not having close friends or confidantes is as detrimental to your health as being overweight or smoking. So MAKE time – no matter *how* demanding your schedule, to seek solace with stimulating, supportive and inspirational people.

Become a master of emotional alchemy! Pain has lousy preservative qualities. Store it inside you and it will fester and infect everything around it. Don't be a one woman warehouse for the wounds of the world. Emotional haemophilia has a habit of alienating even the most empathetic people eventually. The only *valid* reason for investing precious energy in absorbing personal pain is to transform it into someone else's gain. Laugh your way out of your prison of pain; every situation has a funny side, if you look hard enough for it.

Sometimes a seemingly insurmountable situation gains instant clarity by bouncing it off someone else! Because their emotions are not as intimately involved as yours, they are often capable of seeing the whole picture objectively and formulating simple, effective solutions.

Write stressful issues down! Put it in a letter. Say everything you ever wanted to say, and probably never will. Let off all that suppressed steam. Vent all your most venomous vitriol. It can be two words or ten pages. Then burn it. Make a funeral pyre for your pain.

Do you have a spiritual or religious belief? Do you connect with it regularly? If not, perhaps investigate philosophies or beliefs that fascinate you. Religious commitment is linked to a longer life and better physical health according to a statistical analysis of 42 independent studies published since 1977 that addressed this issue. Science News of June 3rd 2000 carried an article that quotes psychologist Michael E. McCollough of the National Institute for Healthcare Research in Rockville, MD; *“Scientists now need to examine the pressing matter of what causes the association between religious activity and mortality”* Belief in some sort of Pattern or Life Plan can be a powerful anchor.

Punch-bags are perfect de-stressing apparatus! If it adds power to your purge, write names, pin photographs or draw pictures on it! Diffuse all that stress and frustration. Take up kick boxing or self defence for physical and emotional release, discipline and focus. You never know when it may come in useful either.

Shout and scream in soundproof surroundings! Hug or connect physically with someone caring and empathetic or seek harmless, circumstantially appropriate, brain immobilizing sexual relief. Human touch is a powerful comforter while sex involves body, mind and emotions simultaneously, releasing a tidal wave of orgasmic endorphins which soothe every cell.

Remember to do a personal inventory of all the elements of everyday life you take for granted! Start and end your day this way; it can change your perspective in seconds!

- ▶ Can you feel the sunlight on your skin?
- ▶ Can you smell the wet earth after it rains?

Emotional Enemas

- ▶ Can you see the opalescent glow of sunrise?
- ▶ Can you savour the taste of good food?
- ▶ Do you listen to music?
- ▶ Do you walk in a park?
- ▶ Can you touch and talk to loved ones?
- ▶ Do you sleep soundly in a soft, warm bed at night?
- ▶ Can you take an invigorating shower or soak in a warm bath?
- ▶ Do you have caring, supportive friends or a family?
- ▶ Do you have a safe, comfortable home?
- ▶ Do you earn an income?
- ▶ Are you healthy?

Then you are infinitely more fortunate than many millions of people on this planet! Take pleasure in your progress and what you already have, no matter how seemingly insignificant, instead of constantly obsessing about the distance you have to travel to attain your goals. Write a list of *everything* of value you have in your life right now. There are millions of people who can't see, can't hear, can't walk or talk. There are those who are unable to learn or be employed, have no family or friends, no home, no bed, no food, or are bedridden or terminally ill. Think about it! Personal stock-takes are a *powerful* source of peace and emotional stability.

Is your sense of self-esteem approaching anorexic? Indulge yourself; with a massage, reflexology, a foot spa, jacuzzi, soothing music, an extra hour in bed, a good movie or book, a night out with friends, a weekend away or a bubble bath by candlelight; essentially any activity that will make you feel nurtured and lower your stress

levels. Treat as many of your senses simultaneously as you can – taste, touch, smell, sight and hearing. Do it NOW - and do it *regularly*! Suppressing and internalising stress takes an appalling toll on your health.

Laugh! Go on, howl like a hysterical hyena! When was the last time you laughed until you cried? Research sadly, indicates that most of us laugh much less than we did 20 or 30 years ago. Laughter is a *powerful* stress release. It stimulates circulation and improves breathing, boosting the brain's endorphin production and immune system activity. Laughter promotes healing – even from critical conditions like cancer. When my daughter died, three of us walking wounded would hire a hilarious movie, get a couple of bottles of wine and a pizza and transform the pain temporarily, when the world looked as full of laughter as a dungeon on death row. Of course there were tears too, and we often didn't feel like making the effort, but the mutual empathy and release helped to keep us sane and ultimately transcend the trauma. Another friend runs Laughter Workshops, getting together on a regular basis, each person contributing a joke, funny story, CD or movie. Keep a jokes file on your PC and open it when you're feeling stressed or depressed. Why not let laughter lighten and lengthen your life?

Do you feel as though you've been trampled by a herd of incontinent buffaloes? Cry! When you're upset, your immune system becomes suppressed. Tears not only flood your eyes, but also your nose and throat, releasing a battalion of antibodies. Tears release psychological toxins, lower your blood pressure, body temperature and pulse rate. You were given the ability to cry for a reason; use it! Crying opens the door to your internal pharmacy, producing your

body's natural tranquillisers and painkillers. You know that calm that comes after a good cry? Just drain that mental effluent. When you rupture an emotional artery, don't be afraid to swim in a sea of self pity; it's healthy, provided you don't drown in it!

Are you addicted to obsessing about stressful issues? You've had a confrontation of cataclysmic proportions, and you maul the injustice of it like a pit-bull on Ecstasy. *You just can't let go.* It's hard to believe now, but the feeling used to be oh, so familiar. Pour it out on paper. Do a cerebral biopsy and dump all the mental toxins into a letter. Vacuum all the vitriol. Then the internal poison can't spread and you will have patched your energy puncture. Now cauterise the confrontation. Burn the letter. Send your mental toxins up in smoke. Then get physical; assault a punch bag, pound the pavement, or play some music and dance 'til you drop. Having drained the excess adrenalin from your bloodstream, sit or lie quietly and do a deep relaxation exercise, visualising something, someone or somewhere that instils peace in every cell. Re-programme your emotions. *Repeat* this procedure *every time* you feel yourself sliding into obsessive thought patterns.

Are your thoughts poisoning you?

Remember, your immune cells are constantly receiving e-mails of every thought you think, obediently relayed by your neuro-transmitters and neuro-peptides. When you consider that your thoughts create your language, your language creates your habits, and your habits create your daily lifestyle, allowing toxic seeds to germinate is not an option. Every time you allow your mind to lock

into blame-bingeing, guilt-gorging, jealousy jamborees, fear-festivals, anger-orgies, revenge-rodeos, victim-hood or victimisation, 'should have, would have' or 'could have,' you are manifesting conditions in your life and physiology that do not benefit you. Delete energy draining thoughts from your database. Living proactively means consciously choosing productive thought patterns. Energy depleting thoughts and emotions are simply too expensive.

When you catch your thoughts travelling destructive habitual highways switch to an empowering channel and repeat as often as you can every day. I consciously choose empowering thoughts because I know each one is creating my life!



About the author

Pamina Mullins trained as a corporate and personal stress management consultant in the United Kingdom and practices in Harare, Zimbabwe where stress management is an essential survival tool.

She works with CEOs and secretaries, human resources trainers, housewives, board members, bankers, and marketing executives.

