

## Episode 052: Five Steps to Deal with Stress

I am so stressed out. That's just a stressful situation. Man, she's got a stressful job. There're just too many stressors. What a stressful environment.

What is stress really? Is it these external situations or people in our lives or upcoming events or things that we're asked to do? Is it those things that are stress or is it our responses to those things? Why is it that speaking in public is stressful to some but exhilarating to others? Why is it that some people are deathly afraid of flying, right, while others find complete joy in it, and why is it that some parents can be overcome by the responsibilities of having children and other seem to handle the parenting challenges so effortlessly?

How we respond to external stimulus is what categorizes something as being stressful or not. It's not the situations or the tasks or the people that are stressful, but rather it's our responses to those things that are the real causes of stress and once we realize that, then dealing with stress takes on a new light

Welcome to the TD Fitness podcast, giving you healthy living insights for your physical, mental, social and spiritual wellbeing. And now your host, certified health coach and personal trainer, Coach T.

Hey, it's Coach T. Welcome back to TD Fitness. This is episode number 52. We're talking Five-Steps to Deal With Stress. So stress is actually a good thing. I mean, think back throughout human history, right? I mean, think back to the prehistoric days, and when you think about it, stress was something that was a natural occurrence to again, a stimulus from the outside. Something that you observe, something that you noticed, but it causes tension. It causes tension within us. And again, that's a good thing. It's partly behind the fight or flight response. So stress is what you get. You get that rush of Adrenaline, it tells you, "Okay, I need to do something here. I'm in danger. There's a saber-tooth tiger there, for example, I need to do something that's stressful. Let me get out of here." Right?

Or, it can cause you to excel. It can cause you to really hone in and focus on what it is that you need to do. And there are many different types of stress, right? When I think about fitness, over-training, over-training muscles, or exercising in general, those are stressors on our muscles, on our bodies. We extend ourselves when we try to go longer distances or farther than we've gone before. We're putting stress on our bodies. And by extending ourselves like that, we actually make headway. We make gains.

From a mental aspect, stress is when we feel overwhelmed with things that are seemingly important to us. And from a social aspect, there's the pressure from others that could include family, it could include close friends, it could include those that you work with. It could just mean society in general. There are pressures all around us. From a spiritual aspect, many times, there is this stress associated with the need to feel or be perfect. So how do we deal with these stresses?

Well, the first thing is that we need to recognize it because stress is insidious. It sneaks up on us. It may not necessarily be the loud thump in the middle of the night that you know is out of place. It might not be something like that. It could be things as simple as another email popping up in your inbox. It could be having to stay late at work. It could be that the ding on your phone when you get a text message, all of these things add to a response or initiating

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some type of response for us and those things are stressful because the stressors today are not the same stressors that our ancestors in prehistoric times had. Right? Where there are no saber-tooth tigers walking down the street, but the stressors are more frequent. There may be much smaller but a lot more frequent. A lot of times they don't even appear to be stressors. They fall below, again, that that threshold of what we would consider being stressful and it's cumulative. It just adds up over time.

So if there are things that are weighing you down, things that you feel like you have to do. Tasks like shuttling your kids around to play sports or mowing the lawn or raking leaves, taking out the trash, cleaning the house, all these little things they add up. And just like positive habits can add up to create long-lasting, positive lifestyle change, these small stressors add up and weigh us down and we don't even realize it. So what are some of the indicators?

If the first step is recognizing that we are facing stress and facing stressors, what are some of the indicators of that? Well, it could be that you're getting short with people and you're not normally. Maybe you're having trouble sleeping. Maybe people have told you that you're acting different, and the really dangerous part here is when that type of behavior starts to be the norm.

So it's normal for you to be that way because you're in a constant state of stress. You're used to those stressors. That's the normal way of doing business and the family may think, "Well, that's just how daddy is now," it's a new job or it's a tough time. It's hard to recognize, but it's even harder to admit sometimes. So the very first step in dealing with stress is recognition that those stresses occur and that recognition has to be cognizant because sometimes the stressors don't even, again, make the threshold or make the cut off for what we would think would be a stressor, but added up, the cumulative effect of that can absolutely mean a stressful environment in a stressful situation.

Let's think about this from a health and fitness standpoint. Obviously, as a personal trainer, I understand pretty well what happens when we put our muscles under stress. I referred to that a little bit ago. That's part of the process. That's part of the process of getting stronger, of getting better. When it comes to nutrition if you wait a little bit longer to eat, some type of fasting maybe, or you limit the amount that you're going to eat in a given meal or you decide not to have dessert, you make a conscious effort to do that in a bit of a sacrifice where you avoid snacking or you eat vegetables versus chips. All of those things are little stressors. They're ultimately there to make us better. Again, we're extending ourselves. We're reaching beyond what we're comfortable with going beyond our comfort level, but that is stress.

