

5 STEPS

TO MAKING
STRESS
WORK *FOR*
YOU

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TAKE CONTROL OVER YOUR STRESS INSTEAD OF IT HAVING CONTROL OVER YOU

Everyday I work with individuals experiencing severe stress - to the point that it is having a negative impact on either their physical or mental health, their relationships, and/or their personal or work life. We're all aware that stress can take a negative toll on our lives, and there is an endless supply of resources out there to assist with stress management. Yet the prevalence of chronic stress and its negative impacts continues to rise. It's safe to say that stress is here to stay. Instead of avoiding it or attempting to stop it from entering your life, it's time to change the way you respond to it! Learn 5 simple steps to help you get control over stress today.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER 01

Understand the stress response

CHAPTER 02

Change the way you perceive stress

CHAPTER 03

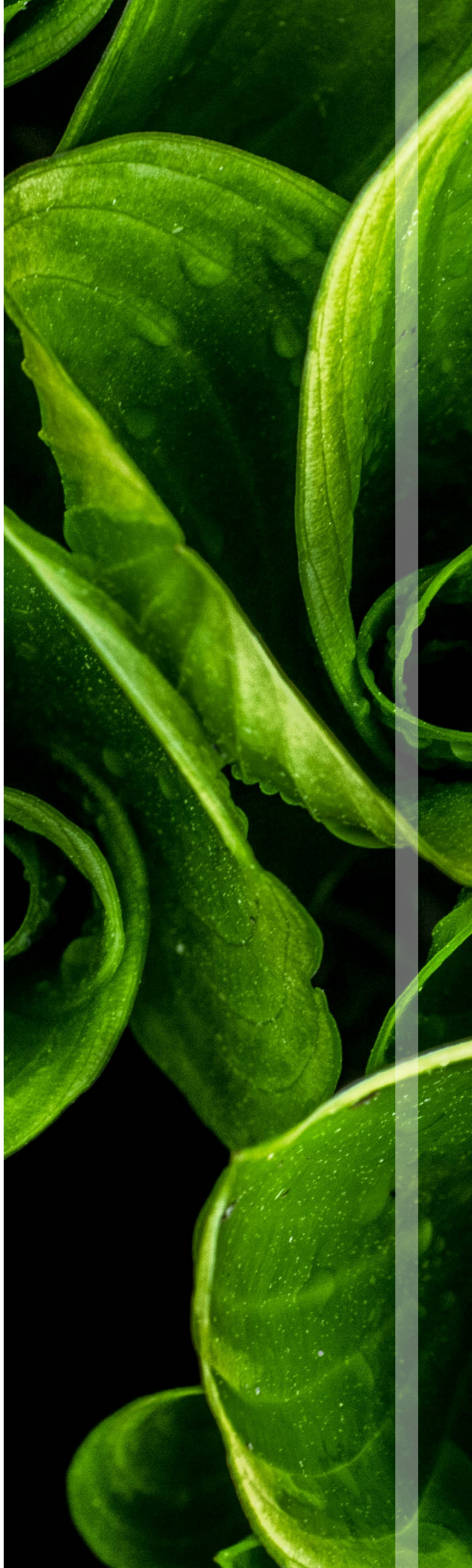
Breathe from your belly

CHAPTER 04

Use your senses to become present

CHAPTER 05

Learn Mindfulness



CHAPTER 01

Understand the stress

When faced with a stressful situation, our brain goes into survival mode. This is an automatic function hardwired into the bottom, primitive part of our brain known as the fight or flight response. We all have it and sorry to say there's no getting rid of it. However, understanding what's going on inside your brain when you are stressed is the first step to getting control over it. Here's what you need to know:

FIGHT OR FLIGHT

When faced with a life threatening situation the fight or flight response is triggered in our brain. This prepares our body to either fight off the danger or run away. A number of physical changes happen in our body to achieve this (e.g. heart beats fast, immune system shuts down, blood flows from smaller to larger parts of our body, sweating, etc). Very adaptive when faced with a tiger!

FALSE ALARMS

Over time, human beings have become more and more susceptible to getting this same fight/flight response triggered by non life-threatening situations (e.g. when faced with giving a speech, or trying to get things done on your to-do list). Essentially, our brain is sending 'false alarms'.

HUMAN BRAIN

When this primitive part of our brain is triggered, the more sophisticated human part of our brain essentially shuts down. That's fine when we're faced with an actual life-threatening situation, but not when we're wanting to get tasks done, perform, etc. For these tasks we want the higher functioning, human part of our brain switched on. It controls higher functioning behaviours such as critical thinking, problem-solving, empathy, compassion, and emotion regulation - functions that are pretty important for our day-to-day lives!



