



CONTROLLING

S T R E S S

OVER AGE 45

Strategies and Tactics For Dealing With
What Life Throws At You

INTRODUCTION



I was under so much stress, members of my family were convinced I was on my way to a heart attack.

I had just turned 50.

My business was struggling, and I was about to lose everything.

My marriage was in trouble.

Even though I was in the fitness industry, I was letting my own health fall by the wayside...

My relationships with my children and those around me were suffering.

I found myself self-medicating with that extra glass of wine...or three.

In short, being stressed had become my new normal.

I tossed and turned every night.

Literally moaning out loud...half asleep...half awake...but entirely miserable.

It seemed like there was a constant barrage of negativity.

At one point I actually remember driving my son somewhere to an after school sports thing and, with my right hand, I was literally grinding my thumb back and forth against my fingers in an almost compulsive pattern.

I saw him look over..

He realized it was not a normal thing, but didn't understand what it meant or what to say.

It had to stop. This had to be addressed.

But, there was a problem...

I didn't know where to turn or what to do...

I knew nothing about stress reduction, meditation, mindfulness and so forth. All that just seemed like some off the wall stuff...never even on my radar.

I felt like I had no plan, and no control over my life situation.

This played directly into another thing I didn't realize...it's a basic human need to have some sense of control.

When anyone feels like they don't or can't control their own situation or destiny... despair is the result.

So...

Finally, I realized that there were really only two options left...

Either have that heart attack or find a way to deal with it all.

I chose the latter.

And so started on my road back.

It started with simple deep breathing I had learned as an athlete, and it grew from there.

Then I moved onto using some of the visualization training I had relied upon during my extensive track and field career. I had no concept of how this could positively impact my life after sports!

I studied more...

When I finally started to get a clue...and some reasonable perspective, I could see how stress and anxiety had had such a profoundly negative impact on almost everything I did.

If I had only realized how much of this was under my control!

After years of stalling, avoidance and procrastination, I finally feel like I'm the one in charge of my moods, sleep, reactions and attitude.

Today, because I took the time to actually address the issue and NOT sweep it under the rug, I sleep through the night...

I can literally feel that my blood pressure is lower...

I have more energy...

My outlook on life has improved many fold...

Literally EVERY aspect of my life has improved!

All by simply following some of the simple suggestions in this guide.

(and I know you may think this demanded a lot of time to implement. Not so. I have actually found that I have MORE time in my day because I'm working so much more effectively...and with incredible clarity.)

It's not as if I don't experience stress.

Stress is a necessary part of life. In fact, the only 'stress free' people are deceased.

In truth, when it's dealt with correctly, stress keeps us sharp, aware and focused. It wakes us in the morning, and makes sure we are at that meeting when we're supposed to be.

The information in this guide is pulled from multiple places. But here is the part that's important. It actually works.

It's proven.

This is not someone's random opinion or guess.

The basis of this information has been studied for decades, but refined over centuries.

DEFINITIONS



Since several of the terms I use here can have different meaning to different people, it's important we start off by clarifying some terminology.

Eustress: This is "good" stress. The kind you might experience at a joyous, but impactful event such as a marriage or graduation. The event is positive and there is stress, but not the type that disrupts your life or causes misery.

We will NOT be discussing this type of stress here.

Acute Stress: This is a period of brief, powerful feelings of stress. Think – true 'fight or flight' events. A car accident, a physical altercation, a robbery, etc. At the end of this event, the individuals involved will eventually return to baseline, if you will. And then, the stressful event is over and goes away.

Acute stress is vital for our survival, and our systems adapt to deal with this sudden burst of adrenaline.

Again, this is NOT the type of stress we will be focusing on here.

Patterns: A behavior you engage in every day, usually without thinking about it and – in this case – usually without considering the long-term negative impact.

Obstacles: As the name implies, this is something in the way. For our purposes, these obstacles are usually mindset related. These are thoughts preventing us from making much needed change. As with many things, it is our mind that creates these hurdles, not real-world logistics.

But here is where things changed over time.

We humans, being the brilliant people we are, figured out how to be stressed 24/7.