That's that tension that we talk about. These are all temporary stressors though, so ultimately regular exercise, good nutrition habits, those are good for you. They're good for countering those long-term, longer-term stressors that we commonly refer to. When you exercise endorphins are released. Good nutrition makes our digestive system more efficient and it causes us to feel better and if we feel better, guess what? That's one less thing to contribute to us feeling bad, i.e. one less thing to contribute to us feeling stressed.

The ironic thing though is that the truly important things, things like exercise, proper nutrition, some breathing room or white space in your schedule, those are the very first things to drop in times of stress. When we're feeling stressed, we feel like we need to do something to handle that stress and exercise or eating well or taking a break doesn't seem like something that we need to do to handle that stress, but the truth of the matter is that is exactly what we need to do.

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I recently read a book called the One Minute Manager Meets the Monkey. It's a book about delegation, how to go about leadership and it's got some pretty insightful commentary in it. One of the things that it says is, although it talks about, first it talks about this discretionary time, so putting time in our schedules where we can think where we can reflect, where we can have the ability, have some flexibility to do things that aren't just forced on us.

Right, and it says, on a quote from the book, "Although discretionary time is the most vital time of all it is, unfortunately, the first to disappear when the pressure is on." And that's absolutely true, right? Like I said, we feel like we have to do something about the stress and to take a break, to go take a yoga class or to do some stretching or to go jog or to have a healthy meal. Those all seem like things that are taking away from our ability to actually handle the stress because we feel like we want to be hands on, but those things again are absolutely critical.

I struggle with this now too, so in managing my schedule, my discretionary time is the time when I feel like I can think. So the take this podcast, for example, you get a better product when I have time to think and adequately prepare and for me, that's some serious downtime. That's some time by myself without any distractions where I can just think about things that are pertinent to the topic at hand. Even my fitness performance, my fitness performance is enhanced when I make time to do things that don't seem to be related to the end result. For example, I'm training for a race right now. It's in two or three weeks and the training plans, obviously the training plan calls for a lot of running, a lot of biking, a lot of swimming.

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Calls for a lot of running, a lot of biking, a lot of swimming, but it also calls for time stretching, and time resting not exercising. But the stretching and the resting, those are things that seem counterintuitive to training for a race where you have to swim, bike, and run, but those, I will tell you, are the most important parts. The rest and recovery, the adequate stretching to make sure that your balanced those things are critical.

So, you have to make time for the things that you would normally drop from your life, or from your routine in times of stress. When you do that you are, in fact, dealing with stress.

So, that's point number two. Keep the seemingly unimportant things in your schedule, because those things help you destress and they help to prevent stress.

Let's move on to the mental aspect of stress. So, the U.S is the leading nation in anxiety. Do you ever think about why this is? I mean, seriously we have everything, right? As a population we have everything. As a generation we have everything. We have more now than anyone before us had, and in this land of options, whether it's options for food, even healthy options, options for exercise, so many options for comfort, there is still an unprecedented amount of stress and anxiety. I think the reason for this is because there is too much that we have. There's having an abundance like that causes stress in itself.

I think back when I was a kid we had ... First of all, we didn't have any cable until maybe I was in high school, any cable T.V. We had three channels to choose from. That was it. Those were your only options on the T.V. Now there are 300, maybe even more, cable channels depending on what cable plan you have, and that is an issue. I mean, that's stressful. How can you possibly decide what to watch with 300 choices? What are going to watch for a half hour when you have 300 choices to choose from? So, it becomes a prioritization issue.

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A lot of times people say, 'I just don't know what to do.' I think that stems from one of two things. Number one, having no options at all, or number two, like I said, having too many options. And when there are too many options we are prone to paralysis by analysis. Meaning we over think things. There's just too much to consider. That in itself causes stress, and we worry. We worry about making the wrong choice.

The reality of the matter is that there are way fewer choices and options that are absolutely wrong than there are right. And the wrong ones are usually pretty obvious. There are a host of other options that can, and probably will work. There's a lot of right decisions to be made not just one. So, in order to make a decision then you have to cut the excess. You have to narrow it down.

A couple of years back I remember I had to hire someone for a new position, and there were, I don't know, a couple of hundred applications that came in. Well, I don't go through 200 applications, and say this is the one I want. I narrow those 200 down to maybe 20 based on some general factors that I know that I'm looking for. Then I take a deeper look at those 20, and maybe narrow it down to three or four. It's easier to choose one out of three or four choices than it is to choose one out of 200 choices.

So, that's point number three. You have to prioritize.

Let's move on to the social realm. And when I think of stressors in the social realm, really, the first thing that comes to mind for me, maybe because it's close to home, is the tendency to take on too much.

So, let me first say that I am a firm believer in this notion that we are so much more capable than we can typically imagine. We can do a lot more than we see ourselves doing, and the only way to find out how much more is to stretch yourself. That is absolutely something that I believe.

