

# **COPING WITH STRESS AND CHANGE**

A Personal Survival Strategy

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**Iain McCormick PhD**

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

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

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***To that endless and ever-varying landscape of stress and change that rushes past us all, and within which we each strive to find some peace and stability.***

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## About the Author



Dr Iain McCormick is a trained Clinical Psychologist with a PhD in organisational psychology. He is a partner in [clickthesolution.com](http://clickthesolution.com) and heads the Executive Coaching Centre Limited in New Zealand. Prior to this he held the following positions:

- Managing Director of Aon Human Resources Consulting, Hong Kong
- Partner in the Deloitte working in Canada and New Zealand.

He has twenty years of consulting experience in the Asia-Pacific Region. His client list includes: Alcatel, BP, GE, Goldman Sachs, Marks and Spencer, Reuters, and Westfield.

He currently coaches a range of boards of directors, chief executives and other senior managers in New Zealand and Australia. He also has a web based tools business selling board of director evaluation services and e-learning modules.

Visit his web sites: [www.executivecoachingcentre.com](http://www.executivecoachingcentre.com)  
[www.directorevaluation.com](http://www.directorevaluation.com) and [www.clickthesolution.com](http://www.clickthesolution.com)

## Preface

**Stress and change ...** is what this book is about. We want you to learn about the sorts of stress and change that are affecting us all. We also want to enable you to become more adaptable, more flexible, more forward-looking, these being the best ways to cope with uncertainty.

It is no longer just your grandparents who will tell you the world has changed profoundly. You know it yourself because you too are caught up in the whirlpool of stress and change. And you also know that rapid change is no longer something that happens "out there", beyond our shores. The events of the past twenty years are testimony to that! Deregulation, immigration, privatization, the acquisition of so many local businesses by international companies, the rise and fall of the share market - all of these have affected people on very personal levels. With every major change there has been fortunes made, fortunes lost; of redundancies, unemployment, career changes; of uncertainty; of exciting new prospects.

**Coping with Stress and Change: a personal survival strategy**, always keeping in mind ongoing changes, looks at the nature of change in the twenty first century and offers guidelines on how you, personally, can adapt to change in a positive and effective manner.

The book was originally published in April 1988 and has been revised and updated to produce this 2004 version. The original version was in paper but reflecting the new reality of this century we have produced this as an e-book.

*Iain McCormick*

February 2008

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## **Table of Contents**

Changing - The Normal State in the Twentieth Century.....	6
Reacting - Change and Stress.....	10
Coping - Getting Beyond Distress.....	19
Living - A Healthy Lifestyle.....	35
Achieving - Setting Goals in Life.....	62
Thinking - Altering Your Style.....	72
Concluding - A Final Word.....	94

# 1

## Changing - The Normal State in the Twentieth Century

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*In this chapter -*

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The inevitable and natural cycle of change - we are all part of it

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History's revolutionary changes - what are they?

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The ten major worldwide changes affecting the lives of us all

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Determining the implications for your own life of these major changes

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*Rose Allenson retired today. Sitting at home after the work farewell, she begins to think back over her life. She thinks about what seemed to be a quiet and idyllic childhood on her parents' farm, with its wide open, green spaces. Her memory of the farm presents such a different picture to the reality of her present place where, admittedly, there are many plants, but they are all potted. She remembers the old family home, that sprawling house, which was always full of children. In contrast, Rose and her only child - a daughter, Sophia, lived for a number of years in a tiny city apartment.*

*She thinks back to her first day at school, and to the school bus that whined and jerked along the rough country roads. In those days, education was not considered important for girls; after all, they were only at school to pass the time until they got married.*

*Sophia, however, has gained university degrees in business administration and computer science, and is now working in very demanding position in a merchant bank. Rose's first job was at the local grocery store, where she worked for Mr Grenich, a bad-tempered old fellow, who seemed to consider that being a shopkeeper would be a great occupation if it weren't for the customers. "Old Mr Grenich's attitude would have certainly been out of place in retailing today," Rose tells herself. She knows that his type of attitude would have been quite unacceptable in the small chain of fashion boutiques from which she has just retired. There, high quality customer service has always been Rule Number One.*

*Rose's thoughts turn to the holidays she had with the family at the local beach and, smiling, she thinks of Sophia who is currently on holiday with her boyfriend in New York!*

*Looking back over her lifetime, Rose marvels at the changes she has experienced and how the pace of life has accelerated, but she also cannot help feeling a little anxious about what the future will hold for Sophia. "Things seem to be changing so fast these days," she murmurs.*

*"If only we could both better understand the way in which the world is changing and how to better cope with it."*

Rose's concerns are not misplaced. The changes she has experienced during her life have led to Sophia having experiences quite different from those of her mother's. The rate of change is accelerating for each new generation, and it is vital for us to understand the process of stress and change and its universal nature so that we can better adapt to it.

## The universal nature of stress and change

Life, by its very nature, is an eternal cycle. The process of birth, growth, decline and death is ever present. We see this process in our gardens, with spring bringing birth; summer rapid growth; autumn, decline; and winter, death. What we observe in our garden is the natural cycle of all events on earth.

While it is easy to observe this cyclical process in plants, and even domestic animals, it is very much harder to accept that we humans are also part of it. Too often we go through life thinking only of day to-day events, and we remain unaware of the passage of time which means birth, growth, decline and death. Recognition of this process, along with the realisation that life is finite, is not a negative thing. Imagine the horror of being condemned to live forever. Consider having to turn up to the office every Monday to Friday for the rest of eternity. Think about having to look after the family for all time.

There are many paradoxes in life, and the nature of change is one of them. On the one hand, change is inevitable, and there is nothing whatsoever we can do to stop it. On the other hand, change is not some omnipotent force which renders us all just impotent victims. We do have a considerable degree of control over our own lives and destinies. The key to handling change effectively is to accept that although change is both inevitable and natural, it is a force that you can use to your advantage. Having accepted this paradox, you can start to find ways of adapting to change and of using it as a powerful ally. You may well find occasions to revel in it.

## *The accelerating rate of change*

While change has long been an inevitable part of life, the amount of change faced by people in Western society over the last century has been accelerating.

The last 100 years or so have been labelled in a number of ways. Rollo May, a famous psychiatrist, named it the Age of Anxiety<sup>2</sup>. Peter Drucker, the prolific management writer, called it the Age of Discontinuity<sup>3</sup>. For the economist John Galbraith, it is the Age of uncertainty;<sup>4</sup> for media



commentator Marshall McLuhan, the Age of the Global Village;<sup>5</sup> and for futurist and writer Alvin Toffler, the Age of Future Shock.<sup>6</sup>

These names arose because technology, which influences nearly all aspects of our lives, has developed at an ever increasing rate over the last century. Between 1900 and 1905, for example, the major technological developments were powered flight and electric lighting for homes. While these two advances were extremely significant, they have been dwarfed by the flood of advances in the 1990s.

Between 1995 and 2000, major technological advances included an explosion in the use of personal computers and a dramatic drop in their price; a huge rise in the number of body organ transplants ; the development of cheap, portable, compact video discs, and the reality of the Iran War watched live on television. These are but a few of the significant developments that have taken place in just *five* years.

Over the next fifty years, the developments will be even more rapid. We can expect to see computers used to further aid us in every aspect of our lives. Dr. Terry J. van der Werff in his futurist website [[www.globalfuture.com](http://www.globalfuture.com)] suggests a number of major changes in technology:

- \$ The biotech revolution will gradually shift its focus from curing diseases to preventing them.
- \$ Nanotechnology is the next revolution and will find applications this decade in labeling, health care, manufacturing, monitoring, and transport.
- \$ The "last mile" difficulty in telecom will gradually recede and usage of broadband communications will explode.
- \$ More varieties of computing devices will be available this decade than in all the years up to now.

Changes in technology have brought about not only changes to world trade and politics but also, inevitably, changes to our personal, everyday lives. Our lifestyles differ markedly from those of our parents and grandparents. The changes have been huge and include amongst them the move from small rural communities to major urban communities; the move from communities with a great deal of open land to ones with very restricted areas; the move from low-pollution rural areas to high pollution urban areas; the move from slow to very rapid means of travel; and the move from manufacturing-based work to information-based work. The cumulative effect of all of these changes is today's greatly increased pace of life and stress.

## *What is stress?*

Most of us know intuitively when we are stressed, yet the term is very difficult to define. Peter Hart and Cary Cooper, two experts in the area, claim that despite use of the key words 'occupational stress,' 'work stress,' and 'job stress' in 2,768 scientific articles published during the 1990's, the scientific community has still not reached an agreed position on the meaning and definition of occupational stress.

Put simply, there are different ways stress can be viewed

- § The difficult situations that lead to unpleasant feelings
- § The imbalance you see between the demands placed upon you and your ability to cope with these
- § A dynamic changing thing that depends on the pressure on you, your personality, the way in which you cope and results in either positive exciting feelings or negative distress, and if prolonged can lead to physical or behavioural disorders.

There is a growing recognition that the last definition is probably the most useful way to understand stress.

## *So what has this all got to do with me?*

Stress and change impact on all our lives. This book is designed to show you a whole variety of ways that you can handle stress and change in more productive ways. Stress and change can be daunting and frightening for some yet for others these things are exciting and thrilling. It all depends on how you deal with these things - that is what this book is about.

# 2

## Reacting - Change and Stress

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**In this chapter -**

*Change - how much has been occurring in your life?*

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The relationship between change and personal wellbeing

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Stress - the positive and negative sides

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How your body reacts to stress

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*Stress and behavioural changes*

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*Jane Swanson, age twenty-three, had been doing very well for herself. She had recently been promoted, with a substantial rise in pay, to supervisor - at her age, a fine feat by anybody's standards. On the day she had got the promotion she had been overjoyed, and that evening had gone with three of her friends to Dominiques, a very pleasant little French restaurant. The avocados had been just as she liked them, and the lamb in filo pastry, perfect. On the way home she had stopped off at a car sales yard and looked at a new car. In the bright spotlights, all the cars looked just great, and she had made up her mind then and there that she would get a new car.*

*This was the beginning of a series of events which all, at first, seemed to be great, like buying new clothes, the new car, eating out more ... all in all, the good life. But slowly it all started to go wrong. The new job was good, but it involved more work conflict than she had anticipated. Many of her fellow workers, who had been friends beforehand, now started to treat her differently. She was expected to tell people off when they came to work late and to enforce production quotas. She found it very difficult to do these things. She became isolated at work. She ate out more, but the experience of doing so never seemed to be as satisfying as it had been before the promotion. The new car was OK, but it developed a leak around the windscreen and the carpet got wet and smelly. She longed for the old car. It had been a bit of a mess, but it had never let her down and had not been prone to leaks. On one particularly depressing night, Jane sat alone at home and told herself that her new life was a disaster. She wished she could turn the clock back, resume her simple life once more, and just be part of the gang.*

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Jane had undergone a great deal of change. She had changed her income, her friends, her car and her clothes. Overall, she had changed her lifestyle. A decent income, car, clothes and good friends are things that many of us want, and yet they do not always make us happy once we have them. It is ironic that too much positive change can turn out to be negative.

You may ask, "What could Jane have done differently? Should she have turned down the promotion?" No, never! If she had, she would have been both miserable and poor. At least, with her new life, she was just miserable. So what is the answer for someone like Jane? Consider the case of Bill.

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*Bill Southdown was a car assembly worker. He had worked in the industry for five years; spot welder, spray painter, he had tried a number of jobs. The company's policy of job rotation to help overcome boredom had been a blessing because it had meant that he had learned all sorts of skills. The job was not always great, but it paid well, and he had lots of good mates.*

*Then came the bombshell. A company decision was made to close down the factory in which Bill worked. All the manufacturing was to go to the new highly automated plant 300 kilometres away. Bill was struck dumb at first. He just could not believe it. Why him? Why this factory? Why? Why? Why? Bill did not sleep for the first few nights after the closure announcement. However, before long he got involved in union protest action, and he somehow felt a lot better. Bill took the redundancy money, paid off the mortgage on his house and went on a government retraining programme to become a metal work teacher.*

*It was a huge upheaval. He felt awkward, uncomfortable and self-conscious on the course. He had never had to speak in front of a group before, let alone stand up and control a class of cheeky school kids. But he coped. Many of his friends from the factory moved away to get new work, so Bill made a real effort to get on with the others on the course, and slowly he made new friends. When Bill landed his first school placement, he was made.*

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Bill had experienced a great deal of change - redundancy, retraining, a new job, and yet he did well. So why could Bill cope while Jane could not?

## *Different types of change*

Change affects us in different ways. Sometimes it can be very positive. We have all experienced a certain kind of excitement, the sort that we feel when we move to a new house, or complete an important task, or see our first child take those first steps. This is the type of change that we love - a change for the better. This sort of change can give a burst of energy when we need to attain a high level of motivation and alertness. It can also enable us to achieve our goals. Positive outcomes from change depend on the degree of change experienced and the individual's style of coping with it. Most people are positively affected by a moderate amount of change, even though it can present a challenge, a mountain to climb. However, with this sort of change, we feel that we can successfully meet the challenge, that the top of the mountain is in sight.

If the change is too great or persists for too long, it usually becomes negative and distressing. With this sort of change, the challenge becomes overwhelming; we feel that the top of the mountain is out of sight.

Figure 2 shows that too much change in our lives can result in low levels of wellbeing (we feel overwhelmed and unhappy). Figure 2 also shows that too little change can contribute to low levels of wellbeing (we feel bored and frustrated). To maximise our wellbeing and get the most out of life, not too much and not too little change seems the answer. However, keeping to a middle course is not always possible, for life can frequently deal out all sorts of unanticipated blows. We may suddenly lose a friend in a car accident, or we may (like Bill in the case study) be made redundant. When these blows occur, it is important that they are balanced with times of peace and quiet where change is kept to a minimum.

## *Assessing the amount of change in your life*

Most people find it easy to understand the connection between amount of change and level of personal wellbeing. They can readily discern the effects certain changes have had on the wellbeing of their friends or members of their family. But they are not always so perceptive when it comes to forming connections between their own wellbeing and changes in their own lives. Being able to assess the amount of recent change in your life, and the likely impact of that change on your wellbeing, is one of the first steps you need to take on the road to coping successfully with change. The Change Scale<sup>18</sup> which follows helps you to assess how much change you have experienced over the past year or so. It asks you to think back carefully over the last year and to recall the types of things that you have experienced.

## The change scale

### Instructions

Circle the numbers in the left hand column for each of the life events that have happened to you during the past year. After completing the scale, total all the numbers that you have circled.

