

Stress Less

HOW TO RECONNECT
TO YOURSELF AND
FIND PEACE IN ANY
SITUATION

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contents

01

introduction

04

get back to
basics

08

focus on taking one
step at a time

12

make the time to
quiet your mind

18

put pen to paper

23

stop trying to figure
everything out

28

look for the answer
within

32

make peace with
where you are

38

resources



Introduction

When you're stressed out it can feel like everything is spiraling out of control. And then you get stressed out about how stressed you are and it's clear that something needs to change so you can find a moment of peace, but what?

You might be tempted to ask a ton of other people what they think you should do or beat yourself up and overanalyze, or tell yourself you just need to go faster and force yourself to push through it.

But the truth is, sometimes you need to slow down when speeding up or just pushing through seems like the logical choice. Because beyond all the external stuff coming at you, you have the power to shift your perception of the situation.

I don't know about you, but my ego voice, monkey mind, whatever you want to call it, is pretty smart. And clever. And loud.

And not always the nicest. I am usually harder on myself than anyone else is.

Sometimes my inner mean girl dialogue can go to a place where I'm essentially beating myself up for not doing x, y, or z perfectly even if no one else has said a word about it. And I've found that recognizing and releasing that pressure we put on ourselves is a huge part of finding peace in the storm.

We also cause ourselves a lot of stress by constantly wishing the present moment, and often the past, were different than they are or were.

But there is tremendous peace to be found in simply accepting what is. Not in being complacent and never doing anything that will result in positive change and moving forward, but in just accepting that this is how it is now.

The key when you get overwhelmed, stressed, or feel indecisive is to practice focusing on being present with what is so you can find a sense of peace and reconnect to your inner voice.

But, how do you stop resisting being in the moment?

How do you actually surrender and release your need to control everything happening around you?

How do you find peace in any situation?

In this guide you'll find seven tools and practices that have helped me and I hope they will be of help to you too!



01

*Get back
to basics*

I don't know about you, but whenever I've gone through a really stressful period in my life my self-care automatically took a back seat.

Or I should say, it used to.

But one of the major things I've learned is that basic things like sleeping when I'm tired, drinking a ton of fresh filtered water when I'm thirsty (and when I'm not!), eating real wholesome food when I'm hungry, taking a walk and feeling the sunshine on my face when I feel frustrated and spending even just a few minutes doing mindful things like breathing deeply and quieting my mind are the key to thriving, instead of simply surviving.

Because if we don't put these fundamental practices in place in our daily lives who will?

It's funny how these can be the first things we trade in when we feel stressed, but so many of us put our own self-care as the last thing on the list when we're overwhelmed, that is, if it even makes it on the list at all.

The thing about these basic practices is they are the foundation of everything else. When we take care of ourselves we're making a statement about what we value and what we're committed to.

You might not have control over the external stress in your life, but you do make thousands of tiny decisions every day, an estimated 35,000 decisions in fact, so just think about the impact each small shift you make can have when you decide to put taking care of yourself at the top of your list each and every day.



02

*Focus on
taking one
step at
a time*

**“FAITH IS
TAKING THE
FIRST STEP
EVEN WHEN
YOU DON'T
SEE THE
WHOLE
STAIRCASE.”**

-MARTIN LUTHER KING JR.

Having faith that everything will work out when you feel stressed and overwhelmed is easier said than done, but all you really have to focus on to get there is putting one foot in front of the other.

It's about trusting that you're heading in the right direction with each small step you take.

My life coach Gina gave me a great analogy about this idea early on in our work together that has always been super helpful to me, so I want to share it with you.

Picture that you're walking down a mountain in the dark and just have a small flashlight to guide you. Literally all you can see is the next step you have to take as you slowly make your way down.

You're relying on what you can see right in front of you of course, but a part of you also has to rely on your intuition and trust that it's playing a role in guiding you forward too.

Even when you can't see more than a few steps in front of you, you intuitively know that the only way to get to the bottom is one step at a time.

If you just tried to run blindly down the mountain in the dark and rush to the bottom you'd probably fall and hurt yourself, or worse.

So, when you're stressing about the next 10, 20, or 30 steps you have to take to get where you want to go, simply focus on the next step right in front of you.

A person with long blonde hair, wearing a blue and white striped shirt, is sitting and reading a book. In the foreground, the head of a brown dog is visible, looking towards the camera. The background is a soft, out-of-focus outdoor setting.

03

*Make the
time to quiet
your mind*

**“THE LACK OF
QUIET IN THE MIND
IS THE BIGGEST
PROBLEM WE HAVE.
AND THE FACT THAT
OUR LACK OF QUIET
IS SMART CHATTER
DOESN'T MAKE IT
ANY LESS
DESTRUCTIVE.”**

-MARIANNE WILLIAMSON

I was listening to an audio recording of a Marianne Williamson lecture recently and she said something so simple that I've heard said in many different ways before, but the way she put it really hit home for me.

She said, "The lack of quiet in the mind is the biggest problem we have. And the fact that our lack of quiet is smart chatter doesn't make it any less destructive."

Truth.

