

# Stressed: How to Survive And Thrive

Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.



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Special and grateful acknowledgement is made to Dr. Sharon Johnson for graciously sharing her story.

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# About the Author

Dr. Grace Sidberry is a clinical psychologist with extensive experience treating people dealing with stress related issues. She specializes in working with couples teaching them practical tools for improving communication, managing conflict and enhancing intimacy.

Visit [www.yourloverelationship.com](http://www.yourloverelationship.com) for tools and strategies to help you build a great love relationship.

# Preface

Stress is a part of everyday life; it affects how you function at work, with family and friends and how you feel personally. ***Stressed: How To Survive and Thrive*** shares information about what happens when you are stressed. You will learn where the sensations originate in your body, how it impacts you physically and emotionally and you will learn how to cope effectively.

The quick-read format of this e-book is designed to provide you with relevant, scientifically based information and ideas that you can apply immediately to change how you manage stress. The pictures throughout the book will enhance your reading experience. This makes it easy to grasp new concepts as you associate what you've read with a memorable illustration.

Your default approach for managing stress has been established and reinforced over the course of your lifetime. In order to change deeply rooted patterns of responding, you must first become aware of how you react to stressors, then practice new strategies for coping. So review this e-book periodically in order to solidify what you've learned. Over time as you intentionally implement these adaptive tools, you may develop new response patterns that eventually become a part of your routine.



## Part One

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# The Nature of Stress and Its Impact on You

# What is Stress?

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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | Chapter 1  
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The stress responses is your body's instinctual reaction to threatening stimuli. Feelings of stress may be triggered by external factors such as financial difficulties, an argument with someone, or by internal factors such as thoughts about something unpleasant. When you are stressed, your normal balanced way of functioning is disrupted.

Day to day experiences stimulate the stress response even when you are not consciously aware of it.

# Problems lead to feelings of stress



# Happy events may also cause stress



# Stress: Identifying the Source

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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | Chapter 2  
by Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.

Sometimes deeply rooted issues, even from childhood, can be a source of stress that continues to impact you well into your adult life. Children who grow up in a chaotic, neglectful or abusive home environment may experience great difficulty learning how to effectively cope with stress.

Stress is unavoidable so one of the important tasks of childhood is to learn healthy strategies for coping. In a home environment that is predominantly supportive and loving, children are more likely to develop the appropriate stress management skills.



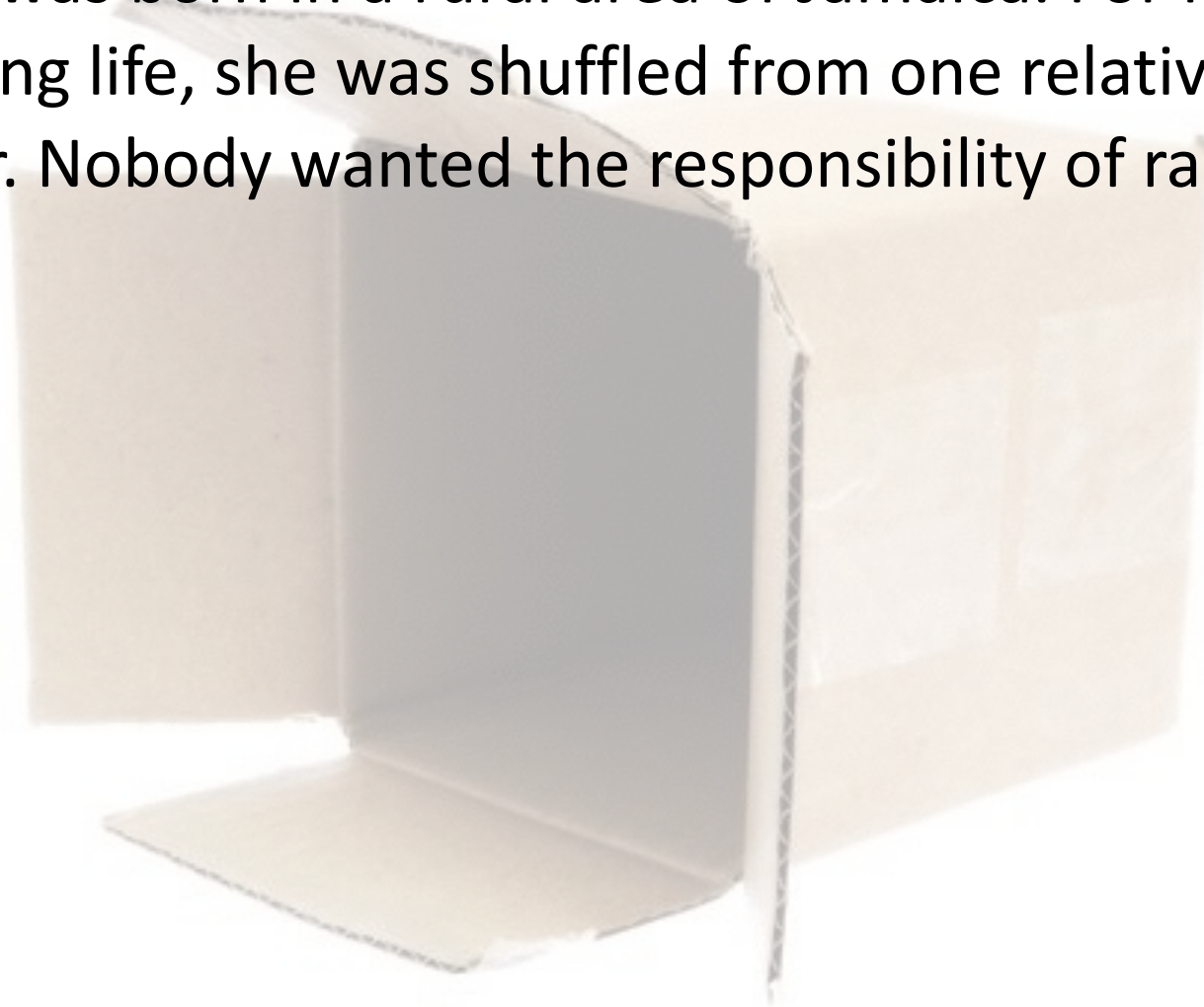
However, if you grew up in a dysfunctional household, before you conclude that all is lost, there is positive news!

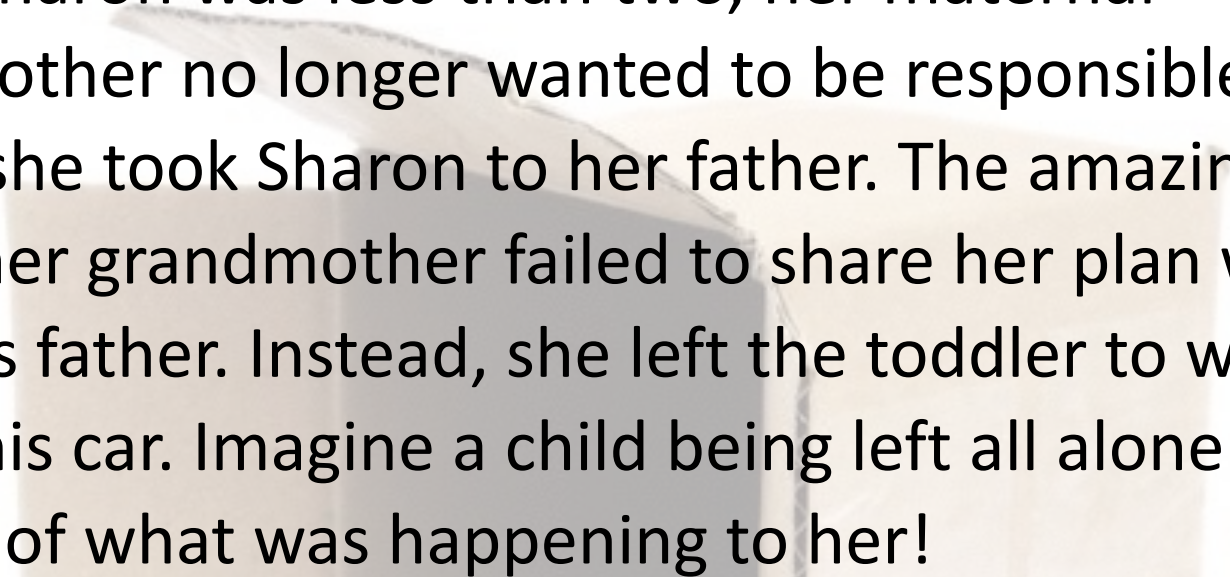
You are not simply a product of your past! Regardless of what your childhood was like, it is possible for you to learn how to manage your response to stress in an adaptive way.

# Sharon's Story



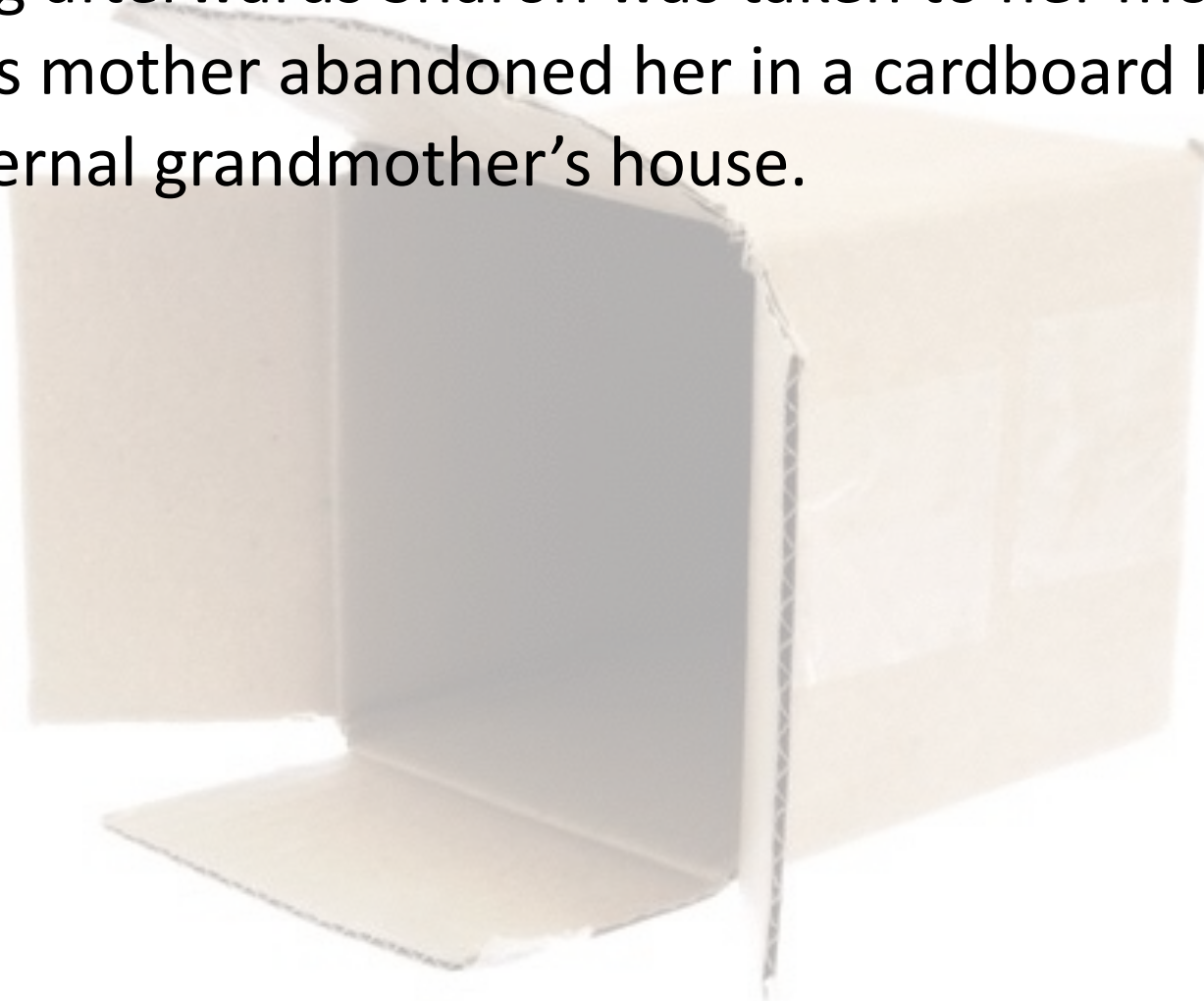
Sharon was born in a rural area of Jamaica. For much of her young life, she was shuffled from one relative to another. Nobody wanted the responsibility of raising her.