Life Event	Score
1 Death of your spouse (wife or husband	100
2 Divorce	73
3 Marital separation from partner	65
4 Detention in jail or other institution	63
5 Death of a close family member	63
6 Major personal injury or illness	53
7 Marriage	50
8 Being fired at work	47
9 Marital reconciliation with partner	45
10 Retirement from work	45
11 Major change in health or behaviour of a family member	44
12 Pregnancy	40
13 Sexual difficulties	39
14 Gaining a new family member (e.g., through birth, adoption, parent moving in, etc..)	39
15 Major business readjustment (e.g., merger, reorganisation, bankruptcy, etc..)	39
16 Major change in financial state (e.g., a lot worse off or a lot better off than usual)	38
17 Death of a close friend	37
18 Changing to a different line of work	36
19 Major change in the number of arguments with husband or wife (e.g., either a lot more or a lot less than usual, regarding child-rearing, personal habits, etc..)	35
20 Taking on a mortgage greater than \$50,000 (e.g., purchasing a home, business, etc..)	31

21	Foreclosure on a mortgage or loan	30
22	Major change in responsibilities at work (e.g., promotion, demotion, lateral transfer)	29
23	Son or daughter leaving home (e.g., marriage, attending university, etc..)	29
24	In-law troubles	29
25	Outstanding personal achievement	28
26	Wife or husband beginning or ceasing work outside the home	26
27	Beginning or ceasing formal schooling	26
28	Major change in living conditions (e.g., building a new home, remodelling, deterioration of home or neighbourhood)	25
29	Revision of personal habits (dress, manners, associations, etc..)	24
30	Troubles with the boss	23
31	Major change in working hours or conditions	20
32	Change in residence	20
33	Changing to a new school	20
34	Major change in usual type and/or amount of recreation	19
35	Major change in church activities (e.g., a lot more or a lot less than usual)	19
36	Major change in social activities (e.g., clubs, dancing, movies, visiting, etc..)	18
37	Taking on a mortgage or loan less than \$50,000 (e.g., purchasing a car, TV, freezer, etc..)	17
38	Major change in sleeping habits (a lot more or a lot less sleep, or change in part of day when asleep)	16
39	Major change in number of family get-togethers (e.g., a lot more or a lot less than usual)	15
40	Major change in eating habits (a lot more or a lot less food intake, or very different meal hours or surroundings)	15
41	Vacation or holidays	13
42	Christmas	12

43	Minor violation of the law (e.g., traffic tickets, jaywalking, disturbing the peace, etc.)	11
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*Total Score =*

## *How to interpret your score*

If you scored less than 200 on this scale, then your chances of being physically ill in the near future are very small. If you scored between 200 and 300, then you have a slight chance of becoming seriously physically ill, but if you scored over 300 points, then you definitely need to consider slowing down the rate of change in your life. A significant relationship between scores at the 300 plus level and becoming physically ill has been found.

However, you must be careful in interpreting your score. A high score does *not* mean that you will become ill soon, but it does mean that you should look hard at what is going on in your life. It is also true that a score below 200 does not mean that you will be immune from illness. It does mean either that the degree of change that you have recently experienced is relatively low, or that the types of change that you have undergone are not listed here.

## *The development of the change scale*

The Change Scale was developed by two United States Navy psychologists, Holmes and Raye.<sup>19</sup> These two were interested in trying to predict how many people were likely to become ill on navy vessels. They examined a number of different factors and found that the amount of change people had experienced over the past year or so was a useful predictor of their chance of becoming ill.

You will notice that some of the items on the scale seem positive - for example, those that relate to a promotion, and others seem negative - for example, detention in jail. While illness arising out of negative change appears to make sense, illness arising out of positive change may seem strange. The answer is that all change is stressful; it does not make much difference whether it is positive or negative.

Some researchers have tried to improve the ability of this scale to predict illness by removing the items that appear to be negative. The results indicate that retaining all the items produces the best results. This confirms the idea that all types of change are stressful, not just those that seem negative.

## *What to do if you have a high score*

*As already mentioned, if your score is above the 300 mark, your chance of becoming ill is increased, and you need to think hard about trying to slow down in some way. This does not mean that you should turn down your next salary increase or promotion. Nor does it mean that you should forego your planned holiday. What it does mean is that it may be a good idea to delay taking on something that might mean over-committing or over-extending yourself - such as the buying of a new house or new car or taking on a totally new line of work.*



Often, people who have undergone a great deal of change and are feeling stressed tend to want to change something else in the false belief that this will make them feel better. I once counselled a man who was a very successful executive. This man worked long hours and had moved around the country several times to take up promotions or to change companies so that he could get a better salary and more responsibility. These moves were tolerable, but on learning that his father was seriously ill, he felt crushed. He claimed that he could not cope any more and that he was at the end of his tether.

When we began to look at his life, we quickly found one important cause for this extreme reaction - he had bought a new car. Shortly before coming to see me he had decided that he would feel much better if he had a new car, so he had borrowed a large sum of money to do this. Taking on a large loan to buy the car soon after hearing of his father's illness had been the final straw - he had tried to heal the detrimental effects of too much change with more change. Having realised this, he began to reduce the pace of his life, and this made a slow but favourable difference to the level of stress he had been experiencing. He took a job that was relatively easy for him to do. He gradually reduced his loan repayment, and he decided against moving house again. Within a year, his life was balanced and satisfying.

## *The physiology of stress*

We have seen that there is a definite connection between too much change and stress, but just what goes on in the body to produce that feeling of distress?

When confronted by a stressful incident or situation, the body responds by undergoing a number of changes. The first change takes place in the brain. It starts as we process information. To give an example, our senses tell us that a car has just rammed into the side of our house, a rapid and unexpected event which arouses considerable activity in the brain. For our purposes, the brain can be thought of as having a structure like an ice-cream cone. The ice-cream cone has two parts - the scoop of ice-cream on top and the cone under this. The ice-cream represents the area of the brain known as the cortex. The cortex arose later in evolution than the other parts of the brain, and is responsible for higher level processing of information such as mathematics and logic. The cone of the ice-cream represents the brain stem. This primitive part of the brain developed early in the evolution of the brain. It is responsible for regulating body processes, such as breathing and the flow of hormones. The fact that a car has just rammed into the side of our house is transmitted from our eyes and ears into the brain. We think to ourselves, "Panic!", which sets off a reaction in an area of the primitive brain stem called the hypothalamus, which in turn stimulates the pituitary gland - the master gland of the body. The pituitary gland releases a powerful hormone into the bloodstream - adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH for short). ACTH is very powerful, but it affects only one organ in the body - the adrenal glands. These are situated on top of the kidneys, and ACTH causes them to release adrenaline. This powerful hormone flows into the bloodstream and, within six to eight seconds of the car hitting the house, adrenaline will be in every living cell of our bodies.

The effects of this rush of adrenaline on our body's functioning are dramatic. Blood flow into the major muscles of our body - those of the arms and legs - as well as into the heart, lungs and brain is markedly increased, and our body is now prepared for violent physical activity. Perhaps we need to run at great speed and get a fire extinguisher to put out the house fire set off by

the car crash. Perhaps we need to drag someone out of the car. With our bodies now awash with adrenaline, these feats of speed, strength and bravery are all possible.

This seems all very useful, and it is, but if an adrenaline reaction goes on for too long, or if we release adrenaline at "the drop of a hat", this survival mechanism can take on an ironic twist by becoming destructive. Our bodies are not designed to be at fever pitch for long periods of time. If we do not find a way of either slowing ourselves down or burning off the rush of energy that we create, then stress problems will arise.

## *The long-term effects of stress*

The initial stage of the stress response is sometimes called the alarm stage. This stage mobilises our body's resources through the release of adrenaline, enabling us to adapt rapidly to threat by being ready to fight or to run.

If the threat is prolonged, a second stage - resistance - occurs. During the second stage, the body partly adjusts to the level of stress. This is not to say that the body returns to normal, but it is not in as high a gear as it was during the first stage. However, it is during this second stage that medical complications can develop. For example, victims of severe burns frequently develop stomach ulcers. A simple or direct connection between the burnt skin and the stomach is unlikely, but we do know that severe burns are extremely painful and distressing, a situation very likely to lead to the long-term stress response of ulcers. Extended periods of stress can contribute to a great many medical problems, including heart attacks and cancer. But a word of caution at this point: there are many factors other than long-term stress ones involved in such medical conditions as heart attacks. Genetic make-up, diet and cigarette smoking all play a part. Stress is never the only factor.

The final stage of a long-term response to stress, or of an extreme response to a short-term, highly stressful situation, is death. The body cannot meet the challenge, can no longer set up a resistance to the threat, and the person or animal dies.

## Changes in behaviour due to stress

In an experiment,<sup>20</sup> a group of college students was placed in a room and then asked to remove shoes and socks. The experimental room had eleven doors, each of which was painted a different colour. The room also had a steel grid on the floor. An electric current could be turned on from outside the room to pass through the grid. In this way, electric shocks could be administered to the students' feet. There was no easy way they could avoid the shocks. If, for example, they were to try to avoid them by jumping up in the air, gravity would be against them; and on landing, they would make very good contact with the floor, ensuring a shock. In addition, if their feet were to sweat, the moisture would convey the electrical current, heightening the connection between the feet and the current. The students were told that of the eleven doors in the room only one would be left unlocked. To avoid the shocks, they had to find out which door was unlocked, and then to get out as fast as they could.

The students were sent into the room several times. Before going in the first time, they were told that there was one over-riding rule: if you find one particular door is unlocked on one occasion when you are in the room, *you will never* find it open the next time. In other words, it was never possible for the students to get out the door they had got out of the previous time.

During the first few times in the room, very low levels of electric shock were administered, and the students behaved very rationally. Careful not to waste time trying the door they had used to get out of the room the last time they had been in it, they found the unlocked door and were out in a flash. However, as the number of times in the room went on, the level of the shocks was increased, and at a particular level, the behaviour of the students started to change rapidly - the rational problem solving behaviour characteristic of the low levels of shock gave way to totally irrational behaviour. When the shocks became painful, the students all started rushing for the door *they had got out of the last time*. Under a high level of stress their behaviour became unproductive.

This experiment amply illustrates that during times of stress and change, the way our brain functions alters dramatically. During low levels of stress, we use our highly developed cortex to solve problems rationally, but under high levels, that rational part of our brain seems to shut off, and primitive, irrational behaviour becomes controlled by our brain stem.

This switch in brain activity explains the strange things that people do when under stress. Take, for example, the workers at a chemical factory who were seen just to stand and watch as the plant caught on fire after an explosion. In shock, they were unable to react. Then there is the case of the woman on the aircraft which had engine failure. At 28,000 feet she turned to the man next to her and, in a little girl's voice, said, "Please take me home!" We all react differently to extreme pressure, and these reactions are rarely productive, providing a strong reason for *why we need to try to control and alleviate* any symptoms of extreme pressure that we experience.

# 3

## Coping - Getting Beyond Distress

***In this chapter -***

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Adapting to change - is it possible?

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Are you suffering from distress due to too much change?

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just which symptoms of stress are you personally experiencing?

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Dealing with change - the importance of being pro-active rather than re-active

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The necessity of maintaining a sense of control over your life

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So far in this book, change has been considered primarily as something that is inevitable and irresistible. While this is true, and neither you nor I are going to stop such things as the development of new family configurations, we can learn to adapt.

One thing I have learned over many years of working in both clinical and organisational psychology is that many people take a passive and inflexible approach to change. Consider the situation that faced two women who had phobic reactions to driving. They had both been involved in serious car accidents, and they and their fellow passengers had been injured. After their accidents, the two women had become very fearful of driving and frequently had nightmares about horrific multiple car crashes. The women were advised that the best approach towards dealing with the phobia was to begin by learning some form of relaxation, which both did with ease, and then to get used to driving a car again. This they were to undertake in a *very* gradual way. Their first step was just to touch the car, and only when they felt comfortable doing this were they to move on to sitting in the car. The third step would require then to start the car, and the fourth to drive it just a few centimetres. Thus they were to build up their small chain of steps until, after much practice they could drive on a regular basis with a minimum of apprehension.

The first woman had been particularly fearful following her accident and, even after learning to relax herself, found it very difficult just to sit in the car for a few seconds. However, she persisted in a very courageous way and spent considerable time and effort between counselling sessions actively practising the necessary step. In contrast, the second woman found sitting in the car quite easy, but she was unable to move to the next step of starting up the engine. The sorts of hitches in moving from one step to the next experienced by these two women are common amongst people who are working to overcome a phobia, yet with persistence most of them do achieve their aim. However, this was not the case with the second woman. On

reaching her sticking-point of starting up the engine, she adopted a passive approach to her problem by refusing to drive or to make any attempts to do so. She insisted that her husband assume all responsibility for driving. The husband soon came to see that he was supporting and even rewarding his wife's fear, but as she consistently refused to help herself overcome her problem, he felt he had no other option but to continue taking on all responsibility for the driving.

The need to actively involve oneself in overcoming difficulties and the stress-inducing effects of change applies in many situations. This is very clearly seen in people's different responses to computers. For some people, computers represent a fascination, a chance to participate in the possibilities of tomorrow. Other people see no point in spending the time or energy needed to become familiar with computers. They may want to resist their introduction because they feel jobs may be threatened, or they may even be "computer phobic", and so consider the computer as something to be avoided at all cost.

## *The symptoms of too much stress*

Learning to change is often the cause of stress and its resulting symptoms. Most people think that experiencing symptoms of stress is a sign of weakness and failure. This is totally wrong. If you are experiencing such symptoms, then it means that your body is trying to communicate something to you. It is trying to tell you to slow down, or to learn some new approach to distressing situations, or to rethink the strategies you employ in your life. Look on symptoms of stress as important early warning signals.

Very real problems arise when you are under stress but do not consciously experience symptoms. It is a sad fact that for a number men the *very first recognisable symptom* of their stress is a sudden heart attack, resulting in sudden death. As you can imagine, this does not give the victim much time to adjust or cope; he is dead! Being able to recognise the symptoms of stress, and to see the occasional period of distress as normal, will help you deal effectively with change in your life. Life has its ups and downs, and even the downs can have a beneficial side - they give us some perspective on how good the "ups" can be!

If we experience a great deal of change and do not learn to adapt or adjust to it, we are likely to experience the ill-effects. If the change is persistent, we may become aware of our health and feelings deteriorating.

The symptoms of this deterioration generally fall into three main groups: i) poor general health and a constant rundown feeling, ii) an inability to sleep at night and iii) anxiety and worry. There are, of course, other more serious symptoms. The ones given here are the most common.

The following questionnaire<sup>21</sup> provides a quick and useful means of determining your present stress level as well as the types of stress symptoms that you are experiencing. Take a pencil and try it out now.

## General health questionnaire

Please read carefully

*This questionnaire asks if you have had any recent medical complaints and how your health, in general, has been over the past few weeks. Answer all the questions on the following pages by simply circling the answer which you think most nearly applies to you. It is important that you consider only recent complaints, not those that you have had in the past. Please try to answer all the questions. Add your scores together for each section, then at the end calculate your total score and use the chart which follows the questionnaire to interpret your score.*

Have you recently

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1. Been feeling perfectly well and in good health?	Better than usual 0	Same as usual 1	Worse than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
2. Been feeling in need of some medicine to pick you up?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
3. Been feeling rundown and out of sorts?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
4. Felt that you are ill?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
5. Been feeling full of energy?	Better than usual 0	Same as usual 1	Worse than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3

---

Add together the numbers that you have scored above.

**General health score =**

**Have you recently**

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6. Found yourself waking early and unable to get back to sleep?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
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7. Been getting up feeling your sleep hasn't refreshed you?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
8. Had difficulty in getting off to sleep?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
9. Had difficulty in staying asleep once you are off?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
10. Been having restless, disturbed nights?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3

**Sleep disturbance score =**  
**Have you recently**

11. Been getting scared or panicky for no good reason?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
12. Found everything getting on top of you?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
13. Been feeling unhappy and depressed?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
14. Been losing confidence in yourself?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3
15. Been feeling nervous and uptight all the time?	Not at all 0	No more than usual 1	Rather more than usual 2	Much worse than usual 3

**Anxiety score =**

**Total score =**

**Score interpretation chart**

Scale	High	Moderate	Low
General Health Score	7 or more	3-6	2 or less
Sleep Disturbance Score	5 or more	4 - 2	1 or less
Anxiety Score	5 or more	4 - 2	1 or less
Total Stress Score	15 or more	14 - 7	5 or less

## What your score means

A score in the high range of the General Health Scale means that of late you have been feeling rundown, ill and lacking in energy. It may be that you have recently had a severe cold or the 'flu, or that you have just been off-colour for no particular reason. A score in the high range of the Sleep Disturbance Scale means you have problems getting to sleep, staying asleep or waking too early. This may be due to the fact that you have a newborn baby or a sick child who wakes you in the night. If you scored in the high range on the Anxiety Scale, then you have been feeling worried and uptight over the last few weeks. If your Total Stress Score was in the high range, then probably you have been feeling at the end of your tether, and distressed. It is likely that you have been caught up in a period of rapid change.

