

# **Coping With Stress In The 21st Century**

Controlling Your Mind And  
Your Destiny!



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# Introduction

*Stress has become a part and parcel of our lives at present. Try as we might, we cannot keep it away from us.*

*But this stress can sap at our very innards and make our lives meaningless and quite redundant.*

*We need to understand how to enrich our lives by keeping the stress away.*

*Here are some ways we can do that.*

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# **Chapter 1:**

What Is Stress?

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# Summary

*Can stress be defined? Is it uniform all through the human race, in all people, across geographical boundaries and time?*

## What Is Stress?

Stress is probably one of the terms that are bandied about the most in the 21<sup>st</sup> century but people know about it the least. Though almost everyone says that they are stressed out, they cannot actually define stress.

So, what's the definition anyway?

The Cambridge Dictionary (International Edition) defines stress as *great worry caused by a difficult situation or something which causes this condition*. The Oxford Dictionary defines it as *pressure or worry resulting from mental or physical distress, difficult circumstances, etc.*

From these definitions, we can arrive at this – *When there is some situation or circumstance in our lives that we find difficult to cope with, the resulting condition in our mind is known as stress.*

When we are stressed, we find it very difficult to rationalize our circumstances. In most people, it has been observed that stress can totally exhaust their mental potential to think. Even if there is a way out of their predicament, because of the stress, they will fail to see it. This is what makes the stressful situation worse. The problem is that when you have stress playing in your mind, the one sure way to remove it is to eliminate the circumstance that has caused it. But in many people, when stress begins to play on their minds, they are quite unable to think and so they do not understand what they must do to eliminate the cause. This worsens their stress.

In the 21<sup>st</sup> century, we find that stress has become quite commonplace. The rising competition has given rise to workplace stress. Most people carry their work home and can never come out of it, even when they are home with their families. Everyone is in high tempers, even within families, which gives rise to domestic stress. In addition, increasing costs, rising pollution, ever-growing traffic, etc. all contribute to stress in their own way.

The problem is that we cannot see the solution from these situations because we are so deeply entrenched in trying to cope with the problem. This is a global situation today. Even the string-pullers of society in whom we have entrusted the power to remedy such situations are stressed out and even they cannot come up with viable answers.

Stress could very well place itself among the top 3 problems of the current century. If we do not take steps to eradicate it as soon as possible, it will consume us much before global warming and its correlate can.

The best thing is that though stress is a collective problem, we can work individually at eliminating it. Becoming stress-free is largely in our hands.



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## **Chapter 2:**

The Basic Rules for Coping with Stress

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# Summary

*We can remove stress completely from our lives, like so many famous people we know have done. All we need is to abide by the right principles.*

## **The Basic Rules for Coping with Stress**

Stress can be too difficult on you and it could become one of the most important aspects that govern your life. Today there are several stress management courses all around and all of them are working at teaching people how to overcome stress. However, you don't need these courses if you know that you can beat stress by making some small but significant adjustments in your life.

Speaking about stress management, it actually boils down to just 7 important rules. If you learn to incorporate them in your daily life, you will find that you can stay without stress forever.

### ***Rule # 1 – Improving Your Perspective***

A lot of stress is generated by the way we look at things. Take the classic cliché of a glass that has half its capacity of wine. People who have learnt to deal with stress will look at the wine that occupies half the glass and will be content with it. But people who make stress a part and parcel of their lives will look at the half empty portion of the glass and will stress themselves about thinking about what isn't there. If you could improve your perspective and focus on what you have rather than what you don't, you could conquer stress in a very emphatic manner.

### ***Rule # 2 – Don't Overexert Yourself***

Taking up more than you can handle is a sure way of stressing yourself up. This is a major component of workplace stress today.

People set unrealistic deadlines for themselves and take more work than they can manage in a bid to earn more money. But the result – they lose out on the work and their health as well.

### ***Rule # 3 – Learn to Put the Leash on Circumstances***

Ups and downs happen in everyone's lives, but people's reactions to them are different. Some of them would be stoic about changing circumstances while others would get totally worked up. People who learn how to put the leash on their circumstances can largely control their lives, and hence they can remain happier in life.