If you had told me 10 years ago that I was going to be a parent ... I mean, being a parent was something that I always wanted to do, but, I mean, as I look at myself now with two young children that's ... Being a parent requires a lot of stretching, a lot of sacrificing, right? That's definitely something that could be a stressor.

You throw that on top of just the fact of having a healthy, happy marriage. I mean, that too is somewhat stressful, because there's work that goes into that. And then you throw on the added stressors of doing your best job at work. And then the added stressor of, oh by the way, running a business. And the stress associated with wanting to provide all of you some valuable, valuable information, content, and services because I feel that, that's important. And then there's: Okay, why don't we train for an Ironman event too this year? There's a stress associated with the races and the fitness. And then there's the stress associated with how active we are in our church, and all of that we gradually add on little by little, and all of that adds up to what could possibly be too much.

Going back to one of the first points, it's kind of insidious when you keep piling things on top. If you're holding a stack of bricks, maybe two or three, you can add one, that's okay. What's one more going to do? What's on more going to do? What's one more going to do? Before you know it, it's too heavy, and you're just going to fall. You're going to crumble.

So, this is something that I struggle with taking on too much. And, like I said, it's insidious. I don't always realize it.

Just using the example of how active we are in the church, so we found a good church home where we live, and we are very excited to be a part of that, because part of what we feel like we are called to do is to help others in the Christian capacity. So, one of the things that I signed up to do, shortly after joining the church, was to be a member of the set up team. Our church meets in an elementary school every Sunday, so there are things that have to be done in order to prepare the school for those that are going to come to church. So, church starts at 11. I get there at 8:30 to move chairs out of the way in the classrooms, and then bring in all the toys, and lay out all the mats for the babies and for the kids, and hang signs so people know where to go, and all of this. I'm part of a team that does that, and that's something that I enjoy doing.

We are also active in ... We are marriage mentors for our church. So, when couples are looking to get married, or they're engaged, or they have questions about that, or even if they've been married for some time people can come talk to us. We work with them for a few sessions on what it means to be married, some of the challenges that you go through, and how do you get through some of those things. And that's something that we are very passionate about, because we feel like we've been called to do that.

And then recently our church is doing a series of lessons that are enhanced by this small group aspect. So, they've asked for group leaders, so my wife and I volunteered to be group leaders. So, every week we have six other couples and their kids coming into the house, and we're doing a Bible study on the topics related to the series.

So, all of that ... We love all of that, right? But I realized literally just this week or last week that, that is too much. So, I had to come off of the set up team, and the point for me ... First of all, I didn't realize it until I started forgetting a couple of very basic things that I don't usually forget. For me, I know myself well enough to know that, that's an indication that I am taking on too much. I'm extending myself ... I'm overextending myself. I'm doing way too many things. But it's easy to do when you're already in a sacrificing mindset, because, I mean, it's the church, right? You want to help others. You want to give. That's what the community is all about. So, what's a little bit more? Well, a little bit more could mean too much, and you have to be cognizant of that.

I see it in running my own business too, and the simplest example is when I think about who the cheapest person I can hire is. Who is the cheapest person that I can hire to do this task? Well, it's me because I'm always willing to say, 'I'll just knock that out myself. Why am I going to bring somebody else on to do that?' It's so easy to do.

I think back to some of the advice that a good friend of mine gave me before I took a pretty significant leadership position in the military, and he said, 'T, you have to do the things that only you can do.' And this could mean a couple of things, right? It could mean do the things that only you have the ability to do.

So, going back to the church example I feel like there are many other people that could do the church set up, but maybe not as many people that are willing to do the marriage mentoring. So, we wanted to stay involved with the marriage mentoring, and let the set up go. Let somebody else do that.

It could mean that due to your position at work, maybe, you have easier access, or easier paths to getting things done and to accomplishing things. For example, if you're higher ranking you may have better access to someone above you who can make a decision. That's harder for someone who, maybe, isn't in at the level or position that you're in at work. That

may be harder for them to do. So, do the things that only you can do, and delegate everything else.

It could also mean that you have the bandwidth, or you have the time to do that. Both my wife and I can wash the dishes, or wash the clothes, or clean up around the house, or give the girls a bath, but if she's got a hand full of kids then I can-

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Bath, but if she's got a handful of kids, then I can be the one to do those chores around the house. So, whoever has the bandwidth or time. So, do the things that only you can do. I think that such sage and sound advice. When you're over extended, it's important to cut things out. Okay? That is rule number four. Part two of the prioritizing, which was rule number three, or step number three, part two of that is letting everything else go. So, once you prioritize, if you have that list of one to 200, and you narrow it down to the top three, cut everything from four to 200. Cut it out, and focus on number one through three. Prioritize and let other things go.