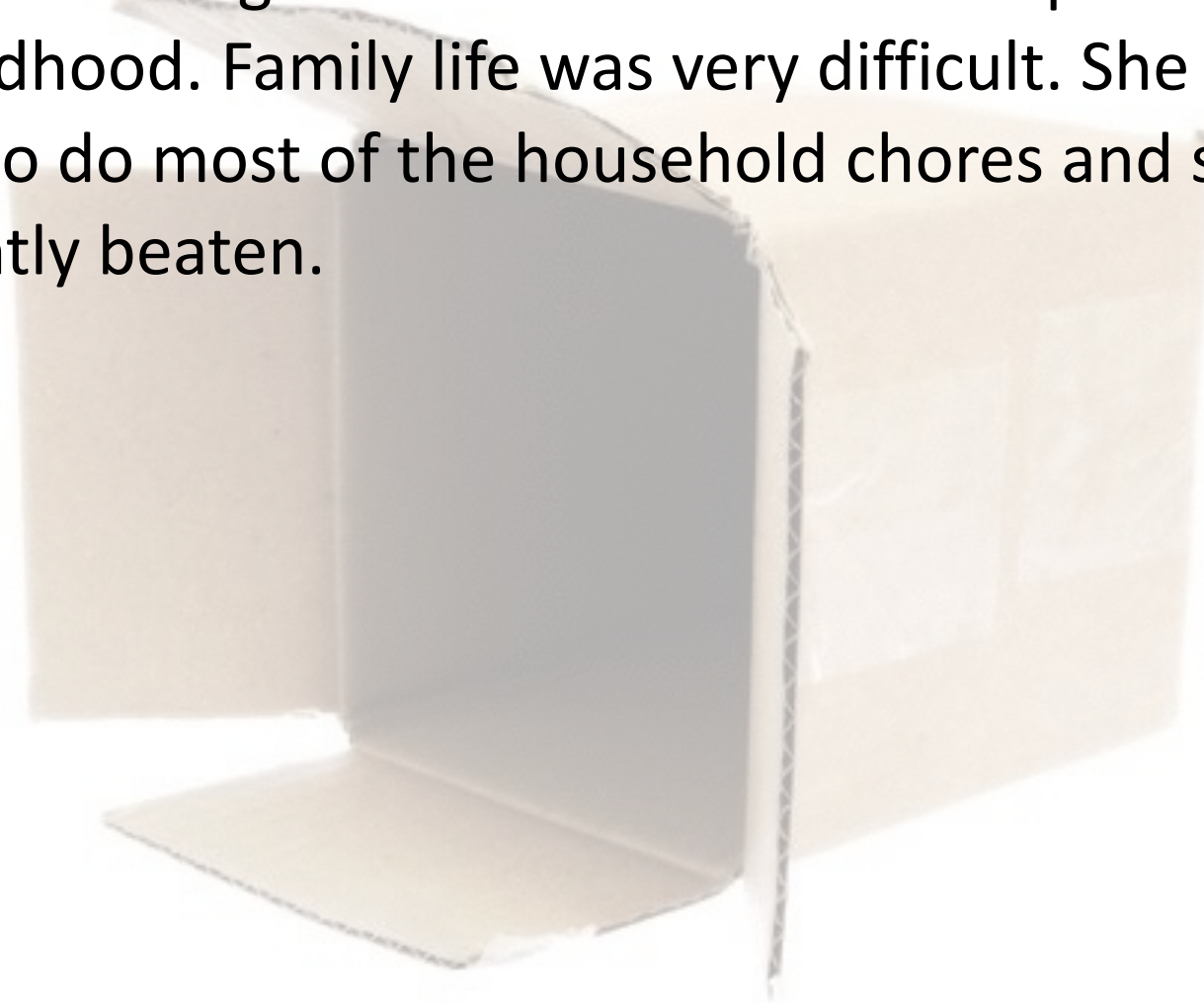


When Sharon was less than two, her maternal grandmother no longer wanted to be responsible for her, so she took Sharon to her father. The amazing thing is that her grandmother failed to share her plan with Sharon's father. Instead, she left the toddler to wait for him in his car. Imagine a child being left all alone with no idea of what was happening to her!

Not long afterwards Sharon was taken to her mother. Sharon's mother abandoned her in a cardboard box at her paternal grandmother's house.

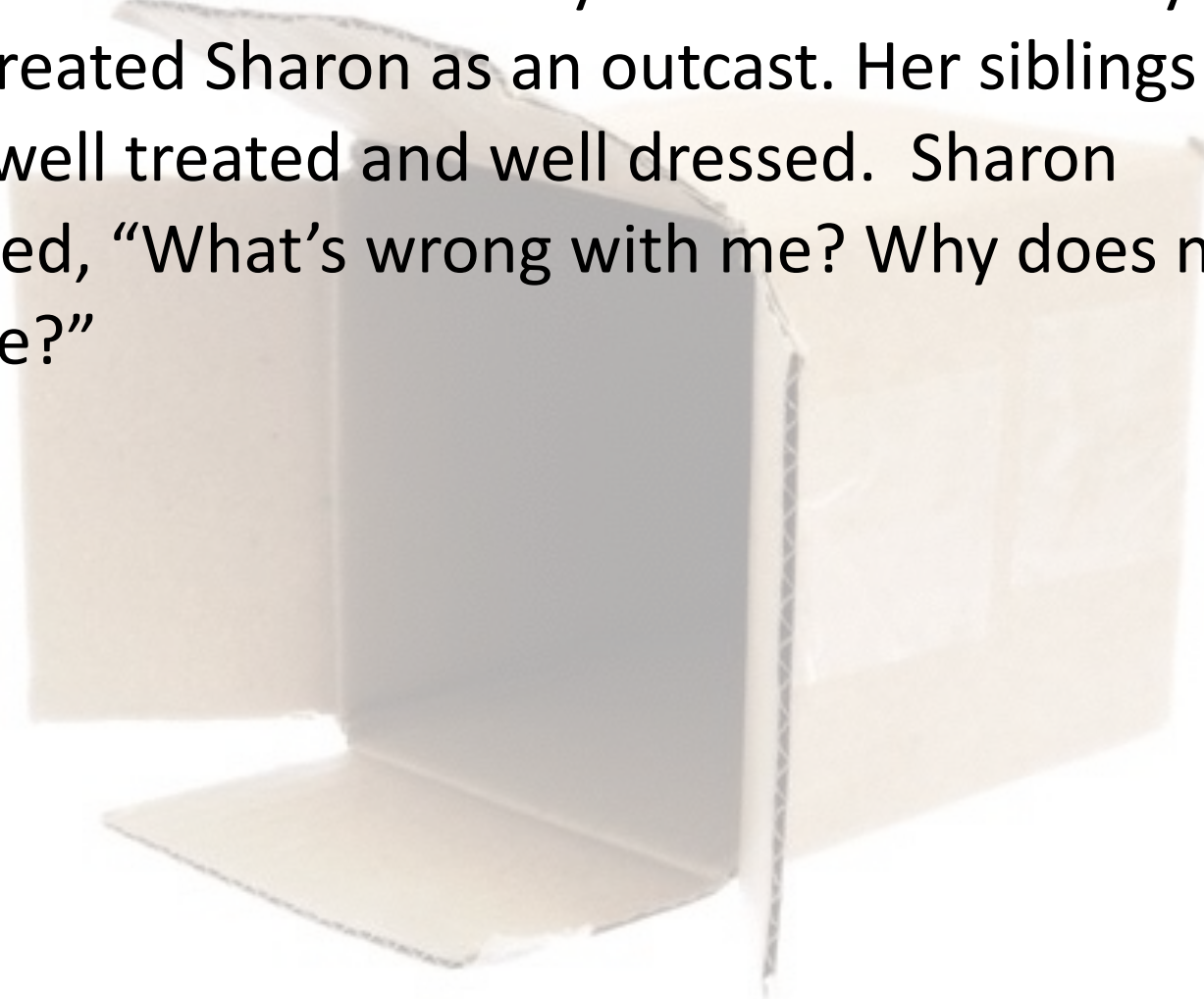


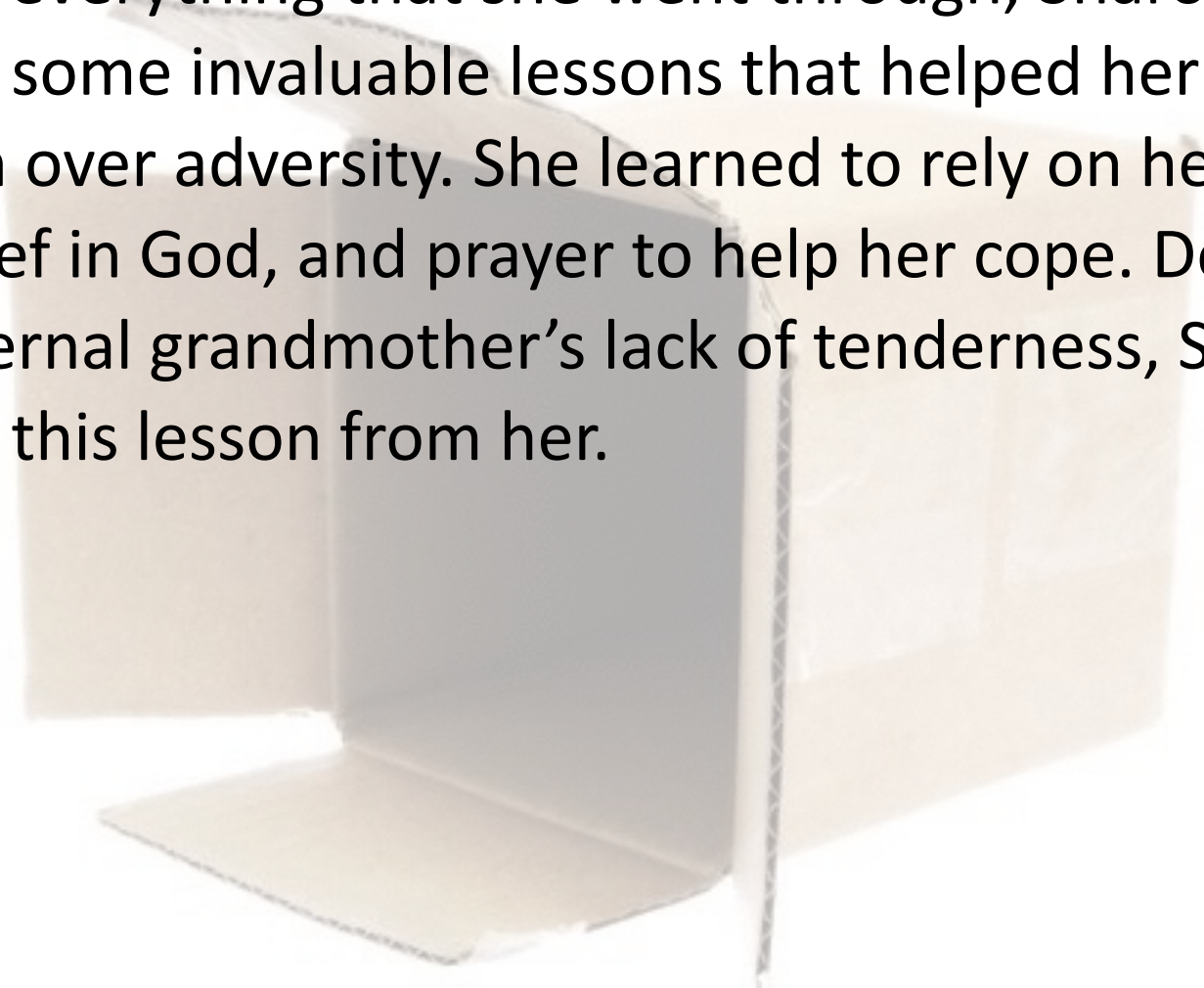
It was with this grandmother that Sharon spent most of her childhood. Family life was very difficult. She was forced to do most of the household chores and she was frequently beaten.