Those of you with a score in the moderate range of any of the scales or of the total score are very typical of a broad range of people. You are not under too much stress, but you do have occasional symptoms. While you need to keep a watch on your levels of symptoms, you need not undertake a specific plan of action at the moment. If you scored on the low side of the scales, then you are generally suffering from few symptoms at the moment. The best way that you can use this book is as "preventative medicine" - in other words, study it carefully to learn how you can maintain your moderate and low levels of stress.

Whatever your scores on the General Health Questionnaire, you will learn new and different ways of alleviating or preventing the symptoms of stress in this book. Those of you who are presently experiencing sleep problems will find specific help in Chapter 5. High or moderate Anxiety Scale scorers can take advantage of the relaxation techniques described in Chapter 4.

*It is important at this point to remember that humans are generally very well adapted to coping with occasional stress. If your score on the questionnaire was very high, then it does not mean that you are going to have a nervous breakdown or that a heart attack is on the way. The questionnaire works like a snapshot; it is a picture of the degree of stress that you are experiencing at one point in time. Everyone has periods of high stress, so if you do, you are quite normal. You need to put the scores that you received on the questionnaire into perspective, and to use them as a way of committing yourself to learning more about change and how to adapt to it.*



## *The importance of being pro-active*

People have two basic approaches to dealing with change. The first is re-active; the second is pro-active. Re-active people just let life happen to them. Like billiard balls, they take the knocks. Pro-active people anticipate and examine likely changes in their lives, so that they can prepare for those changes. These people wield the billiard cues.

The greatest advantage of being pro-active is that it enables you to gain a sense of control in your life. As well as making you feel good; it can have a profound effect on your behaviour. In an experiment<sup>22</sup> designed to illustrate this point, two groups of subjects were put into identical rooms, and each group was asked to undertake a very difficult proofreading task. The groups were given the same amount of time in which to complete the task. Both rooms were equipped with powerful loudspeakers capable of pouring out a very loud noise, which, in the experiment, sounded like a jet aircraft taking off. One group of subjects was told that they must complete as much of the proofreading task as they could while the noise was on. The members of the second group were given the same instructions, but were also told that if the noise became simply unbearable, then the volume could be lowered. However, it was emphasised to them that they should only ask to have the noise turned down as a last resort. In this experiment, the people in the second group were able to work on the proofreading task without once asking to have the volume lowered, and it was found that they had done a much better job of proofreading than the first group.

The fact that the second group did so much better could not be attributed to differences in the complexity of the task or in the level of noise, as both were identical for each group. The critical difference was that the second group of subjects had some control over their environment whereas the first did not. The second group knew they could have the noise level turned down if requested. This sense of control was vital in enabling them to perform the task more effectively.

A sense of control can make a tremendous difference to our feelings and our ability to put up with the stresses and strains of normal life. But the things that contribute to stress in life are not like the noise in the experiment that has just been described. We cannot control stress by turning down a volume control knob. The best way we can gain a sense of control over our lives is to examine the process of change in our society and to find ways of adapting to it or moving with it, so that it has less impact on us. Re-active or pro-active? *The choice is yours.*

# 4

## Relaxing - Reducing Tension

*In this chapter -*

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Learning to identify muscle tension

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Relaxation - what is it?

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How does relaxation affect the body?

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The different types of relaxation

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How to relax

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When confronted by too much change, people often feel uptight and strung-out. This is usually the result of excessive muscle tension and fatigue. There are over 600 skeletal muscles in the body which move limbs and spine and enable us to shift about. Most muscles exist in opposing pairs; one group relaxes as the opposing group contracts. This can easily be seen and felt as you bend your elbow. In the upper arm there are pairs of muscles, the triceps and the biceps. When the arm is straightened out, the triceps contract and the biceps relax. When the arm is bent at the elbow, the biceps contract and the triceps relax. You can observe this for yourself by reaching over and placing your hand on the biceps of your other arm. Bend your arm and then straighten it out; you will be able to feel the biceps relax and contract. You will feel the relaxation and contraction even more clearly if you clench the fist of the arm that you are bending.

This relaxation and contraction of muscles, which is a part of all movement, assists the circulation of blood and the removal of wastes in the muscles. When muscles are held tight and tense for long periods, so that the opposing pairs of muscles pull against one another, the circulation is impeded and there is a build-up of waste products. The end result is fatigue. This muscle tension often causes cramp-like spasms, as well as aches and pains. High and sustained levels of muscle tension can lead to other problems as well. Because tense muscles impede blood circulation, the heart has to work harder than normal to force the blood through the muscles. Over a sustained period of time this situation can lead to permanently heightened blood pressure. Headaches, backache, painful shoulders and neck are just a few other outcomes of prolonged muscle tension.

Exercising the muscles, by alternatively tensing and relaxing each of the various pairs in the body, will improve circulation, decrease the level of waste products in the muscles and reduce pain and fatigue. Think of those times when you felt too tired to do anything much but decided to go for a walk anyway. Afterwards, to your surprise, you found the exercise had made you feel refreshed and relaxed, and that you were able to work productively once more. That change in feeling was directly related to reduced muscle wastes.

Before we address the issue of learning to relax, it is useful to learn to recognise tension. This is essential because muscle tension is a little like background noise; the longer the noise goes on, the more normal it seems, and the less you notice it. The easiest and most effective way to recognise muscle tension is by touch. You can actually feel the difference between tense, contracted muscle groups and soft, relaxed ones. Try the following. Reach across with one hand and hold the wrist of your other hand. Grip the wrist and move your free hand up and down. You will be able to feel the tension shifting and changing in the various muscles in your wrist. Having moved your hand up and down a number of times, try letting it just flop. Feel the resulting change in the muscles of your wrist.

Now, with one hand, grasp the muscles at the back of your neck. Move your head backwards and forwards and feel the tension shift and change. Now let your head sit in a very comfortable position and feel the muscles relax.

Try the same sort of exercise on various muscles of your body until you become accustomed to identifying tension. Once you have achieved this, you will be ready to learn how to relax.

## *What is relaxation?*

Relaxation involves a well orchestrated set of responses that includes the reduction of muscle tension, a decrease in breathing rate, a decrease in heart rate and blood pressure, an increase in digestion by the gut, a decrease in glucose release by the liver and an increase in the blood flow to the skin that makes you feel warm and comfortable.

### The benefits of relaxation

*The changes that take place in the body when it is relaxed have beneficial long-term effects for our physical functioning, our health in general, and our feelings, thoughts and behaviour. These effects carry through into all areas of our lives - one important area being the workplace. Following is a brief summary of the advantageous effects of relaxation for people and the places in which they work.*

#### **Physical**

*Relaxation has been shown to lead to a decrease in heart rate, in sweating rate, the incidence of hot and cold spells and dryness of the mouth, and the reduction of breathing problems and of difficulties associated with numbness in parts of the body.*

#### **Health**

*Relaxation has been associated with a decrease in medical problems including asthma (a respiratory disorder characterised by intermittent attacks of difficult breathing), diarrhoea and frequent urination, dyspepsia (uncomfortable acid stomach feelings), frequent headaches, loss of sexual interest, insomnia, skin rashes and ulcers.*

## **Thinking**

Reduced tension levels can improve thinking ability, with speed of thinking and ability to make decisions being increased, and forgetfulness being decreased. There is also less likelihood of mental blocks.

## **Feelings**

*People who are relaxed feel less worry, fear and apprehension. They are likely to experience less anger and to be more in control of their aggression. They are also likely to experience an increase in general interest and sensitivity, as well as a decrease in possible feelings of depression, fatigue, frustration and guilt. Decreased irritability and swings in mood, as well as improved self-esteem, are also common.*

## **Behaviour**

*Relaxation has been shown to decrease accident-proneness, drug-taking, eating disorders, emotional outbursts, impulsive behaviour, impaired speech and restlessness.*

## **Work**

*In the workplace, relaxed employees tend to have a lower rate of absenteeism, to be less antagonistic while on the job and to turn over jobs less often than non-relaxed employees. They also tend to report a higher degree of job satisfaction and to be more productive and have better relations with others at work.*

## Which type of relaxation is best?

*Research into relaxation indicates that although the various forms of it are very different, the beneficial results are not.<sup>23</sup> Researchers have assessed the different types of relaxation in terms of changes in level of oxygen consumption, respiration rate, heart rate, brain waves, blood pressure and muscle tension. They have found that the changes in these levels tend to be much the same for each form of relaxation. The best way for any one person to view the different relaxation techniques, therefore, is to see them as variations on a theme, and to select whichever type seems most appropriate to him or her.*

## *Learning to relax*

Learning to relax is similar, in many ways, to learning any new skill - tennis, cooking or oil painting, for example. It takes practice, practice, and more practice. With regular practice anyone can learn to control body tension and to maintain that control over an extended period of time. In addition, learning relaxation familiarises people with their tension points (those areas in the body, such as the back of the neck, where tension readily builds up). By getting to know where these points are, people can "relax them away" before they develop into muscle cramps and other problems.

## *Deep muscle relaxation*

Here is a simple and quick form of relaxation which can be done when sitting in a chair in the office or at home. If you have a chair with armrests, use it, as you will find it more comfortable. A small cushion to give your back additional support can also help. This particular technique takes about five minutes, and it is important that you try to avoid being interrupted by anyone or anything during that time.

Sit upright in your chair, and make sure that your back and thighs are well supported. Rest your hands on your lap, put your feet flat on the floor, and wriggle around in the chair to ensure that you are quite comfortable.

Begin by breathing out. Then breathe in slowly and gently. Very slowly take three or four breaths and, as you breathe out, feel the tension begin to drain away from your body.

Now direct your attention to your hands. Tense them up into tight fists, and count slowly from one to five. Let the tension go completely. Note, for a moment, the difference between the tension as you felt it a minute ago and the relaxation that you now feel as the tension fades. Breathe away in a slow, relaxed manner.

Push your wrists into your thighs and feel the tension in your arms. Count to five, and feel the tension build, then let it go completely. Feel the difference between relaxation and tension, and breathe away in a calm manner.

Now screw your face up, and feel the tension in those particular muscles. Count to five, and feel the tightness build, then let it go completely. Feel the difference between relaxation and tension, and breathe away in a relaxed fashion.

Pull your shoulders down. Feel the tension. Count to five. Feel the tension build, then let it go completely. Feel the difference between relaxation and tension, and breathe away in a calm manner.

Now tense the muscles in your torso, and feel the tension. Count to five and feel the tension build, then let it go completely. Feel the difference between relaxation and tension, and breathe away in a relaxed fashion.

Push your feet into the ground, and feel the tension in your thighs and buttocks. Count to five, feel the tension build, then let go completely. Feel the difference between relaxation and tension, and breathe away in a relaxed fashion.

Spend a minute or two checking over your body to see if you can detect any tension that is remaining in your muscles. If you can then just let it melt away. Now spend a few moments simply enjoying the feelings that come with relaxation and the opportunity to be away from the tension and worries of life.

To deepen the effects of the relaxation, take a deep breathe and then slowly breathe out and silently say to yourself, "Calm and relax. Carefully listen to yourself saying these words, and let them carry you deeper and deeper into the state of relaxation.

After a few minutes, quietly open your eyes, have a stretch any a yawn if you want, and feel alert but relaxed.

### **Possible problems with deep muscle relaxation**

Most people find deep muscle relaxation fun and easy to do and have, no problems, but other people do experience difficulties. Possible solution for the most common ones is outlined here.

#### **External distractions**

Find a quiet place to do the relaxation, but if, even then background noises distract you, do not get annoyed about them Quietly bring your mind back to the relaxation instruction; whenever you find yourself listening to the distractions.

#### **Distracting thoughts**

*If you find your mind drifting away during the relaxation, again do not be concerned. Just quietly bring your mind back to the sound of the relaxation instructions.*

#### **Losing control**

Some people feel as if they are floating when they are in the middle of deep muscle relaxation, and this can sometimes lead to an unpleasant feeling of losing control. If this happens to you, just open your eyes for a minute, then go back to the relaxation. The more you practise the relaxation, the more you will find that you are in control and comfortable.

#### **Muscle spasms**

You will sometimes notice odd muscle spasms or jerks as you relax. These are nothing to worry about. In fact, they are a good sign that you are becoming more and more relaxed.

## *Short-cut relaxation*

Relaxing quickly whenever you wish is obviously a valuable skill. After a week or so of practising the full relaxation, you should be able to shorten the process considerably. You will find that by selecting out a few muscle groups to tense and relax, you will be able to achieve a feeling of deep relaxation. You may even find that simply taking a deep breath and saying "Calm and relax" to yourself will be enough to induce a very pleasant and deep state of relaxation.

However, if like most people, you lead a busy lifestyle, you may not always be aware of just when you are getting tense, and this is where the learning of another skill - self-monitoring - is advantageous. Self-monitoring involves assessing day by day, moment by moment, your own internal tension level: if you find your tension level creeping up, you can spend time when convenient relaxing yourself. The best times to monitor or check on your tension level are those that could be termed "wasted" - for example, when waiting for or travelling in lifts; when waiting for traffic lights to change; when sitting in traffic jams; when waiting for others to turn up to meetings; when waiting for an appointment.

## *Simple meditation*

As an alternative to deep muscle relaxation, you might like to try meditation. This simple and straightforward technique has been set out by Herbert Benson in his book, *The Relaxation Response*<sup>23</sup>. It is very similar to many related meditation techniques and involves the following four basic components.

### **A quiet place**

The office is all right, but you may be better off at home in a bedroom or study. Meditating in the same place every day is a good idea. You will find after some months that you will only need to enter the room to find yourself being filled with calm and serene feelings.

### **A comfortable position**

Sitting in a chair is much better than trying to force yourself into the "lotus" position. If you lie down, you will probably just fall asleep.

### **A passive attitude**

Trying hard to meditate does not work. The best approach is to take it quietly and to adopt a passive attitude. It is important not to evaluate the effects of the meditation on a minute-by-minute basis, but just to take the situation as you find it. Try not to worry about doing the technique incorrectly. Distracting thoughts always come during any form of relaxation and are perfectly normal.

### **A simple mental exercise**

You will need to find a mental exercise or device to enable you to shift your mind from the active problem-solving approach needed while at work to the passive approach required to achieve the relaxation response. Some very experienced meditators can "just sit" and not think about anything for fifteen to twenty minutes. Unless you are a natural at meditation, just sitting will be hopeless - within a few seconds you will find yourself thinking about work or something else you normally worry about. Because thoughts naturally occur at frequent intervals, many relaxation techniques involve using a sound or a word that can be repeated over and over. It is almost as if the word comes to imitate the way normal thinking occurs.

## **Simple meditation -**

A summary of what to do

- Find a quiet place and then sit in a comfortable position with your eyes closed.
- Put your feet flat on the ground and place your hands in your lap.
- Breathe easily and naturally, and quietly relax any tension you experience.
- Notice how thoughts just naturally float into your mind. Now quiet] try to allow the word "RELAX" to float into your mind in a natural way.
- Breathe in and out and say "RELAX" silently to yourself. Breathe in ... out "RELAX"; in ... out "RELAX", and so on.
- Do this for fifteen to twenty minutes. You may want to open you eyes and check the time - that is fine - simply go back to the relaxation when you have found it out. Do not worry how successful you are - just be passive during this time.



There is nothing magical about what word or sound you use during the relaxation. Pick one for yourself if you want.

## *Is relaxation the same as sleep?*

A number of studies have been conducted to determine whether the physiological changes associated with relaxation are the same as those found in sleep. Results from these studies indicate that there is very little similarity between the effects of relaxation and the effects of sleep. During both states there is a decrease in oxygen consumption, but the rate of that decrease is markedly different for the two states. During sleep, oxygen consumption usually decreases rather slowly until, after about four to five hours, it is about eight percent lower than that which occurs during the usual state of wakefulness. During relaxation, however, the decrease average is significantly more substantial, and is often ten to fifteen percent below the resting state. It is not possible for people to bring down their oxygen consumption through means other than the practising of relaxation. Holding one's breath, for example, brings no real change to the consumption of oxygen in the long term.