We are constantly on the go...

Overscheduled...

Being 'productive'...

We are expected to do more with less time, and in many cases, with fewer resources.

This is NOT something we are adapted for.

This is called Chronic Stress.

Chronic stress, as the name implies, is the response to emotional pressure suffered for a prolonged period of time in which an individual perceives they have little or no control.

This type of stress can be deadly, and leads to an entire cascade of health issues. Check out these numbers directly from The American Stress Institute:

- ✓ **44% of Americans feel more stressed than they did just 5 years ago**
- ✓ 3 out of 4 doctor's visits are for stress-related ailments
- ✓ **It is estimated that stress is the basic cause of 60% of all human illness and disease**
- ✓ 44% of people suffering from stress lose sleep on a nightly basis
- ✓ **Stress increases the risk of heart disease by 40%**
- ✓ Stress increases the risk of a heart attack by 25%
- ✓ **Stress increases the risk of stroke by an amazing 50%!**

In addition, recent studies have shown that stress actually shrinks the gray matter of the brain!

PURPOSE



Now that we have put some numbers to the problem, let's define the purpose behind this information.

This booklet was created to help the reader:

- ✓ **To create a life NOT dominated by staring at the ceiling at 2:00am, trying to solve your problems**
- ✓ **NOT snapping at those around you because you feel like you are constantly under duress**
- ✓ **Discover how to acknowledge the problem, pinpoint the sources of the stress, take appropriate steps to deal with it, and NOT ignore this very serious challenge**

SO, WHO SUFFERS FROM STRESS?



In short?

Everyone.

Kids. Adults. Teens. Heck, even most animals can clearly suffer stress.

It is a truly universal condition.

But this Guide is not for everyone. It is specifically for individuals over age 45.

You may have kids in school and older parents. Being part of the “sandwich generation” is a highly responsible situation with loads of stress.

If you’re in the workplace, you’re likely in peak earning years, but perhaps dealing with a unique contradiction. If you’ve been on the job for years, that comes with a higher paycheck and more experience.

The problem is many companies can see that paycheck as a liability.

There is a pressure to produce at a higher level to both keep up with younger employees, AND keep your job secure...despite the advantage your experience provides.

Older employees are often viewed as a liability because they tend to have more health issues and absenteeism, resulting in higher insurance utilization and premiums; premiums the company doesn’t want to deal with.

While ageism is 100% illegal, it is still widely practiced, and easily covered up by human resource departments’ unofficial policies. Just reality...

And if you find yourself unemployed, the likelihood of you finding a new position anywhere equal to the one you have now is incredibly small.

Talk about stress...

But it doesn’t stop in the workplace, of course...



Just look at this list of physical, emotional and cognitive issues resulting from increased stress in your life.

It's a frightening laundry list, touching upon virtually every aspect of your life...

- ✓ Low energy
- ✓ Poor short term memory
- ✓ **Headaches.**
- ✓ Upset stomach, including **diarrhea, constipation, and nausea.**
- ✓ **Aches, pains,** and tense **muscles.**
- ✓ **Chest pain** and **rapid heartbeat.**
- ✓ **Insomnia** or disturbed sleeping patterns
- ✓ **Frequent** colds and infections.
- ✓ Loss of sexual desire and/or ability
- ✓ Becoming easily agitated, frustrated, and moody
- ✓ Feeling overwhelmed, like you are losing control, or need to take control
- ✓ Having difficulty relaxing and quieting your mind

- ✓ Feeling bad about yourself (low self-esteem), lonely, worthless, and depressed
- ✓ Avoiding others
- ✓ Nervousness and shaking, [ringing in the ear](#), cold or sweaty hands and feet
- ✓ [Dry mouth](#) and difficulty swallowing
- ✓ Clenched jaw and grinding [teeth](#)
- ✓ **Cognitive symptoms** of stress include:
 - Constant [worrying](#)
 - Racing thoughts
 - Forgetfulness and disorganization
 - Inability to focus
 - Poor judgment
 - Being pessimistic or seeing only the negative side

STRATEGIES



These next two sections require a brief explanation...