Sharon's father lived nearby with his new family. The family treated Sharon as an outcast. Her siblings were always well treated and well dressed. Sharon wondered, "What's wrong with me? Why does nobody want me?"

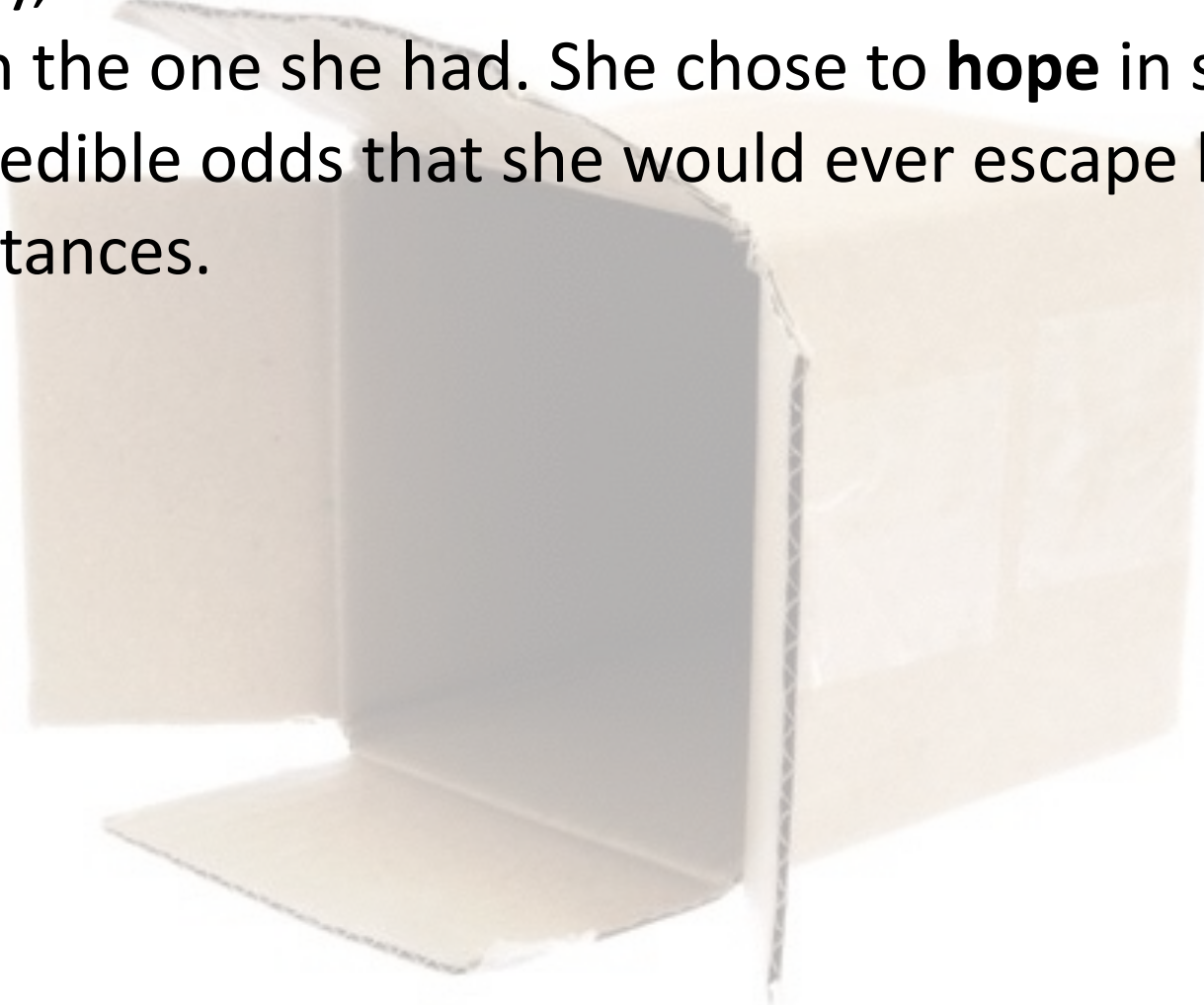




Despite everything that she went through, Sharon learned some invaluable lessons that helped her to triumph over adversity. She learned to rely on her **faith**, her belief in God, and prayer to help her cope. Despite her paternal grandmother's lack of tenderness, Sharon learned this lesson from her.



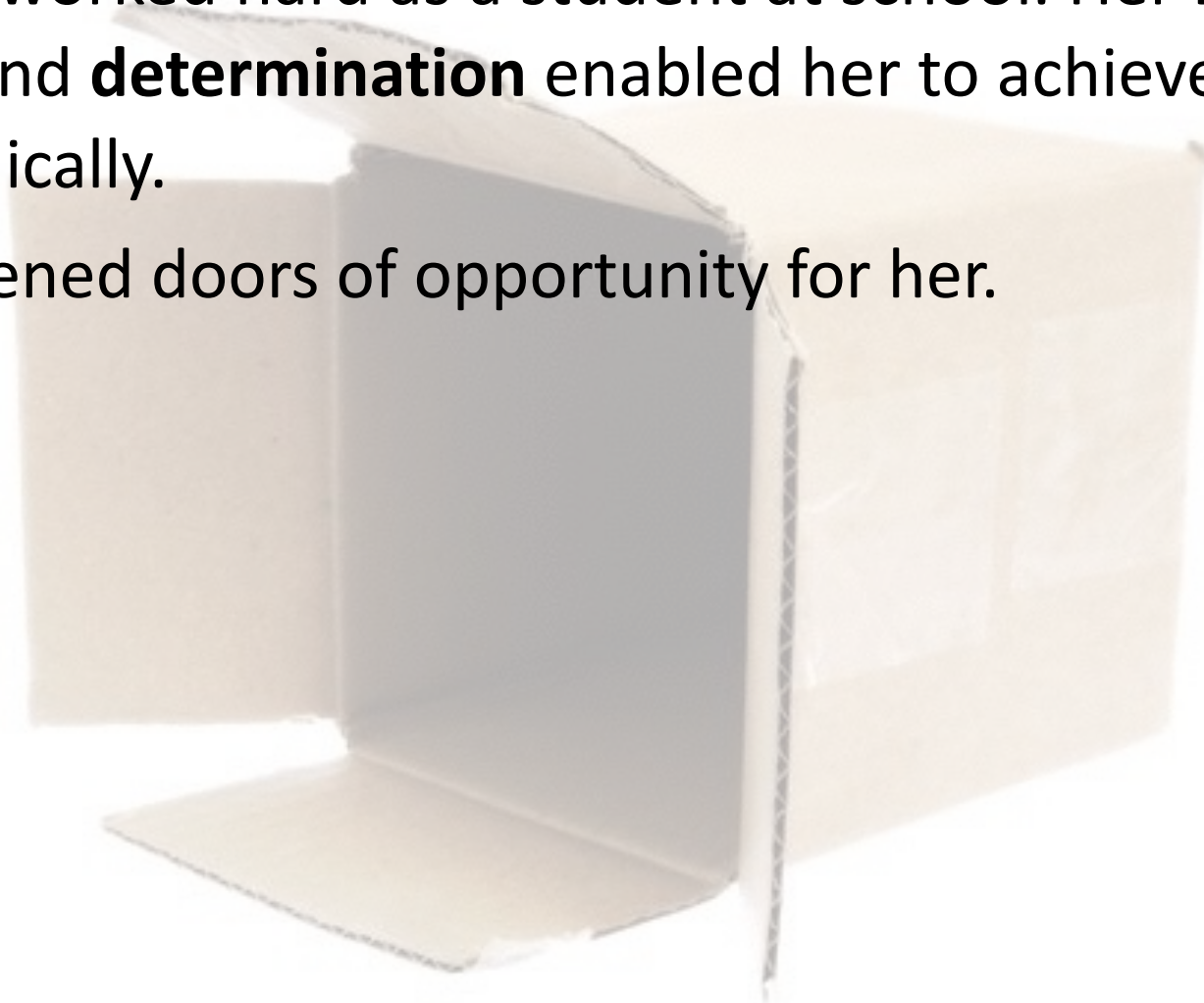
Secondly, Sharon realized that she wanted a different life than the one she had. She chose to **hope** in spite of the incredible odds that she would ever escape her circumstances.