A second difference between deep relaxation and sleep is that of brain activity. Alpha waves, the slow brain waves indicative of a tranquil state of mind, increase in intensity and frequency during the practice of relaxation, but are not particularly common during sleep. REM (Rapid Eye Movement) sleep, which is associated with dreaming, is never seen during relaxation. Other differences between relaxation and sleep abound, but the examples given here illustrate that relaxation is not just another form of sleep, nor can it be used as a substitute for sleep.

## *Do the benefits of relaxation last?*

*Along with the drop in oxygen consumption and the change in brain wave activity during relaxation, there is also a decrease in the rate of production of the various waste products produced in the major muscles of the body. These waste products are frequently found in people who are under a great deal of stress. In fact, people who are very anxious and who are injected with a solution of this type of compound often experience an immediate anxiety attack. But what happens to the rate at which these waste products decrease under relaxation? It has been found that blood wastes such as blood lactates fall off rapidly during the first ten minutes of a relaxation session and generally remain extremely low during the rest of the session. Further, the level remains low for some considerable hours after the relaxation, indicating that this comfortable state remains with the person for some time.*

## *Relaxation - a necessity*

Most people recognise the importance of relaxation, but they also feel that it is a bit of a luxury that they might just find the time to indulge in when they have achieved all their other goals for the day. This is a most unfortunate belief. Bob Montgomery and Lynette Evans, in their book, *You and Stress*,<sup>24</sup> describe this belief as the Luxury Myth. The Luxury Myth asserts that any time or money that you spend on yourself is a luxury, and that you should only do this after you have spent all the time and money necessary to fulfil everyone else's wants and needs. Imagine if you had the same attitude towards the servicing of your car; if you only renewed the oil and tyres after you had done all the driving that



you needed to do. Obviously, this would be quite absurd! It is the same with you. Look after yourself by relaxing on a regular basis.

Accepting that relaxation is important is one thing, getting a commitment from yourself to undertake it regularly is another. It is commonly believed that willpower is what is needed. This is true, but it is possible to strengthen your willpower by making an agreement or contract with yourself. The contract spells out how often you will do the relaxation, what rewards you will give yourself for relaxing, and what punishments you will give yourself for not relaxing. Get a piece of card and write out the following contract for yourself. Put it in a place where you will see it regularly, such as in your kitchen.

## Relaxation contract

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I \_\_\_\_\_ hereby agree to practise my relaxation at least three times per week for 15 to 20 minutes. Every week that I keep this contract, will reward myself with (e.g., a pleasant food, drink, activity etc.). Every week that I fail to keep this contract, I will punish myself by (e.g., missing out on a pleasant activity or food).  
When I have completed the first month of consecutive weeks, I will reward myself with \_\_\_\_\_.

---

Signed

Date:

---

Mon	Tue	Wed	Thu	Fri	Sat	Sun
y	y	ay	y	y	ay	ay

---

Week  
One

---

Week  
Two

---

Week  
Three

---

Week  
Four

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Using this sort of contract will strengthen your willpower and motivate you to get into relaxation on a regular basis. Once you have established the habit of relaxation, you will find that it is easy and enjoyable to do.

# 5

## Living - A Healthy Lifestyle

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### ***In this chapter -***

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Why maintaining a moderate lifestyle is important in times of change

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How does your own lifestyle measure up?

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Eating well - what is a moderate and balanced diet?

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Cigarette smoking - the dangers and some hints on giving up

---

The use and abuse of alcohol - what constitutes moderation?

---

Exercise - how much do you need to stay healthy?

---

Sleep - how to improve it

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Social support - the importance of getting help from others

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*During periods of rapid change, people often tend to let their lifestyles slip. They cannot be bothered exercising. All they want to do is come home from work and have a couple of drinks, or collapse in a stupor and watch television after the kids have gone to bed. They cannot be bothered to prepare their usual healthy meals, and so eat takeaways. They may even take up smoking.*

These sorts of reaction to change and stress will not do a great deal of harm if they are short-term, lasting for only a few weeks, but they will do considerable harm if they become long-term. In order to remain healthy and adapt to change we need to adopt a lifestyle that provides us with sustained energy and vitality. By answering the simple questions in the Lifestyle Test<sup>25</sup> below, you can assess the quality of your lifestyle.

# The lifestyle test

## Instructions

Read each item carefully, and use your judgement to give yourself a score of 1, 2, 3, 4 or 5. Add up your scores for each section after completing the test, and use the chart that follows to interpret your score.

### Relaxation

\$	Do you ensure that you regularly get time away from work (whether outside or inside the home) and other pressures so that you can really unwind?	Frequently	5
		Quite often	4
		Sometimes	3
		Not often	2
		I'm hopeless!	1
\$	Do you regularly practise some form of relaxation - e.g., meditation or yoga?	Every day	5
		Three times a week	4
		Once a week	3
		Seldom	2
		I can never relax!	1

Relaxation scale score =

### Diet

-	Do you actively restrict your salt and saturated fat intake?	Every day	5
		Often	4
		Occasionally	3
		Seldom	2
		I love them!	1
-	Do you eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables?	Every day	5
		Often	4
		Occasionally	3
		Seldom	2
		Hate them!	1

Diet scale score =

Exercise

1. Do you actively exercise - e.g., swimming, running, or vigorous walking – several times a week?

Almost always	5
Often	4
Occasionally	3
Seldom	2
I'm a sloth!	1

2. Are you able to walk up two three flights of stairs without becoming exhausted

Easily	5
Fairly well	4
Get tired	3
Cannot do it	2
I'd have a heart attack	1

Exercise scale score =

Drug use

1. Do you drink alcohol? (Here a drink is taken as a *small* glass.)

Rarely or never	5
One or two a day	4
About three a day	3
Four to six a day	2
I'm an alkie	1

2. Do you smoke cigarettes?

Rarely or never	5
One a day	4
two to three a day	3
Four to twenty a day	2
Chain-smoker!	1

Drug use scale score =

Total lifestyle score =

## Score interpretation chart

Scale	High	Moderate	Low
Relaxation scale	8 or more	6-7	5 or less
Diet scale	8 or more	6-7	5 or less
Exercise scale	8 or more	6-7	5 or less
Drug scale	8 or more	6-7	5 or less
Total lifestyle scale	32 or more	24- 28	20 or less

## Lifestyle changes

If your score was low on any of the areas in the Lifestyle Test, then you need to read the following guidelines with great care.

### Diet - Eating Right

While too much variety in life can lead to stress, variety in diet will help you cope with change. Eating a range of foods from the five main groups (fruits, vegetables, grains and cereals, fish and meats, and fats) is extremely important for the maintenance of the right diet, and this importance is one of the main reasons why fad diets are usually not so good. For example, the Dr Atkin high-protein diet may let you eat plenty of meat, eggs, fish and milk products, but little carbohydrate. You'll certainly get plenty of protein, but you could be overdosing on saturated fats; cutting down considerably on carbohydrate is not a smart idea either. When planning meals, the important points to remember are:

- ◆ Eat plenty of fibre, as it will lower your blood pressure and keep your bowels healthy.
- ◆ Minimise your salt intake - most people in the Western world eat about ten times the amount of salt they actually need.
- ◆ Eat plenty of fresh fruit and vegetables, as these contain the essential vitamins and minerals you need for energy and vitality.
- ◆ Eat complex carbohydrates such as potatoes, brown rice and pasta, as these release energy slowly and over a sustained period.
- ◆ Ensure your intake of saturated fats, such as animal fats, eggs and cheese are kept down.

Eating well helps us deal more effectively with change. This is because a good diet provides sustained and balanced energy levels which are derived from complex carbohydrates. It also minimises the strain placed on the body from having to do such things as breaking down large amounts of fatty substances.

## *Cigarette smoking beating the habit*

It has been estimated that out of every one million people in the Western world, one person will die in an aircraft crash every fifty years, one will die from alcohol-related problems every four days, one will die from a motor vehicle accident every two days - and one will die from smoking every two or three hours!

There is now clear and unequivocal evidence that cigarette smoking increases the chance of developing many types of cancer and heart disease. It is impossible not to give any other advice but GIVE UP! If you cannot do this, then try hard to get your smoking down to less than twenty cigarettes a day, if not ten. It has been estimated that smoking forty cigarettes a day shortens your life by about eight years; twenty a day reduces the loss to five years. There is no doubt that smoking is extremely hard to give up - there are no miracle cures! Many techniques such as hypnosis and group support exist to help people give up, and they are all about equally effective in doing so. There is certainly no harm in trying one of these methods - it might just provide the extra bit of incentive you need. But, in the end, giving up or reducing your cigarette consumption is up to you.

One very cheap disincentive to smoking that you might like to try is to carry a "butt bottle". This is a small screw-top jar into which you put all your cigarette butts until it is nearly full. Add a little water, and shake the mixture up. Ensure the screw-top is on tightly, and put the bottle in your purse or briefcase. You can even have several butts bottles - one for work, one for home and one for when you are travelling around. Whenever you feel like a cigarette, take the top off the bottle and have a good smell. This is the sort of junk that can build up in your very sensitive lungs! If you can get yourself to follow this practice for a month or so, you will start to feel very negative about cigarettes. If you really want it to work, you *must* smell your butt bottle *every* time you want a cigarette, and ensure that it is kept full, watered and shaken.

It is also critical to be positive in your thinking. Write yourself some slogans on a small card. These might say: "Cancer sucks!" or "I'm no ciggy addict" or "Long live us non-smokers!" Read these over to yourself three or four times a day. Think about how healthy your lungs will become as you give away this poison. See yourself as a winner over tobacco.

Contracts or written agreements with yourself can also be very helpful. As with the relaxation contract on page 50, setting up rewards and punishments is vital. If you manage to give up for a day, go buy yourself a new shirt, record or compact disc. If you give up for a month, then go out to a really good restaurant. If you give up for a year, try an overseas holiday as a reward. Celebrate your victory.

A small book put out by the National Heart Foundation, and written by Jane Chetwynd,<sup>26</sup> gives the following tips:

- ◆ Never carry cigarettes. Doing this only increases the temptation
- ◆ If you must smoke, do it outside in the cold or somewhere else unpleasant.
- ◆ Never do anything else pleasant while you smoke - for example, reading or watching television; you are only encouraging yourself to go on smoking.

- ◆ Change your brand of cigarettes to one you don't like.
- ◆ Use non-smoking signs in your home and at work as a reminder.
- ◆ Spend more time with non-smoking friends.
- ◆ Tell everybody that you are giving up so that they can support you.
- ◆ If you drink tea or coffee when you smoke, try breaking the association by drinking herbal tea or fruit juice.
- ◆ Save your cigarette money in a big jar so that you can see how fast the money accumulates.
- ◆ Find something else to do with your hands, such as knitting or doodling.
- ◆ Have taste alternatives - carrot or celery sticks, gum, peppermints, or dried pineapple or bananas.
- ◆ If you must smoke, try to inhale less and learn to stub the cigarette out earlier and earlier each time.

Some people feel that smoking relaxes them and that therefore it must be a useful means of dealing with stress. However, the benefits of any relaxing effects are vastly outweighed by the poisons being poured into the body during cigarette smoking.

### *Alcohol - how much is too much?*

About 85% of people in Westernised countries drink alcohol in regular amounts. Many people find it helps them to relax and to socialise. This may be true for moderate amounts of alcohol, but without a careful watch on your intake, very serious ill-effects on the body and on relationships can occur.

About two thirds of drinkers consume less than two small drinks a day, while the other third consumes greater amounts, which often leads to real problems. If you do drink on a regular basis, it is important that you set a long-term limit on how much you drink.

In order to set limits on alcohol consumption, you must have some understanding of how much *pure* alcohol you drink. You may think: "Well, all I have is just one gin and tonic every night!" Yet many people who drink at home pour drinks that are much larger than they would get at a pub. Therefore, it is necessary to define what is called a standard drink. One standard drink is:

- ◆ a small 60 ml glass of port or sherry
- ◆ a 100 ml glass of wine
- ◆ a 200 ml glass of beer
- ◆ one nip of spirits.

So, if you drink a pint of beer you will be having about three standard drinks. A bottle of table wine is about seven standard drinks, and a large bottle of spirits is well over forty standard drinks!



Most drinkers greatly under-estimate the amount that they drink. In order to rectify this, try counting your drinks. You will probably find that you drink much more than you think, especially when your count is in terms of *standard* drinks. You might like to carry a small card and note down your dosage and how you consume it. If the idea of this makes you feel uncomfortable, try carrying a packet of sweets or matches around. Each time you have a drink, transfer a sweet or a match from one pocket to another so that you can later determine your consumption.

### **Don't moderate drinkers live longer than non-drinkers?**

Some studies do suggest that people who drink in moderation appear to live a little longer than those who never drink, but care needs to be taken when interpreting these findings, as it may not be the drinking that is the important factor. It seems likely that those people who drink in moderation, also eat and exercise in moderation. However, if you are a moderate eater, exercise regularly and do not drink, don't say, "Great!" and rush off to the nearest bar for a few quick slugs. If you do decide to drink, ensure that it is, along with all other aspects of your lifestyle, in moderation.

### **How much can I safely drink?**

There is much argument over an answer to this question. It seems preferable, however, to give some sort of guideline than none at all, and to state that this guideline does not come with a money-back guarantee - I don't want to be stopped by strangers demanding an explanation about their early demise as I try to slip through the pearly gates!

For men, a sensible limit is about three or four standard drinks, three or four times a week. For women, it is two or three standard drinks, three or four times a week. Men who drink more than six drinks a day run a much greater risk of alcohol-related illness or problems. More than four drinks a day are too many for women. Keeping two or three days a week drink-free is also advisable to give your liver a holiday.

Women are more susceptible to alcohol damage than men. This is probably because men have more fluid in their bodies than women, and so the alcohol gets more diluted. Also, women tend to be smaller than men, which means that their bodies cannot absorb as much alcohol. Concern has recently been aroused that for women, even small amounts of alcohol can increase the chances of developing breast cancer, but it appears that this danger is not increased if only moderate amounts of table wine are drunk with meals, rather than larger amounts of beer or spirits.

The limits given here apply to healthy people, and you should not drink at all if you are ill and/or on medication. Also, it is better not to drink if you are pregnant, have a poor diet or are over seventy years of age.

### **What drink is best?**

All liquor contains the same type of alcohol, but damage to the body seems to be reduced if the alcohol is absorbed slowly. Consequently, cool drinks are better than warm ones, and low-alcohol drinks diluted with non-alcoholic beverages are better than high-alcohol or "straight" raw spirits ones. This is because cool, diluted drinks are absorbed at a slower rate than warm, non-diluted drinks. Probably, as was mentioned above in relation to breast cancer and alcohol, if you must have alcohol, the best thing to drink is cool white wine, and preferably with a meal. The worst thing to drink is warm spirits on an empty stomach.

### **If I am drunk, how can I sober up quickly?**

Theories about how to sober up fast abound. They are *all* wrong. Your body can break down about one standard drink an hour, and there appears to be no way to speed up this process. If you drink lots of black coffee, you just become an alert drunk. If you have a cold shower, you become a wet drunk. If you run around the block, you become an exhausted drunk. The only thing you can do when drunk to reduce the damage is to ensure that you do not get dehydrated, so drinking lots of fluid (non-alcoholic!) is very important. Most important, of course, is if you drink, don't drive!

### **OK, then, how do I cut down?**

A report by the Alcoholic Liquor Advisory Council,<sup>47</sup> which confirms much of the above information, offers a number of suggestions on how to cut down your alcohol consumption.

