

***Say
Yes!
To
Stress***

Why Stress Should Be An Ally
& How A New Self-Care System
Helps You Keep It That Way

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Revised Edition

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Stress In Action

Stress comes when life changes on us. The change can be disruptive — like illness, the death of a loved-one or a job loss. It can be neutral — like different climates, foods, activities, or schedules. It can even be a welcome change — like a promotion, falling in love, or taking a vacation.

In all these cases, some stress is both normal and necessary. We couldn't survive without it. Our stress-response mechanisms supply us with a certain type of energy, a natural arousal that gives us the power to react to each new turn of events as appropriately as possible. Stress is not just a human experience, either. All living things experience some kind of stress and have stress responses.

Functionally, stress should be our friend. In fact, much of the time it is. If we stay levelheaded during change, the process automatically brings us to our best. These moments feel so easy for us that we rarely think of them as involving any 'stress.'

On the other hand, we react to some changes by getting upset or disorganized. Now stress feels like a foe. The same mechanisms that were designed to give us an extra boost of constructive energy instead become troublesome. Instead of providing more staying power for the task at hand, our responses rob our energy. Instead of enabling us to think quickly and correctly, they leave us stalled and confused. When stress like this persists, it drains our reserves and makes us vulnerable to a wide assortment of health problems. Even worse, it can accumulate without our awareness, building up until it causes a sudden physical or mental collapse.

Our lives will always include change. That means we must deal with stress every day. Because we are not perfect, some of our reactions are bound to be self-defeating. For instance, sometimes we make small problems into big ones just because we solve them ineffectively.

It isn't stress, itself, that's the problem — it's how we respond to it. Once we understand the stress process, we can recognize whether we are channeling its energy in helpful or harmful directions. Next we can teach ourselves to choose better options when we are under pressure. Eventually, we can reach a point where stress reliably supports us as we take on new challenges in life.

Friend or foe? The choice is ours. There are five basic steps that allow us to keep stress constructive. Accepting stress as an everyday life event is the first step in saying YES! to stress.

Stressors, Stress Symptoms and the Stress Process

Hans Selye, the 'father' of stress research, was the first to distinguish between the causes of stress, the stress symptoms we develop and the process of responding to stress. His work tells us that the causes, or "stressors" as he called them, are specific things — the boss yelling at us, money worries, or the pollen from blossoming roses.

Since no two people are exactly alike, we each respond differently to these triggers. The same roses may set off a hay fever attack in one person yet not affect the rest of us at all. We may see a family member become upset about something the rest of the family considers to be trivial. The point is always more vivid, of course, when we seem to be the only one feeling pressured.

What we call symptoms, or the effects of stress, are also an individual matter. The same irritable boss may manage one employee who will develop a gastric ulcer, another whose work effectiveness will plunge, and a third who will suffer no ill effects at all. We show the wear and tear of stress in our own weakest links. How much stress we can tolerate, and what our symptoms will be, depend mainly on our genetics, our overall health, and what we have learned about dealing with pressure. For each of us the formula is different.

In contrast to this Selye found there is an underlying process to stress — basic bodily reactions that are essentially the same in everyone. He called this process the Generalized Adaptation Syndrome (G.A.S.), and he showed that it begins operating within us as soon as we realize we must respond to change. Recognizing the G.A.S. in action is the second step toward managing stress successfully.

G.A.S. Stage 1: Alert

We have all felt the sudden rush of adrenalin that comes with fear. We can remember nervous moments when our hearts began pounding or our hands started to sweat. What provokes these reactions? How do we shift from normal functioning into these automatic stress responses?

Driving along in our car, for instance, we may see another car swerve into our lane and hear the screeching of brakes. Our eyes and ears immediately send this information to the brain. How alert we become depends on how many signals the brain receives and how intense they are. While small changes mobilize our attention at low levels, larger changes affect more sensory nerves and arouse us to a higher pitch.

Next the brain evaluates. In a typical stressful situation it sorts through millions of impulses, consults its memory, estimates the likely outcomes of various responses, and makes decisions — all within fractions of a second. If in the brain's judgment we need to react, then it triggers the first stage of stress — Alert.

Instantly the brain signals the body to release stress hormones into the blood stream from the glands where they have been produced and stored. These hormones are carried to every part of the body. They produce many metabolic changes, but two are especially important for us to understand. First, blood circulation begins bypassing the digestive tract and floods instead into the skeletal muscles. There the stress hormones are busy preparing each cell to generate more energy. Second, the blood supply to the front brain (cerebral cortex) decreases. This shuts down non-essential areas of the brain and streamlines our thinking processes.

