



DR. RACHEL'S STRESS EDUCATION

STRESS REDUCTION, STRESS MANAGEMENT
& INCREASING CAPACITY TO DEAL WITH STRESS

BY RACHEL EVA DEW, DNM, PHD

HELLO...

I'M DR. RACHEL

My name is Dr. Rachel Eva Dew, DNM, PhD. but please call me Dr. Rachel. I am a Doctor of Natural Medicine, PhD in Integrative Medicine, Integrative Life Transformation Coach, International Teacher and Speaker as well as a 5x Author.



I am board certified Doctor of Natural Medicine and an Integrative Life Transformation Coach who is additionally certified in over 20 healing modalities that support my integrative approach to whole person integrative wellness and optimal wellbeing. I believe in being trained in as many tools as possible to support the patients I work with and the community that I teach within. This is why amongst my additional training I have focused on modalities of the mind, body and emotions. I specialize in treating the whole person; mind, body, heart & spirit in order to help people achieve optimal health and wellbeing.

In clinical practice for over 20 years I have treated all types of conditions and illnesses as well as a strong focus on preventative care. No matter where you are in your journey, I can help!

I hope to help you gain the tools, support and solutions you need to heal your total self in mind, body, heart & spirit.

Connect with me on instagram: @drrachelofficial

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WHAT IS STRESS?

FOUNDATIONS THAT WILL FREE YOU

Since stress, tension and burnout are so prevalent in most people's lives and have such significant negative impact on their lives, often resulting in somatic issues. We are going to explore stress further and the concept of 'breaking up with stress'.

This material is interactive. Please follow all of the prompts and exercises within this section on your own as one of your key assignments.



STRESS & EMPOWERMENT

A FRESH PERSPECTIVE

An important aspect of becoming empowered to break up with stress to consider is asking yourself these two powerful questions:

Where may I be adding to or creating stress in my life?

And the second question...

What do I gain from doing this?
Or what do I get out of it?

Those are two questions I want to invite you to marinate on. Get your journal, come back to those two questions later and really do some writing. Do a deep dive on those answers to discover how you may be participating with stress in your life. Sometimes we create stress and chaos in our lives or become so accustomed to it that we perpetuate it, or at the very least, we feed into it in order to avoid dealing with it or acknowledging something that we're not yet ready to face, resolve, or change.



It's like creating a big, loud, clanking distraction that makes it almost impossible to hear or notice anything else. In order to truly break up with stress and reclaim our health, we must take ownership and accountability for the part that we play in it. We are not victims. Stress is not something that just happens to us. We develop relationships to stress and how we shift that relationship can radically change the quality of our life and our health.

Good stress versus bad stress - it's important to note that some stress is actually very good for us. It can challenge us, inspire us to grow, to change, to achieve our goals. And some physical stressors on the body are also helpful. Every type of exercise puts stress on the body. However, bad stress, especially when it becomes chronic, meaning repetitive and stress that we're unable to process and release in healthy ways, has very negative impacts.

Whether you're experiencing good stress or bad stress, it's important to rebalance your body and help your body return to a state of rest and restore or rest and digest, known as your parasympathetic nervous system. I'm going to break down this section into four main portions that are really going to help you break up with stress and reclaim your health.

The first one is how to identify hidden stressors that may be impacting your health. The second is how stressors impact the mind, body, heart, and even spirit. And the third is discovering less well-known approaches to reducing stress. And the final one, how to increase your capacity to deal with life stressors. So first, let's talk about how to identify hidden stressors that may be impacting your health. The way that we're designed is to be able to handle stressors is that our bodies have natural responses to it, and I'm going to definitely go into further soon, but first I would like to give a visual example.

This is a visual that helps you understand stress and how it works within your system. So imagine that you have a glass, and you begin to pour water into that glass. Now the water represents stress. Whether it's good stress or bad stress, the water going into your cup is stress, and that stress begins to fill up your cup slowly until it gets more and more full. Now, what happens when that water gets to the top of the glass? If you keep pouring more in, more stress into that cup, it's going to overflow, it's going to spill out all over the other areas of your life. And this is when we start to see breakdowns. When we have that overflow of stress, it impacts our physical health, our emotional health, our mental health, physical health, our relationships, our career, even our finances and our self-development. It negatively impacts every single aspect of ourselves and our lives.