First we need to look at strategies. **A strategy is an overall approach...a mission if you will.**

It's where you ask yourself the question, "What is the end result I am looking for?"

Tactics are different.

These are the actual "boots on the ground" **things** that you DO in order to make things happen.

So, with that in mind...

Our over-arching question is this, "What is the best approach for reducing stress after age 45?"

Here are some key **strategies** to consider:

1. Identify the weak link(s) in my current situation.
2. Being fully aware of my situation, resources and options.
3. Identifying the behaviors that have gotten me into trouble in the past.
4. Identifying any obstacles in my path to making the necessary changes.
5. Creating a viable action plan to implement changes that are practical and sustainable over time; and do so with intention and commitment.
6. Living a life where each day holds the prospect of enjoyment rather than misery.

Sound reasonable?

Let's look at some tactics for implementing these strategies.

TACTICS



Pinpointing the primary cause of your stress

This first step – for many – can be the easiest by far...and possibly the most painful.

In order to properly complete this step, you must open a document on our computer or (preferably) get a piece of paper and pen.

The list of stress sources is as diverse as our population.

“My stress is largely caused by my...”

- ✓ Job demands
- ✓ Fellow employees
- ✓ Family responsibilities (elder care, daily assistance, college costs, etc...)
- ✓ Spouse
- ✓ Commute
- ✓ Paycheck
- ✓ Debt
- ✓ Health issues

As you can imagine, a list can be as long as the number of people you ask.

If this is a strategy you have avoided, then take this challenge first...

- ✓ Losses (personal, financial, physical, etc.)
- ✓ Prospects
- ✓ Addiction
- ✓ Mindset
- ✓ Isolation
- ✓ Living situation
- ✓ Self-image
- ✓ Sleep patterns
- ✓ .
- ✓ .
- ✓ .

CHALLENGE: Take as much time as needed, and write down the primary source – or sources – of your stress.

Next...

Here is where we get a bit esoteric...

The concept of "Awareness" is key. Most people realize they are under duress, but never give a second thought to changing their situation.

Answer these questions right now.

What are your *REAL* options?

What is the *ACCURATE* assessment of your situation?

Are there realistic alternatives?

Don't discard anything. Write down everything that comes into your mind, no matter how "off the wall" it may seem.

Don't limit yourself to what you view as "practical". The stakes are too high. What are your true possibilities?

That one strange thought may be your salvation...

CHALLENGE: If you could wave a magic wand and change anything about your current situation, what would that be? And ask yourself, "What are all the options available to me?"

The next step (which may force you to revise your answers to the previous questions) is this....

Take an honest look at the things you do on a daily basis that are done out of HABIT, not conscious decision.

For example; are you doing any of the following, even though these things are causing you problems?

If your health is an issue, are you still following a pattern of eating the same foods, cooked the same way, in the same portion sizes?

Are you eating at the same restaurants with the same frequency?

Do you find yourself pouring that extra glass of wine...or two on the weekends, even though you know it disrupts your sleep and steals your energy the next morning?

Do you see where this is going?

And understand that this is something every human on the planet does. Each day we execute a series of finely detailed habits and patterns – generally without giving them any thought – even though these same habits and patterns may literally be killing us!

This important process will allow you to identify the things we do in our daily lives which are likely contributing to our “stress trap”.

Many people who do this type of “inventory” discover they have essentially been “sleeping” for months or even years on end... simply following a negative and destructive pattern, while falsely believing they have little choice.

CHALLENGE: Take a few minutes to identify the patterns in your daily life that you follow without actually thinking about them. Frankly, you don't have to think about all of them...just the ones that directly (or indirectly) impact your stress levels.

Now, you need to figure out exactly what's standing in your way.

We call them "Big Rocks".

These are those obstacles that are preventing you from making much needed changes in your life. You may view them as immovable, but are they really?

Here are some examples.

"I can't make that switch because...."

- I've been at this job for too long so I would have to...
- I've been with him/her for so long, that I...
- I really can't change my commute because...
- I don't have enough money to...
- I can't take time to add meditation to my crazy schedule...
- I really can't move because...