### ***Rule # 4 – Don't Go for the Extremes***

Extremes must be avoided in anything. Don't take too much work or too little of it. Don't be too greedy and don't be too generous either. Don't eat too much and don't starve yourself. Don't think too highly of yourself and don't condemn yourself too much either. When you place yourself on the middle path, you will be much happier.

### ***Rule # 5 – Learn to Avoid***

A lot of people who are stressed out to the max are so because they don't know how to say a simple monosyllabic word when the time comes – "No". That is the reason they fall into the trap of doing things they should have avoided in the first place. They get into friendships they didn't want, they commit to relationships they think they shouldn't have, they take work they can't manage. This is what builds stress up to a very great degree.

***Rule # 6 – Relax***

Relaxation techniques work much more effectively than you think. Something as simple as the correct breathing exercise can make you liberated from your stress.

***Rule # 7 – Prioritize***

If you have several tasks to do, learn to prioritize. Learn to understand how important any task is and accomplish accordingly. This helps you in managing your life optimally and you can do very well at keeping stress away.

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# **Chapter 3:**

Changing the Way You React to Situations

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# Summary

*One of the main reasons why we have such a lot of stress is because we overreact to situations and circumstances. We need to know how extreme we have to be with our thoughts.*

## **Changing the Way You React to Situations**

Most of us overreact, either positively or negatively. This overreaction can come in the form of excessive joy or excessive sorrow or even excessive paranoia about something. Someone might get really worked up about the fact that the meal they prepared for their guests has gone bad. Someone might invite stress upon themselves because one of their colleagues has just been fired. Some bring on stress because of an approaching examination. All these are situations that can be very easily handled. They don't deserve the stress we accord them with.

Almost all situations that we deem as stressful have nothing to them. If we were to apply our minds with a levelheaded approach, we would find that we could cope with the situation and even become winners there.

If the meal you have prepared for your guests has gone bad, just order something and in fact make a joke about your adventure in the kitchen when the guests arrive. If your coworker has been fired, it doesn't mean you have been fired too. In any case, you must keep your résumé ready and be hopeful of a better job if the situation comes to that because you have a better profile now. Exam stress is one of the most avoidable kind of stress because no academic examination requires you to be so worked up about it, especially with the hundreds of options we have with us now in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

So, you see, it is all about how you look at things. If you think that something is a problematic situation, then a problem is all that it will



turn out to be. However, people who have learnt to cope with stress know how to deal with so-called problematic situations and actually turn the tide in their favor so that the impediment turns into an opportunity.

It all lies in the way you think. Everything – every single thing – that occurs in life has a pro and a con. If a circumstance has changed, even though it seems intimidating and scary at the moment, there will be some benefit that you can derive from it.

Learn how to look at things positively and optimistically. You will be living a more stress-free and fruitful life when you learn to do so.

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# **Chapter 4:**

Biting Only as Much as We Chew

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# Summary

*When we stuff too much into our mouths, we are quite unable to chew it and it is very likely we will spit it out and waste the food for everyone else too.*

## **Biting Only as Much as You Can Chew**

A lot of stress in the 21<sup>st</sup> century – workplace stress mostly – comes from the fact that people are over-committing themselves. They are taking upon themselves things that they know they cannot realistically do. Probably it is greed or the need to prove something to someone or even just to themselves, but the fact is that people are taking more upon themselves than they can handle.

Many people do it because they are lured by the chance to earn more money. Some take more than they can manage just because they want to show in their workplace that they are better than their colleagues. Some do it because it panders to their ego to know that they can break limits and set records.

But, in most cases, over-committing has serious negative repercussions. Even if you can manage the quantum of work you have taken within the unrealistic timeframe that it is assigned for, there are some negative things that can happen.

Let us take a look at what can happen when you try to bite more than what you can possibly chew.

- The first thing is that you might not be able to manage the task on time. Everything works on a strict deadline in the 21<sup>st</sup> century and you have to learn to respect that. If you aren't able to churn out results within the stipulated timeframe, money is not the only thing you may lose. You may also lose a potential client and future business.