We are going to talk about how we can empty that cup a bit. Because we can't avoid stress being poured into our cup a hundred percent. So we're going to talk about how we empty the cup as we go along, how we reduce the amount we're pouring into the cup, but also how we empty the cup as we go. This is stress reduction and stress management.

Stress Reduction & Stress Management

Let's dive into stressors. First, I want to talk about physical stressors, things like food environment, toxins and chemicals, overwork, poor sleep patterns, lack of exercise or over exercising, physical stressors, things that are physically increasing stress in your body. Let's talk about the foods that we eat. A lot of the foods that we're eating might have chemicals within them. They may be processed foods, they may be high in unhealthy fats, they may be high in sugars, those types of things as well as alcohol put stress on the body. Also, the things that we don't eat or don't ingest, like if we're chronically operating at a low level of dehydration, or not enough healthy fats, that puts stress on the body. So number one is really focusing on the foods that you're putting in your body, the water that you're putting in your body, and trying to increase balance within that. Next is the environment.

Obviously, we can't completely change the environment around us when we walk outside. The quality of the air is what it is. We can obviously do things to try to shift and change that as well as reduce our footprint to make the environment cleaner and better in the future. But how do we deal with a toxic environment that is happening right now and impacting our health right now? First, we can do things like begin being aware of the air quality and avoid going outside and doing long hikes or walks or playing outdoor sports when the quality of the air is poorer. Also, when you're driving around in an air car and the air quality is poor, keep the windows rolled up and keep the inner air circulating versus the outside air coming in and circulating. You can also make sure that when the air quality is poor, that you're leaving your windows closed at home and that you're running air filters to clean the air that does come in and circulate within your home. You can also clear and strengthen your lungs with any of breathing techniques.

There are a lot of ways to deal with environmental toxins. This is something that I recommend doing some research on and figuring out what feels doable or achievable for your life. Next, let's talk about household toxins and chemicals because we are all exposed to so many toxins and chemicals in the products that we use every single day. You may not even be aware of it, but the beauty products, the skincare products, the soap, the shampoo, the cleaning products in your home, all may have toxins and chemicals that are putting an extremely large amount of stress, chronic stress on your body. So go through all the different products that you use, and as you begin running out of those products, try to replace them with cleaner, more natural, less toxic options. A wonderful recourse guide for reducing toxins is the book 'Non-Toxic: Guide to Living Healthy in a Chemical World' by Aly Cohen, MD.

The next thing that puts a lot of physical stress on your body is overwork. Practicing good time management helps with that. Setting work boundaries helps with that. But when we overwork or drive ourselves too hard, that puts a lot of stress on our system and can very easily turn into chronic stress and manifest in somatic symptoms. Evaluating your work schedule, your work pace, and making some changes to increase a little bit more work life balance will definitely help reduce those physical stressors from overwork.

Next is poor sleep patterns. When you are sleeping, your body has a natural rhythm and it's both resting and releasing hormones. It is releasing stress from the body. It's allowing every aspect and every system in your body to restore. When we have poor sleep patterns, the body can't release the stressors from the body, and it starts to break down the different systems that are creating hormones or reducing stress when you sleep.

Going to sleep and waking up at the same time every day helps with this. Sleeping in total darkness so that there is no light present, helps with your sleep rhythms. Using black out curtains or a sleep mask can be hugely beneficial as well. Also, avoiding eating late at night and avoiding media, electronics and watching tv, especially stressful things like the news or violent TV shows 90-minutes before bed is going to help with that sleep pattern as well.

Another thing that puts a lot of stress on the body is a lack of exercise. Our bodies are created to be in motion. There's a great saying. A body in motions tends to stay in motion. A body at rest tends to stay at rest. So if you don't use it, you begin to lose it. A lack of exercise doesn't allow the body to physically release stress from the body while also over exercising puts a lot of physical stressors on the body, not just on your muscles, your joints, your spine, but also over exercising can cause physical stress to your entire system. Both a lack of enough exercise as well as chronic intense exercise can both begin to decrease your immune system function. So when it comes to exercise, it's all about balance, and it's all about the balance that's right for your body. What's right for one body is not right for every body.

