



STRESS FREE

Guide to Managing
Stress, Anxiety, and Panic
Attacks

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INTRODUCTION

It seems like you hear it all the time from nearly every one you know – “I’m SO stressed out.” Pressures abound in this world today. Those pressures cause stress and anxiety, and often we are ill-equipped to deal with those stressors that trigger anxiety and other feelings that can make us sick. Literally, sick.

The statistics are staggering. One in every eight Americans age 18-54 suffers from an anxiety disorder. This totals over 19 million people. Research conducted by the National Institute of Mental Health has shown that anxiety disorders are the number one mental health problem among American women and are second only to alcohol and drug abuse by men.

Women suffer from anxiety and stress almost twice as much as men. Anxiety disorders are the most common mental illness in America, surpassing even depression in numbers. Also, anxiety is the most common mental health issue facing adults over 65 years of age. Anxiety disorders cost the U.S. \$46.6 billion annually. Many times, anxiety sufferers see an average of five doctors before being successfully diagnosed.

Unfortunately, stress and anxiety go hand in hand. In fact, one of the major symptoms of stress is anxiety. And stress accounts for 80 percent of all illnesses either directly or indirectly.

In fact, stress is more dangerous than we thought. You've probably heard that it can raise your blood pressure or increase the likelihood of a stroke in the distant future, but recently a health insurance brochure claimed that 90 percent of visits to a primary care physician were linked to stress in one way or another.

Health Psychology magazine reports that chronic stress can interfere with the normal function of the body's immune system. And studies have proven that stressed individuals have an increased vulnerability to catching an

illness and are more susceptible to allergic, autoimmune or cardiovascular diseases.

Doctors agree that during chronic stress, the functions of the body that are nonessential to survival, such as the digestive and immune systems, shut down. "This is why people get sick," he says. "There are also many occurrences of psychosomatic illness, an illness with an emotional or psychological side to it."

Furthermore, stress often prompts people to respond in unhealthy ways such as smoking, drinking alcohol, eating poorly, or becoming physically inactive. This damages the body in addition to the wear and tear of the stress itself.

Stress is a part of daily life. It's how we react to it that makes all the difference in maintaining our health and well-being. Pressures occur throughout life and those pressures cause stress. You need to realize that you will never completely get rid of stress in your life, but you can learn coping techniques to turn that stress into a healthier situation.

When I first got the assignment to write this book, I immediately thought, "Sure you can eliminate stress and anxiety by locking yourself into a room and never talking to anyone ever again," But that wouldn't make a very informative book, now would it?

I have suffered from anxiety disorders caused by stress for years. I have learned somewhat how to cope with that although I'm always learning new things and dealing mechanisms. So what I've done in this book is taken some of my own experiences and combined them with advice from experts to give you tools that will help you in stressful situations.

I've also outlined different ways you can face debilitating anxiety and panic attacks that many people suffer from. While researching this book, I've come across some amazing information and can't wait to share it with you. I've learned so much myself, so let's look at how to eliminate stress and anxiety from your life.

WHY ARE WE SO STRESSED OUT

We're living in very trying and difficult times and things don't seem to be getting any easier. Sometimes life can seem terribly painful and unfair, yet somehow we manage to struggle on, day after day, hoping and praying that things will soon get better.

But day by day, the world is becoming a crazier and more uncertain place to live in, not to mention stressful. Nothing seems safe anymore. Millions of people are in record levels of debt. Many are losing their jobs, their homes, their health and sometimes even their sanity. Worry, depression and anxiety seem to have become a way of life for way too many people.

We seem to have entered the Age of Anxiety. In fact, in 2002, Time magazine proclaimed this loud and clear on one of their covers as the featured story in that issue. The constant stress and uncertainties of living in the 21st century have certainly taken their toll, and as a result, many of us seem to live a life of constant fear and worry.

When the terrorist attacks happened on September 11, this constant stress and worry seemed to just be magnified. In fact, many people even now, many years later, report they are still scared that something of that magnitude could happen again – perhaps greater than that magnitude.

Turn on the news or open up a newspaper and we are bombarded with disturbing images and stories. We begin to wonder if we are safe anywhere. In this information age, never before have we had so much access to so much data.

The economy is another stressor. Our country is in debt and so are many Americans. Soaring gas prices, unstable housing market, even the cost of food has sent many Americans to work in jobs that are unsatisfying and tedious. They work these jobs because they need a paycheck. Today, it's

more important to bring home the bacon rather than work in a dream career.

Having more women in the workplace adds to the stress. So many women feel the need to be everything to everyone and that includes a paycheck earner, house keeper, mom, wife, daughter, and sibling. The only problem with that is some women just don't make any time for themselves thus contributing to their stress levels being at an all-time high.

Even children can feel the pressure of stress and anxiety. Teenagers who want to go to college find themselves pushing themselves during their studies to try and obtain scholarships so they can attend schools that have ever increasing tuition costs.

On top of all that, they find themselves having to hold down part-time jobs to earn money for extras that their parents can no longer afford. Add peer pressure into the mix and you have a veritable pressure cooker.

Cell phones, internet, palm pilots, blackberries, i-pods – we are always on the go and always reachable. We don't make time to relax and enjoy life any more. Why not? We certainly should.

We feel pressure to do these things because we think we HAVE to, not because we WANT to. All too often, it's difficult for people to just say "No." Not saying that one little word piles up un-needed expectations and obligations that make us feel anxious.

All of us will experience situations that may cause us to become stressed or feel anxious. The reasons are too many to note but can include, buying a property, having guests stay over (in-laws), being bullied, exams, looking after children, managing finances, relationship issues, traveling etc.

Stress is a 'normal' function of everyday life. Only when it appears to take over our lives does it then become a problem.

Everyone will have different reasons why a situation causes them pressure. As a rule it's usually when we don't feel in control of a situation, then we feel its grip tightening around us causing us to feel worried or 'stressed.'

If stress is caused by us not feeling in control of a situation, the answer is to try and reverse this and regain that control. The good news is: YOU CAN.

You have everything inside you that you need to overcome your stress and the accompanying anxiety. The problem is often we don't realize that we are in control because we feel so out of control at times. But the tools are there, you just have to use them.

Let's first look at the barriers we put up that are preventing us from becoming healthy and getting rid of our anxiety and stress.

BLOCKING BEHAVIORS KEEPING YOUR STRESS ALIVE

There are three obsessive behaviors that you are likely to be engaging in that impeded your healing process and stop you from enjoying a stress-free life. Recognizing these barriers can be a great first step toward getting rid of the problems that go with being too stressed.

The first is obsessive negativity. When you are obsessively negative, it means that you have a tendency toward being "negative" about people, places, situations, and things in your life.

Perhaps you find yourself saying things like "I can't do this" or "No one understands" or "Nothing ever works," for example. You may be doing this unconsciously, but essentially you have what's known as a "sour grapes" attitude and it holds you back from knowing what it's like to view life from a positive lens and enjoy the beauty in yourself and people around you. There's a whole world out there for you...with happiness and positive thinking.

Then you have obsessive perfectionism. When you engage in obsessive perfectionism, you are centered on trying to do everything "perfectly" to the point of driving yourself into an anxious state of being. You may find