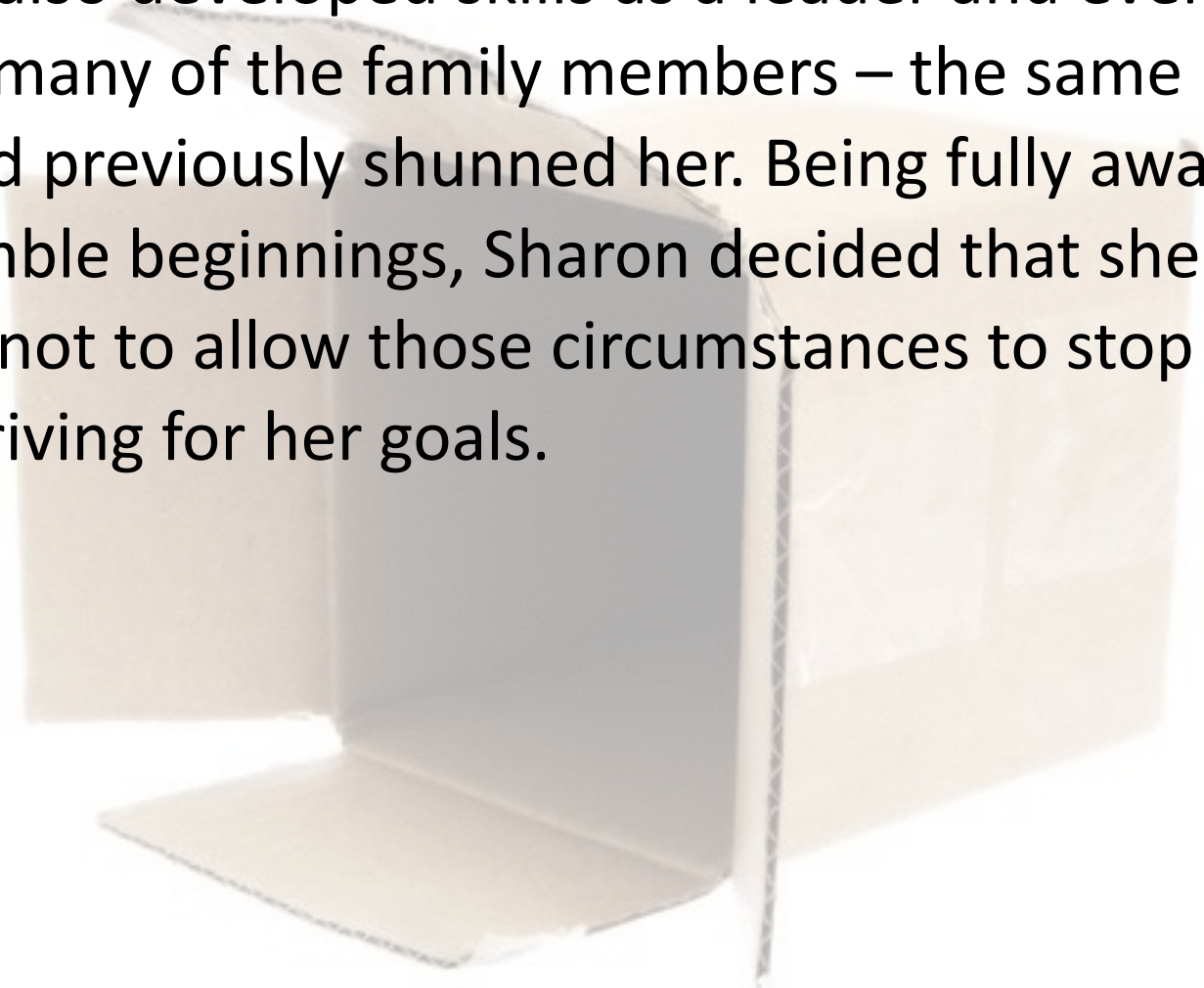


A third lesson was one of **determination**. Sharon experienced many daunting obstacles in her quest to escape the unhealthy environment in which she grew up. She learned to dream and keep going even when she had no idea where she was going or how she was going to get there.

Sharon worked hard as a student at school. Her **faith**, **hope**, and **determination** enabled her to achieve academically.

This opened doors of opportunity for her.





Sharon also developed skills as a leader and eventually helped many of the family members – the same people who had previously shunned her. Being fully aware of her humble beginnings, Sharon decided that she could choose not to allow those circumstances to stop her from striving for her goals.

Dr. Sharon Johnson is a published author, radio show host, and the CEO of Comtivate LLC, an organization that empowers, inspires, and motivates others through training, coaching, and public speaking.



Dr. Sharon Johnson

This story points out an undeniable fact – you do not get to choose your parents or the family in which you grow up. In order to move past the potentially debilitating impact of a chaotic and painful past, it is necessary for you to piece together, not just the details of the story, but also your emotional interpretation of what happened.

Accept your story for what it is. Realize that **you get to choose** the meaning you take from the story. Because this is so, you have the power to influence the rest of your life. Most importantly you are not defined, or limited by your story.

# The Origin of the Stress Response

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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | Chapter 3  
by Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.



A moderate amount of stress is essential to motivate us to accomplish our responsibilities.



Too little stress and you accomplish very little.





Too much stress and you become overwhelmed.



Negative emotions such as anger, frustration, fear and resentment also play a role in your experiencing of stress. Learning how to manage these emotions is important in order for you to cope effectively. Your emotions, mind and body are intricately involved when you are faced with a stressful situation.

Stress affects you emotionally, mentally and physically.





Your entire body responds to situations which are threatening.



Your body is designed to deal with the threat,  
then return to normal.



The primary purpose of the stress response is to enable survival. The stress response helped our early ancestors to survive life and death situations when they lived in a primitive environment.



Even though you may not encounter life or death situations on a regular basis, the same biological mechanism is at work, and your body produces certain characteristic responses.

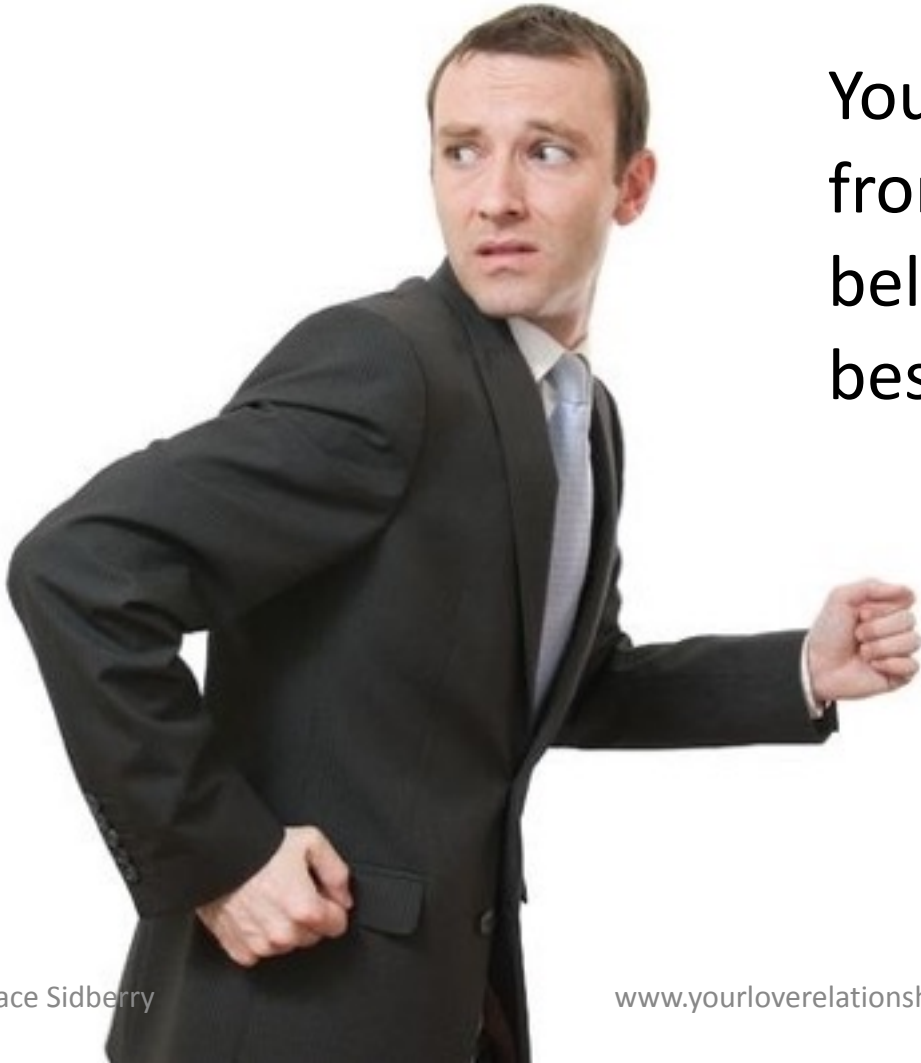
The human body is engineered to deal with a major threat in one of three ways:

# The Fight Response to Stress



The instinct to fight may be aroused in you when you believe you can take on the threat, fight and manage to win.

# The Flight Response to Stress



You choose to run away from the threat when you believe that escaping is the best option.

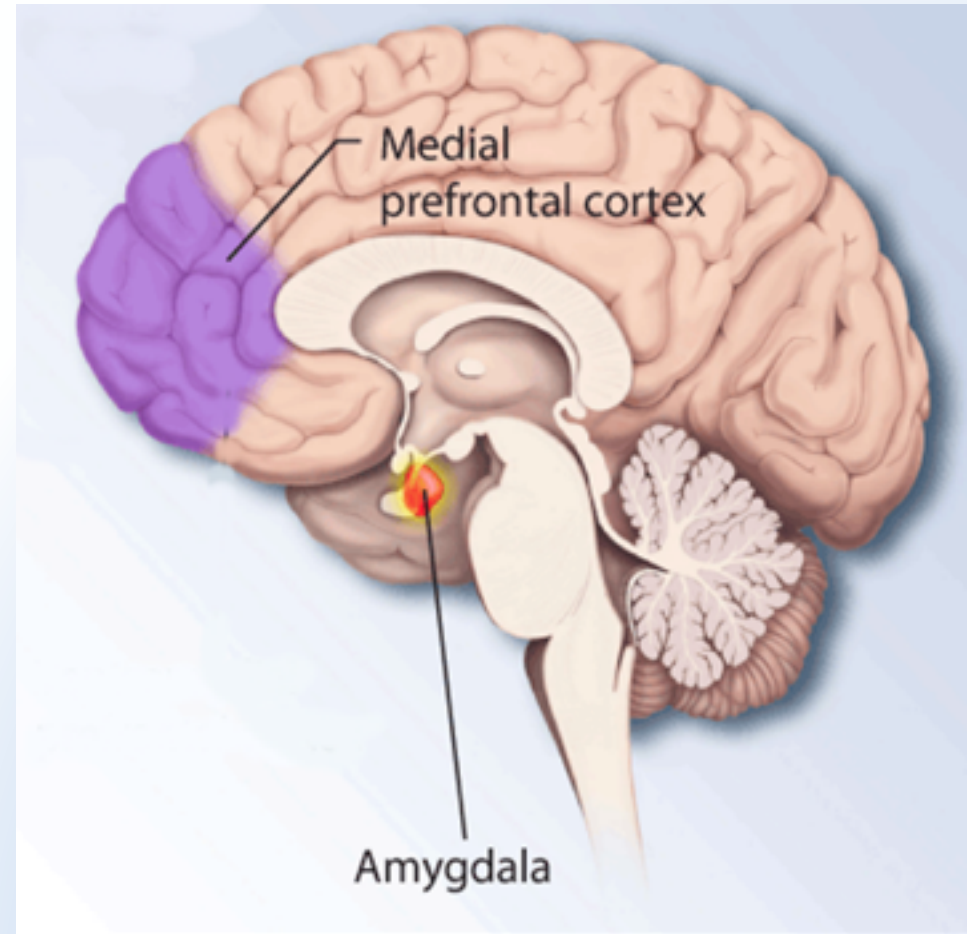
# The Freeze Response to Stress



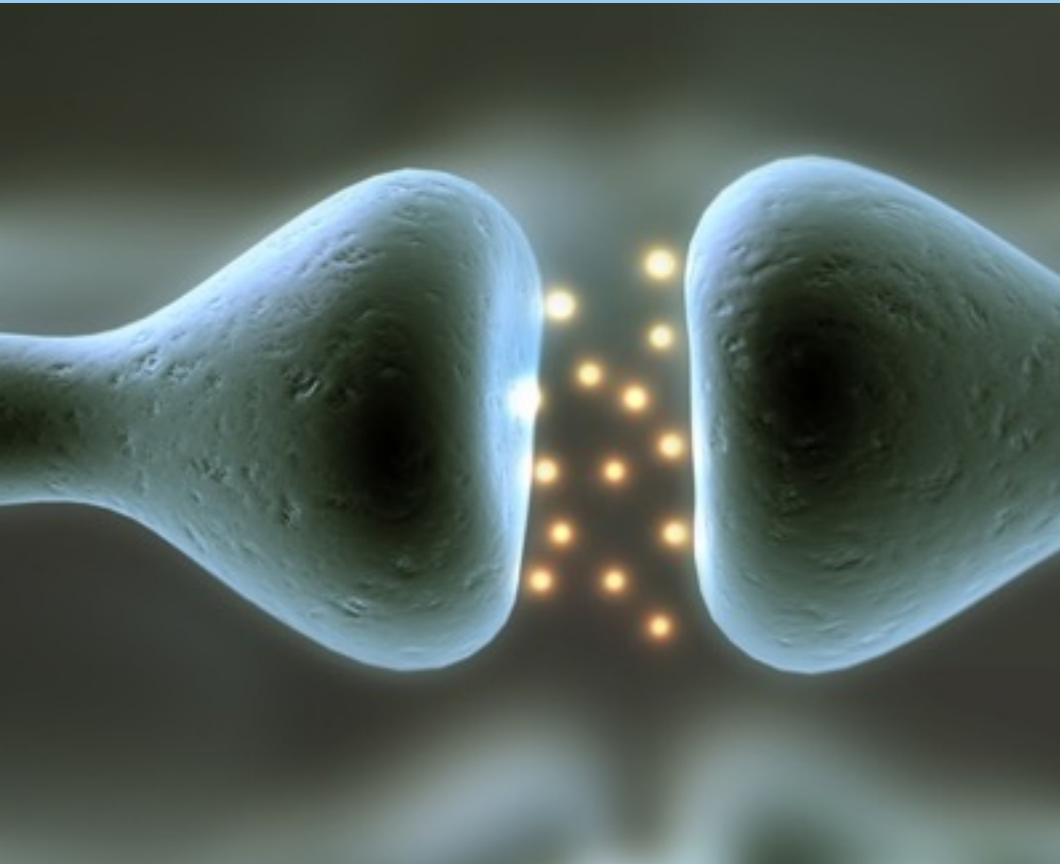
In situations where the threat is overwhelming, you may shut down as you feel powerless to escape, and hopeless that you could fight and win.