Next, let's talk about mental or mindset stressors. There is such a huge connection between our mind and our body. Whenever we think thoughts, we have a physiological response to those thoughts. So negative thought patterns, especially when they become consistent or reoccurring patterns, have a physical impact on your health and your stress levels. Identifying those negative thought patterns are an important step. They might be patterns that you have when you think about yourself, about life or the things around you or about specific people in your life. Those negative thought patterns are having a very negative impact on your stress level and therefore your health. So identifying those negative thought patterns and then learning how to process and release those are key! Learning how to intentionally shift mindsets and to create more positive thought patterns are going to decrease your stress levels significantly. The Finding the Beauty Exercise is quite helpful with building new positive thought patterns. We will go over that exercise later.

Another mental stressor is limiting beliefs. What a belief is are the things we believe to be true or agreements, things that we choose to agree with when we hear or learn or are taught them. A limiting belief is one that we choose to believe that might limit us in our lives. An example of a limiting belief is that 'you can't trust people' or 'all people are selfish' or 'no one loves me' or 'I'm not good enough'. Those are examples of limiting beliefs and those types of limiting beliefs, once they're in place and we agree with them, we begin acting as if they're true and that changes our behavior, that changes our choices, that changes our thought patterns, all of which can cause quite a bit of stress. Uncovering what beliefs you might have or agreements you may have made that limit you in moving forward in positive ways in your life and begin replacing those with beliefs that serve you at a higher level will definitely decrease those mindset or mental stressors.

Another thing is a dis-alignment of values. Now let me explain what I mean by that. We all have values. These are the things that we hold in high regard or at a high level of importance in our lives. Each of us have values that are very different from every single other person that we know. It's very unique to us. A lot of us adopt values that are taught to us but that are not necessarily aligned with our true values. This happens a lot in the workplace and in career paths. I'll give you an example of how that can look. So let's say a person learns a value that success is important, and what success is, is climbing the ladder in a nine to five job. However, if a person has a high value of independence, freedom, creating their own path in life and traveling, then those values, those true internal values may actually be in conflict with the career that they've adopted.

But they believe they 'should' have a nine to five job or they believe they should do X, Y, Z... whatever it is that is from the value that they've learned and adopted versus their true values. Spending some time really discovering, going within and uncovering what your true values are, your personal values, not the ones you've learned, and then taking a look at your life and the things that you've created around you, the choices you've made, and seeing where there's dis-alignments between what you've chosen and what you truly value and seeing if you can close that gap and make more choices aligned with your highest values, that will decrease a lot of unconscious stress.

Next, we come to emotional stressors, and this is a big one. This has such a large impact on our physical health, our mental and emotional wellbeing, and the really the quality of life that we live. When we have significant emotional stressors, it breaks down our immune system. It breaks down the body's ability to function optimally. It breaks down our ability to show up to all relationships, commitments, and situations as the best versions of ourselves.

The first two forms of emotional stressors that I want to talk about go hand in hand, stuck trauma and unprocessed negative emotions or unresolved negative emotions. When we are storing stuck trauma or unprocessed negative emotions within ourselves, within our mind, within our body, within our emotions, within our spirit, it is causing us significant stress on an unconscious level. If we've experienced some type of trauma earlier in life, if we have not fully processed that and released that, it is stuck in the body.

The same goes for negative emotions. If we haven't processed and released them, they are still impacting us and causing us stress unconsciously. So very important to get the tools that you need in order to learn how to process and release these types of traumas or negative emotions. Working with integrative somatic practitioners can help provide tools to physically process and release stuck traumas and negative emotions, however it is also key to work on the core of these or the root with either an integrative life coach, mental health practitioner or both.

Things like resentments are also negative emotions. You may have heard the famous saying that holding onto a resentment is like drinking poison and expecting the other person to die. And there's a reason that that is a famous saying, that's because resentments or unresolved anger, just like any other negative emotions or stuck traumas, radically breaks down your health and your wellbeing. Additionally, unhealthy relationships and challenging family dynamics cause a lot of emotional stress. While we can't control the people around us, we can learn how to control our response and learn tools and techniques to increase the health of our relationships and our boundaries, which I'll definitely go into more later.

