

The Opposite of Stress by Michael Neill

One of the things I've noticed over the years is that when a client tells me that they are "stressed out", there are two things which are always present - a busy mind and an icky feeling.

What makes it worse is that these two things tend to feed on each other. The worse they feel, the busier their minds tend to get as they try to figure out what's wrong and what to do about it; the busier their mind gets, the worse they tend to feel.

In order to help them to reconnect with their innate happiness and well-being, I will often point them towards what I believe to be the opposite of stress:

A quiet mind and a beautiful feeling

These two things feed each other in a wonderfully positive way. The quieter your mind, the more beautiful feeling you will tend to feel in your body; the more wonderful the feeling, the quieter your mind will tend to become.

One of my favorite analogies for the workings of the mind is the tachometer (or RPM gauge) of a racing car. Generally speaking, you can use the tachometer to let you know when the engine is functioning optimally and when it's time to shift gears

But what if instead of measuring RPM, or "revolutions per minute", our mental tachometer measured TPM - "thoughts per minute"?

Let's say that our brain's "thoughts per minute" tachometer ran on a scale something like this:

- 0 - 50 TPM:** Optimal Functioning/Wonderful Feelings
- 50 - 100 TPM:** Healthy Functioning/Good Feelings
- 100 - 200 TPM:** Beginning to Overload/Mild Stress
- 200 - 300 TPM:** Spinning Out of Control/Persistent Stress
- Over 300 TPM:** Mental Burnout/Extreme Stress

When we find ourselves experiencing stress in our lives, we know that we can reduce and often eliminate that stress entirely by slowing down our thought-speed. And although there are thousands of books written about the power of meditation, prayer, chanting, and even questioning your thoughts to set yourself free, the simpler truth is this:

You don't need to do anything to slow down your thoughts.

If you want to slow down your car engine, you do it by not pressing on the accelerator; if you want to slow down your thoughts, you do it by not speeding them up.

In other words, a quiet mind is actually your default setting - the place you will naturally return to when you're not artificially revving up your thoughts in an attempt to control the future or figure out the past. And that quiet mind is so often accompanied by a beautiful

feeling that continually trying to acquire better feelings through work, relationships, money or food begins to feel as silly as "practicing having a nose" - at best, it's unnecessary, and at worst, it actually gets in the way.

Experiment:

- 1.** Notice for yourself what happens to the feeling in your body when your thoughts slow down and speed up throughout the day.
- 2.** Make a quick list of which activities (e-mail, websurfing, going for walks, eating, reading, etc.) tend to rev up your thoughts and which ones create the space for them to slow back down.
- 3.** Spend as much time as you can today in a quiet mind and a beautiful feeling. If you notice yourself trying too hard to figure it all out, just let it go as best you can and come back to it when it feels easier. Have fun, learn heaps, and hang loose!

No Stress is no good

To live without stress would be to live in a vegetative state. Some stress, some pressures and some obstacles will be all part of our lives. By making efforts to cope with stress, you may find yourself achieving more than you ever thought you could. In this way you can realise your potential. We need to cultivate resilience to face the inevitable stress in daily life. So view being stressed as being resilient

Relax ! You are not seriously over stressed if

- Work leaves you tired but feeling satisfied with your progress
- You only feel stressed when outside your comfort zone
- You sometimes leave your comfort zone in ways and situations that you enjoy
- You are able to get over stress fairly quickly without lasting effects
- You don't feel constantly continuously under pressure and can find some time to relax
- You feel as if you have some control over the situation you are in
- You have some confidence in your ability to cope even if you feel afraid
- You're a high achiever who seeks out challenges

However if you say no to more than half of the above, then the gap between what is expected of you and what you can cope with is too wide. When this happens anxiety can set in and adversely affect you think, feel and act and make it all much worse. To find out more about coping with stress contact your GP.