The stress response starts in your brain.

The amygdala sounds the alarm and the rest of the body responds in a split second.



# Various chemical actions in your body cause:



- Increased heart rate
- Increased blood pressure
- Sweating
- Dilation of your pupils
- Muscle tension

# The stress response is an efficient way of managing a crisis.

At the time of a crisis, speed is essential so you react spontaneously without thinking. After a while, other areas of your brain begin to analyze the situation and determine whether you need to stay on alert.





After the threat is over, your body is designed to return to a state of calm known as homeostasis.





There are times when homeostasis eludes you  
and you experience

# *Chronic Stress*

# Chronic Stress may be caused by problems such as:

- Job Loss
- Foreclosure
- Bankruptcy
- Marital Problems
- Parenting Concerns



## Symptoms of chronic stress include:

- Difficulty sleeping
- Increase in appetite
- Decrease in appetite
- Upset stomach
- Headaches



## Symptoms of chronic stress also include:

- Muscle tension
- Irritability
- Anxiety
- Depression
- Loss of interest in sex



# Chronic stress can contribute to:

Memory  
problems

Insomnia

Depression

Obesity

Compromised  
immune system

Digestive  
Problems

Heart Disease

# A Stress Quiz

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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | A Stress Quiz  
by Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.

# How stressed are you?

Answer each of the following statements

Yes No

1. You are concerned about your weight.

2. Frequently you feel irritable or angry.

3. You lack motivation to do things that would be good for you.

## How stressed are you? (contd.)

- |   | Yes                      | No                       |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 4. You lack sufficient energy.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. You feel that there is never enough time to accomplish all you need to do. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. You feel dissatisfied with your job.                                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |



## How stressed are you? (contd.)

- |  | Yes                      | No                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 7. You are experiencing difficulty falling asleep or staying asleep. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. You are experiencing frequent headaches.                          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. You feel nervous and anxious quite often.                         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## How stressed are you? (contd.)

- |  | Yes                      | No                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 10. You are feeling sad or depressed.                        | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 11. Frequently you suffer from indigestion or upset stomach. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 12. Frequently your muscles feel tense.                      | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

## How stressed are you? (contd.)

- |  | Yes                      | No                       |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 13. You grind your teeth when you sleep.         | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 14. You are experiencing financial difficulties. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Total Yes responses:

\_\_\_\_\_

Total No responses:

\_\_\_\_\_

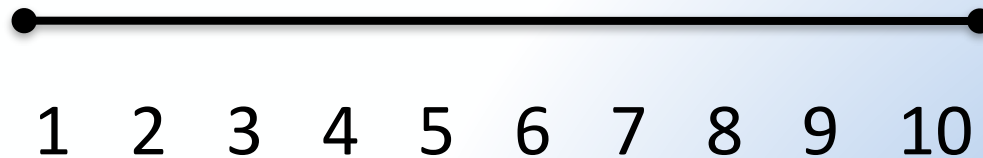
## How stressed are you? (Contd.)

15. Rate your health, choose one of the following:

Poor       Fair       Good       Excellent

## How stressed are you? (Contd.)

16. On a scale from 1 to 10, with 1 being very low stress and 10 being extreme, indicate how stressed you feel on average.



## How stressed are you? (Contd.)

You can benefit from learning how to manage your stress more effectively if:

- ✓ For questions 1-14, you have more Yes responses than No responses
- ✓ You have rated yourself in fair or poor health
- ✓ You have rated yourself at a 6 or higher on the 10 point scale.

## Part Two

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# Tools for Coping with Stress

# Choose a Positive Attitude

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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | Chapter 4  
by Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.



*“Everything can be taken from a man but one thing;  
the last of the human freedoms – to **choose one’s**  
**attitude** in any given set of circumstances”*

– Viktor E. Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*

Your ability to choose your attitude is a powerful concept. If you choose to be hopeful, the outcome will be more positive than if you choose to be pessimistic. How you choose to focus your attention also affects your mood, your confidence and your ability to cope with stress.

If you focus excessively on your problems, they seem overwhelming as you realize that you do not have the power to change the situation. Instead, identify other factors where you do have some control. Turn your attention and your energy there.



Circle of Concerns



Circle of Influence

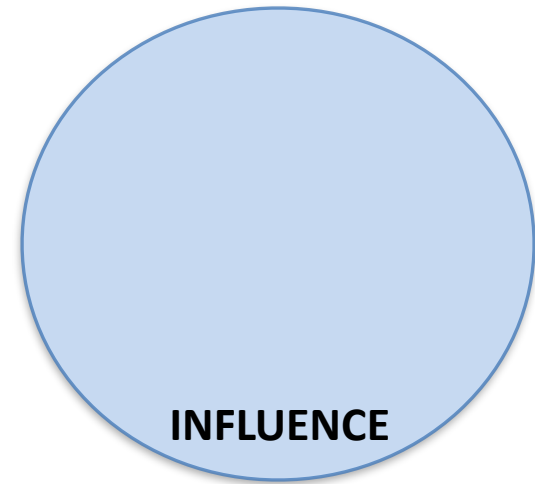
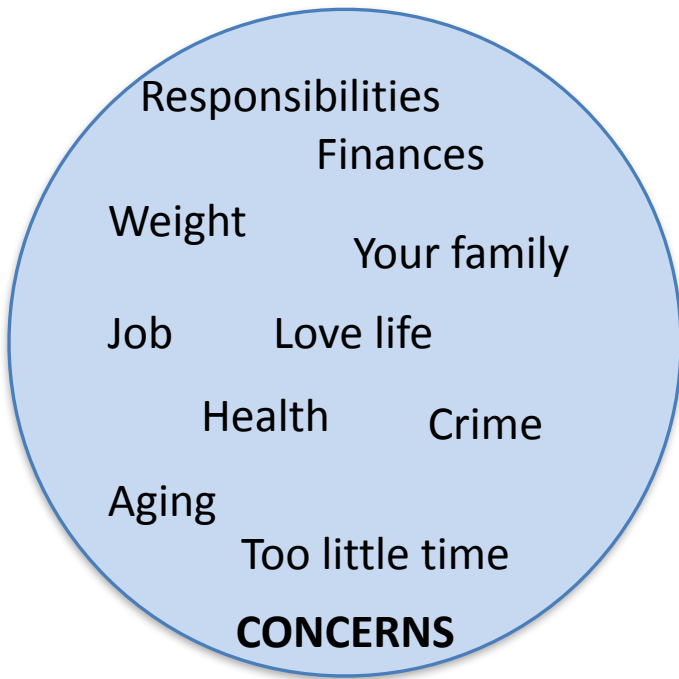
Author Steven Covey introduced the concept of two circles to illustrate the importance of focusing attention proactively. He labeled one the Circle of Concerns, and the other the Circle of Influence.

Circle of Concerns

Circle of Influence



You get to ***CHOOSE*** where you focus your attention.



Your concerns seem overwhelming when you focus excessively on them; you also feel helpless.



Responsibilities  
Finances  
Weight Your family  
Job Love life  
Aging Health Crime  
Too little time  
**CONCERNS**

Make a budget  
Reduce your expenses  
Eat healthy foods Exercise  
Work to improve relationships  
Set goals for your family  
Set goals for your job  
**INFLUENCE**



Focusing your attention and energy on things over which you have some control leaves you feeling hopeful and empowered to make changes in your life.

One of life's biggest stressors is the fact that the future brings uncertainty and change.



Being forced out of your comfort zone and having to face what is unfamiliar creates a sense of fear.





**Choosing to hope,** in spite of the uncertainty, opens the opportunity for new beginnings.



Life requires certain things from you, one of them is for you to grow.

You must leave your comfort zone if you are to grow.

If you are not feeling some discomfort, then you are not growing. Growing requires stretching; stretching involves some amount of pain.



Life also requires you to face the truth that things are not always fair.

Accept this fact for what it is; do not allow it to make you bitter.



Sometimes the presence of seemingly overwhelming challenges presents an opportunity for personal, emotional and spiritual growth.

This was Sharon's experience.

**Exercising faith is essential.**

**Faith is choosing to believe when there is no evidence that what you are hoping for will happen.**

# Align Your Body with Your Mind

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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | Chapter 5  
by Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.

People often complain that when they are stressed, they can't get their mind to shut off. This prevents them from being able to relax and fall asleep.

Willing your mind to shut off is not easy to do. In fact, it is impossible! However with practice you can train your mind to focus your attention in a different way; thus reducing those intrusive thoughts.

Here's one way to do this ...

Pay attention to your breath as you breathe in and as you breathe out. Keep the focus of your attention on your breath for several minutes.



You will notice that your mind wanders. When you realize your mind has wandered, gently redirect the focus back to the breath.





Breathing is a rhythmic and soothing activity. When you focus on your breathing for several minutes, it helps to reduce your heart rate, lowers your blood pressure and it relaxes you.

As you breathe, notice the smooth, rhythmic movement of your chest in and out with each breath. It is helpful to **focus on your breathing** for short periods **several times everyday**. This is an excellent technique for calming your body and your mind.

The benefit of focusing on your breathing goes beyond regaining your composure in a moment of crisis. Scientific researchers have found that practicing techniques such as this can help you to improve your health and strengthen your ability to recover from stressful events.

The health benefit of practicing breathing daily comes from its impact on your nervous system, specifically, your vagus nerve.



The vagus nerve is the largest nerve in the body. It connects the brain to the major organ systems including the heart, lungs and digestive tract. The major organs communicate with the brain through the vagus nerve. This information tells the brain what is happening in the lower regions of the body.

In moments of significant stress, the alarm messages, such as increased heart rate and heightened blood pressure, are transmitted to the brain. Your brain interprets the signals concluding that you are in crisis; all attention and effort is directed towards your survival.

In the midst of the stress response your actions are based on instinct; your reactions are rapidly deployed and bypass the area of your brain that processes information in a logical and rational manner. This is why under pressure you may say and do things that do not reflect your typical style. You may even find that you say or do things that later you regret.



