

## Less Stress Part 1 – Lower Stress Through Your Outlook

Chronic stress is unhealthy. It affects our mood, hormones and causes us to retain weight. But a productive and positive mindset is the first step in overcoming the mental challenges that come with positive change, and it's the beginning of an overall less stressful life.

This month, we again start to step through my principles for healthier living, this time with an eye toward managing stress. The end of the year, holidays and travel are fast approaching, and for many, despite the joy that comes along with all of this, there's increased stress as we try to balance putting kids in school, we work to complete unfinished business and unmet goals for the year, and find it ever more difficult to carve out some time for ourselves. And more stressors means more stress for you and me...unless we know how to approach it and manage it. So over the next 4 episodes, we're going to talk about just that. And here, in Episode 1 of our Less Stress series, we start by diving into the mindset that determines our outlook when stressors arise. Less Stress...through your outlook.

This episode addresses three central themes. The first is having the right mindset in your present state of health. The next is a healthy and productive mindset for envisioning your future self. And the third is framing the past through a healthy mindset and perspective. Present, future, and past...the right mindset is important as we look through each of these lenses.

William Shakespeare wrote in his play, Hamlet, "Nothing is either good or bad but thinking makes it so." This quote perfectly conveys how what we think, right now, about a given situation impacts our mood, our outward demeanor and plays a huge role in our level of stress.

One of the things I like to say is that you are exactly where you're supposed to be right now. Some call it fate. Some call it a Stoic mindset. Some call it divinity. However you choose to label it, and whatever you call it, it's a way of looking at your life, your situation, your circumstances and your stressors that focuses less on the problem at hand and more on what you think of that problem and how you'll handle it.

Whether the work is too much given the little bit of time you have, or the exercise routine is too hard to maintain, the unhealthy foods are too easy to throw down and the healthier ones are harder to find, prepare and consume...that's the situation you're in right now. So what is one to do? I'd offer you one word. Acceptance. This is the hand I've been dealt. It's my particular set of circumstances. And it's ok. It's likely that I can do some things to change my situation. But for those things that I can't change, I can take them as a given, view them in a positive light, and move on despite the challenges. And I can do that by changing my mindset. It's all in how you view your current situation and set of circumstances. As you look at where you are right now, consider that this is exactly where you're supposed to be. And consider that there's a reason...for everything. So ask yourself, what's the reason here?

When we're able to at least partially come to terms with our given situation or set of circumstances, it's easier to determine whether or not we need to spend time trying to change any of it. When you think about the work, family and life stresses you have, there are a couple of things you can do. You can accept the way some things are. (Usually these are the things that you can't change or those that you just don't have the wherewithal to deal with right now. So accept them for now and let go of the stress.) Then there are the things that are both within your ability to change, and that you have time to address. For these, you can let go of the stress because you're already working to address those things. So what we've done here is let go of the stress related to the things that we're not going to change right now (again, because you can't change them or because you've chosen not to address them right now), and we've let go of the stress associated with those things that you can change because now you're doing what you can to fix or change them. That leaves no stress, for any of it. Sounds simple, right? Well, the logic is simple, but the hard part is really letting go of that stress. I'll tell you that it gets easier over time. But you have to practice it.

But before you even get to that step of practicing letting go, you have to believe that you can. And there are a number of things that prevent us from believing that we can live a life of lower stress. Not the least of which are limiting beliefs and negative self-talk. The limits in possibility that we unintentionally impose on ourselves far outweigh those that anyone else can put in us. When you're used to being overly

stressed, you may not even notice it. It's not until you're able let go of some of it that you may realize the immense amount of stress you've been carrying. But unless there's someone or something to remind you that it's not healthy to live under constant stress, we just walk around like it's normal...like this is the way it's supposed to be. But it's not. Everyone's situation is different, and I never mean to compare my experiences to yours, but from the perspective of someone who's dealt with ailing loved ones, who's lost close family members, who works in an extremely demanding profession, who's struggled to make ends meet, who's dealt with the stressors (and joys) of marriage and child rearing, I'm here to tell you that no matter what is on your plate, you can not only get through it. You can thrive. Yes, you can. But it starts with believing that you can. I believe in you. You should too.

One of the things that prevents us from believing in ourselves is fear. Fear underpins just about every type of stress I can think of. I'd go so far as to say that fear is actually the cause of stress. When we worry or stress because we don't know how things are going to turn out or what's going to happen, that's fear of the unknown. And to make matters worse, we usually anticipate the worst, with imaginations of the worst possible outcomes or experiences that we can think of. A simple example is feeling stress over having to deliver a speech. For many, the fear of public speaking is real. And usually that worry is accompanied by thoughts of messing up the delivery, or providing the wrong message, or everyone laughing and judging your failure. That's the stress that comes from those fears.

There's also the worry and stress of feeling overwhelmed. Overwhelmed with work, with family obligations, or with other commitments or expectations. And that often creates a fear that you simply can't do it all, a fear that you'll fail or let people down, a fear of inadequacy. Those fears are not only stressful, they can be paralyzing. They keep us from moving forward.