Now, here's one that a lot of people aren't aware of. Spiritual stressors, such as an incongruency between true values and beliefs and a religious practice, a lack of connection or feeling disconnected from our inner self, our true self, our community, our family, nature and the world and also whatever our belief is about a higher power, whether that's God or Buddha or ala or Jesus, whatever your belief is. When you feel a disconnection from these things or a dis-alignment, it puts spiritual stress on your life.

Also living in a non-ecological way. To understand that, first I must define what I mean by ecological. Ecological is good for self, good for family, community, AND good for the world. When we are living or behaving in a way that is not good for ourselves, not good for our family, not good for our community and not good for the world that we live in it causes unconscious, spiritual stress. Unresolved spiritual or religious hurts cause a lot of stress unconsciously and sometimes consciously as well. If you've ever had a negative experience in the past around spirituality or around your religious experiences, it's very important to process that and to do some release work to heal that area.

Next, let's explore how stressors impact the mind, body, heart, and the spirit. All stress, both the ones that you're consciously aware of and the ones that you're not even aware of at all are both impacting all aspects of self - mind, body, heart, and spirit. And you know what else they're impacting? They're impacting every major area of your life. They're impacting your health and wellness. They're impacting your family and relationships. They're impacting your career and even your finances. They're impacting yourself self-development and spirituality.

It's truly hard to expand and thrive and be our best selves when we are in a constant state of chronic stress. Stress releases the stress hormone called cortisol. And cortisol is nature's built-in alarm system. So when there's chronic increases of cortisol, it has a negative impact on the functioning of many of your body's systems, including your entire endocrine system.

Think of chronic stress and elevated cortisol like depleting your body's resources, think of it like not putting enough oil in a car and driving around in that car for thousands and thousands of miles. That's going to impact every part of the car. It's going to impact the brake system, the engine, every aspect of the car is going to cease to function at its optimal level. It's going eventually to completely break down. But there's a long process of decreasing its functioning level before it fully breaks down.

Stress also triggers your parasympathetic nervous system or your PS and S, and it triggers it to turn off. The parasympathetic nervous system, that's your rest and digest. What stress does is it turns that off and turns on your sympathetic nervous system or your SNS. Now the sympathetic nervous system's job is to direct the body's rapid involuntary response to dangerous or stressful situations. So what happens when the sympathetic nervous system is triggered into the on position is a flash flood of hormones boost the body's alertness, your heart rate increases, it sends extra blood to the muscles because your body is tightening up and tensing up preparing to fight.

Most of us know this triggered state as fight or flight. When we're in this state, nothing can function optimally. We're in survival mode, we're not in 'thrival' mode. And unfortunately, once we've been experiencing chronic stress for a long enough period, that sympathetic nervous system can actually get stuck in the on position. So we're constantly triggered. We're constantly in fight or flight, constantly in survival mode and our body is reacting in that way. What that means is that we're, our body is not digesting, it's not resting, it's not releasing stress, it's in this tense fight or flight state.

So let's talk about some solutions. I'm going to dive into the approaches to reducing stress first. It's up to each and every one of us to really work on this every day for the rest of our lives, and we must do it in a balanced way. It's also important to know that different things that we experience in life, different challenges arise, different seasons of our life arise, and each one of those has a completely different set of stressors.

What works today to reduce stress may not work tomorrow. So you've got to approach this as an ever-changing fluid, flexible relationship, and approach to reducing stress and emotional stress reduction. First and foremost, recognizing and honoring our emotions is a critical part of emotional stress reduction. We need to both be aware of our feelings as well as then process and release those emotions in a healthy and balanced way versus suppressing, avoiding, or ignoring them. Secondly, we need to take ownership of our emotional life. If we're experiencing negative emotions, blaming others will not help.

We must each find healthy ways to experience and express our emotions. No one else can make you feel any emotion without your permission and your participation. Reducing emotional stress is best done through aligning yourself with your values. When our job, relationships and all other aspects of our lives are aligned with our values and our true selves versus all the beliefs and thoughts of what 'should be', emotional stress will be significantly decreased, and that will really happen automatically once those alignments take place. Also, learning healthy boundaries and how to say no to things that add unnecessary emotional stress to your life will really set you free from an overabundance of emotional stress. The things that we say yes to are very powerful. However, the things that we say no to are also equally powerful.