The vagus nerve plays a critical role in helping you to calm down after a stressful event. Information is transmitted from the brain to the major organs through the vagus nerve. After the crisis has passed, the brain gives the signal to be calm so the body can return to its normal state known as homeostasis.

Individuals who are described as having a healthy vagal tone are better able to recover from stressful situations. These are people who don't remain angry or stressed out for very long.

Individuals with poor vagal tone have a harder time coping with stress. They tend to be more moody and may be more susceptible to illnesses. It takes them a longer time to recover from a stressful event.

Paying attention to your breathing improves your vagal tone. It also facilitates the release of certain hormones that help to slow down your heart rate and reduce your blood pressure.

# Present Moment Awareness

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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | Chapter 6  
by Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.

Another powerful technique for coping with stress is to shift your thoughts away from being preoccupied with what has happened in the past. The past is gone and cannot be changed. Also shift your thoughts from worrying about the future.

All the worrying in the world will not change what is going to happen.

The effect of spending your time and energy regretting the past or worrying about the future is that you miss the opportunity to live fully in the present moment. Many people function on automatic pilot going through daily routines but not really engaging fully in their activities and experiences.

How often do you drive to a familiar location and have no recollection of the journey? How often do you find yourself reading a book and at the end of the page, you realize you have no idea what you just read? This lack of focus can also interfere with your being fully available in your relationships with others.



Dwelling on the past tends to keep you living in the past and marinating in a stew of pain, guilt, fear, anger or bitterness. Fretting about the future is unproductive; most of the things you fret about do not happen the way you fear it will.

When you are consumed by your own thoughts, you pay little attention to what's happening around you in the present.



Shift your focus by tuning into the information coming from your five senses. Pay attention to touch, and to the sights, sounds, taste and smells around you.



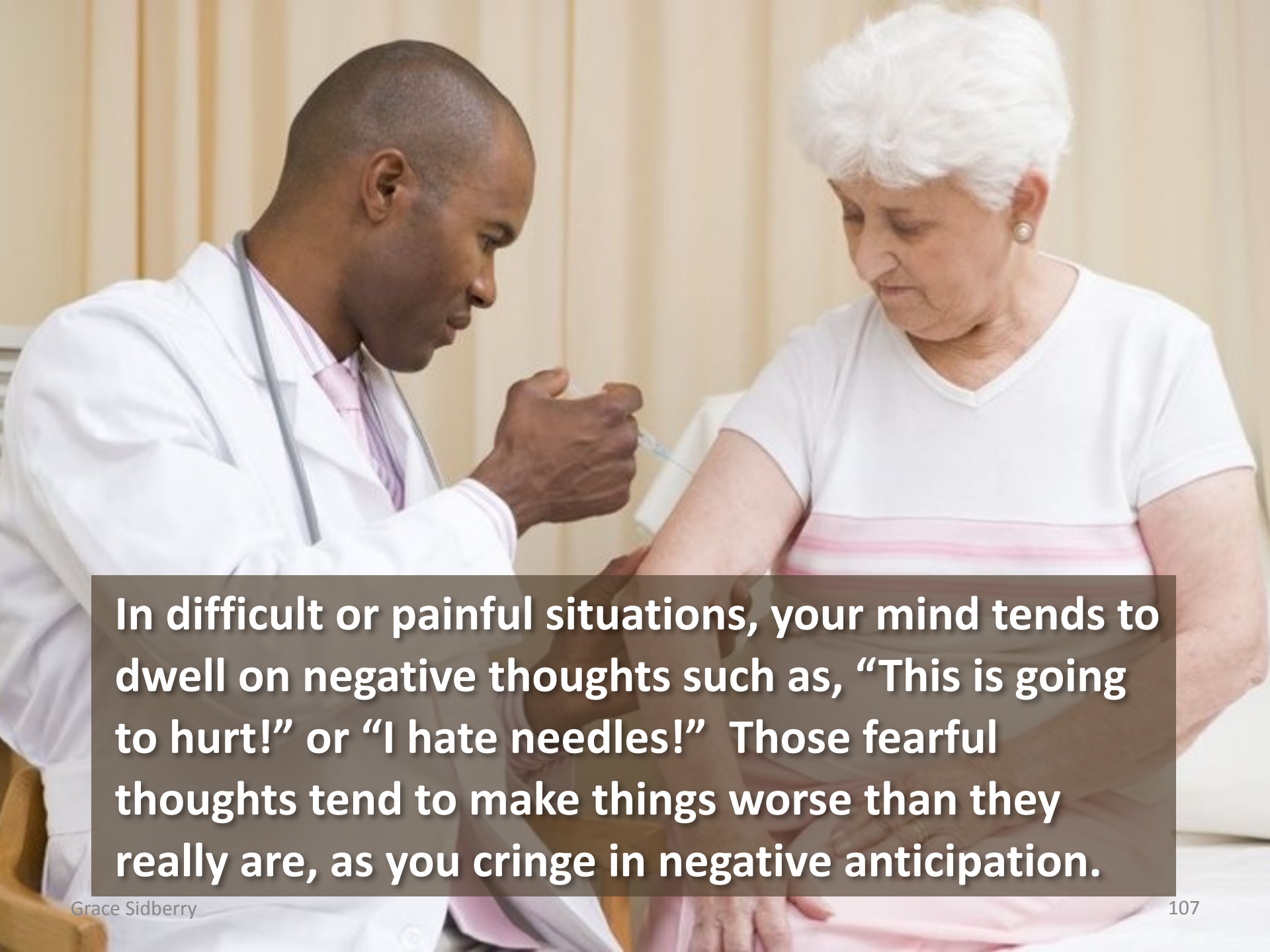


You will find that your thoughts and your mood will change; your body will also be less stressed. Start a ritual, commit to practicing present moment awareness daily.




By shifting the focus of your attention away from your negative thoughts, you are freed up to more effectively choose a healthy response to the situation you are facing.

Shifting your focus to what's happening in the present moment is beneficial, even when your present moment experience is not the most pleasant.

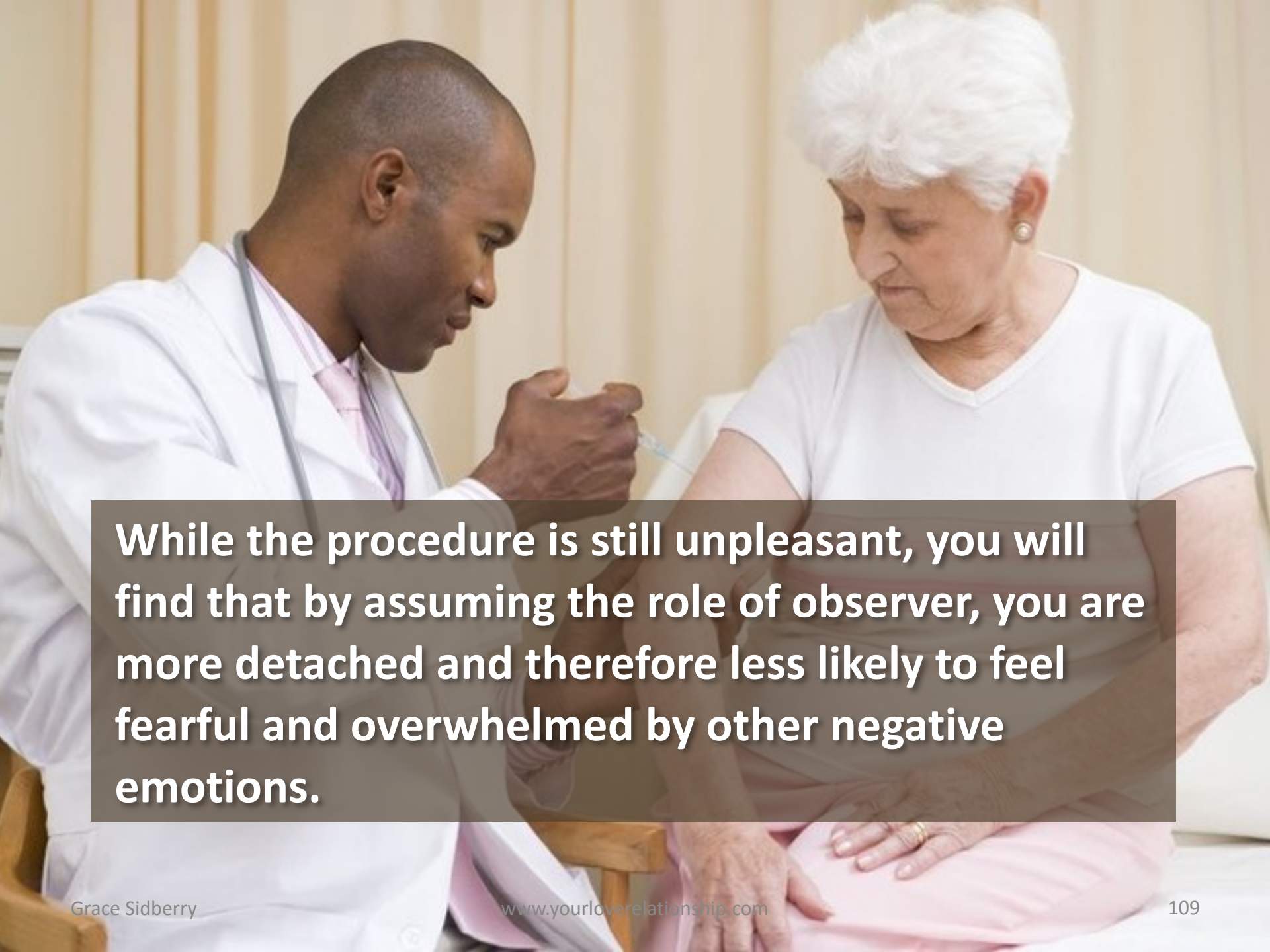


**In difficult or painful situations, your mind tends to dwell on negative thoughts such as, “This is going to hurt!” or “I hate needles!” Those fearful thoughts tend to make things worse than they really are, as you cringe in negative anticipation.**





**Instead, try to approach the situation with an open mind. Curiously observe what is happening. In this example you might first notice the prick of the needle, then a sharp pain as the doctor inserts it. This is followed by a burning sensation as the medicine enters your arm.**



**While the procedure is still unpleasant, you will find that by assuming the role of observer, you are more detached and therefore less likely to feel fearful and overwhelmed by other negative emotions.**

# Release The Stronghold of Hidden Wounds

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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | Chapter 7  
by Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.

A lot of the stress you experience comes from the influence of unresolved and hidden wounds. Acknowledging these wounds and learning to reframe your attitude and your mindset helps to improve your response to stress.

Recently, I had the experience of watching an old TV show called Daniel Boone. As I watched, I found myself responding with a deep sense of sadness as the storyline revealed themes of prejudice and injustice.

The main characters were prejudiced towards the Native American characters. There was also a theme of insensitivity and disregard for the rights of a Native American woman; who was being offered as a token of peace to a rival tribe.

My sadness came from realizing how prevalent these themes still are today, even though we live in an enlightened world. A lot of people go through life being affected by deep wounds of abuse, injustice, feelings of inadequacy and poor self-worth.



These issues can create internal stress; especially when current events serve to trigger uncomfortable feelings. You may not even be consciously aware of why you feel the way you do.

In his book *Mindsight: The New Science of Personal Transformation*, Dan Siegel speaks of the value of developing a place of inner calm within the mind where you can be fully aware of your thoughts and emotions without allowing them to overpower you.

