

Anxious? Stressed? That's Okay!

[Shamash Alidina](#) | April 13, 2015

Stress has got a bad reputation. A quick search for the term “stress” online, and I find the first five websites are about reducing stress and dealing with anxiety and depression. Magazines are full of tips for reducing stress. And the popular term “[mindfulness](#)” in part came from [Jon Kabat-Zinn](#)’s pioneering program called Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction.

But is stress really that bad? If you watch the [talk](#) by Health Psychologist Kelly McGonigal on TED, you may be pleasantly surprised. She highlighted a huge piece of [research](#) at University of Wisconsin-Madison that shocked many people. The research on 29,000 people over 8 years discovered that your view of stress impacts your health far more than the stress itself.

The research found that if you think of stress is always bad for you, then your prediction will come true. But, if you think stress is a good thing—it energizes you, challenges you and gets you moving—you’re also correct. People with a positive view of stress lived many years longer than those with a negative view of stress—an amazing fact.

So stress itself isn’t so bad after all. Part of the reason I titled my book, [The Mindful Way Through Stress](#), was to emphasize that it’s about discovering how to move within the feeling and experience of stress effectively, rather than just reducing stress.

Short-term stress has the following potential benefits: it boost your [immune system](#), makes you [more social](#), [improves learning](#) and may [improve memory](#).

But here’s an important point. We’re talking about short-term stress. Chronic stress isn’t such a good thing. Exercise is good for your body, as long as you’re not exercising all day, every day. So a bit of stress is fine from time to time, as long as you know how to let go of that stress. Mindfulness meditation is one

excellent way to achieve that.

Mindfulness can help you to spot not only when your stress level is rising, but what your personal reaction to that stress is. Imagine you have an interview coming up. Do you think *I love this feeling. I feel so energized and pumped up to do this interview!* Or do you think *Oh no, I'm so stressed! I need to meditate away this feeling as soon as possible.*

Hans Selye, the renowned researcher who discovered the dangers of the stress response, later coined the terms eustress and distress. He was keen to emphasise that all stress is not bad. Eustress is a positive experience, the stress you feel when you're having fun on a rollercoaster, or down a ski slope. Or even in an interview for that matter. And distress arises when you tell yourself you don't like the feeling and experience that you're having.

How to Reframe Your Stress

Here's a simple, short exercise to help you to re-frame your stress next time your heart begins to race. Give it a go now if you have time, and again when you feel your stress levels rising:

1. Find a place to comfortably sit or lie down, and close your eyes if you can.
2. Spend the first minute being aware of your body and getting comfortable. As time passes, you'll notice more body parts that are tense and begin to relax them as far as you can.
3. Notice the physiology of the stress response in your body. Your heart racing, the tingling in your stomach and/or fingers. Any tension in your body.
4. Say to yourself *There is a positive side to stress. Stress can be energising and uplifting. In the short term, stress can boost my immune system, improve performance and optimise learning.* Combine this with a little smile on your face.

This combination of mental reframing with a little smile on your face will help to start changing the feeling of stress to be a more positive experience.

Hopefully, you don't feel a failure for feeling stressed—stress is a natural feeling to have from time to time. Discover not just how to reduce stress, but how to reframe that very human experience.

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