Next let's explore physical stress reduction. Physical stress comes when we do not properly care for our bodies and our physical environment, as well as when we're exposed to toxins. As I mentioned before, through the food we eat, the water we drink, products we use and the air that we breathe. Obviously trying to control this by completely removing all physical stressors would create an even bigger imbalance and even more stress. Try to find ways that you can limit physical stressors and instead, move towards less physical stressors, balancing and responsibly managing finances, life tasks, and even cleaning, such as decluttering and organizing will greatly reduced physical stressors as well.

When you think of physical stressors, think of what goes in your body, but also think of all the conditions that are around your body. Another way to reduce physical stressors is by making a commitment to yourself to get enough sleep, enough hydration, meaning drinking enough clean water and by eating healthy balanced meals each day. You can reduce the toxins you ingest by not only drinking more filtered water, but also by packing foods in glass versus plastic. Eating foods that are freshly made by you and that include fruits, veggies, lean proteins, and healthy fats while avoiding eating pre-prepared, processed, sugar or junk foods.

Next let's explore mental stress reduction. Whenever I mention mental health or mental stress, people often think I am only referring to intelligence or expanding the mind, and that's what the word mental is associated with. Whenever I'm speaking of mental stress, this is always when I'm referring to... your thought life. The thought life are the types of thoughts you think, especially the recurring ones. Are they negative? Are they filled with fear? Are they optimistic, pessimistic, balanced, loving, or reactionary?

You are in control of your mind and the thoughts that you think, I'm not recommending avoiding negative thoughts. That's just a part of being human. Instead, invite yourself to avoid getting into a relationship or getting on that spinning hamster wheel with your negative thoughts and negative thought cycles. In order to have a relationship with someone or something, you must invest time and attention to them. So don't invest in your negative thoughts and thought cycles which allows them to go on and on and around and around repeatedly. Also, learn how to let things go. Obsessing is not problem solving and only causes you to suffer and increases mental stress.

Next up is environmental stress reduction. Environmental stressors can also include many, many different types of toxins and chemicals. These could be in the air you breathe or the materials within the four walls where you live or work. Again, we cannot healthfully completely control our environment, but we can choose to reduce environmental stress by intentionally increasing time in less stressful environments, less traffic, less pollution, less toxic materials. Intentionally investing time in environments that feel better will automatically begin reducing your exposure to environmental stress.

We must learn to listen to what environments feel good, feel bad, or feel better. Somatic work helps with this, especially some of the exercises that take place in nature. The two simplest ways to reduce your environmental stress are to increase time and nature amongst its beauty, out in the cleaner air and to clean up the environment you are most in. Cleaning up your environment means participating in reducing your own footprint because we're all co-creating this toxicity we're experiencing. It also means being intentional about your home and your workspace, wherever you're able to do so in a balanced way.

Keep your space clean, continue removing toxins, filter your air, purify your space, and purchasing environmentally safe items such as non-toxic clothing and furniture will do so much for reducing your environmental stress, more than you could ever imagine.

Let's dive into spiritual stress reduction. First and foremost, it's important to identify any past hurts. That means really thinking about what were any harmful experiences that may have happened which might be creating a lack of connection or a dis-alignment, and then get support around processing and releasing those. That might mean working with a mental health practitioner, an integrative life coach or a spiritual advisor to help you work this through. It could also mean journaling or talking to a friend, whatever feels helpful to you. Also identify what moving 'towards' more spiritual connection looks like for you. Again, this is really going to be unique to you. Try not thinking about what 'should be' when moving towards more spiritual connection, but really what you're aligned with, what is in your values and really what are in your personal beliefs.

The next step in reducing spiritual stress is coming up with a game plan of action steps that you can take to move towards more spiritual connection. This leads to developing a spiritual practice that can again, look like anything that feels helpful in building a connection for you, and then add it to your routine with consistency. Make a commitment to your spiritual practice.