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“IF A PROBLEM IS FIXABLE, IF A SITUATION IS SUCH THAT YOU CAN DO SOMETHING ABOUT IT, THEN THERE IS NO NEED TO WORRY. IF IT'S NOT FIXABLE, THEN THERE IS NO HELP IN WORRYING. THERE IS NO BENEFIT IN WORRYING WHATSOEVER.” DALAI LAMA

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CHAPTER 02

Change the way you perceive stress

How we perceive and react to stress can dramatically change the impact that stress has on the body. We've spent so long telling people that stress is horrible, terrible, awful, and that it's going to kill you. However, more recent research shows that it's not actually the experience of stress that leads to increased health problems. It's what people believe! Those that believe stress is bad, are more likely to die from stress. Those who view stress as helpful are not more likely to die. Instead they have a lower risk of dying than even those with little stress. Time to start changing your beliefs about stress with the 3 points below:

STRENGTH & COURAGE

Your pounding heart is giving you strength and energy. When your stress response is triggered, there are a number of physical changes as discussed in Chapter 1. However, instead of viewing these as negative, see them as allowing you to rise to the challenge and give you the courage you need in that moment.

SOCIAL SUPPORT

Did you know that that beautiful love hormone, Oxytocin, is actually a stress hormone!? It gets pumped out as part of the stress response. When released, it is motivating you to seek support...to tell someone how you feel instead of shutting off. Oxytocin is a natural anti-inflammatory that actually helps you RECOVER from stress. So when triggered, it helps your body heal and recover from any damaging effects of stress!

WATCH THIS VIDEO

Don't take my word for it. For a better understanding, check out the TED talk by health psychologist, Kelly McGonigal, called 'How to make stress your friend'.



**"THIS IS MY BODY HELPING
ME RISE TO THIS CHALLENGE."
KELLY MCGONIGAL**



CHAPTER 03

Breathe from your belly

Breathing from your belly is one of the most effective tools for calming the physical symptoms of anxiety down, helping you to relax, and keeping you out of the fight or flight response. We were designed to breathe from our belly, however, many of us have developed nasty habits over the years and now breathe heavily from our chest. This puts you at a higher risk for stress to be triggered and may even lead to panic. Here's how to get your breath down into your belly:

NOTE YOUR NATURAL RHYTHM

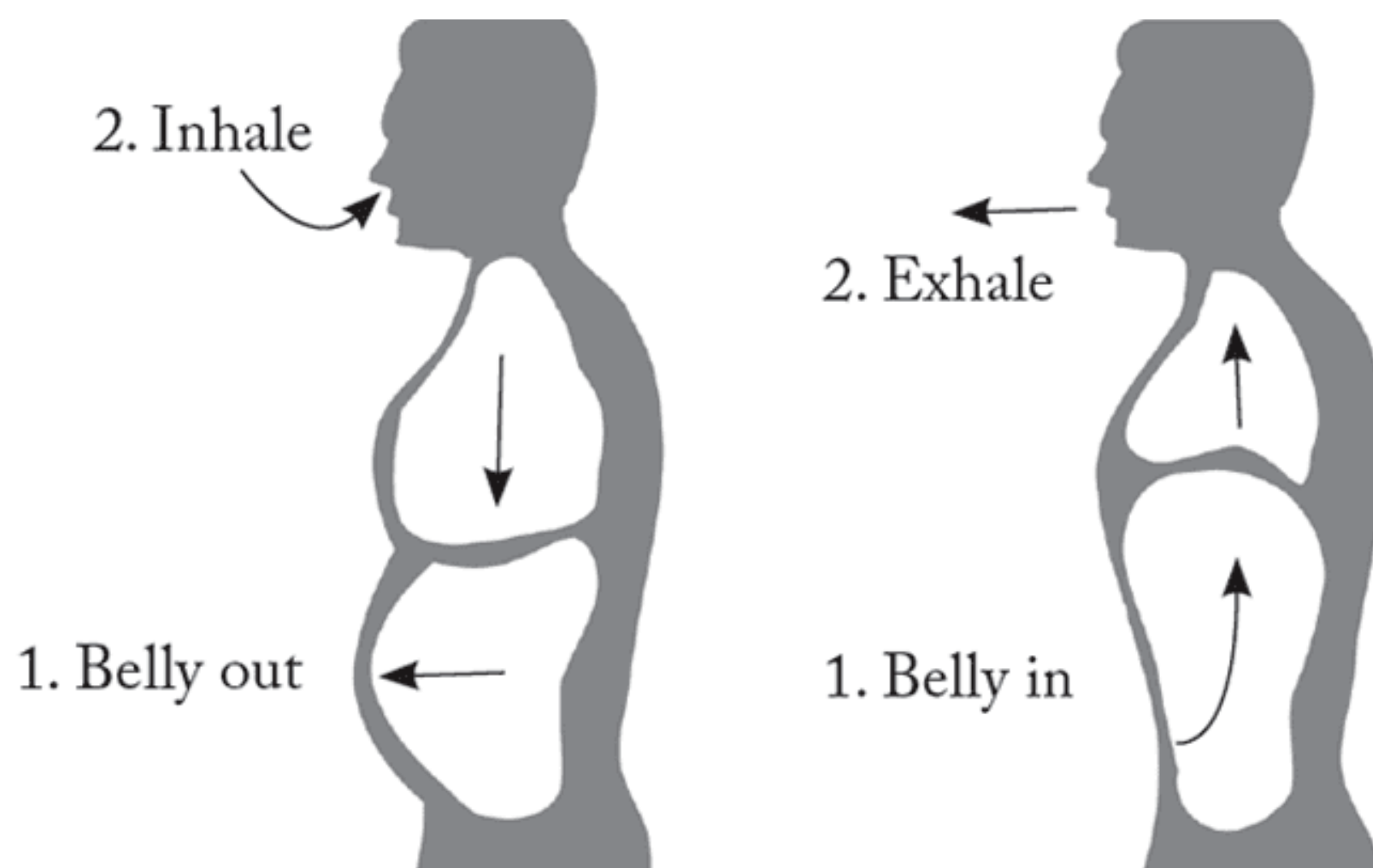
Put one hand on your belly, and one hand on your chest. Start breathing normally to begin with and become aware of where you can feel your breath most in your body. Which hand is moving the most?