Now, another thing that leads to stress in the social aspect of our lives is worrying about what other people think of us, and I think that's actually a good segue to the fourth and final domain we're discussing on this topic of stress, and that's the spiritual aspect of our lives.

So, when it comes to religion or spirituality and beliefs, I feel like there's this notion that you have to be perfect. You have to be perfect in your faith, or perfect in order to practice your spiritual beliefs, or perfect to fit in with the rest of the congregation or the rest of the faith community. In many ways, this was the notion that I had being raised in the church from a very young age. And I know I'm not the only one in this regard.

To try to be perfect is an obvious source of stress because it's an impossible task. To take an example from the FitLife program, we set weekly goals for practicing healthy habits, and one of those goals in the FitLife program that you and I helped develop together may be to incorporate vegetables with lunch or dinner on four days this week or four days next week.

Note how different that is than saying, "I'm going to eat vegetables with lunch and dinner every day this week." That second statement leaves no room for what I call the realities of life or the imperfections that we all have. It's just not sustainable, and it's the same thing with the New Year's resolutions that promised to exercise every day. Really? You're going to exercise every day? Okay. In my faith, it's so refreshing to know that I don't have to be perfect, but that God wants me just the way that I am, imperfections and all. In fact, it's through those imperfections that I grow closer to him and grow in my faith.

So, I don't want you to try to be perfect because no one on earth is perfect. Okay? That is rule number five. Perfection is somewhat of a fallacy. It's good to strive to do the best you can, but it has to start with just being better, doing a little bit better, than you're doing right now. It doesn't have to end with the pristine perfection. Don't try to be perfect. No one on earth is perfect.

So, how do you deal with stress? First, you have to recognize it. It can be insidious. It can sneak up on you, and recognize that small stressors add up, and that cumulative effect of stress can turn out to be a really big deal.

Number two, keep the seemingly unimportant things in your schedule. The things like white space, the things like exercise, the things like proper nutrition. These things add up and help you de-stress, and they help prevent stress. Okay? Social time, time with your family, going to church, all of those things. All of those things are important to handle those tasks that are weighing down on you, so don't neglect them.

Number three, prioritize. Determine what the really important things are, and if those things are stressing you out, figure out are they worth the stress?

And then number four, once you prioritize, cutaway. Cutaway the other things. Get rid of the other distractors because keeping them there just causes more stress.

And number five, don't put pressure on yourselves to be perfect. Again, no one is perfect, so you should not feel stressed or feel like you have to be perfect either.

That's it. Those are my five steps for dealing with stress.

All right guys, as we wrap up here, I just want to let you know a little bit about the FitLife program. As I think about these five steps for dealing with stress and also think about the FitLife program, it's no coincidence that a lot of this lines up.

Step number one, when we recognize those stressors, the very first module in the FitLife program, helps you to recognize some of the personal and internal things that are important in setting your goals for a healthier life. We talk about keeping the seemingly unimportant things in your schedule. This FitLife program absolutely stresses the need to incorporate proper stretching, proper downtime and a balanced approach to fitness and nutrition. It helps you prioritize and cut away those things that [inaudible 00:28:01] important, helps you prioritize the things that are going to be important for you, not in general for everyone, but for you in your quest for a healthier life.

And then finally, when we talk about not trying to be perfect, one of the things that I say time and time again in the FitLife program is that consistency over time is better than perfection all the time, and that's because that perfection is not something that's possible, but you do want to remain consistent over time.

So, that's FitLife in a nutshell. You'll hear a little bit more about that after this episode or at the end of this podcast.

Just a reminder that if you want to check out the show notes for this episode, head on over to [TDFitness.net/052](http://TDFitness.net/052). There are options there to listen to watch. You'll find links to all of the references that I made here. Also encouraging you to use the call-in line and give me a shout, or just drop me a line from the website on the contact page. I love answering questions, and that is one of the things that drives the topics of discussion for these podcasts and for the blog posts as well. So, give me your question. I'm sure everyone could benefit from it, and I'm happy to address it on the air here.

So finally, thank you guys. Thank you so much, as always, for tuning in. You are the best listeners, the best followers out there, and I really do appreciate you. Thank you all so much. I want you to have a blessed one. Coach T. Out.

Why did I create the FitLife program? I wanted to provide something that wasn't just for weight loss, not just for feeling better, not even just for better health. I wanted a more complete solution, and I also wanted to make it sustainable. It's not just about starting

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something or sticking with it for a month or two. Healthy living, which includes fitness, nutrition, and a healthy mindset, is about practicing healthy habits consistently, not all the time, because no one is perfect, but practicing those healthy habits more than you are right now. That's how change begins, and that's how healthy living continues.

Find out more at [FitLifeProgram.com](http://FitLifeProgram.com) or [TDFitness.net/FitLife](http://TDFitness.net/FitLife).

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