When you take a close look at ANY of these, it becomes clear that we all make excuses to avoid change, when in reality, we have more control over any situation than we imagine.

- Yes, there are other jobs.
- If you really want something, you WILL find the time for it.
- There are other relationships.
- Money is rarely ever the factor when it comes to stress reduction!
- Relocating is incredibly commonplace.
- Do you see the pattern here?

Nothing is impossible and most claims to the contrary are only excuses we make for ourselves. What we describe as "obstacles" are little more than entities we created in our own minds.

These obstacles are easily brushed aside once we have our purpose clearly defined, and have committed to it!
But...

When it comes to your long-term health and mental well-being, you CANNOT afford excuses, and you CANNOT afford to wait!

CHALLENGE: You have identified your primary source(s) of stress, and have thought about possible options to correct the situation. Now you need to ask yourself, honestly, just how ‘immovable’ those obstacles really are.

Once you have identified some of the patterns that are causing you stress, you need to make a concrete plan to change them.

For example,

Many of these changes may take time, but the fact that you will now have **CONTROL** over these steps and changes, by human nature, this will result in less stress. **Having CONTROL over your destiny is essential for a happier outlook!**

The Major Takeaway? One of the key traits of stress is feeling like you don't have any control over the situation.

In the examples above, these life changes may have appeared to be very large in scale. However, there are things we can do every day that can bring clarity to our thoughts and reduce our stress levels tremendously.

Here are some actions you can implement today:

“The 3 Minute Reboot” – Controlled Breathing

- Download the app called “Breath Deep” (There are plenty out there, but this one is incredibly simple)
- Set the “Session Duration” to 3 minutes
- Under “Technique”, select an inhalation time for 3.5 seconds, an Inhalation Hold for 1 second. Next, set an exhalation for 4 seconds; and finally, an exhalation hold for 1 second.

- Hit the start button and just follow along
 - NOTE: if you are not used to deep breathing, make certain you are sitting down in case you get a bit lightheaded. You will get used to the deep breathing shortly.

Studies have shown you can decrease your heart rate, blood pressure and tension levels in as little as 3 minutes (or less with practice).

“Wave Breathing” – Another Version of Controlled Breathing

You execute the deep breathing in exactly the same way as you did above, but now, each time you exhale, you ‘feel’ a wave start from your head and flow down to your feet.

This is a wave of relaxation that flows through each muscle group from the top to bottom of your body.

You envision the muscles getting longer with each exhale.

In addition, you focus on dropping the shoulders with each breath, especially at the beginning. Many of us, especially those who work at a desk for extended periods of time, “hold” stress and tension in the shoulders.

We have found that it is almost impossible to have high levels of stress at the same time as low, relaxed shoulders.

Morning Rituals

If you are looking to set a positive tone for the day and control stress levels proactively, there are few things that will serve you better than establishing morning rituals.

This allows you to start the day on your terms.

Here are a few things some of the most successful people in the world do at the beginning of the day, to help keep things moving in a positive direction:

- **Journaling** – writing down a few things in a “gratitude” journal, or a journal with some similar meaning, can dictate a positive tone for the day. It is virtually impossible to show gratitude AND be angry or stressed at the same time.
- **Prayer or meditation** – the positive benefits of both of these common morning activities is irrefutable. Studies have shown that areas of the brain associated with calmness and positivity are stimulated by both.
- **Morning Exercise** – in a survey of some of the world’s top performers, morning exercise appeared in a disproportionately large number of responses. Exercise can trigger mood boosting hormones, as well as helping to improve energy levels. In addition, regular exercise can help you with your “stress reserves”, or your ability to deal with stress that might otherwise overwhelm you. More on that shortly...
- **Reading or listening to positive material** – virtually everyone can make time for this activity these days. By feeding yourself positive or motivational material first thing in the morning, you again start and keep your thoughts in a positive place. This can have dramatic impact, especially during trying times.

Meditation & Mindfulness

This is *THE* big topic right now.