IMAGINE A BALLOON

Now, imagine there is a balloon in your belly. When you breathe in allow the air to travel down into your belly and blow that balloon up. When you breathe out, allow the balloon in your belly to deflate.

PRACTICE

Continue practicing this for a few minutes, seeing if you can get a bit more air down into your belly with each breath. Just like anything in life, if we don't practice it we don't get better at it. For breathing to be beneficial for you in times of stress, it is important to practice it when you are calm..to get your breath deeper and deeper down into your belly.



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“ONE WAY TO BREAK UP ANY KIND OF TENSION IS GOOD DEEP BREATHING.” BYRON NELSON

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CHAPTER 04

Use your senses to become present

When we become stressed we tend to get caught up in our heads (typically with thoughts about the future). Getting caught up in these thoughts drives stress. When you ground yourself you come back to the present moment, getting space from your thoughts. When you are grounded in the present moment and not caught up in stressful thoughts, this assists with calming your stress levels. A great way to ground yourself in the present moment is to use your senses:

WHAT CAN YOU SEE?

Name 5 things you can see. Really pay attention to the colours, textures, shadows, etc.

WHAT CAN YOU HEAR?

Name 5 things you can hear. Pay attention to the tone, volume, etc.

WHAT CAN YOU TOUCH?

Name 5 things you can feel/touch. Is it the pressure of your feet against the ground, the sensations of your clothes on your skin?



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**"CALM MIND BRINGS INNER STRENGTH AND SELF-CONFIDENCE,
SO THAT'S VERY IMPORTANT FOR GOOD HEALTH." DALAI LAMA**
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CHAPTER 05

Learn Mindfulness

Practicing Mindfulness can help you turn down the volume of your stressful thoughts. Mindfulness assists with grounding you in the present moment, as well as giving you the skills to better manage stressful thoughts and feelings. Brain imaging studies are now showing that Mindfulness can actually change the structures of our brain! Everytime you commit to a Mindfulness practice, you are firing important neurons in your brain. And neurons that fire together, wire together. Incorporating a Mindfulness practice into your life doesn't have to be difficult. Here's some ways to get you started:

BRING MINDFULNESS TO A DAILY ACTIVITY

Choose an activity you do daily on auto-pilot (e.g. brushing your teeth, having a shower). Use your 5 senses to do this activity mindfully. Notice what you can see, hear, taste, smell, and touch while doing the activity. This is Mindfulness and doesn't take any time out of your day!

DOWNLOAD AN APP

There are some wonderful, free Mindfulness apps out there with 5-10 minute (or less!) guided meditations on them. This can be a great way to get some structure around the practice. At the end of the day Mindfulness is a skill. If you want to build a new muscle, you have to lift some weights and contract the muscle over and over again. This is the same with Mindfulness...if you want to strengthen your Mindfulness muscle, you need to work it over and over again.

USE A PROMPT

The hardest thing about being mindful is remembering to do it. Stick a sticker somewhere you look throughout the day (e.g. your computer or the fridge). Every time you see this sticker, use it as a prompt to check in with yourself: What's going on for you in that moment? What's going through your mind? What body sensations can you notice? Where is your breath in your body?



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"WITH MINDFULNESS, YOU CAN ESTABLISH YOURSELF IN THE PRESENT IN ORDER TO TOUCH THE WONDERS OF LIFE THAT ARE AVAILABLE IN THAT MOMENT.." THICH NHAT HANH
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This guide will help you get started with managing your stress more effectively.

WANT FURTHER ASSISTANCE?

Assisting individuals with their stress is something we do really well. If you need some help with managing your stress, that's what we're here for. Give us a **call** or send us an **email** to chat to one of our friendly reception staff.

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