Siegel uses the metaphor of a camera and a tripod to illustrate the process of internal reflection or introspection. When you use the camera and tripod effectively, you will be able to maintain your composure and a healthy perspective, even in difficult circumstances.



The lens of the camera represent the ability to tune in and become aware of what is on your mind.



The tripod has three legs. It keeps the camera steady so that the picture is clear and crisp. Each leg of the tripod plays a role in achieving that crisp and clear picture.

The three legs are a metaphor for:  
Openness, Observation and Objectivity.  
The goal is to observe your thoughts and feelings objectively, with an attitude of openness and acceptance.

Use the breathing exercise recommended earlier to get you to a place of mental calm. You are now in a position where you are able to accept your thoughts and feelings as they are without judgment.

Realize that you are more than just your thoughts and feelings.

In this place of inner calm, you may also remind yourself of your innate worth as a human being and the unquestionable fact that your life has purpose.



Ask yourself whether your current thoughts and feelings are being influenced by previous experiences.

Try to determine how much of what you are currently feeling is due to old issues.

Choose to stay focused in the current moment.

Respond objectively to the situation at hand.

Even when your situation is difficult it helps to realize that you are not at the mercy of your situation; or at the mercy of your thoughts and feelings.



You are free from the burden of living in what may otherwise appear to be an oppressive environment.

Sometimes the pain of dealing with unresolved issues or hidden wounds is too much to bear by yourself. You may benefit from establishing a relationship with a licensed therapist who can guide and support you as you work to resolve the issues and build healthy coping skills.

# Decrease Your Stress with Healthy Food Choices


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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | Chapter 8  
by Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.



Making simple changes to your diet can help to improve how you manage stress. Increase your intake of vegetables and fruits, nuts and legumes such as beans, peas and lentils. Decrease your intake of fatty meat, foods with added sugar and processed foods.





**When you are experiencing stress, your body secretes a hormone called Cortisol. Cortisol is produced in your adrenal glands located on top of your kidneys. Sustained stress and the accompanying heightened cortisol levels can contribute to stress eating.**



In addition, cortisol triggers certain enzymes located in the fat cells in the abdomen, to convert another hormone, cortizone into more cortisol. The effect is increased abdominal fat.



**Women tend to crave foods that are high in sugar and fat, thus increasing the likelihood of weight gain around the middle.**



The desire to eat when you are stressed occurs because eating so called comfort foods can help to promote a relaxed, pleasant feeling. You can simulate the feeling of pleasure by choosing healthy foods that produce positive emotional effects.

Eating **complex carbohydrates** in conjunction with lean protein helps to facilitate the production of serotonin in your body. Serotonin is a brain chemical that helps to improve your mood and promote relaxation. Good sources of complex carbohydrates include - whole grain bread, potato, sweet potato, corn, yam, brown rice, lentils, couscous, beans, peas, pasta and oatmeal.



Eating **fruits** that are rich in Vitamin C is a great way to combat the effects of stress. Berries have high amounts of Vitamin C and are known to lower cortisol levels, they also help to reduce blood pressure and they sharpen your cognitive skills.





Fish with a high fat content such as tuna and salmon are excellent sources of **Omega 3 Fatty acid**. Omega 3 is beneficial in reducing the effects of stress, and guarding against depression and heart disease.



Leafy, green vegetables such as spinach, asparagus and brussels sprouts contain **folic acid**. Having enough of this nutrient in your diet helps to improve your mood.



Grace Sidberry



[www.yourloverelationship.com](http://www.yourloverelationship.com)



**Magnesium** is a mineral that is critical for helping to guard against the effects of stress. Good sources of magnesium include: dark leafy green vegetables, nuts such as almonds, cashews and peanuts. Also add a slice of avocado to your meal, this provides another great source of magnesium to your diet.



Nothing makes you feel better when you are stressed than indulging yourself just a bit. Try a warm, cup of **chamomile tea**. It is not only soothing to drink something warm, but chamomile helps to reduce feelings of anxiety and promote sleep.





Another delicious indulgence is treating yourself to a piece of chocolate. Just remember not to over indulge! You don't want to create another problem.



# Relieve Stress with Exercise

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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | Chapter 9  
by Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.

Exercise is an effective tool for fighting stress. Regular exercise restructures your brain by creating new brain cells. In stressful situations, these cells secrete a brain chemical called GABA.

GABA helps to soothe other brain cells that are activated as a result of the stress you are experiencing.



Exercise is also a great way to improve your mood. Exercising boosts the activity of chemicals in your body known as endorphins. Endorphins can stir feelings of exhilaration and increase your threshold for pain.





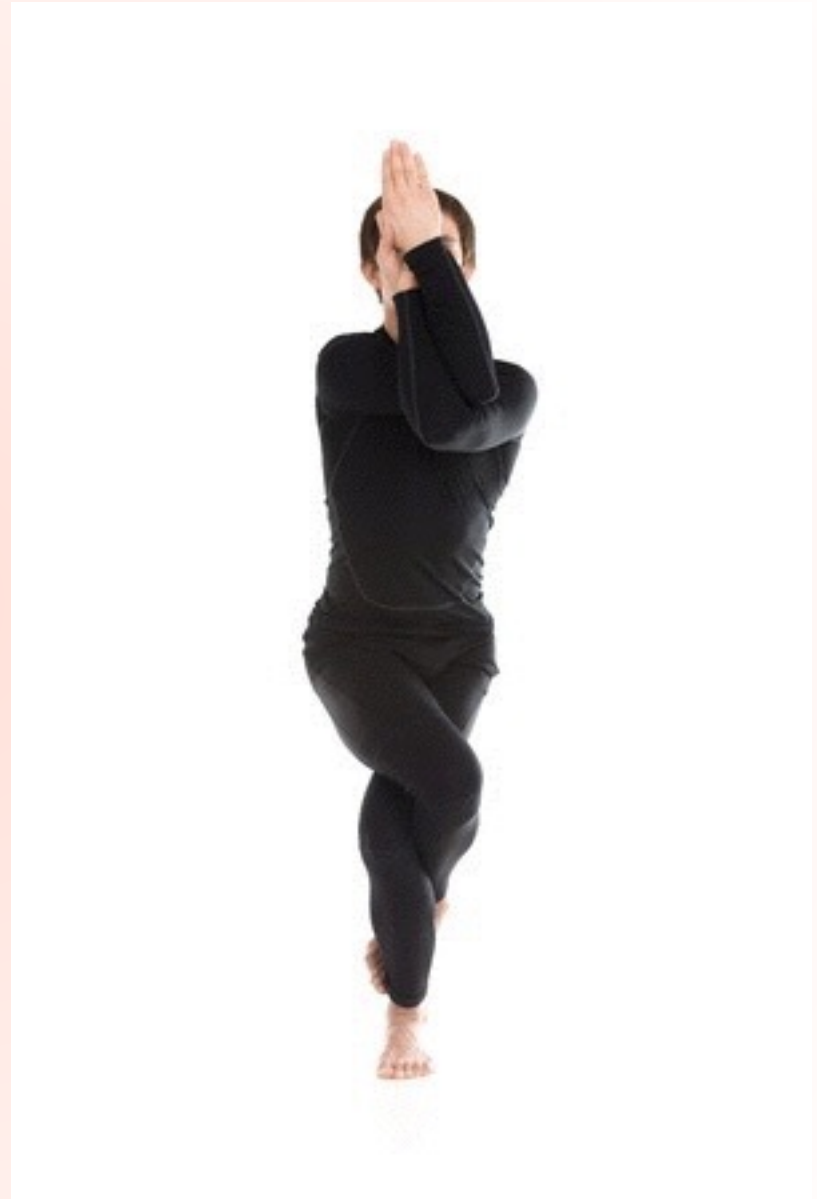
The long term benefits of regular exercise are numerous including weight loss, strengthening your immunity to diseases, reversing feelings of depression and improving self esteem and confidence.



In addition, maintaining a consistent exercise routine is your most effective tool for fighting against the cognitive deterioration that occurs as part of the aging process.

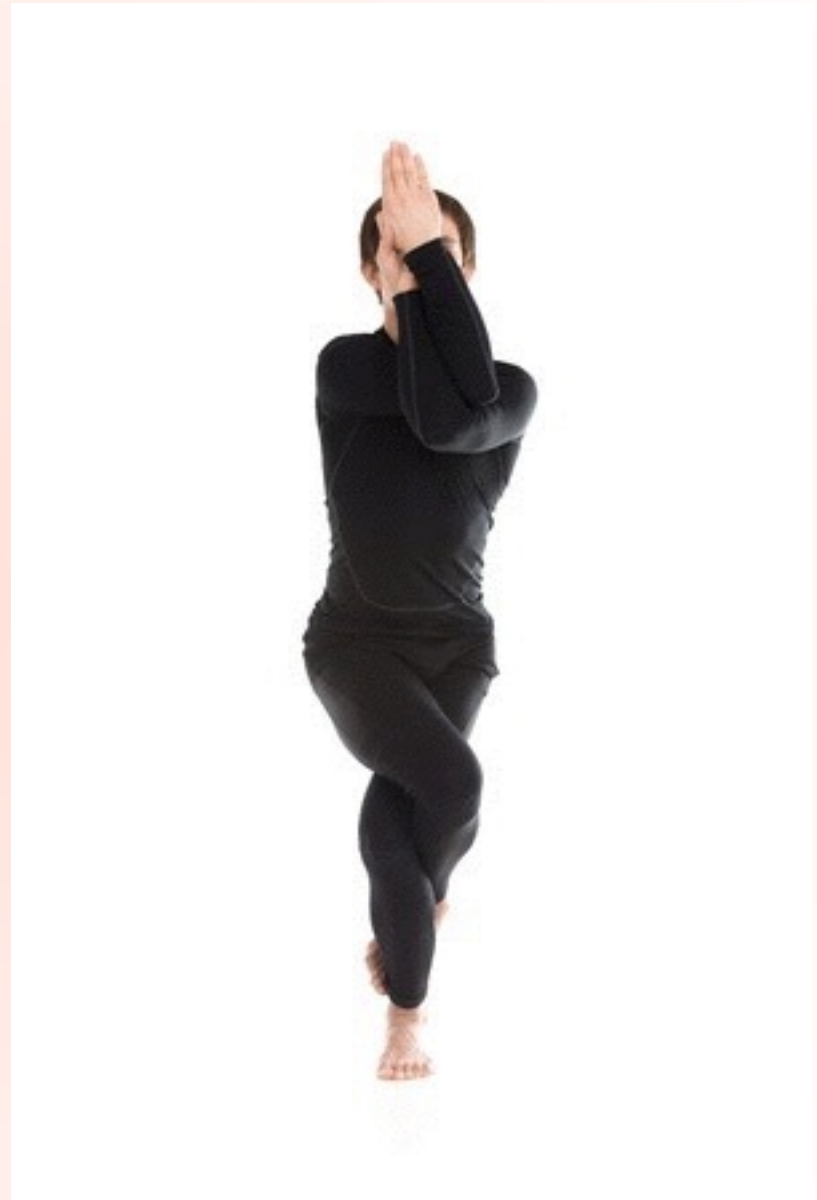


Practicing yoga is another scientifically proven strategy for managing the stress response. Yoga is a complementary health practice that integrates physical exercise with promoting mental calmness.