Now we are poised for action. If the stressor is mild and the need for response is small, the process dies out after this initial phase. We return to normal. If the stressor continues or the need for response is strong, we move into the next stage of the G.A.S.

G.A.S. Stage 2: Response

The common name for this stage is 'fight/flight.' In Response, we attempt to deal with the stressor and protect our well-being. On the whole our choices are straightforward: we accept change when we can, avoid it when we can't accept it, fight it when we can't avoid it, and surrender to it when we must.

Suppose we decide to fight against a change. Then the brain automatically sends extra blood to the face, neck, and chest. This prepares the upper body for a physical struggle. It also causes our faces to flush when we are angry. If we decide to run away, circulation is drawn away from the face, neck, and chest and supplied to the arms and legs for running. That's why our faces turn pale when we're afraid.

What if there is no actual fighting or running? What if we are only arguing or just feeling angry? What if we decide to 'flee' by sitting still and remaining silent during a confrontation? The body mobilizes for action to some extent anyway. This is why emotional upsets so often leave us with tense and tired muscles.

During both fight and flight, blood continues to be diverted from the front brain. This area contains our intellect — our conscious thinking power — and it is designed to handle all our complex problem-solving. The more stress we are in, the more the front brain is turned off. Lower, more primitive brain centers are left in control. In those lower parts of the brain decisions are made unconsciously, based on our instincts. Physical survival is the primary goal.

All in all, Response is a conservative arrangement for dealing with change. It allows us to use our intellect as much as possible while guaranteeing that we will not bog down in useless details if rapid action becomes necessary.

Response sounds simple enough at first. Nevertheless, some changes demand a sophisticated blend of attack, escape, surrender, and acceptance; and different aspects of the same situation can require different approaches. For example, we may need to accept that we have developed an ulcer. At the same time to get well we must attack the causes (make changes at work), avoid irritating foods for a time, and surrender to (tolerate) any medications we must take.

Fortunately, our stressors usually clear up by themselves or else we manage to resolve them. As long as we react effectively, we burn up the stress hormones circulating in our blood stream and our bodies gradually return to normal. Sometimes, though, our efforts to deal with change tax our limits. Another protective mechanism, the third stage of stress, acts as a safeguard at these times.

G.A.S. Stage 3: Overwhelm

We get rattled, off balance, don't know which way to turn. We come unglued, fall apart, lose our heads. We can't think straight, draw a blank, are at our wits' end,

We have all experienced the unpleasant symptoms of Overwhelm. Few of us know, however, that its goal is to prevent fatal overloads of stress and that the physical and mental disorientation we feel is actually helping us.

There are times when we get an overdose of stress hormones in the body. The reactions these hormones set off — usually beneficial — start endangering our body chemistry. Dealing with long-term problems, for instance, can exhaust us. Heavy emotional shock can send our stress hormones skyrocketing. Change can follow change too rapidly. A point comes when we must stop and recover our internal balance or, if we don't, our physiological reactions will eventually kill us. The Overwhelm mechanism insures that we will stop in time.

In contrast to Response, which mobilizes us to face change, Overwhelm de-mobilizes us. Blood is drawn back in from the limbs and sent to the abdominal organs where the liver, lungs, and kidneys begin removing the stress hormones from it. With less blood in the muscles, our arms and legs are harder to move. This encourages us to slow down and rest. At the same time, circulation changes in the brain continue to reduce our mental capacity and prevent us from reacting too easily to anything new.

Mild overdoses of stress lead to mild Overwhelm: we get accident-prone, lose interest easily, and make mistakes performing routine tasks. We may feel a vague sense of being behind or find ourselves procrastinating.

More serious Overwhelm shows up as mental fogging, outright inattentiveness, or even dizziness. At this level, any physical activity takes extra effort. We may experience fatigue that doesn't disappear even after sleep. Because extra blood has gathered in the belly, we often feel heavy there and want to sit or lie down.

High levels of Overwhelm are easy to spot — we simply faint. Shocking news and unbearable pain are known to produce this response, which represents the last line of defense against situations too demanding for us to handle.

As protective as Overwhelm is, most of us struggle against it. We know we are out of control in this stage of stress, and we feel vulnerable. This is the kind of stress that distresses us. This is the experience we hope to avoid, and situations, which repeatedly overwhelm us become more and more upsetting each time we lose control to them.