It may not make logical sense to you to slow down when you're up against a deadline or rushing to get one thing after the next done during the day, but logic isn't really helpful here. Your "smart chatter," as Marianne called it, might say, "You have SO much to do, why are you just sitting there? Get moving!"

But when you can't think clearly and feel fragmented or pulled in multiple directions it's pretty tough to do anything well. Even just stopping before you pick up the phone or shoot off an email to recalibrate and take five big deep breaths can make a huge difference.

So, how do you get to that quiet place?

I rely on meditation to get me there, but I was super resistant to trying meditation for a long time. I mean, it sounded nice I guess, but sitting quietly while my thoughts swirled around in my head was pretty much the exact opposite of what I wanted to do.

But it became clear to me it was exactly what I needed once I finally gave it a chance and, eventually, committed to doing it as a daily practice.

I remember when I started meditating I felt like I wasn't doing it right because the minute I sat down and closed my eyes the crazy swirl of thoughts in my head would go into overdrive, which was a little overwhelming.

After all, our collective tendency is to try and push down or ignore our inner dialogue most of the time. But once you get used to letting it come up and simply observing it and being with it, the fear of hearing it pretty much goes away.

If you're just starting out and pure silence feels like too much to handle, a great way to ease in to it is to put on a relaxing song you love and sit with your eyes closed while you listen to it. Then just breathe long and deep and let whatever thoughts you have come up, and try not to judge them.

You don't have to clear your mind of thoughts, just think of it like you're practicing getting more comfortable being with your thoughts instead of running from them.

I remember when I was getting trained to practice Transcendental Meditation (TM), the teacher told us that the act of thoughts coming up during the meditation *is* your stress being released. So each time I feel myself veering from my mantra to a rising thought I notice it, let it go, go back to the mantra and release whatever stress I'm holding onto with every breath.

I practice a few different kinds of meditation including Kundalini and TM, which I love, but there are a ton of different meditation paths so try a bunch and find what works for you.

04

*Put pen to
paper*



A lot of times I don't really know what I think about something until I write about it. There is something about getting the thoughts swirling in my head out of my head that helps me make sense of them and I suspect the same is true for most of us.

And that brings me to Morning Pages.

Have you ever heard of it? It's a simple yet powerful practice, and not just for people who like writing or journaling. I think of it as burning off a layer of the morning fog in my brain.

Meditation starts the fog burning process, and Morning Pages brings it home. It's kind of like doing a brain dump where you just let everything pour out onto the page.

I was introduced to the concept of Morning Pages in Julia Cameron's genius book, *The Artist's Way*, and was surprised at how much doing it helped me process my thoughts.

She describes it like this:

"Morning Pages are three pages of longhand, stream of consciousness writing, done first thing in the morning. There is no wrong way to do Morning Pages—they are not high art. They are not even “writing.” They are about anything and everything that crosses your mind— and they are for your eyes only. Morning Pages provoke, clarify, comfort, cajole, prioritize and synchronize the day at hand. Do not over-think Morning Pages: just put three pages of anything on the page...and then do three more pages tomorrow."

I know you might be thinking, "There is NO way I could fill three pages with deep thoughts every morning!" And you might be right, but it doesn't matter. That is the simplistic beauty of Morning Pages.

Sometimes what I write is revelatory, but often it's just a stream of consciousness list of the stuff that's taking up space in my head. This is not supposed to be a masterpiece, and no one is going to see it but you.

It's just a space where you can let your worries, hopes, fears, gratitude, stress, etc. flow on to the page without giving a thought to how any of it sounds, if you spelled that word right, or what other people will think.

It's totally freeing.

A close-up photograph of a person's lower legs and feet. They are wearing black leggings and white, pointed-toe high-heeled shoes. The person is standing on a dark asphalt surface with white chalk lines. The overall lighting is cool, with a blueish tint.

05

*Stop trying
to figure
everything out*

**“OUR TENDENCY IS TO
TRY TO FIGURE
THINGS OUT, BUT
THERE IS MORE TO BE
GAINED FROM THE
STATE OF NOT
KNOWING. ONLY IN
THE UNCERTAINTY
CAN SOMETHING NEW
EMERGE.”**

- NANCY LEVIN

It might seem counterintuitive to focus on not trying to figure everything out at first, but making a commitment to surrendering and letting go of the need to control the outcome is what actually sets you free.

When you stop trying to figure everything out you also come to a point where you can stop relying on your own strength and put your faith in something bigger than yourself.

And when you believe and trust that everything will unfold as it's meant to, you can release the need to control everything and let yourself be guided.

A simple mantra I like to use is:

I am open. I am willing. I am ready for whatever comes next and release the need control the outcome.

Write this (or whatever mantra fits for you) on a post-it and put it on your computer, your bathroom mirror, in your wallet —anywhere and everywhere that you look throughout the day. Or put a reminder in your phone and set it to go off throughout the day so you remember to tune back in to your intention to surrender control over everything every few hours.

The thing that trips a lot of people up with this one is that when we're in a moment of uncertainty we don't know exactly what's going to happen. And uncertainty freaks us out.