- ◆ Decide beforehand your limit for the evening, and count your drinks so that you stay within that limit. Reward yourself if you do keep to it.
- ◆ Avoid shouts and rounds. They can put a lot of pressure on you to drink more than you wish to.
- ◆ Space your drinks with non-alcoholic ones, such as fruit juice or pure water.
- ◆ Put your glass down between sips - this will slow down the rate at which you get through each glass.
- ◆ If you find yourself drinking more than you want, take a break, have a dance or a walk; say to yourself, "I'm in control of my life!"
- ◆ Don't let anyone force you to drink. Practise saying, "No thanks!"
- ◆ Try low alcohol beer or wine; they are quite good these days.
- ◆ Always eat some food when you drink - eating slows the rate at which your body absorbs the alcohol.
- ◆ If you cannot cut down, get professional help.

## *Exercise - burning off stress*

Chapter Two of this book detailed how considerable change in our lives triggers off a series of stress reactions in our bodies. These reactions can include:

- ◆ A boost to the supplies of fuel in our bloodstream, such as blood sugars and oxygen.
- ◆ An increased heart rate, which ensures the "fuel" supplies are pumped rapidly and at a greater pressure.
- ◆ An increase in blood pressure so that the "souped-up" blood supply is directed to major muscles, for example, those of the arms and legs.

These changes prepare the body for vigorous physical exercise, and it therefore makes sense to use exercise as one of the best methods of returning our bodies from a state of distress to one of relaxation, as Ruth, a maths teacher at a busy city secondary school, discovered:

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Early in the second term of the school year, Ruth attended a three hour-long meeting between parents and teachers. By the end of the meeting, he was fed up with the abuse he had been receiving from the parents over his new maths course. The parents were afraid of a drop in achievement standards, but Ruth knew his course would bring about a big improvement in the maths performance of many of his pupils. Although, after this meeting, he felt like going home and having a stiff whisky, he decided to challenge Jenny, a fellow teacher and ace player, to a game of badminton. They played for about twenty minutes, and Ruth really let his frustrations out. By the time the game finished, he felt great. He had put the parents' comments into a sensible perspective, and he was ready to go home and get a good night's sleep. Since that game with Jenny, Ruth has used regular exercise as a means of relieving tension.

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At the end of an exercise session, our heart rate drops and our blood flow pattern changes to one in which there is lower pressure in our major muscles and a little more in our skin. This results in us feeling relaxed, warm and comfortable.

Exercise not only relieves stress, but it also conditions our bodies to take the strain of life in a rapidly changing society. For example, if you were to take a group of twenty people, put half of them on a "get fit" programme for a month and the other half on a no-exercise regime, and then, at the end of the month, subject the whole group to a difficult and new experience such as sky diving, or public speaking, you would find that the heart rate and adrenaline levels of the fit group would be much lower than those of the unfit group. Exercising the heart and lungs appears to make us much more able to cope with the pressures that we put on them in times of change.

There are four basic types of exercise that will help to keep you healthy and keep your distress level down - vigorous exercise, walking, floor exercises and isometric exercises.

## **Vigorous exercise**

Vigorous exercise includes swimming, cycling, tennis, and running. Of these, swimming is particularly good, as it provides exercise for most muscles, but places little strain on the joints. This contrasts with running which, although very useful, does increase the chance of knee and ankle injury. Swimming is also a particularly good form of exercise for many physically disabled or elderly people. Pregnant women, too, find it an excellent way to exercise.

## **Walking**

This is a great form of exercise for times of crisis, as you can just go out and do it without having to change out of your business clothes. It can be done with the dog, children in pushchairs, or a good friend, and it places less strain on the joints than most forms of vigorous exercise.

## **Floor exercises**

These involve knee-bends, push-ups, shadow boxing and so on. They can sometimes be done in work situations.

## **Isometric exercises**

Isometric exercises involve squeezing up the muscles without actually moving them. These are useful to do in those types of situations you cannot easily escape from, such as talking on the phone to a particularly aggravating work client. One of the simplest isometric exercises to do at such a time is to squeeze your fingers into a tight fist, hold the clench for five seconds, and then relax it, just as advocated in the deep muscle relaxation exercises on pages 45-46.

## **How much exercise is enough?**

Just as it is not easy to set limits on the amount of alcohol that people should drink, so the same is true for exercise but, as a guide, approximately one hour of vigorous exercise (where you are puffing) per week is about right. This is best done in three bursts of twenty minutes or so. If you do not like swimming, cycling, or so forth, but you do enjoy walking or some other not so vigorous exercise, then you need about two hours per week. Again, this block of time is best divided up into three or four periods of exercise.

## *Sleep - getting enough*

Sleep problems are one of the most frequent symptoms of stress induced by rapid change. Sleeping difficulties often take on the form of a vicious cycle in which people experience one or two nights of bad sleep, feel exhausted on the following days, and then start punishing themselves for not sleeping or panicking about not getting enough rest, and so sleep badly the next night. In this way a pattern of poor sleep develops.

Research conducted in the United States indicates that one in ten people has frequent sleep problems. Among the referrals to psychologists in private practice are usually a large number of clients who have sleep difficulties. Such referrals have increased dramatically, as general practitioners now recognise the futility of giving patients sleeping medication. Studies on the effectiveness of sleep medication indicate that the beneficial effects last for about ten nights, after which time the pills start to disrupt the natural sleep cycle. A person may actually sleep for eight hours, but the quality of the sleep will be poor and the person will consequently awaken tired and restless.<sup>28</sup>

### **The nature of sleep**

Sleep consists of a series of different stages that are passed through several times each night. The early stages consist of a gradation from light, Stage 1 sleep to heavy, Stage 4 sleep. As sleep deepens, oxygen consumption and muscle tension gently decrease, as does brain activity. The fifth stage of sleep is very different from the first four, and is known as Rapid Eye Movement (REM) sleep. This is because during this stage the eyes move rapidly, even though they are closed. People woken at this stage are usually able to recall a dream quite vividly. REM sleep occurs two or three times a night, but not everyone will recall the dreams that occur during those times.

People are often surprised to know that dreams do occur during non-REM sleep, but these dreams are more likely to be a random s of sounds and pictures, and not the structured, ongoing dreams of I sleep. REM sleep is also marked by extreme muscular relaxation, more so than any other stage of sleep. For this reason, some researchers t that this stage of sleep may be very important in providing people the essential relaxation that enables them to cope with stress during t waking day.

### **Helping with insomnia**

Insomnia is a complex problem and covers several different types of sleep disturbance. The first type is characterised by an inability to get to sit but once people do nod off, they tend to remain asleep for the rest the night. With the second type of disturbance, people manage to get to sleep, but they wake up frequently. With the third type, people to sleep easily and remain asleep for most of the night, but then wk very early in the morning and do not go back to sleep. Although t] last type has the unfortunate name of terminal insomnia, it will not I you! Daytime consequences of insomnia include an inability to concentrate irritability, depression, lethargy and fatigue.

## **The causes of sleep disturbance**

Not surprisingly, stress is a frequent cause of insomnia - people lie in bed with many worries or concerns on their minds and are unable to get to sleep because their over-active minds will not "switch off" - but there are other reasons why sleep can be disturbed.

Certain conditions can jolt people into wakefulness. One disorder apnea, interrupts the breathing rhythm, even stopping it. The sleeper literally jerks awake while taking in a deep breath. Another disorder nocturnal myoclonus, causes occasional but violent twitches which wake up the sleeper.

Various pre-sleeptime habits or activities also lead to disturbed sleep. Some individuals watch television, eat meals and drink in bed, all of which set up bad habits. Going to bed becomes associated with many things other than sleep, and so people find it difficult to use their bed for its primary purpose - sleep.

Eating large amounts of food, or highly spiced food, before going to bed can disrupt the pattern of sleep. Alcohol and other drugs can initially bring sleep, but often this sleep is of a poor quality, particularly because many drugs disrupt the very important REM sleep.

## **Overcoming sleep problems**

Overcoming sleep problems is usually not as difficult as people experiencing insomnia imagine. More often than not they find that doing one or a combination of the following things soon solves their problem.

### **Monitor your sleep**

Many people think that they sleep far less than they actually do. Monitoring your sleep helps you find out exactly how much you do sleep. You will also be able to use this information to assess your progress as you deal with the problem. Keep a small pad and a pen by your bed and just jot down the times when you wake up.

### **Use relaxation**

Perhaps the most useful tool is relaxation in the evening or even just before going to bed. (See the relaxation exercises on pages 45-48 in Chapter Four.)

### **Establish good habits**

One very important good habit is to go to bed at a regular time. Staying up very late on some nights and subsequently sleeping in the following morning can get your biological clock out of synchronisation. A regular bedtime will prevent this. Not taking a daytime sleep can also be helpful in establishing a routine. If you currently watch television or eat in bed, stop this. Keep bed for sleep. If you still find yourself lying awake for hours at night, get up and do something boring (like scrubbing the floors) until you are sleepy once more. Only go back to bed when you are tired and want to sleep.

### **Talk sensibly to yourself**

Do not get into punishing yourself for not going to sleep. Argue with yourself if you begin to panic. Tell yourself that lack of sleep is not going to do you any harm and that you can always catch up on your sleep at some other time.

If none of these methods helps, consult a professional.

## *Social support - the importance of others*

There is an old saying, "A problem shared is a problem halved." Considerable research has now been done to demonstrate the truth of this. People who have many friends and/or close families tend to suffer less distress than those who have few friends and distant families. It has also been shown that those people who are satisfied with the quality of support that they receive from their friends and family are better able to cope than those people who are dissatisfied with their level of social support. These findings have been found to be true in many circumstances, child-rearing included.

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Jocelyn had a busy and very successful career in advertising until she became pregnant. The pregnancy was a bit of a surprise, but Burt, her partner, was very supportive. Towards the end of her pregnancy, Jocelyn left her job at the agency so that she could stay home and look after the baby. For the first six months after the baby's birth she enjoyed being at home, but then her friends from her previous workplace began dropping out of sight, and Jocelyn started to feel lonely and restless. She had never been a nervous person, but she found herself getting panicky for no good reason. She and Burt talked over the matter and decided that Jocelyn had gone through a huge amount of change during the past year and had become socially isolated. After some further hard talking, they decided that Burt would get someone in to help in his repair shop, enabling him to take turns with Jocelyn to look after the baby. The agency that Jocelyn had worked at was delighted to have her back on a part-time basis. She soon re-established her old friendships, and although it was not always easy for her and Burt to co-ordinate home and careers, they were both much happier, and Jocelyn left behind those feelings of panic.

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The number of people any individual can rely on is often called the network size. The Helpful Behaviour Checklist,<sup>29</sup> which follows, was developed by Richard Siegert, psychologist, and has been designed to assess any one person's network size and level of satisfaction with social support. Complete the questionnaire now to determine your own network size and level of satisfaction.



# Helpful behaviour Checklist

## Instructions

The following questions ask about people in your life who give you help or support. Each question has two parts.

Firstly, list all the people you know, but not yourself, whom you can count on for help or support in the way described. Give the person's initials (see example below). Do not list more than one person next to each of the letters beneath the question.

Secondly, circle how satisfied you are with the overall support you have. If you have no support for the question, put a tick beside the words "No one", but still rate your level of satisfaction. Do not list more than nine people per question. Please answer all questions as best you can.

Example

8 Who do you know who you can trust with information that could get you into trouble?

No one

1	T.N. (brother)	4	7
2	L.M. (friend)	5	8
3	R.S. (friend)	6	9

\_How satisfied?

6	5	4	3	2	1
very satisfied	fairly satisfied	a little satisfied	a little dissatisfied	fairly satisfied	very dissatisfied

1 Who can you really count on to take your mind off your worries when you feel under stress?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

2 How satisfied?

6 very satisfied	5 fairly satisfied	4 a little satisfied	3 a little dissatisfied	2 fairly satisfied	1 very dissatisfied
------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------	--------------------------	---------------------------

3 Who can you really rely on when you need help?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

4 How satisfied?

6 very satisfied	5 fairly satisfied	4 a little satisfied	3 a little dissatisfied	2 fairly satisfied	1 very dissatisfied
------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------	--------------------------	---------------------------

5 With whom can you be totally yourself?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

6 How satisfied?

6 very satisfied	5 fairly satisfied	4 a little satisfied	3 a little dissatisfied	2 fairly satisfied	1 very dissatisfied
------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------	--------------------------	---------------------------

7 Who do you feel really appreciates you as a person?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

8 How satisfied?

6	5	4	3	2	1
very	fairly	a little	a little	fairly	very
satisfied	satisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied

9 Who can you really count on to give you advice or ideas that help you to avoid mistakes?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

10 How satisfied?

6	5	4	3	2	1
very	fairly	a little	a little	fairly	very
satisfied	satisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied

11 Who will comfort you when you need it by holding you in their arms?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

12 How satisfied?

6	5	4	3	2	1
very	fairly	a little	a little	fairly	very
satisfied	satisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied

13 Who can you really count on to help you feel more relaxed when you are under pressure or tense?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

14 How satisfied?

6 very satisfied	5 fairly satisfied	4 a little satisfied	3 a little dissatisfied	2 fairly satisfied	1 very dissatisfied
------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------	--------------------------	---------------------------

15 Who accepts you totally, including your worst and best points?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

16 How satisfied?

6 very satisfied	5 fairly satisfied	4 a little satisfied	3 a little dissatisfied	2 fairly satisfied	1 very dissatisfied
------------------------	--------------------------	----------------------------	-------------------------------	--------------------------	---------------------------

17 Who can you really count on to care about you, regardless of what is happening to you?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

18 How satisfied?

6	5	4	3	2	1
very	fairly	a little	a little	fairly	very
satisfied	satisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied

19 Who can you really count on to help you feel better when you are feeling generally down-in-the dumps?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

20 How satisfied?

6	5	4	3	2	1
very	fairly	a little	a little	fairly	very
satisfied	satisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied

21 Who can you really count on to help you feel better when you are very upset?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

22 How satisfied?

6	5	4	3	2	1
very	fairly	a little	a little	fairly	very
satisfied	satisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied

23 Who can you really count on to support you in major decisions you make?

No one

1	4	7
2	5	8
3	6	9

24 How satisfied?

6	5	4	3	2	1
very	fairly	a little	a little	fairly	very
satisfied	satisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied	satisfied	dissatisfied

## Calculate your scores

### Network Size Score

Add together the total number of initials you have put for each of the odd-numbered items (i.e., 1,3,5, ... 23).

Network Size Score =

### Satisfaction Score

Add together the rating of satisfaction you circled for each of the even-numbered items (i.e., 2,4,6, ... 24).

Satisfaction Score =

## Score interpretation Chart

<b>Scale</b>	<b>High</b>	<b>Moderate</b>	<b>Low</b>
Network Size Score	60 or more	59 - 33	32 or less
Satisfaction Score	66 or more	65 - 58	57 or less

If your score is at the high end of the Network Size Scale, it means that you have a large number of friends and family members whom you can count on to get you through difficult times and to help you cope with change. If your score is on the low end of the scale, it means that you have few friends, and it would be a good idea to try to make new ones.

A high score on the Satisfaction Scale means that you are very content with the quality of social support you receive, and that you are happy with your friends and family. A score on the low side of the scale means that you need to look carefully at the friends you have or at your relationships with your family. Perhaps you have ended up with people you cannot get close to or people you do not trust as much as you would like.

## *Improving your social support*

If your scores were low on either of the social support scales, then you need to think about becoming more involved in support groups. These exist in many different forms, but all have a number of common characteristics: the groups usually meet on a regular basis; the same people attend most meetings; and the groups provide time for people to share personal matters.

If you have decided that you want more support, start by thinking about expanding the base of support that you already have. It is usually much easier to do this than to try and break into a totally new group. Think about each of the following groups - are you involved in any of these and can you get more support from them?