Nevertheless once we are in Overwhelm, we are also on the road to recovery. Learning to make that shift easily and to recover fully is the third step toward having stress work in our favor.

Recovery

We live in a society that rewards hard work and high performance. The emphasis is on activity, not rest. Unless we have a major accident or disabling illness, we tend to take recovery for granted and forget its importance. Still, only adequate recovery can return us to normal functioning and keep us active and healthy.

During recovery, stress hormones are eliminated. Normal circulation patterns are re-established. Repairs are made to any parts of the body that were damaged during stress. Once we regenerate our capacities, we feel energized and relaxed — ready to make a fresh start.

We have the best survival mechanisms evolved by nature so far. Our natural cycle of stress and recovery works excellently. But no human system works perfectly. Acknowledging that we do have limitations and deciding to work constructively with them is the fourth step in using stress positively.

Our Limitations: The Harmful Side of Stress

Medical research and insurance statistics make us increasingly aware of the physical toll stress can take. Beyond this, stress causes other significant losses. It can strip our lives of joy, leaving us with the toil but no satisfaction. It can dampen our confidence and make us afraid to reach out toward new opportunities. It can create a climate of 'defensive indifference,' in which we are too strained to take an active part in our family, our work, or our community.

Granted, some of these harmful effects are only temporary. An especially busy holiday season, for instance, may end up in a head cold. We may get so fatigued from overwork that we sleep through most of our long-awaited vacation. Under pressure, we may buy a car that we later dislike.

More importantly, though, stress also causes permanent physical damage to our bodies. This damage occurs when stress overwhelms us. As the damage accumulates, it becomes a major cause of illness; and stress damage is one of the main reasons we age at the rate we do.

Stress research has shown that anything can overwhelm us if it is strong enough, lasts long enough, or is repeated frequently enough. In actuality, most of the Overwhelm we experience comes from specific errors we make as we deal with change. Let's look at this from the physical side first.

Selye found that the average body, making its average number of errors in everyday functioning, tends automatically to over-react under pressure. In other words an average level of functioning predisposes us to stress-related damage and disease. This tendency is obvious in otherwise healthy people who suffer from allergies, high blood pressure, or gastrointestinal disorders.

A poorly conditioned body makes even more mistakes under pressure and is more likely to become overwhelmed. For this reason, influences such as nutrition, exercise, rest, health care, and genetic make-up all help determine how many mistakes our bodies will make and how harmful stress will be for each of us.

We make errors on the mental side, too. Since we never know all the facts in a situation, our opinions and decisions can, in the moment, only represent best guesses. Consequently our mental errors are mostly ones of judgment. As an example, social manners prevent us from crying in public, though it would quite effectively burn up stress hormones and reduce emotional tension. Sometimes our beliefs about life or our view of ourselves lead us to make choices, which don't solve our problems but are familiar, comfortable, and easy to justify.

Memory plays an important role, too, because it allows us to compare our past experience with the present moment. This should improve our understanding of our situation and help us react more effectively. Still, no two situations are exactly alike. Our memories can distort our perceptions and lead us to assumptions that are wrong.

As if all this weren't enough to contend with, we have a quality that both greatly assists and greatly hinders us: we anticipate. We know, for example, that the screeching of brakes is not dangerous in itself. On the other hand, we also know that screeching brakes often go with collision and injury. Associating these events allows us to act early — it improves our chances of protecting ourselves. Without being able to anticipate, would always have to sustain injury or loss before we could react.

On the other hand, this same ability becomes a problem for us when we are alarmed by and mobilize against changes that are actually harmless. The errors we make in anticipation result in more stress for us to handle and increase the possibilities of stress-induced illness and early death.

Another common error we make is to ignore the early signs of Overwhelm. We get engrossed in an activity and overdo. We have obligations we feel we must meet. We misjudge ourselves, thinking our reserves will be greater than they are. For one reason or another, when we begin feeling overloaded we fail to stop. Persistence in the face of exhaustion can be useful for accomplishing extraordinary goals, but too often it is only a thoughtless habit that keeps us perpetually drained.

Even when we do stop to recover, we usually rest too little. Unaware of the need for thorough recovery, we return to activity once our most annoying symptoms disappear, thus failing to heal the deeper levels of damage done by stress.

Finally, we humans have a habit that other creatures apparently do not share with us — during otherwise tranquil times we replay our unresolved problems. As we recall our anxieties, the stress mechanisms fire all over again. In this way we add the burden of remembered pressures to the new stresses we confront each day.

