

When and why stress can be beneficial for you

Chapter 01: Perception transforms stress

Often we associate the word stress with something negative, and would never expect the words, “Oh, I’m so happy to be feeling stressed”, to leave someone’s lips. However, believe it or not, a certain level of stress within your life can actually be positive and helpful for your mental states and can even serve as a source of motivation.

Stress can be defined as anything which causes you to feel some level of pressure, and has the capacity to affect homeostasis. Homeostasis can be thought of as the base levels within your biological environment for example temperature. Your body is always working to maintain these levels,

and thus you undergo automatic adjustments in response to external factors such as stress. Luckily, despite these internal biological processes being automatic, when you can learn to change your relationship to stress via your perception of it, you can actually utilize it to achieve increased health and happiness. This is as your perception of stress ultimately depends on how well you believe yourself capable of coping with it. For example, if you experience stressful events and have the mindset of, “Yes, this is stressful, but I know that I can get through it”, as opposed to, “This is far too stressful and I don’t even know where to start”, then you can more easily turn the perceived bad stress into good stress, and vice versa.

Chapter 02: What is good stress?

Eustress is the official word used in psychology when referring to 'good stress'. Formulated by endocrinologist Hans Selye, using the Greek prefix 'eu' meaning good, and 'stress' literally meaning stress. Eustress, or good stress, can be attributed to the type of stress which occurs when you experience excitement. When you are excited, stress hormones are released and bodily responses, such as an increased heart rate and quickened pulse, occur. Responses which can cause you to feel motivated and happy to 'get things done'. For example, creating a new project, going on a first date, buying a new home or even just trying something new for the first time. Good stress is the type of bodily response which gives you those feelings of zest for life, and makes you feel alive and exhilarated within the moment.

Chapter 03: Types of bad stress

On the other hand, what would be defined as bad stress, or distress, is what we usually associate with 'feeling stressed'.

There are two main types of bad stress.

The first is acute stress, which comes from sudden events requiring quick responses, such as jumping out of the way of a car you didn't see initially. Acute stress is usually short lasting and doesn't take much of a toll if you can find a way to relax afterwards and return to a stable level of homeostasis.

The second is chronic stress, and occurs when we are unable to return to homeostasis due to repeatedly facing stressors. Chronic stress is usually associated with long-term stressors, such as a stressful job, financial stress or perhaps an unhappy living environment. Our bodies are not naturally designed to deal with chronic stress, and thus can cause long-lasting detrimental health effects, including but not limited to heart disease, high blood pressure, digestive disorders, depression and anxiety.

Chapter 04: Turning stress into challenge and growth

The good news is that when you can change your perception around bad stress and your ability to cope with it, or even purposefully add good stress into your life, you actually increase your levels of resilience against the bad types of stress. This has the potential to change your entire experience of the event itself into something more positive. Moving away from feelings embedded in fear and stress, and instead to those of growth and challenge.

For example, when you can see something as a challenge, which can act as a catalyst towards your growth and resilience, you may be able to turn this stress into feelings of excitement and anticipation, good stress.

Chapter 05: How to start transforming stress

So, how to start transforming stress? You can firstly begin to do this by recognizing whether what you are feeling is good or bad stress. If you are feeling anticipation or excitement your perception of the task or event

would more likely be, "I want to", rather than an, "I have to do x,y or z".

By recognizing the things which are the "have to's" rather than the "want to's", you can then turn the "have to's" into growth challenges, and create excitement about them by breaking them into smaller pieces by doing the following.

Firstly, note down the resources which are needed in order to meet the challenge at hand. Then acknowledge your own strengths and those which will assist you in coping with this challenge. Seeing the potential benefits of dealing with the situation or task, what is the end goal and how you will feel once you've done this.

By doing the aforementioned, you can actually reduce the amount of stress you feel in relation to something which may have previously been perceived as bad stress. Potentially transforming the bad stress into good stress, as you are able to create an

environment and perception around it which instead encourages feelings of challenge and excitement, rather than dread.

Chapter 06: Seeing stress as an opportunity for growth

In practicing looking at things that you fear and dread as challenges and opportunities for growth, you can begin to build your sense of resilience and potentially reduce your automatic stress responses in the future – thus gearing yourself to experience more good stress than bad stress.

Next time you feel that familiar feeling of stress arise within you, stop and ask yourself, can I see this as a challenge? Then list your strengths and capabilities, which will help you meet the challenge at hand, building a sense of pride that you can handle it.