- ◆ Your own or your partner's family circle.
- ◆ Your co-workers.
- ◆ The people at work who you meet through the social club or other groupings.
- ◆ Sports or hobby groups, such as squash or judo clubs.
- ◆ Action groups, such as political parties or local residence groups.
- ◆ Service groups, such as Rotary.
- ◆ Racial, ethnic, or nationality groups.
- ◆ Professional or trade associations.
- ◆ Church or related groups.
- ◆ Social groups, such as men's or women's support groups.

Most people have many more possible contacts than they realise or take advantage of - take some chances and get a bit closer to others who can really be of help to you!



# 6

## Achieving - Setting Goals in Life

### **In this chapter -**

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Why priorities in life are important

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Values - what do you hold dear?

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Goal setting - getting yourself into action

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Slowing it all down - time for reflection and review

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*Murray consistently performed near the top of his sales team. Despite this, he remained bitter and distressed that he never seemed to be able to sell as much as the top two team members. One day he went to chat to Julie, the sales manager. He was feeling off colour and just wanted to talk. Julie asked him what was wrong, and he said he did not really know, but that he did not enjoy selling any more. When she inquired further, Murray admitted that despite what he saw as his best efforts he had never reached the number one slot in the team. Julie urged Murray to tell her why he thought he was not number one. After some consideration, Murray replied that he just did not seem to get the lucky breaks of the top two salespeople. After some further discussion, Julie said, "I believe that you are not number one on the team because you do not put in the time." Hurt at this observation, Murray explained that he worked as long as anyone. "Well, yes," said Julie, "you do work as long as anyone else does during the week, but the top two salespeople spend most of their weekends at it as well. It seems to me that you have chosen to spend your weekends with your family, and I think that is great. However, the price you pay for that is that you are number three on the team." Murray thought over what Julie had said, and came to realise that she was right. He did place great emphasis on his family and he did want to spend his weekends with them. The more he thought about it, the happier he felt. "What's wrong with a great family life and being number three?" he finally said to himself.*

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*Murray's story is a common one. People who live in rapidly changing times have to cope with conflicting priorities, a situation which is frequently a source of considerable stress. The best method of dealing with conflicting priorities is to determine which priorities have a major claim on your attention and which the least. In other words, you set priorities. Over 200 years ago, Benjamin Franklin wrote:*

*If you want to enjoy one of the greatest luxuries in life, the luxury of having enough time, time to rest, time to think things through, time to get things done and know you have done them to the best of your ability, remember there is only one way. Take enough time to think and plan things in the order of their importance. Your life will take on a new zest, you will add years to your life, and more life to your years. Let all your things have their places. Let every part of your business have its time.<sup>30</sup>*

One of the problems with rapid change is that it forces choices. If we fail to make choices consciously, we get swept along by circumstance. The only solution is to take time to think and plan, so that if we cannot do everything we would like to do, we can at least do the things that are important.

## *Setting priorities*

When setting out your priorities, your first task is to determine what is important in your life, and why. Which things mean the most to you? Is it your career, your health, your family? Which things mean the least? Your personal possessions perhaps? Your public reputation?

Having decided what is important, your next task is to work out how you can ensure the things you value most are given corresponding priority. This task requires you to set goals and to determine the actions you need to take to reach each goal.

At the end of this chapter you will find a series of exercises to help you with these tasks. But before you tackle them, read through the following filled-out examples (by a person we'll call Anna) and my commentary on them.

## *The values questionnaire*

*Imagine that you have suffered a personal disaster or series of disasters. You have had no control over the losses incurred by them. With this scenario in mind, consider which of the following values you would find easiest to give up. Rank order the items from 1 (most precious to you) through to 15 (least important to you).*

- |           |  |
|-----------|--|
| <u>10</u> | Your sight through an accident                         |
| <u>7</u>  | Your hearing through an accident                       |
| <u>1</u>  | Your family through an accident                        |
| <u>11</u> | Your mobility through loss of your legs                |
| <u>2</u>  | Your closest friends other than your family            |
| <u>8</u>  | Your freed through being cast into prison for 10 years |
| <u>9</u>  | Your faith in God through disillusionment              |
| <u>3</u>  | Your sense of purpose in life                          |
| <u>14</u> | Your current job through being fired                   |
| <u>4</u>  | Your total career                                      |
| <u>15</u> | Your savings through a banking collapse                |

12	Your home or place of dwelling through fire
5	Your reputation in the eyes of the public
6	Your confidence and self-esteem
13	All your personal belongings through a massive burglary

You can see from this example that Anna sees "family" as most precious, followed by "closest friends" then a "sense of purpose in life" and so on through to "savings", which she considers least important.

## Reasons for rankings

Now that you have established your values, write down your reasons for you first, second and third rankings.

Number 1 \_\_\_\_\_

My family is the most important because they provide me with a sense of stability in life, and I know they will always accept me for who I am, no matter what I do

Number 2 \_\_\_\_\_

My friends are important for the same reasons as my family. They have seen me through good times and bad, and I am just not sure what I would do without them.

Number 3 \_\_\_\_\_

There cannot be any point in life with a sense of purpose. I know that I could not carry on without it.

Here we can see that family and friends are at the core of Anna's life, but that she sees little point in living without a sense of purpose.

## Setting long-range goals

*Having determined the reasons for your rank-ordering, it is necessary to establish some long-term goals. This is done by taking the value that was ranked Number 1 and setting a series of goals for it, and then doing the same for the second ranked value, and so on through as many seems reasonable. As this is done, it is important to remember that the goals must always be subservient to the values. Suppose, for example you place a great deal of value on your marriage, and you do not want anything to upset this*

*relationship, not even your career. You should not, then, have a goal under career that would hinder your marriage. However, you may also value your career and want to spend more time developing it at the office. Unless you establish clearly, through your goals, which value has priority - family or career - you will experience much stress.*

**Number 3 Value**    *Family*

- Goals**
- 1 To have a close family To think about this issue occasionally
  - 2 To ensure the time I spend with the family is useful
  - 3 To tell the family that they are important to me

**Number 2 Value**    *Friends*

- Goals**
- 1 To write to Jill in London once a month
  - 2 To invite Carol and George to dinner on my birthday
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Number 3 Value**    *A sense of purpose*

- Goals**
- 1 To think about this issue occasionally
  - 2 To reread Paul Tillich's The Courage to Be
  - 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Action steps**

With your goals in mind, you now need to establish a series of small steps that will enable you to achieve each goal. At this time, you may not see all the steps necessary, but it is important that you try to list as many as seem practical. Under family relationships, for example, you may have a goal to become a more close-knit family than you are now. Perhaps you decide that one way this can be done is to have the whole family spend at least one meal per day together, and to discuss day to-day issues at this time. As you work on this system, you will be able to tick off each step as it is accomplished and then to move on to the next on. Ensure that you leave your action chart somewhere handy so that can see it on a regular basis.

<b>Goal</b>	<i>To have a closer family</i>
<b>Action steps</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 <u>To have one meal together as a family per day</u></li> <li>2 <u>To do something together as a family each weekend</u></li> <li>3 <u>To go on one holiday together as a family per year</u></li> </ol>
<b>Goal</b>	<i>To ensure the time I spend with the family is useful</i>
<b>Action steps</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 <u>To read the kids a story each night</u></li> <li>2 <u>To talk about important matters at the dinner table</u></li> <li>3 _____</li> </ol>
<b>Goal</b>	To tell the family they are important to me
<b>Action steps</b>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 <u>To talk over this questionnaire with the family</u></li> <li>2 <u>Top actually say to them that they are important</u></li> <li>3 _____</li> </ol>

## *Time to reflect and review*

Many people with whom I have worked have completed these exercises and then told me that they found them very useful. When I have asked them why, they have often replied that doing the exercises gave them an opportunity to reflect on their lives - something they had never really done before. Time to reflect on one's life might seem a luxury during the day-to-day rush, yet it is both important and rewarding.

One way of ensuring yourself space for such reflection is to set aside a regular time to do this - the day before New Year's Day perhaps. Instead of making pious resolutions, reflect on what the year has brought you and whether or not your values have changed over the year. If your values have changed, do you need to set new goals and, on the basis of these, some new action steps?

Values can change markedly over time, and often reflect changes in family circumstance and career. People frequently find when starting out in their careers that their jobs are all-important. Urged on by a desire to get ahead in their chosen occupations, they devote considerable energy and time to working hard. However, with the advent of a family, they may find that their values and priorities concerning their careers require adjustment, especially if they consider it important to spend time with their children when they are young.

## *The values questionnaire*

Imagine that you have suffered a personal disaster or series of disasters. You have had no control over the losses incurred by them. With this scenario in mind, consider, which of the following values you would find easiest to give up. Rank order the items from 1 (most precious to you) through to 15 (least important to you).

- \_\_\_\_\_ Your sight through an accident
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your hearing through an accident
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your family through an accident
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your mobility through loss of your legs
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your closest friends other than your family
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your freed through being cast into prison for 10 years
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your faith in God through disillusionment
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your sense of purpose in life
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your current job through being fired
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your total career
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your savings through a banking collapse
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your home or place of dwelling through fire
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your reputation in the eyes of the public
- \_\_\_\_\_ Your confidence and self-esteem
- \_\_\_\_\_ All your personal belongings through a massive burglary

## *Reasons for rankings*

What are your reasons for your first, second and third rankings?

Number 1 \_\_\_\_\_

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Number 2 \_\_\_\_\_

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Number 3 \_\_\_\_\_

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\_\_\_\_\_

*Setting your goals*

**Number 1  
Value**

**Goals**

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Number 2  
Value**

**Goals**

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_

**Number 3  
Value**

**Goals**

- 1 \_\_\_\_\_
- 2 \_\_\_\_\_
- 3 \_\_\_\_\_



## Action steps

With your goals in mind, you now need to establish a series of small steps that will enable you to achieve each goal. At this time, you may not see all the steps necessary, but it is important that you try to list as many as seem practical.

### Goal

#### Action steps

1

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2

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3

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### Goal

#### Action steps

1

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2

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3

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### Goal

#### Action steps

1

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2

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3

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### Goal

#### Action steps

1

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**Goal**

**Action  
steps**

1

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**Goal**

**Action  
steps**

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**Goal**

**Action  
steps**

1

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## Thinking - Altering Your Style

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### *In this chapter*

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The nature of thinking

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Behind your thinking - the sources of your thoughts

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Thinking irrationally

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A change for the better - how to change your own thinking

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Whether we realise it or not, we spend most of our waking day talking to ourselves. This talk is, of course, usually silent, and often we are not even aware that it is going on. Despite this, what we say to ourselves makes a tremendous difference to our ability to adapt to change.

This claim has particular validity when it is realised that different people often see the same event in totally different ways. For example, when flying in an aircraft one person may be saying to herself something like - "This is great; just feel the thrust of those jets!" By contrast, a second person may be saying to himself - "Hell, those jets are making a lot of noise, they are bound to blow up soon, and when they do the fuselage will be damaged and we will all be sucked out of the plane by the low atmospheric pressure up here!" The first person's thoughts trigger feelings of excitement and fascination. The second person's thoughts trigger an entirely different reaction - terror!

Although this example may seem simplistic, it is indicative of how thinking affects *all* behaviour. People tend to underestimate the importance of their own thinking, often wrongly believing that their behaviour and feelings are directly determined by their external conditions. A growing body of evidence suggests that it is not outside events, which determine our feelings, but the way in which we think about those events that is important. Somebody might say, "That kid makes me angry!" or "TV relaxes me." However, it is not the child who makes the person angry, but the thoughts that person generates when the child is around. Similarly, it is not the television set which makes the person relax.

Rather, it is the fact that watching television coincides with such thoughts as, "It's great to be finished work for the day and to have escaped from the problems of reality." These thoughts are usually automatic and unconscious; they happen so quickly and so frequently that we fail to recognise the impact they have on our feelings. We are in a situation and suddenly we feel something. Because the thoughts which engender our feelings tend to be fleeting and/or perceived as unimportant, we wrongly blame our feelings on the situation.

The process by which our thinking governs our feelings can be likened to the process of playing a musical instrument. During our early attempts to learn an instrument, we play it in a slow and self-conscious manner. We give ourselves instructions about what to do; it could be said we talk ourselves through those first attempts to play. As time passes, and our familiarity with the instrument increases, we relax, become faster and need less overt self-talk. Eventually, we come to play without any conscious thought at all. We automatically translate the notes on the page into a melody. While we are not aware of the thoughts, they are, of course, going on. As there is no simple and direct connection of the nerves between your eyes which allow you to read the music and those which allow your hands to play, there must be lots of extremely fast thinking going on to process the information received by your eyes, and then to translate it into movements made by your hands. This is exactly what happens when we experience emotion. The thoughts behind the emotions are not evident to us on a conscious level, but they are there.

Philosophers told us long ago that the events in our lives, by themselves, do not make us unhappy. It was the Stoic philosopher Epictetus who said people are not troubled by things, but rather by the view they take of them. Bill is a case in point:

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At thirty-five, Bill has been a manager for five years. He is married and has two children. He used to enjoy life a great deal, particularly in the summer when he was able to spend time playing golf and tennis. This summer has been very different, however, as his workload seems to have increased considerably. His wife, June, has been starting to criticise him lately for not spending more time with the family, and although he argues with her, he knows very well she is right. On this particular bright, sunny, summer day he is sitting in his office, staring idly out the window and feeling more and more dissatisfied. If we could hear what he was thinking, it would be something like this:

"You've got to get on with this work you know."

"I know, but I'll never get this stuff properly organised."

"You will never get anywhere if you don't. Think of June and the kids."

"I just don't know how to sort this mess out. I think my brain is going soft."

"You're just being lazy, that's all." "But I'm tired."

"What are you going to say in the next managers' meeting - that you just can't make the grade or something?"

"I don't really care; it all seems too hard!"

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It might seem, when you look at this example, that the real problem is the amount of work Bill has to do. But if we were to walk to the office next door to Bill's, we would find another manager, Margaret, in a worse position as far as workload and family commitments are concerned, yet coping well with her situation. It is therefore not the situation itself that is causing Bill's distress but the way he is thinking about it. Bill's inner dialogue, or inner conversation, is somehow not only stopping him from coping, it is also causing a great deal of stress. His criticism of himself as "lazy", and his counter-statement, "But I'm tired," exemplifies Bill's problem: the more he criticises himself, the more negative he feels. Before long, Bill will find himself trapped in a vicious cycle of self-criticism and negative feelings.

In order to understand this relationship between thinking and feeling,

we need to turn to the cognitive branch of psychology or, as it is more popularly known, the psychology of thinking.

## *The cognitive approach*

The cognitive approach to psychology involves the study of thinking processes and their influences on behaviour. This type of investigation has become increasingly important following the realisation that what we tell ourselves can have a significant impact on our lives. However, the simple recognition of this fact does not help us decide how we should go about changing our thinking and behaviour. You may have heard people who make a great show of preaching the importance of positive thinking but who rarely get around to telling you how to think this way. Most of these so-called motivational experts spend all their time telling nice little stories about people who have left behind old patterns of behaviour and gone on to do well. What they should be doing is offering a systematic, workable means of discarding the irrational, non-useful thinking processes and of developing new helpful, constructive thinking processes.

This chapter offers a practical method of changing your nonproductive thinking. The method given draws on the work of several people, each of whom has contributed to our understanding of the cognitive approach. Case studies are given to help you analyse destructive thinking, and there are also exercises designed to help you control your own thinking. What you will not find in this chapter are easy remedies of the "Every day, in every way, I'm getting better and better" type. The method given here does not call on you to deny reality. For example, if you are a person who is afraid of public speaking, you will not, as you stand in front of a crowd, instantly untie that knot in your gut by telling yourself that you are wonderful. Telling yourself this while faced with a mass of upturned faces blinds you to the reality of public speaking: public speaking is a skill which most of us acquire only after much preparatory work and practice.

If you are to achieve the task of controlling your own thinking, then it is useful to understand how thinking patterns develop.