With education and practice, we can avoid most of these errors and minimize the harm stress does to us. A wide range of techniques has been developed for this purpose. Still, there is another step we can take — one that reverses our opinion of stress altogether. Instead of seeing stress as a negative experience that has some survival value, we can decide to consider it a beneficial state that has unpleasant side-effects only when mishandled. This point of view gives us an active, positive interest in how we react to change. This is the ultimate step in saying YES! to stress.

Stress as an Ally

Stress re-positions us. Whether we're fighting off a virus or campaigning for the local school board, it enables us to be flexible and to respond appropriately to new circumstances as they arise. We need this resilience in every aspect of our lives. The value of the stress process is that it re-directs us toward better and more efficient functioning.

As we go through the stages of stress, we shift mental and physical gears. When we see stress as an ally, we know these shifts are helping us adjust to new demands. Instead of getting distracted by these changes, we expect to feel them. We are able to keep our attention on the situation at hand. Instead of fighting against our natural responses, we begin relying on them to put us in the right gear for the present moment.

Seeing stress as an ally also helps when we do get into Overwhelm. We know our stress mechanisms are designed to improve our coping abilities, not to disrupt us. This awareness makes us more motivated to find out why we feel off balance and what we can do about it. We learn to shift quickly and deliberately into Recovery.

As we master this attitude, we find ourselves able to handle more and more pressure while remaining clear-headed and in control. This is when good stress training pays off. Now we can lead richer and more stimulating lives, using the energies mobilized by stress for constructive and satisfying ends. Like all other aspects of life, we'll never handle stress perfectly — but like all other aspects of life, the more we practice, the better we get.

In Sickness or in Health

Stress can be managed from the outside in or from the inside out. From the outside in, we depend on people around us — government agencies, local interest groups, employers, associates, and our families — to provide us with a wholesome environment. Working from the inside out, we rely on re-training ourselves and our bodies to respond to change more elegantly.

Saying YES! to stress means taking responsibility for our stress reactions and for whether they make us sick or well. Touch for Health (TFH), a new approach to natural self-care, gives us excellent tools for this task. With it, we can upgrade both our body's stress behaviors and the voluntary choices we make under pressure.

Whether our pressures are mental or physical ones, TFH helps us evaluate the condition we are in, determine if we are being overwhelmed, and recover more quickly and completely. What's more exciting is that we can use TFH to prepare in advance for better on-the-spot performance in specific situations.

How does TFH accomplish all this?

In the next pages we'll take a closer look at four techniques in the TFH system and how we can use them to keep stress working in our favor.

Basic Balancing

Chronic pressure drains our reserves. Likewise, being in poor condition makes us more susceptible to stress. All too often this becomes a vicious circle. Problems look larger and larger as we get more depleted, until we end up exhausted or ill. As we come to understand the close connection between fitness and "stressability," we can put this mechanism to work for us. TFH's Basic Balancing technique is especially useful here.

In Basic Balancing, individual muscle tests are done with 14 postural muscles, each in its most contracted position, to see if the muscles hold firmly in place or give way under moderate pressure. Muscle testing is also used to evaluate the 14 major acupuncture meridians (energy pathways). Muscles or meridians found too strong or too weak are considered 'out of balance' and are corrected using specific touch points.

Basic Balancing gives us tangible feedback about our overall condition. Generally speaking, the more muscles and meridians that test poorly, the more vulnerable we are. We can take on new activities when we are fit and avoid over-extending when our reserves are low.

As we do the TFH corrections, we reduce the number of errors our 'bodymind' is making and relieve some of the tension coming from internal sources. This, in itself, reduces our stress load. In addition to relaxing us, the technique leaves us better internally organized and better prepared for the next round of stress. We can use TFH Basic Balancing in a more refined way, too, to improve our responses to a particular situation.

For this, the person is tested and balanced in the usual manner. They then close their eyes, recall the stressful situation and hold a mental image of it while the muscles and meridians are re-tested. As the person keeps their focus on the stressor, any imbalances found are corrected in the usual manner.

This process often reveals a unique pattern that will not show when a person is tested 'in the clear.' Merely recalling the upsetting event has triggered the person into a stress response, giving a picture of their body's reactions when actually facing the specific situation. As we test and correct, their bodymind receives highly specific feedback about how to stay better internally organized. People balanced in this fashion often report they found themselves automatically more calm and clear-headed when facing the stressful situation again.