- Even if you manage the work in time, its quality might not be as good as you wanted it to be. This could put a question mark over your credibility.
- Also, there is the domino effect that you have to be worried about. One disgruntled client can carry the message to several other potential clients and you might lose a lot of business that could have come your way. With the help of the Internet, it is quite easy to post a negative review about someone and let the whole world know about their “unprofessionalism”.
- The stress that this can create is almost indescribable. People are known to go crazy just before a deadline, and the more important the client is, the more profound is the stress. What is the use if you can manage the project in time if you are not able to get up for two weeks after its completion?

Learn to say “no”. It is a very important word if you are trying to keep yourself away from stress. It really helps if you are realistic about your capabilities and take up only as much as you can handle.

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# **Chapter 5:**

Control the Situation; Don't Let the Situation Control You

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# Summary

*Every situation can be controlled. You just need to hold the right strings.*

## **Control the Situation; Don't Let the Situation Control You**

Many a time, we let situations slip out of our clumsy hands and that is when they begin to control us like puppets. Think about this example. You have to complete an assignment in three days. It is not a very big deal; you can easily manage it within the timeframe. But you get complacent just because of this fact and let the first day pass by without a muster. No work done. You lose half of the next day too. Now you have just one day to complete the assignment. You had three days when you started out. You let the situation control you. If, instead, you would have taken stock of the situation, you could have done much better at managing the whole thing, wouldn't you?

This is just one example, in the realm of our workplace. But we let this happen everywhere, in every aspect of our lives. Suppose your child spills something at the breakfast table. You scold the child. The child becomes grumpy and doesn't speak with you. Your spouse is angry because you scolded the child. You come to work with that baggage on your mind and, understandably, you don't produce well. You return home and everyone is still grumpy. The grumpiness continues for a week.

Instead, if you had handled the situation more delicately, everything would have been just fine. Your personal life often spills out into your professional life, however much you don't want it to happen. Hence, handling situations delicately helps you in enriching your overall quality of life. You live better, without stress.



Next time you are going to get angry at something, or are going to let some unwanted emotion get the better of you, just keep in mind that you are letting your circumstances control you. We are not made to be ruled like puppets by the situations in our lives. The Almighty has made us strong enough to rationalize and think what's best for us. We must learn to handle situations in ways that they don't become our rulers. A lot of stress can be kept away by doing that.

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# **Chapter 6:**

Using the Middle Path

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# Summary

*The extremes are disastrous if you want to strike perfect balances in your life. Thinking about extremes can keep you in perpetual stressful states.*

## **Using the Middle Path**

One very important thing that you must bear in mind if you want to keep the stress away is to refrain yourself from falling into very drastic ways of thinking. There are always two distaff sides to anything. If you start thinking on the lines of any one of these extremes, you are making things very difficult for yourself.

For instance, it is not at all good to think very highly about yourself. It makes you egotistic and you begin to look down upon others. This is an extreme that you should avoid at all costs. However, the other extreme of this is very dangerous too. And that extreme is thinking too lowly about yourself. This is also quite wrong, because when you think very low about yourself, you develop extreme inferiority complexes which again keep you away from progressing.

The right approach would be to tread on the middle path. Don't think entirely this way or that. There is always a balance that you need to strike, even when it comes to your way of thinking.

This also makes you a wholesome individual. When you think in just one way, you are quite incapable of thinking the other way. You are shutting out your mind to all those possibilities. But if you keep your mind open and keep thinking in a balanced manner, you can be more complete in your way of thinking. It makes you a more perfectly balanced individual because you are not shunting out any of the possibilities from your mind.

When you think in a very extreme manner, things sometimes happen totally differently, in an exactly opposite manner of what you thought. When that happens, you get considerably stressed, because you didn't expect things to happen in that way. However, if you don't resort to extremes, if you walk the middle path, you will be ready for anything. The stress becomes minimized.