Increasing Capacity to Deal with Stress

Increasing your capacity to deal with life's stressors is a critical part of living in a balanced and healthy way. Part of being human being means living in a world with other imperfect humans and stressful things in our world. We need to increase our capacity to deal with stress. It's completely unrealistic and not a healthy to try to avoid everything that's stressful. This simply weakens our ability to cope with life. Just because something might feel difficult or bad doesn't mean that it is actually bad for you. Overcoming and dealing with life stressors not only strengthens our character and increases our capacity to cope with stress, but it also continues to build our character, to stretch us, to expand us.

It helps us grow and expand into the type of person who can feel inner peace and have clarity and calmness of thought, even amidst difficult challenges. When we cultivate those coping skills, bumping into a stressful experience that may have felt like a 10 on the Richter scale, suddenly feels like a five when increasing our capacity for stress. It builds our resilience and coping abilities. The metaphor I like to use most is... imagine that you're carrying around a glass of water that's half full, every time you encounter stress it's like adding another ounce of water. Remember I shared that visual earlier, So we're going to dive back into that here. It's like adding another ounce of water into that glass. Now, if you don't take frequent sips to empty the glass, eventually those stressors will make your glass so full that the next added stressor that you bump into will cause an overflow, a big mess that will pour out everywhere.

If we're continually intentional about emptying the stress, we're not thrown off balance when we encounter a new stress. We will naturally have more capacity. So part of increasing our capacity to deal with stress also is learning and practicing tools and techniques that help us to empty that glass of stress (stress management and stress reduction).

Here are some additional ways to increase your capacity to deal with stress and proactively manage the stress you already have. Probably one of my most favorites is self-care. Self-care gives you the energy you need to handle stress. It's really like putting deposits in the bank so that when you need to write a check, you have enough money in the bank to write that check against. The same thing goes with the deposits that we make into ourselves through acts of self-care so that when we bump up against stress that will deplete us, we have enough deposits in ourselves to be able to handle it otherwise known as having the capacity to handle it.

Self-care should be approached as a non-negotiable, a non-optional practice in your life. If you're too busy or overloaded for self-care, I recommend that you schedule it into your daily life with the same priority you would a work meeting, a family obligation, or even a doctor's appointment. Self-care can be anything that you find helpful, enjoyable, or recharging.

Another powerful way of increasing your capacity for stress and reducing stress is by practicing healthy boundaries. Healthy boundaries are rooted in love and are an absolute game changer for the way you experience and enjoy your life, career, and relationships. Boundaries are often misunderstood. They're definitely not rules or things that you demand from others. That's called control, not a boundary. A boundary is something that you personally set within yourself and that you personally respect. You are the only one who abides by your own boundaries to honor yourself, your needs, your values, and your safety. You are the only person in any relationship that can honor your boundaries.

It's up to you to do so, and if you don't do it, you are not a victim of someone else. Don't place the blame on them if you did not respect your own boundaries. So if someone crosses your boundaries, it's up to you to remove yourself from the situation or for you to take action to respect and honor that boundary. Most of us have never learned about healthy boundaries though, so I want to make sure that I give you a great resource for beginning or expanding your personal understanding and relationship to boundaries, and that's the book 'Boundaries' by Townson and Cloud.

Next, let's talk about letting it go. Why? Holding onto old resentments causes a significant amount of emotional stress. Resentments are only poisoning you. No one is perfect, and everyone is doing the very best they can with the information, the skills, and the resources that they have at the time. Would you be angry at a deaf person for not hearing you speak? No, of course not. So then why do we get angry and hurt when people are unable to give or to do something for us that they're just not capable of? Now, I want to be really clear, this doesn't mean we continue in toxic relationships, and it doesn't mean that it's okay for someone to treat you poorly.

Refer back to your boundaries. Take responsibility for how you react and respond to others' behaviors that offends or harms you. You can honor yourself, remain safe and have healthy boundaries while also no longer feeling the venom and anger and resentment in your own life. A wonderful free resource for this is found on Byron Katie's website the work.com the resource is called 'The Work'. So if you're struggling with holding onto anger or resentment, or even negative thoughts that are limiting you, definitely take a look at her website and do the one sheet exercise that you're able to download there.