Muscle Testing to Identify Individual Stressors

Our stressors often read like a shopping list with item after item competing for our time and attention. Sometimes we ignore the whole list because we fear that if we begin we will never get out of the store. Muscle testing can help us sort out major from minor concerns. We can determine which situations most trouble us, condense our list, and pay attention to the worst items first.

In TFH this task can be done with the Supraspinatus, a muscle that spans the back of the shoulders. This muscle test is easy to learn and to do, and Supraspinatus responses seem to be highly sensitive to mental and emotional states.

The Supraspinatus is tested and balanced if necessary. (A test on a non-stressful image gives a benchmark to measure against.) The person then closes their eyes and brings their name to mind as the muscle is re-tested. Still with eyes closed, the person brings an individual stressor to mind. The Supraspinatus is re-tested to see if it gives a different response.

A whole list of situations can be checked, one after another, in this manner. A strong muscle response shows that the body is staying well organized during the stressful recall. A weakened response means the event is a source of signaling errors and accompanying muscular disorganization — reliable indications of Overwhelm taking place.

There are many ways to identify and measure stressors, but muscle testing has several advantages. First, any situation that overwhelms us is producing excessive wear and tear each time it is recalled or re-experienced. With muscle testing, we can locate these upsets and attend to them before they lead to illness.

Second, muscle testing goes beyond our opinions and assesses our integrated bodymind reaction. This is especially valuable in stress, when our mental evaluations are not always accurate. Muscle testing often reveals that situations we view as trivial are actually overwhelming us, while stressors we see as major are leaving us well organized. (This may happen in part because we tend to pull ourselves together to deal with the 'big" problems.)

Third, muscle testing alerts more of our brain than mental evaluation does alone. The extra activity of the testing expands both the amount and the quality of information being supplied to the brain. When the Supraspinatus is tested, the brain gets feedback in one of its basic languages -- proprioception. It gets a 'feel' for how it is doing under pressure.

There is yet another application for the Supraspinatus test: pinpointing what in particular is upsetting us. We know it is not an experience as a whole but individual aspects of it that bother us. It wasn't just that our in-laws came to visit, for instance, but that we felt we couldn't entertain them properly on our tight budget. Or perhaps the worst part was trying to fit their visit into an already too busy schedule.

The Supraspinatus can be checked for each facet. This fine-tuning brings to our attention pressures that may have been felt but not recognized or verbalized. Sometimes just knowing the precise cause of our tension gives the brain enough information to arrive at a much better response.

Cross Crawling

Cross Crawling is a set of movements done rhythmically using the opposing arm and leg. It can be done quickly, without equipment or preparation. We can Cross Crawl standing up, lying down or even sitting in a wheelchair. Almost anyone can learn to do it effectively.

The goal is to stay loose and easy and to smooth out the movements. When done standing, a hop can be added to each movement for extra improvement in coordination. The person should do eight or more repetitions of each of the following sequences.

- Opposing arm and leg are raised to the front. The knee comes up bent and the arm lifts straight up toward the ceiling.
- Opposing arm and leg swing forward. The knee stays straight. The waist and supporting leg can bend slightly.
- Elbow touches opposing raised knee. The waist and shoulders are allowed to flex.
- Opposing arm and straight leg lift out to the side. The arm lifts all the way toward the ceiling and the knee is kept straight.

- Opposing arm and bent leg lift out to the side. The arm lifts all the way toward the ceiling while the knee comes up bent and stays to the side.
- Opposing arm and leg swing to the back. The knee should be kept as straight as possible.

What does Cross Crawling do?

A round of Cross Crawling accelerates our metabolism, burning up accumulated stress chemicals. It also improves our respiration and circulation. In this respect, Cross Crawling is similar to most other forms of physical exertion. Done every morning and night, the exercise is a good general toner. Used after a moment of stress, it helps eliminate unwanted hormones from our bodies and speeds Recovery.

Another feature of Cross Crawling, though, makes it especially useful: with it we can use our bodies to reorganize our minds. Cross Crawling stimulates and balances the right and left sides of the brain. The neurological signaling necessary to move opposing limbs requires activity in both brain hemispheres along with good cross-brain communication. When we do the movements, our bodies become their own biofeedback mechanisms. If the brain signals improperly, the Cross Crawl gets jerky and confused. As the brain reacts to smooth out the movements and eliminate errors it is making, more coherent functioning is generated within the brain.

We're designed to maintain good coordination. When the brain gets feedback from Cross Crawling, it automatically adjusts itself to correct for errors. This effect is heightened if we have the conscious intention of making the movements as smooth as possible.