Not knowing what's going to happen usually equals “something bad” in our minds. But the truth is, not knowing what's going to happen means anything could happen.

This is where looking at our life experiences for a reality check can be helpful. If you look at your past there will no doubt be some tough times, but if you're still here you clearly came out on the other side of them, right?

So why would you think the future would be any different? Adversity sucks while we're in the middle of it, but we're usually a better person for the experience and come through it having learned a lesson.

What would happen if you used those times as evidence that you can handle whatever is happening right now?

Would you fear the uncertainty a little less?



06

*Look for the
answer within*

**“ALL THE
HAPPINESS, SELF-
CONFIDENCE
AND SUPPORT
YOU'RE SEEKING
IS ALREADY
WITHIN YOU.”**

- GABBY BERNSTEIN

I used to have a bad habit of frantically polling everyone around me and asking them what they thought I should do whenever I doubted my intuition. And the crazy thing is I knew when I was doing it that what I was really doing was looking for external validation to either affirm or contradict what I maybe kind-of sorta thought I should do.

But the thing about searching outside yourself for the answer is it doesn't work. In most situations we really do know what to do, but a lot of us have trouble hearing that answer. I mean think about it, how are you supposed to even know what you think if you're letting all those outside influences tell you what to think?

I don't mean to say that getting an outside perspective isn't helpful because it can be.

But I bet if you think about the people in your life you turn to, it's the ones that ask you the right questions, not the ones who tell you what they think you should do, who help you the most.

There's definitely a time where you need to ponder all sides of a situation, make your pros and cons list, ask friends and family what they think, try to come up with a solution and map out what to do next. But there's also a time to look within and just let it come to you.

Which really means that once you've gathered all those opinions, weighed your options, and looked at whatever your thing is from all angles, sometimes, the next best step you can take is to quiet your mind and see what your intuition is trying to tell you.

07

*Make peace
with where
you are*

**"PEACE.
IT DOES NOT MEAN TO
BE IN A PLACE WHERE
THERE IS NO NOISE,
TROUBLE OR HARD
WORK. IT MEANS TO
BE IN THE MIDST OF
THOSE THINGS AND
STILL BE CALM IN
YOUR HEART."**

- UNKNOWN

This may sound strange, but I've learned that our response to stress has a lot to do with how much we're fighting being with the present moment.

We actually create more stress in our lives by insisting that things should not be as they are right now.

We struggle against the present moment because we think it should be different than it is, and that stresses us out even more. But what would our lives be like if we simply let situations be what they are? And what does that actually mean in our daily lives?

I've found that the more I can trust what's happening right now is exactly what's supposed to happen, the more I can simply accept what is.

This may seem like an impossible idea when you look at a tough situation you're in the middle of, but everything we experience is there to help us in some way.

It might not feel that way all the time, but sometimes we need to go through things over and over again in different places with different people until we wake up and get the lesson we were supposed to learn.

We often tell ourselves a story about this or that being so difficult or challenging, but really, how much of that comes from just wanting it to be different and resisting the lesson we're meant to learn in that moment or situation?

I say it has everything to do with it.

If we want to keep growing we'll likely find ourselves feeling uncomfortable sometimes when we try to be at peace with what is happening to us, or to put it another way —what's happening for us.

And that's actually a good thing because every time we step out of our imagined comfort zone we open up to possibilities for our lives we might never have seen otherwise.

When we take the time to pause in the middle of it all and find a way to make peace with how things are, even when we want them to change, we create a pocket of space so we can learn the lesson and move forward as a stronger and more authentic version of ourselves.

As Debbie Ford said, “When we stop resisting and surrender to the situation exactly as it is, things begin to change.”

Your ability to make peace with the present moment may change overnight or it may take time, but the key here is to stop believing that you won't or can't be happy or feel peaceful unless everything is as you think it should be, right now.

That constant conflict we create within ourselves when we resist the present puts our bodies and minds into a churning stressful cycle, so by releasing that constant need to make everything fit into the image or box we think it needs to be in we can free ourselves. And we make the choice to do that or the opposite every day.

We always have a choice.



Resources

MEDITATION

The David Lynch Foundation is a great resource for learning more about TM and you can read all about the profound impact TM has had when they've taught it everywhere from schools to prisons.

www.davidlynchfoundation.org

TM.org can help you find a teacher near you and has tons of information about TM.

www.tm.org

The Kundalini meditation I'm doing right now

www.kellybroganmd.com/change-your-life-in-12-minutes-a-day/

Guided mindfulness meditations

www.oprah.com/spirit/audio-meditations-for-finding-inner-peace

Gabby Bernstein's 5-min meditations

www.gabbybernstein.com/5-minute-meditations-to-make-you-feel-awesome-right-now/

Gabby Bernstein's beginner's guide to meditation

www.gabbybernstein.com/beginners-guide-to-meditation/

Yoga Journal's Guide to Kundalini

www.yogajournal.com/yoga-101/types-of-yoga/kundalini

MORNING PAGES

***The Artists's Way* by Julia Cameron**

www.amazon.com/dp/B000000000

CONTACT ME

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