### **How do we learn to think**

We have seen that thinking is very important in determining the way in which we feel, but what is it that causes us to think in a particular way in the first place? Like many other aspects of psychological functioning, patterns of thought have their beginnings in early childhood.

As we developed through infancy and on into childhood, we learned to obey the instructions of our parents. When we did obey them, we were rewarded, and when we did not, we were punished. This training went on, moment-by-moment, day after day, year after year. It was so intensive that we eventually learned not only to obey the instructions of our parents but also to give ourselves instructions in the same manner. We got to the point of obeying our own self-talk.

Because training during childhood for many of us is based around punishment or threat of punishment ("If you do that again, you can go to your room!"), our self-talk ends up reflecting a critical fault-finding attitude towards ourselves. Many people tend to set very harsh standards for themselves, and they mete out severe penalties in the form of self-condemnation when they feel they have not met those standards. Even people who have had a very relaxed and warm childhood and who are not too demanding or hard on themselves are unlikely to have minds that are constructively and positively self-disciplined.

## *Assessing your own thinking*

The first step towards changing your thinking from a negative to a positive stance is to assess your own thoughts. You can begin to do this by learning some labels for the various thinking processes which go on in our minds. Pamela Butler in her book, *Talking To Yourself: learning the language of self support*,<sup>31</sup> outlines three general types of thinking that have particular relevance to the self-assessment process. The first type I have called the Dangerous Drivers, in which we mentally push ourselves to the point where our ability to adapt to change is drastically reduced; the second, the Stupid Stoppers, in which we simply stop ourselves from coping in an effective manner; and the third, the Cunning Confusers, in which we bewilder ourselves and make adjusting to change more difficult.

### **The dangerous drivers**

There are times when it is necessary for us to tell ourselves to get on with the job, to put extra effort into the task. These thoughts are very helpful up to a certain point, but beyond it they become destructive - they become dangerous drivers. The more we push ourselves beyond our limits, the more we feel pressured and hassled, and the more our ability to cope decreases. But instead of easing up on ourselves when this happens, we intensify the pressure by using dangerous drivers more frequently.

The best way to decide whether or not you are using a dangerous driver is to examine the consequences of your actions. If your behaviour enables you to adapt to change and to experience high levels of personal satisfaction and contentment, then you are being rational and logical. However, if you are feeling stressed and frustrated, and are finding that you cannot adapt to change as readily as you would like, then you are probably thinking destructively - you are using the dangerous drivers.

Dangerous drivers come in various guises. There is the Be Perfect dangerous driver, the Hurry Up dangerous driver, the Be Strong dangerous driver, and the Please Everyone dangerous driver.

## Be perfect

The notion that we and other people ought to be perfect is very pervasive in society. It is certainly fine to want to do well in life, but people driven by the be perfect dangerous driver take this desire to an unrealistic extreme. They forget an appointment and all hell breaks loose inside them. They say to themselves, "That just shouldn't have happened! It's terrible! I'm an absolute fool!" Caught up in the grip of be perfect statements, these people constantly grade themselves. And that grading system is usually a bizarre one, in which 100% perfect is a pass and anything less is a failure.

Within most firms, the be perfect dangerous driver is a common affliction. It is seen in people who have a problem with effective delegation of work. I have heard managers complaining about the shortcomings and inabilities of staff. They state that the only way they can be sure of getting a job done properly is to do it themselves. However, I firmly believe that given the correct training and clear instructions, staff are almost *always* able to do a good job. The effects of dangerous drivers come out in some very interesting ways. The other day I spoke to an older partner in Touche Ross, a firm of chartered accountants. He told me about his early days as a member of the staff. He did his work in a thorough and competent way, and he always ensured that before releasing accounts they were signed out by a senior partner in the firm. When he became a partner himself and was in a position to sign out his own work, he suddenly became extremely anxious and overly concerned about the quality of it. In the end, he forced himself to challenge his own thinking and to use the sensible guideline that his mentor had taught him - specifically, had the accounts been completed in a thorough and competent manner? Using this criterion, he was able to sign out the accounts without anxiety. Had he persisted in worrying if the accounts were perfect, he would have got no work done and would have been highly stressed.

## Hurry up

The second dangerous -driver, hurry up, consists of thoughts that push us to do things in less and less time. Those of us who get ourselves in the hurry up trap are impatient not only with ourselves but also with others. We are the sort of people who always press the lift button at least three times and who toot the car horn only a fraction of a second after the lights have turned green.

The hurry up dangerous driver is a major contributor to what is known as Type A behaviour. In a recent best-seller, *Type A Behaviour and Your Heart*,<sup>32</sup> the authors Friedman and Rosenham stated: "Overwhelmingly the most significant trait of the Type A person is his or her habitual sense of time urgency or hurry sickness."

Type A people place great pressure on themselves by constantly struggling to complete daily tasks in less and less time. The pressure they experience is usually vented in the form of anger and extreme irritation. As Friedman and Rosenham observe, Type A people have "an extraordinarily well rationalised hostility". They are the sort of people whom you feel are angry at you for no reason at all whenever you walk into their offices. There is now clear evidence that people with this type of personality have a very much higher incidence of heart attacks than Type B people, who are more relaxed, less driven and do not talk to themselves in such a harsh manner.

Hurry up dangerous drivers are particularly problematic because society frequently reinforces those who hurry up or who try always to be perfect. Meeting unrealistic deadlines, for example, is often rewarded with pay increases, promotion and recognition. But these rewards more often than not

hide the eventual and often serious costs. One cost of overwork can be the loss of family and friends. In the race to accomplish more and more, people driven by the hurry up dangerous driver neglect their family and friends, then discard them, and then finally leave them behind.

The hurry up dangerous driver also has the ironic knack of causing people to produce sloppy work. Mistakes are inevitable when people rush through their work in order to take on new and even more unrealistic tasks. (The irony is that hurry up dangerous drivers are often seen in people who strive to be perfectionists.) It is also seen when "hurry up" managers constantly place unrealistic expectations upon their staff - quality is sacrificed to quantity. Most importantly, once people enter the hurry up syndrome, they become tied up in the vicious cycle of unrealistic deadlines leading to unproductive urgency, leading to further demands and deadlines, and so on.

### **Be strong**

With this dangerous driver, people tell themselves that certain needs and feelings such as sadness, grief and loneliness are intolerable, not only in themselves but also in others. This dangerous driver is often apparent in meetings when one or more of the people present have their ideas criticised and then get into foolish arguments about totally irrelevant issues as a way of boosting their own egos. Hurt by the criticism, they find it unacceptable to feel this way, and so attempt to submerge their feelings under a show of bluster.

### **Please everyone**

People who are driven by the please everyone dangerous driver only feel comfortable when other people like or approve of them; losing the approval of other people, even for a short period of time, can cause them discomfort and anxiety. People controlled by the please everyone dangerous driver often have a difficult time telling other people that they are really too busy to undertake this or that assignment or task. They often end up in the position of spending their entire lives doing what other people want them to do and not what they want to do.

When considering the please everyone dangerous driver, it is important to realise that there is nothing wrong with the give and take inherent in most relationships. Pleasing another person can be worthwhile and enjoyable. However, those people who please everyone else at their own expense develop a great sensitivity to other people's emotional needs whilst remaining unaware of their own needs. You may well recall people coming to tell you that they have just accepted another major assignment. Although pleased about getting the job, they also seem very anxious about their ability to actually handle the work. It is vital to find a reasonable balance between providing a good and timely service to others, and maintaining a reasonable and sustainable degree of stress.

The please everyone dangerous driver is particularly evident in the workplace amongst people who are always available at almost any time, day or night, to accept phone calls from clients. They fear that the slightest inability to respond instantly to a client demand will lose them work from that person. Yet other people appear able to restrict calls when necessary - for example, when they need to deal with an urgent job or a particularly pressing problem.



The obvious point regarding the please everyone dangerous driver is that you *cannot* please every significant person in your life all the time. Priorities need to be set on the rational basis of time and resources available, not on the irrational basis of who is screaming the loudest for your attention.

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## *Case study number one*

Jim, a twenty-eight-year-old manager, works in a moderately sized Auckland firm. He is lean and hungry and very keen to pick up new work that has become available through the deregulation of the economy. He demands high standards of himself and is particularly careful about the quality of the work that he gives to clients.

He has just received a request from a major client who has embarked on a horse breeding programme. This client wants Jim to assist her with the financial management of the new venture. Jim already has a full workload and is quite unsure of how he is going to deal with this project. However, feeling that it is vital for his office to become more and more involved in work that is different and innovative, he recognises the potential value of accepting his client's offer.

His wife has recently given birth to their second child, and this newly born daughter has a severe case of colic. The child consequently spends much time crying, and sleeps only fitfully at nights. Jim fully understands the pressure that his wife is under, especially as she frequently breaks down and cries through sheer frustration and exhaustion. He is becoming concerned that if the pressure does not ease off she may be at risk of harming the child. Jim wants to help and support his wife, and he is very aware of the consequences of neglecting her at this vital time.

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### **Questions**

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Which dangerous drivers are important in Jim's life at the moment?

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What evidence do you have for the existence of these dangerous drivers?

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Could it be said that Jim's conflicts are just normal ones?

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What would you advise Jim to do?

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### **Stupid stoppers**

Stupid stoppers are the things that we say to ourselves which interrupt our activities or actions. These are not statements of normal caution but are stressful thoughts that limit productivity. Two examples of stupid stoppers are "catastrophizing" and destructive self-criticism.

### **Catastrophizing**

Change in our lives always involves uncertainty. People can handle this uncertainty in two main ways, either by attempting to sort the options in a logical way and then devising a strategy to cope, or by worrying about all sorts of unlikely, unrealistic and catastrophic possibilities. The tendency to create a catastrophe out of uncertainty severely limits our ability to cope. Basically, catastrophizing consists of the internal rehearsal of the worst possible outcome of a situation.<sup>33</sup>

Consider these thoughts: "It would be awful if I went and discussed this controversial issue with Joe and he got really angry at me. I would feel so bad I would want to die!" Beyond these thoughts is an obvious fear of embarrassment and injured pride should Joe get angry. This seems reasonable enough, but the thought that the embarrassment would result in the unlikely and catastrophic event of death is unrealistic. In reality, the worst thing that could happen is that Joe might get upset and say something unpleasant - hardly a catastrophe!

All manner of things can go wrong in life. Examine the following statements. Do you sometimes catastrophize by using them?

It would be awful, or terrible, or a catastrophe:

- ... if that person didn't like and approve of me.
- ... if I ever made a mistake.
- ... if I couldn't find a perfect solution.
- ... if someone didn't want to see me again.
- ... if I were wrong.
- ... if my opinion were challenged.
- ... if someone got angry at me.
- ... if I were disapproved of.
- ... if I got angry.
- ... if I got emotional.
- ... if my relationship didn't work out.
- ... if I were criticised.
- ... if I couldn't think of anything to say.
- ... if I were rejected.
- ... if anyone didn't consider me to be a nice person.
- ... if someone didn't listen to me.
- ... if someone knew more than I did.

Saying to yourself "So what, if . . . ?" is one way of neutralising the effect of catastrophizing. As you become more aware of the effect of your own self-talk, you will realise that when you say, "Wouldn't it be awful if . . . " you are very often not examining the realistic consequences of your actions. In other words, most times you will suffer nowhere near the harm you would experience if your "catastrophe" actually did occur.

The only suffering that will occur through catastrophizing is self-imposed, unnecessary stress.

### **Destructive self-criticism**

The second stupid stopper focuses on self-imposed arbitrary judgements which stop our actions and our ability to cope with change. A colleague of mine was obviously being driven by this stupid stopper when he complained to me that he had been trying to write a technical newsletter and had spent three hours writing only three sentences. "With every word I wrote," he said, "I ended up saying to myself - No that's not quite right, or technically that's not correct, or that sounds pretty dumb!" The laborious approach to writing used by my colleague is totally different to that advocated by Llewelyn Powys in his book *The Creative Process*.<sup>34</sup> When writing, Powys says he ignores negative self-labelling and gives

... no thought whatever to the form of what I am writing. I put down my ideas as they present themselves pell-mell in my mind, fanciful, sentimental, bawdy, irreverent, irrelevant, they are all equally welcome. In going over my work, however, I am prepared to spend a great deal of care in endeavouring to find the correct word or an adequate balance for any particular paragraph.

Powys' "constructive critic" comes to the fore only after he has got his first draft down on paper; stupid stoppers are not allowed to interfere with his initial flow of words or thoughts.

Destructive self-criticism can also severely interfere with sports and leisure-time activities. For example, many people refuse to take up bridge, tennis or skiing because they cannot tolerate the way they punish themselves with statements like "You're inept!" or "You're stupid!" when their efforts to learn something new do not meet their own exacting standards. Instead, they find it safer to confine themselves to activities that they have already mastered.

Even when stupid stoppers do not prevent a person from tackling new activities, they can interfere with learning and substantially reduce enjoyment. Timothy Gallwey in his books *The Inner Game of Tennis*<sup>36</sup> and *The Inner Game of Golf*<sup>36</sup> describes how people talk to themselves when playing sport. Criticising and judging past behaviour commonly occurs, as can be seen in this section from *The Inner Game of Tennis*:

I'm hitting my forehand rotten again today ... damn it, why do I keep missing those easy set ups ... I'm not doing anything the coach told me to do in the last lesson. You were great rallying, now you are playing worse than your grandmother.

The negative self-labelling going on in this inner dialogue would do nothing to help the effective eye and hand co-ordination that is essential in tennis.

Stupid stoppers frequently arise amongst professional people who are required by their firms or associations to undertake continuing education courses. While the intent behind urging these people to continue their education is for them to learn something new, more often than not they can be found attending courses that are very clearly in their own area of expertise. Insolvency experts, for example, will go to a course outlining insolvency regulations, even though they will probably cover material they already know well. These people have failed to recognise that undertaking learning in a new area can be difficult and requires perseverance. Rather than being realistic about what is required, they label themselves "stupid" and "ignorant" and fall back into the safety net of familiar concepts.

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## *Case study number two*

Janice is a manager. Standing on her local chemist's scales one day, she discovers she has put on an extra five kilogrammes. She decides that the time has come for her to begin exercising. She knows that she would feel much better if she were fit. Next day she sets out at lunchtime to buy herself a set of running shorts and a pair of running shoes. On the way to the sports shop, Janice runs in to an old university friend, who is looking extremely fit, tanned and healthy. This friend starts to make fun of Janice and actually pokes her stomach.

Horried by this experience, Janice slowly and dispiritedly walks on. By the time she gets to the sports store she feels positively dejected. She wanders around the shelves full of running shoes and feels that she will never manage to lose weight and become fit. She tells herself that the running shoes are all too racey for her anyway. She walks out of the shop and returns to work in a bad mood.

Questions

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1. What stupid stoppers were involved in this situation?

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What sort of self-talk was going on?

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How do you know the self-talk was destructive?

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What would you advise Janice to do now?



## **The cunning confusers**

To help us make sense of the vast amount of information we receive each day, we all devise systems of simplifying things. We develop a kind of shorthand as we sort elements and people into categories, right or wrong, good or bad. We draw conclusions on the basis of certain assumptions. The risk inherent in this process of distillation is that we often distance ourselves from reality. We ignore important factors and misperceive others. As Robert Pirsig, author of *Zen and the Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*,<sup>37</sup> says, "We take a handful of sand from the endless landscape of awareness around us and call that handful of sand the world."

I call these types of thinking the cunning confusers because they distort reality in such a subtle way that most people are unaware that they are happening. A well-known psychiatrist, Aaron Beck,<sup>38</sup> who has done much important pioneering work related to the causes and treatments of depression, argues that these styles of thinking predispose an individual to psychological distress. By adapting the work of Beck and of Pamela Butler,<sup>39</sup> I have identified six frequently used cunning confusers. These are 1) Incorrect Inferences, 2) Misdirected Blame, 3) Denial, 4) Prejudgement, 5) Unanswerable Questions, and 6) Exaggeration.