Years ago, if you mentioned ‘meditation’ you would often be greeted with an eye roll and thought of hippies or monks sitting in temples.

No more.

Both of these activities have been subjected to rigorous testing and reviews, and the results are nothing short of astounding.

While they are different actions, they are difficult to separate, as one usually involves some form of the other.

Complete instruction in HOW to do these properly is beyond the scope of this report, but readers who truly want to reduce stress, and completely change their outlook on life are strongly encouraged to check out the resource section at the back of this report.

Here is the short version.

Meditation is really intended to provide clarity and calmness to those who practice it regularly. It does require time and proper instruction to become proficient at it.



Over the long term, meditators have been shown to have more stimulation in the parts of the brain responsible for happiness. So yes, they are happier!

Mindfulness is defined as the psychological process of bringing one's attention to experiences occurring in the present moment through a non-judgmental awareness.

This is the opposite of the "mindless behavior" patterns discussed earlier.

Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) has been around since the 1970's, and is still in wide practice today. It has been proven to be scientifically viable in dealing with pain and stress of cancer to a wide range of medical conditions.

If stress is a truly significant issue, MBSR may very well be your answer!

It has also been said that people who live in the past have many regrets, and this can be a powerful stressor.

People who are constantly thinking about the future, often suffer stress and anxiety just thinking about what might come to pass.

Again, a powerful stressor.

Staying "in the moment" eliminates both of these negative mindsets.

Your “Stress Reserves”

If your body is not adequately rested and nourished, you can experience what we call a depleted “stress reserve”. That is, if you suffer from poor sleep habits, poor nutrition, or lack adequate exercise, your ability to deal with stressful situations is compromised.

Your “stress reserves” are too low.

When you take the time to replenish your overall health, stressful situations, which may have appeared overwhelming in your depleted state, can now be dealt with more easily and are less likely to spiral out of control.

Here are a few easy ways to replenish your “Stress Reserves”:

- **Get adequate sleep:** Sleep is the easiest and least expensive way to deal with high stress. As the saying goes, “Fix Sleep First!” Once this is done, you make better decisions, employ stress reduction techniques more effectively, and experience an overall improvement to your health.

- **Eat nutrient rich meals:** A poor diet loaded with processed carbohydrates – all too common in the US today – can result in a cascade of health concerns that can deplete your ability to deal with stress. These health concerns range from hypertension, hyperglycemia, high cholesterol, prediabetes and diabetes among others.

Introducing a mindfulness eating pattern, where you really think through your food choices, will result in improved health and better weight management.

- **Exercise:** Humans are designed to exercise. When we cease to do so, our bodies react VERY poorly. Exercise increases our energy levels, improves both our metabolism and our clarity of thought.

All of these things work together in unison to build your Stress Reserves!

FINAL THOUGHTS



Stress can come from many sources. Understanding that worry and stress do nothing to resolve or help a particular situation is useful information, but does NOT make the stress disappear.

Having a comprehensive approach will.

Many of us spend a great deal of time creating problems in our minds that don't exist and maybe never will.

Some studies indicate that as high as 47% of our thoughts during a given day are unhappy ones.

This is an astounding figure, and one that can be changed by employing some of the approaches described above.

And finally, NONE of these approaches work if YOU don't implement them.

If you take away one thing from this report, it should be the urge to take ACTION.

Do not fall victim to the negative patterns and behaviors that brought you to a perpetual state of stress.

It's time to disrupt the daily narrative and establish new, healthy patterns. Your long-term health depends upon it.

Your call to action

If you feel like this information has been helpful, I suggest we have a conversation. I spend my time working with folks just like you, to build Successful Aging Plans. This begins by placing a free phone call to me.

During this call, we will put into place a plan that fits your life and your unique situation. And if you like what you hear, and would like help implementing that plan, the Successful Aging Academy coaching program is here to help.

Here is how you can set up a call with me:
www.calendly.com/artmcdermott68/60-minute

There is no obligation whatsoever. I simply want to help you become the best version of you...the one you want to be.

Stay strong!
Art McDermott



Founder & Chief Motivational Officer

Successful Aging Academy

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