Here's what you should remember. Thinking the worst about an outcome that has yet to be determined creates a very real emotion of fear and stress that we must deal with. But in reality, that extremely unlikely outcome that you have in your mind has a very low chance of playing itself out the way you think it will. Yet your vision (or nightmare) of a terrible outcome trumps the belief you should have in yourself.

You've heard some say that you need to face your fears. Well, I think it starts with identifying them...with truly determining what is at the heart of your concerns. Because those fears that hold us back and that are the root of most, if not all, of our stressors. And when these stressors from work, family and life come up (and they will), try starting with the belief in a positive outcome first. That breeds confidence and leads to a belief in your ability and in yourself. It starts with a positive mindset, by thinking "this is how I can," not "this is why I can't." Belief in yourself is extremely powerful.

Before we wrap up, let's talk about putting the past into perspective, letting the past go, and change going forward. So the question is, how do you change your mindset to not let certain stressors affect you like they have in the past? Some of it comes with maturity. I'm a different person with a different perspective now, as I compare myself to the 20-year-old me. Some of it comes with practice, which again, is attributable to life experience. Some of it has to do with your normal temperament and frankly, what you allow to get to you. And some of it stems from being clear on priorities, which allows you to be clearer on what's NOT as important...at least for the time being. Let me give you a broad example. As I think about the major areas that cause almost all of us stress at some point in our lives, the things that come to mind are work stressors, family stressors, relationship stress, money issues and health issues. It's sometimes easy to prioritize when dire situations arise. For example, being diagnosed with a life-threatening condition trumps just about everything else for the time being. And losing a job may take the top spot for a while until you can find work. But what about when things are somewhat normal? When nothing causes you to have to prioritize a heavy workload, and time with your family, and time to exercise, and attention to your diet? These are some of the daily stressors we face as we try to live out a healthy life. It's in those daily, routine attempts to live healthier that you have to prioritize. You have to! And it's ok to change the priority from time to time. I tend to generally prioritize time with family, but there are days, sometimes multiple days where my loving wife knows that I need to spend longer hours at work. It's about constantly prioritizing, communicating with those that need to understand (your family, your boss or coworkers, etc.), and focusing on what's important to you right now. It doesn't matter that in the past, you've tried to do it

all, and that by living that way, you've been under almost constant stress. What matters is that you don't have to live that way going forward. You don't have to stress that much going forward.

"Old habits that die hard," as the saying goes, but it's not just those old habits that we need to be concerned with. It's the guilt that we live with and hold on to that causes stress. Living in the past is not healthy. You really do have to let the past go in order to move forward. So how do you do that? How do you free yourself from the guilt of having let so many things stress you out in the past, affecting your mood, distracting you from the things that you now realize are the truly important things in life...how do you reconcile that now that you see a different way forward? A way that may free up time, allow you to be more present with your family, or allow you to focus more on your health or your work? I think the way to do that is to understand that each of us is learning every day. We are constantly being presented with new data and new information. And, we have the benefit of learning from our experiences. There are so many things in my life that I could have done better. But for a lot of things, I don't expect that I should have known a better way then, because I didn't have the experiences necessary to reflect on. But now I can reflect on why I was so stressed when I prioritized work over personal health a few years ago, and I make a more informed decision now. Now I can reflect on how I was stressed over trying to eat better years ago without success because my attention was on other things. And now I can use what I've learned, what I've read, better examples I've seen, and I can be better myself. And you can too. It's ok that we're just getting to it now.

As a personal trainer, I know that the greatest predictor of injury, is previous injury in whatever part of the body we're talking about. But physical injury and mental efficacy (your belief in yourself that you can do a particular thing) are different. The problem on the mental side is that it's easy to look back at past attempts and to view them as failures. And that affects your mindset going forward. Not only do we let those "failures" define us, but we also bring those things forward as predictors of future outcomes. What we should do is view those past attempts as learning experiences, not as failures that define us. The past should inform how you move forward, but not what your next outcome will be. So while a prior physical injury may indeed make you more susceptible to injury in that area, not reaching prior goals should not, in

any way, imply that you won't reach future goals. In fact, if used correctly as learning experiences, you should be better postured to meet your future goals of, for example, living a life of lower stress. And the reason is because your mindset, more than anything else, determines your chance of success or failure. Your past is not your future.

They say hindsight is 20/20. Well I think the future can be just as clear. We just have to let the past go. So use the past, but don't let it define you or determine your next outcome. Only you can do that.

As I wrap up here, I can't overemphasize the importance of a healthy mindset, and the importance of that mindset in your present state of health, your future outlook and in framing the past. Alright, that's all for this episode. As always, my hope is that this has been helpful for you. As a reminder, if you like this, please leave a rating or comment, and spread the word! And if there's something else I can provide, drop me a line so I can give you the help and advice you need.

Finally, don't forget to download my "25 Healthy Habit Ideas for Busy Lifestyles" if you're looking for a tool that can help you out with simple ideas on where to start. You can find it at [tdfitness.net](http://tdfitness.net). Alright, I'll be back soon with the next episode in this Less Stress series, when we talk more about the things around you that cause stress and how to deal with those things. Have a blessed one! Coach T, out!