### **Incorrect inferences**

An incorrect inference can be defined as a conclusion that has been drawn without an understanding of the facts involved. The incorrect inference is a very common cunning confuser, partly because the structure of the English language is such that it can be difficult to determine the difference between inference and fact. Thus, when Bill makes the statement, "Peter doesn't like me," he assumes that what he is saying to himself is a fact. However, at no time has Peter ever said to Bill in a serious manner, "I don't like you." Bill has come to this conclusion on his own. He has done so after putting together in his mind this evidence: "Peter hasn't called lately; Peter didn't want to play golf the last time I asked him; Peter didn't come to our house party last month." Seen in this light, the statement, "Peter doesn't like me," becomes not a fact but an inference - a conclusion drawn on the basis of other facts, specifically, Peter's lack of recent contact. In reality, it is likely that Peter's feelings of friendship towards Bill have not altered at all, and that there is a good reason for his unavailability.

While it is readily apparent that Bill's statement, "Peter doesn't like me," is based on an inference, it needs to be realised that the apparently factual statements, "Peter hasn't called me lately," "Peter didn't want to play golf," and "Peter didn't want to come to our party," are also inferences. Bill can consider his "Peter hasn't called" statement to be a fact only if he has an answering service that works or if he has been near his work and home phones every moment, with the phone lines never busy, and no problems along them. Unless he can be sure that his phone lines were always open and that he (or someone else or an answering machine) was always available to take Peter's call, his factual statement must be, "I have not talked with Peter lately, although I don't know if he has tried to get in touch with me." The same careful scrutiny must occur with the second and third statements if Bill wishes to be sure that they are indeed factual.

Like Bill, many of us ignore or are unaware of the important distinction between fact and inference. What we believe, or state, to be fact may not actually be so. We cannot rely on inferences in the same way that we can rely on facts. A more dramatic example of this distinction centres on the number of people who injure or kill themselves while cleaning their "unloaded" guns. The inference is that the guns are unloaded. The fact is that they are not!

Making inferences is not always a negative process, but problems arise when we draw conclusions about a situation or ourselves in an arbitrary fashion - that is, we make conclusions on the basis of flimsy or non-existent evidence. Further, we often fail to recognise that such conclusions may be incorrect. In important areas, this can lead to incorrect conclusions. When our inferences rely on basic opinions about ourselves and others, we also are playing with a loaded gun.

Aaron Beck, in his research on depression,<sup>40</sup> found that an important characteristic of depressed individuals was their tendency to make arbitrary inferences about themselves and about their futures that were overwhelmingly negative. Depressed people commonly say things like, "I'll never develop another relationship," or "I wouldn't be able to make a living if I went out on my own," or "I'll never be happy again." All of these comments are actually inferences, as they have no basis in fact.

During my own consulting work in the stress management field, I have found that the biggest roadblock for people who need to change or rearrange their lives so as to reduce their level of stress is their often stated belief that any attempt to change would be "hopeless". Once they can be encouraged to see the fact that there are opportunities in their lives for the taking, they find hope and are in a better position to conquer their feelings of distress.

### **Misdirected blame**

When people say things like, "You make me angry!" or "Talking to that client depresses me!" they are directing blame away from the real cause of their feelings (or sometimes their actions) and onto someone (or something) else. This phenomenon is particularly problematic when it comes to our feelings. Many of us believe that other people cause or control our feelings, but instances of such beliefs are almost always cases of misdirected blame.

Other people cannot make you feel anything. Your feelings arise as a consequence of the way you interpret, judge and otherwise talk to yourself about what other people say to you or about what they do. The type of feeling you experience will depend on whom or what you direct your blame at. You may feel angry or depressed, frustrated or helpless, or any one of a range of emotions. And, of course, your behaviour will tend to fit your feelings.

People, then, often excuse behaviour itself by casting the blame for it on something or someone else. For example, offensive behaviour of one sort or another is frequently blamed on the effects of alcohol. While alcohol certainly influences behaviour, people need, in the end, to realise that only they are responsible for their own actions - they can choose whether or not to have that one drink too many or even to drink at all.

## **Denial**

With this cunning confuser, people not only fail to note relevant information but also claim it does not exist. People deny problems in relationships because admitting that difficulties exist would be painful and would necessitate some action. Similarly, people on the brink of bankruptcy deny the reality of their situation and refuse to keep an eye on their own cash flow.

## **Pre-judgement**

People who are subject to this cunning confuser recognise only the similarities amongst people and amongst events and ignore the differences; they judge a person or a situation before they have all the relevant facts.

Racial, cultural and sexual prejudices are products of pre-judgement. When people pre-judge others, themselves or a situation, their ability to respond and adjust to change in a flexible manner is reduced. The result is stress. Statements like "All men are insensitive" or "All women are too emotional" or "I can't do anything right" involve pre-judgements. One or two negative experiences with men or women, or one or two difficulties during an attempt to complete a task, are used to draw conclusions about men, women or abilities in general. Statements like "He never thinks of me" or "She *a/ways* complains about everything I do" are also common examples of pre-judgement. In fact, whenever you hear the words *always*, *never*, *everything*, you are very likely witnessing the use of pre-judgement. These words distort reality. When you use them in relation to the negative behaviour of another person, you are likely to feel anger. When you use them in relation to your own actions, you are likely to feel depressed.

## **Unanswerable questions**

There are many subtle ways to torture oneself. In my time as a consultant I have seen how people frequently ask themselves questions which simply cannot be answered - questions like, "Why was I born?" "What would have happened if I had reacted differently?" "Am I really married to the right person?" Asking oneself these questions can cause great stress and decrease our ability to cope with change. Often, people ask these types of questions when they are in the middle of a difficult period in their lives. For example, it is common for university students sitting their final examinations to ask such questions as, "Am I really going to be happy with a career in Zoology or Psychology?" "Where will I be in twenty years time?" Pondering difficult questions like these is important, but it is an activity best carried out when there really is time to think an issue through. It is also important to ensure that these questions are not just being asked so as to escape thinking about the present, important and immediate events and changes in one's life.

## **Exaggeration**

Exaggeration involves an over-estimation of the importance of an event or situation. It is another means by which people distort reality and so confirm their prejudices or attitudes. People who have a poor self-image will often critically examine their every move with what appears to be a magnifying glass. A man who is basically unsure of himself will magnify the addition of an extra kilogramme or two of weight as being far more serious than it actually is.



These people usually also give great significance to how other people behave towards them. They gnaw away in their minds at any slight or perceived slight. By magnifying negative events and qualities, these people confirm the "rightness" of their original belief in their own worthlessness.

The process of exaggeration can have unfortunate results in the workplace, particularly when managers are required to appraise the performance of their staff. A manager who takes a dislike to a particular staff member is more likely to note carefully any small errors or misjudgements that the person makes. These "slip-ups" take on great significance and confirm the manager's belief that the employee is of little use. The result for the staff member can be serious, especially when his or her job is put in jeopardy.

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### *Case study number three*

John is the personnel and marketing manager of a small Hamilton firm. He feels under considerable pressure at the moment. Both he and his wife have careers outside the home, and John has agreed to drop the children off to child care on Mondays, Wednesdays and Fridays. Doing this means that he always arrives late at the office, so just to ensure that he gets a reasonable amount of work done, he works until 6 or 6.30 in the evening. Nevertheless, he finds himself making excuses to the receptionist when he walks in as to why he is late, and he has now got to the stage where he is spending about an hour each morning worrying about the impression that he is creating for his staff.

He has also had particular difficulty over the last few months recruiting sufficient clerical staff to undertake basic office work. John is now beginning to think that he cannot recruit people because there must be something drastically wrong with the firm and that the word has got out.

Eventually, one morning, after spending more time than usual thinking about his problems, John decides that the real source of them all is one of his colleagues, Sue. Sue is a rather aggressive and outspoken individual who has been known to talk very harshly to staff and even swear at them. He decides to confront Sue with her behaviour. He marches assertively down the corridor towards Sue's office, only to hear her saying to one of the other managers that John had better shape up, otherwise the firm will slip even further behind. After a few moments of listening to his colleagues' conversation, John finds the idea of confronting Sue less attractive. He decides to push the whole matter out of his mind and withdraws to his office.

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## Questions

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1. What cunning confusers are operating in this particular situation?

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2. What evidence do you have for the existence of these cunning confusers?

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3. Could it be said that John's conflicts are just normal ones?

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4. What would you advise John to do?

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5. What do you think is the best way to go about changing some of these cunning confusers?

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## Changing your thinking

If you found some difficulty in answering the last question about how John might go about changing his thinking, then this section of the book should be of use to you. Pamela Butler outlines five steps which are needed to change the way we talk to ourselves <sup>41</sup> These involve:

1. *Being aware* - listen to your own self-talk;
2. *Evaluation* - decide if your inner-dialogue helps you or causes you distress;
3. *Identification* - determine which dangerous driver, stupid stopper or cunning confuser is maintaining your inner speech;
4. *Arguing with yourself* - replace your negative self-talk with constructive and positive self-talk;
5. *Developing a plan* - decide what action you need to take to assist you in your new position of self-support.

### Step 1: Being aware (what am I telling myself?)

Because most people are unaware that they talk to themselves, it can be difficult to work out just what one is telling oneself. However, by using the process of logical deduction, it is possible to monitor your selftalk. This process requires you firstly to identify your current situation; secondly to work out your feelings in relation to that situation; and thirdly to determine just what you must be thinking for this situation to have triggered off such feelings.

When monitoring your thinking processes, you will soon discover that your thoughts are triggered by certain external (outside you) and internal (inside you) events. External triggers include compliments, criticism and the undertaking of new projects and activities. Internal triggers include feelings, physical symptoms and avoidance behaviour. With practice, you will soon become much more aware of your own thinking, and it is at this point that you can really start to alter it.

## *Step 2: Evaluation (is what I am telling myself helping me?)*

Only after we have examined what we are thinking is it useful for us to ask ourselves the question, "Is this thinking constructive or is it stress--inducing?"

## *Step 3: Identification*

Which dangerous driver, stupid stopper or cunning confuser is holding me back?

It is important for you to recognise the beliefs that underlie your inner self-talk. The more you understand these, the more able you are to challenge them. In addition, this understanding provides you with a base on which you can begin to build yourself a self-support system.

## *Step 4: Arguing with yourself*

Once you have got a better idea of what you are saying to yourself, you have a much better opportunity for changing it. It is vital to replace your negative self-talk with constructive and positive self-talk.

One of the most powerful ways to do this is to give yourself permission to make mistakes, to have feelings, to experience yourself as human, all without self-punishment. By giving ourselves permission to be less than perfect, we begin to break down our rigid habits of self-punishment, and so are able to function much more efficiently and effectively. Try these:

1. It's okay not to be perfect all the time.
2. It's okay to slow down.
3. It's okay to please myself.
4. It's okay to rest.
5. It's okay to stop punishing myself.
6. It's okay to stop confusing myself.

### **Positive self-talk**

*As well as using permission-givers, you need to develop a series of positive statements that you can say to yourself whenever you find yourself indulging in negative self-talk. If, for example, you are driven by the "hurry up" message, you may find great help from occasionally saying to yourself, "Slow down, you're moving too fast."*

Perhaps you find it foreign to talk deliberately to yourself in this way. If so, here are some guidelines that may be helpful:

1. **Forget what should be.** Don't keep reminding yourself of the ideal state of self-talk. Give yourself credit for the steps you have taken towards achieving it - don't judge the size of those steps, and don't expect yourself to make a major and instant leap forwards.
2. **Be specific** When you spend some time working on a way of changing

your own self-talk, give yourself credit for exactly what you do. For example, you may decide to spend five minutes while driving to work every morning talking to yourself sensibly. Give yourself credit for those five minutes - don't castigate yourself for not having done more.

3. **Focus on something besides accomplishment** Many people want to reach the finish line instantly, and when they don't, they give up. Focusing only on the end goal is frustrating. Praising yourself for effort, for improvements and for the steps accomplished along the way is a much better means of running the race.
4. **Learn to think in percentages** As you manage to reduce your negative self-talk by 5%, 10%, 20%, and so on, acknowledge and praise yourself for each reduction.
5. **Encourage yourself** Perhaps the most important part of changing your self-talk is to ensure that you reward yourself for doing so.

## *The psychology of winning*

Here are a series of pointers to help you become more positive, and to remain positive, after you have identified and then changed your negative beliefs.<sup>42</sup> The pointers all centre on the projection of a positive self-image and require you to -

1. **Project positive self-awareness** Observe the wonder and abundance in nature. Enjoy the sights, sounds and tastes of your environment. Stop feeling sorry for yourself. If you are alive and enjoy some degree of health, you've got it made. Try looking at yourself through others' eyes.
2. **Project positive self-esteem** Spend time writing down your strengths. Review your list on a regular basis and update it with new achievements. Get that positive feeling of your own worth and make sure that you tell others about what you have done well.
3. **Project positive self-motivation** Motivate yourself and others by focusing on the rewards of success and forgetting the penalties of failure. Talk to yourself over and over again when you are relaxed, visualising yourself in the act of enjoying and completing each of your current goals. Complete any project you begin.
4. **Project positive self-expectancy** Set yourself challenging goals that will stimulate and excite you. Your enthusiasm will be contagious and infect almost everyone it touches.
5. **Project positive self-direction** Put your goals down on paper and share them with those who can help you achieve them.
6. **Project positive self-confidence** **Put yourself forward as a winner who can create other winners.**

## *Step 5: Developing a plan*

Just changing your thinking is not enough. It is also necessary to decide what action to take to assist you in your new supportive position. Developing a plan with small action steps in it can be very helpful.

Here is an exercise that you can undertake to help you work through the process of altering your self-talk.

### *Challenging negative thinking and building constructive thinking*

When you encounter a stressful situation in which you know the way you have thought about it has made it worse, you can challenge this negative thinking by working through the following steps.

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1. Describe the situation in detail.

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2. Describe the emotional consequences of the situation - how do you feel?

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3. Assess your own self-talk - what are you telling yourself?

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4. Evaluate your thinking - is your self-talk helping? If your self-talk is helping, then great; if not, go on to step 5.

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Identify the belief underlying your self-talk - what dangerous driver, stupid stopper or cunning confuser is maintaining it?

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What argument can you use to counter the dangerous driver, stupid stopper or cunning confuser?

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1. Develop a plan - what actions can you take to support your new rational thinking?

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## Concluding - A Final Word

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The message of this book is simple: change is an inevitable and unstoppable part of life; it is not some omnipotent force that renders us all impotent victims. We do have a considerable degree of control over our own lives and destiny.

In order to maximise this control we must understand the forces operating upon our lives. The best way to examine these forces is to study your newspapers and magazines with care and to realise that they not only report today's news, but that often, without knowing it, they also forecast tomorrow's trends. Open your mind to the changes of tomorrow.

When you have a grasp of the forces that are affecting your life, you can make some choices about how you want to deal with change. The most important step is to recognise the power of being pro-active and the limitations of just reacting to change. If you grapple with forthcoming issues and choose your own course of action, you will deal with change more effectively and minimise distress.

However, chances are that sooner or later you will strike difficult periods and will want to manage the stress of change. When the tension inside you begins to rise, remember that ordinary and simple changes in your life can make a big difference to how you feel. Learning a simple means of relaxation can be a great help in many areas of tension. Exercise is a useful way to unwind. Simple and sensible dietary rules will help.

Coming to grips with what you want out of life can free you from much of the anguish and confusion that fuels distress during periods of change. The process is simple, and the effects are long-lasting.

Also recognising that *you* are the one who controls your thoughts and self-talk is important. Once you have discovered just which mental pitfalls you keep falling into, you can strive to avoid them.

Coping with change will never be totally easy, but with the right skills and approach you can deal with it effectively. You never know, you might just find yourself enjoying it.

## Notes to Text

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