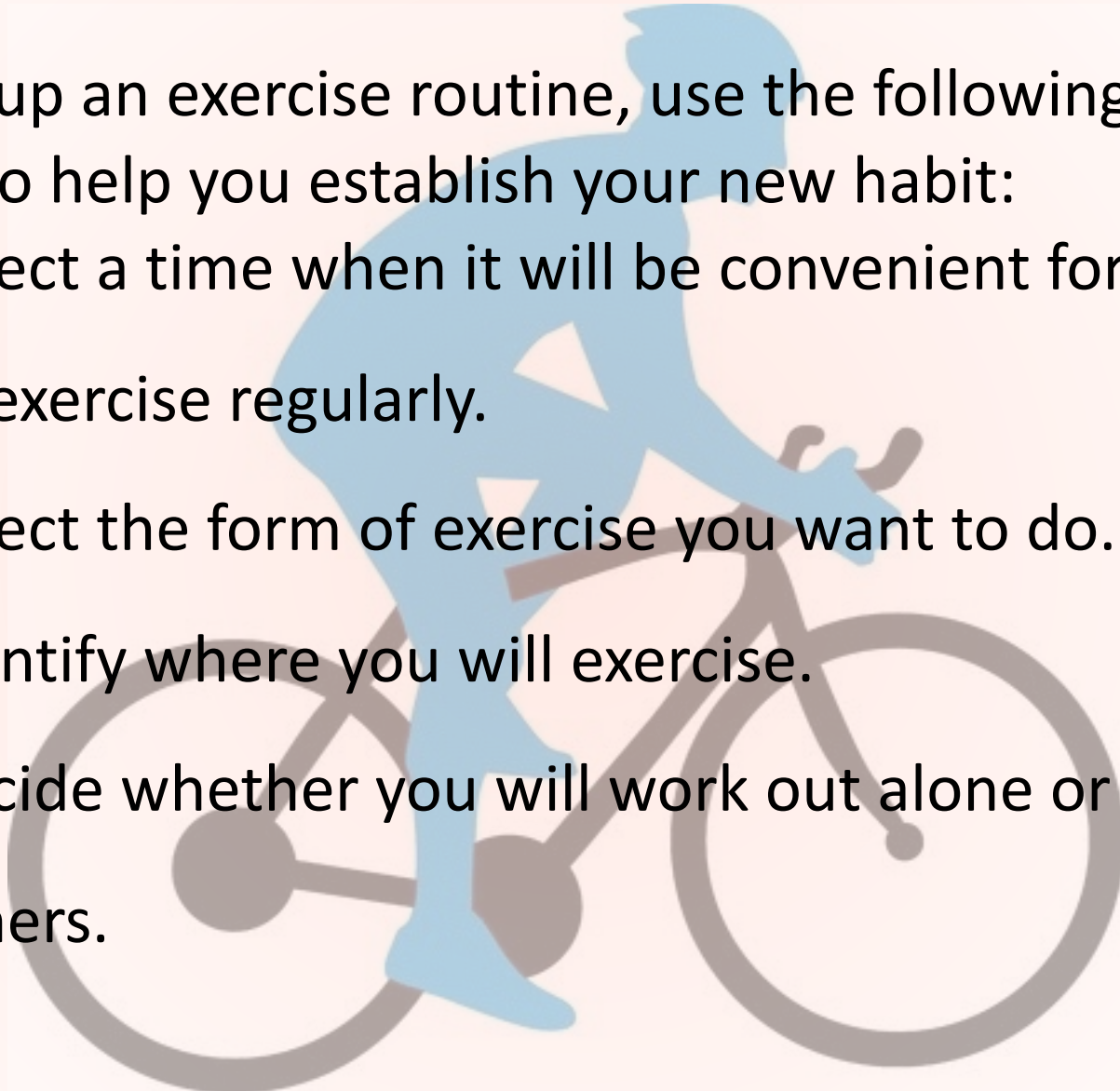


This is achieved by assuming certain poses while managing your breath. The result is greater flexibility, improved physical strength and balance. There are also other health benefits such as improved circulation.

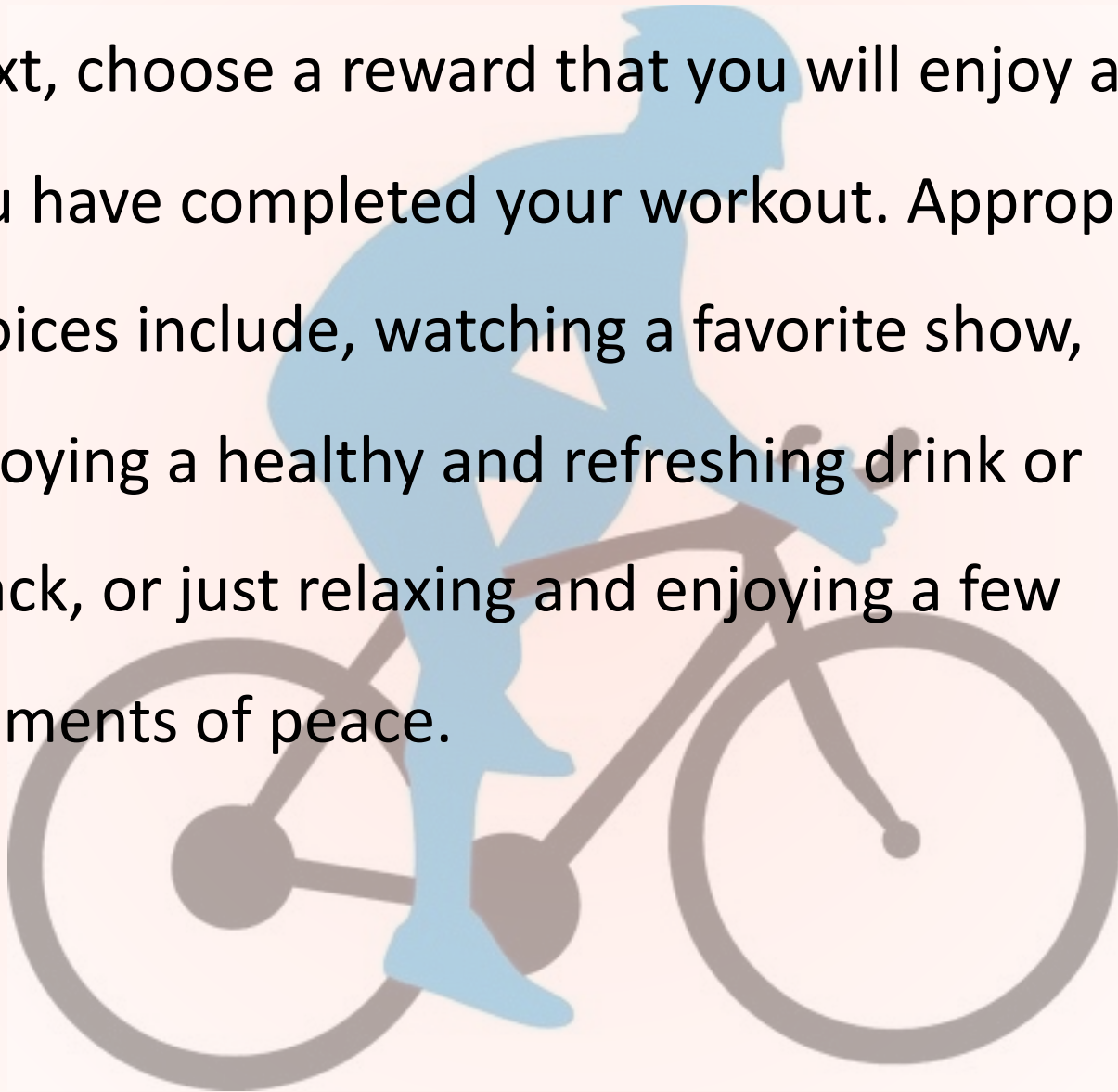


To set up an exercise routine, use the following steps to help you establish your new habit:

1. Select a time when it will be convenient for you to exercise regularly.
2. Select the form of exercise you want to do.
3. Identify where you will exercise.
4. Decide whether you will work out alone or with others.



5. Next, choose a reward that you will enjoy after you have completed your workout. Appropriate choices include, watching a favorite show, enjoying a healthy and refreshing drink or snack, or just relaxing and enjoying a few moments of peace.



6. Now put it all together and make a written commitment to yourself to put your exercise plan into action.
7. Share your plan with a friend; being accountable also helps to solidify your commitment.
8. Remind yourself of your plan by placing a sticky note where you will notice it in your home or workplace, or set a reminder in your phone.

# The Benefit of A Good Night's Rest

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Stressed: How to Survive and Thrive | Chapter 10  
by Grace Sidberry, Ph.D.



Improving the quality of your sleep can go a long way to helping you to cope with stress. In our overly scheduled world, too many people sacrifice the quantity and quality of their sleep in order to get more things done. Over the long term, that sacrifice can take a serious toll on your health.



While you are sleeping, your brain is busy at work accomplishing various activities that are not feasible when you are fully awake. As you sleep your brain sorts through your experiences and works to establish and store memories. A good night's sleep facilitates this process and enables you to learn new information more efficiently.



The energy that is used to accomplish all of the tasks for which your brain is responsible produces certain byproducts that must be disposed of. The perfect time to accomplish this is when you are asleep. This “clean up” job gets rid of waste products that accumulate during your waking hours.

Brain cells known as glial cells work in conjunction with the cerebrospinal fluid to flush away waste material; thus effectively cleansing your brain in preparation for the next day. When you are sleep deprived, this process is compromised. As a result, you may experience difficulty concentrating, thinking clearly, and solving problems.

Recent scientific research reveals that the flushing of the brain helps to dispose of Amyloid Beta proteins. This is the substance which is responsible for destroying the brain tissue of patients with Alzheimer's disease. Ongoing research is investigating the link between sleep deprivation and the susceptibility to cognitive degenerative diseases such as Alzheimer's. All of this points to the critical importance of getting a good night's sleep.

Here are some tips to help improve the quality of your sleep.

- **Establish a sleep rhythm** by going to bed and waking up at the same time each day. Eventually your body will settle into a regular routine.
- **Practicing a bedtime ritual** can help lull you into a readiness for sleep. Ideally an hour before bedtime, turn off all electronic devices including the television. Engage in a relaxing activity such as a warm bath, practicing meditation or listening to soothing music.

- **Create an Ideal sleep environment** by keeping your bedroom dark. The presence of intrusive light interferes with your body's production of melatonin, a hormone that regulates your sleep.
- **Keep your bedroom cool**, you will rest better if you are comfortable.
- **If after about 20 minutes you are unable to fall asleep**, get out of bed, go into another room and do something relaxing. When you are sleepy, go back to bed.

To improve your sleep and your ability to manage stress, here are some things to be aware of.

Contrary to popular belief, having a drink of your favorite alcoholic beverage before bed can disrupt your ability to sleep all night. Initially, a nightcap may cause you to feel drowsy, but alcohol interferes with the quality of your sleep and your body's ability to regulate sleep.



Caffeine is a stimulant with long lasting effects. Consuming too much caffeine can not only interfere with your sleep but may put you at risk for other health problems. Due to the fact that caffeine remains in your system for more than six hours, it is advisable to avoid caffeinated beverages and other products containing caffeine in the afternoon.





Certain prescription medications can also cause insomnia. If you are experiencing difficulty sleeping, check with your physician or pharmacist to find out whether your medications may be contributing to the problem.



Finally, avoid the use of illegal drugs. Along with all of the problems they cause, many contribute to insomnia.

# Afterword

The practice of managing your experiencing of stress is just that, a practice which will benefit you more as you continue to work at it. The multi-faceted approach of adjusting your mindset, balancing your emotions, exercising, eating healthily and protecting your sleep together make up your arsenal of coping strategies that will help you to counteract the potential ravages of stress. Your commitment to using these techniques is your gift to yourself; a gift of improved emotional, physical and mental wellbeing.

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