Another helpful but sometimes tough pill to swallow is to put on your big kid undies and deal with it. Stop making everything such a big deal. Seriously, it's up to us. It's up to each and every single one of us to decide what we take offense to. I choose very consciously not to take too much personally. If you're a person who is very reactionary, you are simply a bomb waiting to go off, and this makes you a victim of every circumstance. It completely robs you of your own power. It's also a huge stress to your system. It's only when I choose to make it all about me, take things personally and to take offense to something that I experience stress and pain. When a situation or circumstance is less than your desired outcome, or when someone says or does something you wished would've been different, more, less, or better, make a conscious choice to put on your big kid undies and deal with it from a peaceful, tolerant, and loving place.

Practicing preference versus attachment reduces ALL stress greatly. I'm very intentional about my life, my goals, my plans, and the thoughts and actions I participate in. I have a specific goal or desired outcome, and I always allow for my goals and desires to show up looking a bit different than I had planned. I practice preference versus attachment, and that means that my happiness and success is not contingent on things being exactly one way. It's not contingent on my way or what I perceive to be exactly the right way. In that same vein, I don't have unrealistic demands or expectations on how other people in this world behave, show up in the world or what beliefs their lives reflect. I honor others and experience so much peace within this world of diverse beliefs and behaviors simply because my beliefs, perspectives, and values are things that I have a preference for versus an attachment to.

Make plans and head for a goal, but also remain flexible by practicing preference versus attachment. When we're attached to something, it is narrow, rigid, and it reflects a 'this is the only way' attitude. This really limits us versus offers expansion, growth, and the potential for greater success. Practicing the art and science of living a life guided by preference versus attachment is something that definitely takes intentional daily practice to master. When you practice continually, you'll build your ability to do this the same way you strengthen a muscle by repetitive exercise. As you weave this art into the framework of your life, you will see stress melt away like a glacier exposed to a hundred-degree weather. You will also experience a dramatic shift in your capacity to handle stressful people, places, things, and situations.

Another powerful tool for stress management and increasing your capacity to deal with life's stressors are breathing exercises and meditation. Now, both breathing exercises, deep, relaxed, intentional focused, breathing, as well as meditation in any and every form have been scientifically proven by countless studies to significantly reduce stress and increase our capacity to cope with stress. Developing a meditation and or intentional breathing practice should be a custom creation by you and by you alone. Try a few experiments and then practice the ones that work best for you as consistently as you're able to do. Developing a two minute or a 20-minute daily practice, we'll still have a positive impact on your stress levels. Start where you can and grow your practice from there.

There are several supplements that can support the body under stress. Always, always, always run supplements by your doctor or healthcare provider before beginning a new supplement. This is really important. You want to make sure that a supplement as well as the dosage are right for YOUR body, and that they won't have any negative interactions with existing medications or other supplements that you're taking. Here are a few to run by your doctor. Magnesium, adaptogens, Ashwagandha, L-theanine, vitamin C, B vitamins, SAME, melatonin for those with sleep disruptions. For more detail see the supplement handout.

Practicing good sleep hygiene that supports the natural sleep rhythms is key to stress level management. The body's natural sleep rhythm (circadian sleep rhythm) is critical to support your body's hormone production and stress release. If the sleep cycles are interrupted or incomplete, it disrupts hormone production and keeps higher levels of the stress hormone cortisol in your system. To truly experience stress release and physically process it, sleep is critical.



Keep in mind that dealing with stress in your life is going to look different today than it is in a year from now or in different situations that might arise. So it's important that you develop a relationship with stress and not only focus on reducing stress, but also learning how to deal with the stressors you have and increasing your capacity to deal with life stressors because it's going to be something that you're encountering for the rest of your life, right? So have a strategy, learn tools, and really practice stress reduction, stress management, and increasing your capacity to deal with life stressors. Remember, it's a process or a journey, not an event.

Let's talk about a few follow up steps that you can do. First and foremost, it's important to do that deep dive inside of yourself. Go back to those journal prompts that I gave you, those two powerful questions at the beginning of this, and really spend some time, again, marinating on it, journaling about it. Then the next step that you can also take is getting clear and understanding what your stressors are and which ones you should reduce, which ones you will need to manage and how and which ones you will need to increase your capacity for.