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# **Chapter 7:**

The Trick Is in Avoiding the Wrong Things

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# Summary

*Avoidance is the best way to keep stress-free. Keep away from all those stress-boosters and you will have busted it already!*

## **The Trick Is in Avoiding the Wrong Things**

Temptation is a very easy thing to happen to everyone. It seems very appealing at the start, but very soon it begins showing its true colors. That is when you see that you cannot tackle it all that simply. That is when the stress begins to creep in.

Just take a very simple example, which most of us will easily relate with. Think about a delicious gourmet delight. You know that it will be great to eat but at the same time you know that it is laden with calories. Very few people can avoid such a treat. They will very likely gobble it. They will become uncontrollable whenever any such food comes their way. The result is that they start piling on weight. Health problems begin to raise their ungainly head.

But if you had made it a point to avoid the sinful food right from the start, all these problems of obesity and the related issues including the high stress would not have arisen at all. Today you are dealing with the stress that you have become overweight and that weight does not dwindle, but had you learnt the fine art of avoiding things, you would have been in much better shape today. This stress that you currently have would not have been a part and parcel of your life.

Temptations come in our way in various forms. Food is just a very simple example; it can come in our way in various complicated manners. A raise for a difficult job is an example. The job given to you is difficult, you know that you aren't capable of it but still you didn't avoid taking the job. You plunged headlong into it, with the lucre of the added money and the chance to rise above the competition. But



just because you didn't say "no" to something you know wouldn't be able to accomplish.

Saying "no" is a fine art. You have to be firm in your decision but at the same time be polite and gentle. It is always best to speak about your own limitation when you are refusing something. If you do that, you assure the person that nothing is wrong with their offer. You are leaving the gate open for them to return with something that better suits your mutual equation.

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# **Chapter 8:**

Looking for Relaxation Techniques

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# Summary

*Various relaxation techniques exist for stress management, and they really work.*

## **Looking for Relaxation Techniques**

For most people, stress management means to use a relaxation technique. Relaxation in itself is a way of working out your stress. When we are stressed, the level of hormones in our body increases. Under periods of extreme stress, three main hormones are released in a high amount – cortisol, norepinephrine and the growth hormone. As long as the level of these hormones is high, we continue to be under stress. The one sure way to relieve ourselves of the onslaught of stress is to bring the level of these hormones back to normal. This is achieved through using the right relaxation techniques. That is the reason we called relaxation “unwinding” – we are bringing hormonal levels back to what they were initially.

There are several relaxation techniques available to us today. Here we discuss some of the most conventional and effective ones.

### ***Yoga***

Yoga has received an important place in the world’s health scenario today. You could make use of this ancient Indian science as well. Through the use of various bodily stances, known as *asanas*, yoga tries to act on various energy points of the body. It releases the latent energies of the body and makes it more energetic, fitter and much healthier. The popularity of yoga has reached into the West a long time ago and now it is very easy to find books, videos, manuals and a lot other educational stuff on how to perform these techniques. Yoga could very well be your ticket out of the persistent stress that’s playing on your mind.

## ***Breathing Exercises***

Breathing works because you are channelizing a flow of healthy oxygen into your lungs, which is then carried over by the bloodstream to different organs of the body, including the brain. There are various kinds of breathing exercises advised, some of which can give quick relief to the person using them. Check out these breathing exercises on the Internet, or visit your local bookstore to find a lot of books written by expert authors who write on health and fitness.

## ***Meditation***

Since stress is a mental problem, meditation can work wonders. The right meditation – whatever form of it you practice – can free your mind from its excess baggage and make it work optimally. Meditation can be practiced anywhere and there are only a few things that are needed in order to perform it effectively. Like the other two methods, there is a lot of information available on meditative processes as well.

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# **Chapter 9:**

Prioritizing

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# Summary

*If you always keep in mind that Wednesday precedes Thursday, you will be fine.*

## **Prioritizing**

A lot of our problems can be solved only if we would learn how to prioritize things. Our lives aren't simple, linear things. There are various intersections, crossroads, junctions and forks as we travel on the path called life. There will be various places where we will have to choose between two or sometimes several options. We will have to decide what we must do in precedence to others. There will be moral, social, familial and personal dilemmas and we will be torn by different emotions at the same time, making it quite difficult for us to choose what to do first.