The Cross Crawl gives us easy access to an already existing self-correcting brain mechanism. We can use the Cross Crawl whenever we want to sharpen our mental processes. Suppose we are presenting a speech, competing in an athletic tournament, or studying for an examination. Cross Crawling before such events helps establish and maintain good mental equilibrium as our performance energies build.

Emotional Stress Release (ESR)

When we're stressed to Overwhelm, we begin losing voluntary control of our muscles and our thinking. We become confused. We lack motivation. Our attention scatters. Most of us dislike this experience; sometimes we can even begin to fear we'll never again regain control. Emotional Stress Release (ESR) is a powerful technique for such moments.

With this technique, the Supraspinatus is tested and balanced if necessary. Then the person closes their eyes and brings the upsetting situation to mind. If the Supraspinatus gives a weak response, the ESR correction is done.

The person can be standing, sitting, or lying down, though the lying position is preferable. The frontal eminences (on the forehead) are held very lightly with the skin slightly stretched while the person replays the upset in their mind two or three times. The frontal eminences can be held from 30 seconds to 10 minutes or more, until a re-test of the Supraspinatus shows a strong response.

A person can do the ESR entirely by themselves by omitting the muscle tests and holding their own frontal eminences as they replay the particular stressor.

The unique advantage of this technique is that it works from two directions at once to re-set the brain's functioning. Light pressure on the frontal eminences stabilizes and calms the body. As soon as the body reports that its internal processes are returning to normal, the brain begins releasing us from the protective Overwhelm state. Meanwhile, holding the frontal eminences also seems to restore circulation immediately and directly to the front brain. The returning blood supply switches our normal thinking processes back on.

The ESR enables us to recover rapidly from stress overloads. This, alone, makes it an invaluable technique. Now we are not so helpless. We can move — at will — out of Overwhelm and into a more productive state, by-passing the harmful side of stress. Used over time the ESR alters our entire perspective about stress. We get more confident in our ability to recover, so we are less rattled when Overwhelm does hit us unexpectedly.

The ESR also gives us the power to re-examine unpleasant situations without re-triggering ourselves. This means we can use the normal processes of the brain, quite literally, to 'change our mind' about a stressor. For instance, the ESR can be quite effective for eliminating some of the symptoms of airborne allergies. We don't remove or change the pollens in this case, but instead re-educate the central nervous system so it behaves more appropriately when exposed to the pollens.

Our brains are designed to locate our best options — to make choices that produce the most pleasure, the least pain, and the greatest long-range possibility of fulfilling our needs and desires. This task is a complex one. We may find it hard to believe that a condition like hay fever represents a 'best' choice; but for the bodymind of the person with allergies, this is true.

When we do the ESR, the brain perceives that we are able to remain calm and organized in a situation that formerly threatened our balance. It receives more, better-organized information about the stressor itself and how we are reacting to it. In most cases, the brain eventually collects enough accurate information to arrive at a more constructive response.

Reactions to small stressors can often be re-programmed in one ESR session. Habits and conditions that are chronic may take more time. For these, we can do the ESR daily until we see a change. Then if we slip back into the old pattern, we can repeat the technique as needed.

While the original use of the ESR was to re-program negative experiences, it is just as powerful at making already good responses even better. Holding the frontal eminences during any mental activity seems to add extra clarity and creativity to our thinking. Some athletes, for example, use the ESR technique this way to rehearse their movements and strategies beforehand so their competitive performances will be top-notch. Even more dramatic results come when the ESR is teamed with other reprogramming methods such as self-hypnosis, relaxation training, guided imagery, neuro-linguistics, and others.

Finally, the ESR equips us with a compassionate and realistic way to help others with their upsets. Using it, we can help someone back to clarity, self-responsibility, and self-control. A person can even remain silent and get valuable aid with problems too vague, too personal, or too upsetting to discuss.

Using the ESR sets the stage for transforming our point of view about stress. The process eventually becomes so thoroughly internalized — we've re-set ourselves so often — that our whole response to pressure begins to alter. While demanding situations once caused a loss of organization and control, we find ourselves by-passing Overwhelm entirely and spontaneously adjusting toward better organization and control. Now we are honestly able to meet problems as opportunities and to experience stressful events as exciting challenges.

The Bottom Line

Different people have different stress-management needs. Some are happy just to recover from their worst stress overdoses. Others want to reduce their current stress load and avoid serious stress-related illness. Only a few are ready to add more intense pressures to their lives. Whatever our needs, we can turn to Touch for Health and other stress-management techniques for help.