The first important step for you to realize in such circumstances is that you are just one individual; it is impossible for you to do several things simultaneously. You might be able to multitask a bit, but you cannot do it with a lot of tasks at once and you certainly cannot do it all the time.

This is where you need to prioritize. When you realize that you aren't physically or mentally capable of doing everything that life sets up in your platter, you will be happier and much more at ease with the fact that you have to do things on a priority basis.

Think of a very common example. You have an urgent work deadline to meet and your family needs you for a dinner. Such situations present themselves all the time. What do you do? You will have to let one of these go in favor of the other. What you choose remains your personal decision. But when you have decided in advance which one of



these you will pursue, the failure of the other doesn't bring a lot of stress on you afterward.

One way to decide on prioritizing things is to see if you can strike compromises with either of them. In the above example, you might try calling up your boss and ask for an extension, or you might speak with your family and ask if the date could be postponed. In most circumstances, such compromise adjustments work. They keep you and everyone involved happier – everyone likes a spot of frankness in their lives – and, most importantly, free from stress.

So, next time such a situation presents itself in front of you, don't panic. Think how you can prioritize and work everything into your schedule. If you cannot do that despite your best attempts, do the things that you should really do and those which won't give you the opportunity again. Choose the things that will have the most positive benefits on yours and your dear ones' lives. This way you will almost always be making the right decisions in life.

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# **Chapter 10:**

Learning How to Keep Avoiding Stress

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# Summary

*Managing stress isn't a onetime activity. It will keep happening all through your life.*

## **Learning How to Keep Avoiding Stress**

Battling with stress is a continual effort for everyone. You try to come up on one stressful situation and another one presents itself. This can give rise to fear and apprehension. More significantly, it can turn you into a defeatist, because you will start thinking that whatever you do, you cannot be a complete winner at everything that comes to you.

But there are ways in which you can be the eventual winner even if you don't win at those small things in life. You can win the war even if you lose out on those petty battles that come your way. What you have to do is to learn how to keep avoiding stress whenever it comes, in whatever form it comes.

Here are 10 rules to keep avoiding stress forever.

- Use proper meditation techniques. Some of these techniques take no more than 5 minutes per day, but they can rejuvenate you for the whole day.
- Practice yoga. Even practicing yoga once every 3 days can work wonders.
- Practice aerobic exercises. Go for a jog in the mornings. It really helps set you for the whole day.
- Take trips often. Go to places where you will be in the midst of nature's bounty. It is great if you can move out of the hustle and

bustle of urban life as often as you can and lay yourself in the lap of nature. It revives your tired spirit.

- Be good to your family. When you are compatible and communicative with them, you have people to speak to. You feel that you aren't alone in this battle of life. That helps you keep away from stress.
- Make friends. The more friends you have, the happier you will be. Friends have a way of pulling you out of stress like no one else can.
- Never commit to more than what you can do. This applies to everything in life, whether it is work or personal commitments.
- Be honest about your work. When you are honest, you don't overpromise and you don't try to over-deliver. Your credibility remains intact, people know what you can achieve and they set realistic goals for you. Bragging that you are able to do more than you really can, will only put you in a bigger soup.
- Have a hobby. This could be anything that makes you happy. Do something that really liberates your mind, something that you can fall back on every time you feel the stress hormones building up.
- Eat good food. When you eat heavy food that cannot be digested easily, the body finds it more difficult to normalize its stress hormone levels. Do not drink or smoke. These can give you

temporal relief from stress, but in the long term they will only make you more depressed.

Stress is a multi-headed monster that you have to kill yourself. Using these 10 simple rules of living, you can practically ensure that you never succumb to its wiles ever in your life.

## **Conclusion**

*You now have everything it takes to keep stress away from yourself.*

*There will never again be a day when you will lose out on love or work because you are "stressed". Make this word extinct from your life.*

***All the best to you!!!***





