



How to Better Manage Your Energy to Feel Less Stress

Presented by Cindi Ackrill, MD, PCC, Certified Stress Mastery Educator

Managing stress in healthy ways enables us to reclaim our energy, productivity and happiness. During the November 5, 2021, webinar hosted by PT WORK Force®, Dr. Cindi Ackrill addressed useful strategies to manage stress in order to build resistance and advocate for your needs. She highlighted five things to understand about stress and five steps to address it. During her presentation, participants moved through a handout that allowed them to personalize the content to the stressors in their lives. This handout is included in this document.

About the Presenter:

Dr. Cynthia Ackrill is a leader in the field of leveraging stress for optimal productivity, leadership, health, and happiness. A graduate of Duke University and the University of Maryland School of Medicine, Dr. Ackrill practiced primary care medicine, then transitioned to applied neuroscience to address a variety of mood and behavior challenges, including stress. She went on to certify in wellness and leadership coaching, and stress education.

Currently, Dr. Ackrill leads workshops and coaches leaders, individuals, and teams to co-create real-life strategies to advance performance and leadership goals, avoid disengagement and burnout, and flourish in a complex world. She contributes widely as a stress and behavior change expert to a range of media, including CNN, Katie Couric, Today Show, Huffington Post, and multiple print/digital venues.

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Stress Strategies

The 2020-2021 Chaos Edition

Unpredictability and challenge are real life, but the last year and a half has dealt us a much larger than usual dose of both! Sadly, most of us were never taught realistic, brain-friendly strategies to handle stress, especially how to work with our human wiring to better manage our brainpower and energy—our physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energies. And now it's clear that the "Whack-a-mole" approach of reacting to each new thing life throws at us, is exhausting us all. The costs of not managing our stress well are steep. We risk our safety, productivity, health, and happiness...and \$300Billion in profits!

But take heart! This isn't something else you have to get "right!" There are simple shifts and tools that you can start today to reclaim mind, body, and spirit and energize your health and happiness, even under duress. Let this help you brainstorm some small tweaks with which you can "play" or experiment to boost your coping confidence, energy, and well-being. Become part of the cultural shift to creating workplaces and homes that supports the best of human thriving.

5 THINGS TO KNOW ABOUT STRESS

- Stress itself is a _____ part of life.** Humans are adaptable organisms that need challenge to grow and perform well. We are pre-wired to react to danger to survive. But poorly managed stress is responsible for 70-90% of medical visits and is a higher risk factor for heart disease and cancer than smoking. So, we need to become smarter, stronger, wiser than our stress!
 - **"Coping Confidence"** is the key--having the knowledge, resources, and skills to handle it.



- It is our **relationship with the stress** in our lives (the story we make of it) that makes it healthy or unhealthy. This is why mindset is so important. How you talk about stress matters!

This does not mean you should play "Pollyanna" and make light of real challenges (toxic positivity.) Nor does it mean over-practicing the art of denial. It refers to accepting what you can and can't control and putting more thought and energy into bringing your best self to the challenges than into worry, self-criticism, shame, or blame.

2. Your brain's #1 priority is _____, followed by satisfaction and connection.

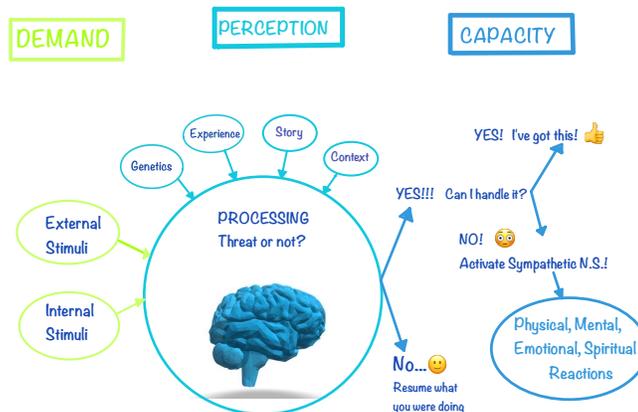
You are perfectly wired to handle acute stress and recover. Learn to appreciate and work with your wiring. It's the chronic triggering of the stress reaction system that robs every other brain and body function of vital energy.

1. **SNS** = Sympathetic nervous system—designed to ring the alarm when your brain perceives a threat—flight/fight, revs you up to take action, diverts blood from your frontal lobe to your large muscles.
 - a. Great for acute, discrete danger that requires you to move.
 - b. Huge energy consumer
 - c. Operates at the cost of all other functions of your mind and body
2. **PNS** = Parasympathetic nervous system—the counter system that allows your mind and body to rest and digest, recover, clean up and repair other functions.
 - a. Usually not given enough “air-time”
 - b. Can be invoked with simple tricks that use your wiring = “active relaxation”
(Practice, practice, practice this!!!)

Frontal lobe functions compromised by stress: attention, judgement, critical thinking, perseverance, impulse control, organization, self-awareness/monitoring/supervision/regulation, problem solving, creativity, learning from experience, predicting possible outcomes, empathy, emotional fine tuning = Your Executive Center

**This is why taking care of your frontal lobe is so important to your safety!*

3. Stress management is _____ management. We are amazingly adaptable energy systems. But when we perceive that the demands on our system exceed our capacity to handle them, we start to feel overwhelmed and stressed. This applies to our **physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual** (connectedness to people/purpose/higher power) **energies**. We can learn to become more aware of our energy levels and creatively find ways to recharge them. This boosts capacity and resilience. *****SMALL CHANGES CAN ADD UP TO BIG RESULTS!*****



4. Stress is _____. Perceived demand can outweigh perceived capacity because something big happens or because the little things just keep piling on (or in the case of 2020-21—both!) Every time we are called upon to react or respond it takes energy that needs to be refueled. It is much easier to stay positive and grounded in what matters and to have a healthier relationship with stress, when we have enough energy for our brains and bodies to function at their best.

5. **Stress is as _____ as Covid.** Managing your own stress helps others, just as helping others manage theirs, helps you.

BREATHE: 5 in... 5 out
Soft belly breaths, to the bottom of your lungs, letting your diaphragm descend and soften your belly out. (After years of holding that belly in, right?!)

5 THINGS TO DO ABOUT STRESS = WINNING STRATEGIES

I. Raise Awareness

a. Become aware of your relationship with stress.

- Watch how you talk about stressors. It matters to your mind and body. It influences your kids, your team, your own attitude.
- Check your perspective- mountain or molehill?
- Check your expectations, assumptions, biases, story.
- How can you shift your “story” to feel empowered or “Stronger than Stress?”
- What questions can you ask to help others feel more empowered?

b. Raise your self-awareness.

Know who you are and how you are. Know your values and needs. Know your wiring and when it is activated. Know what typically triggers you and how you tend to respond. Know your strengths and own them. Know what works for you.

Our culture rewards us for losing self-awareness and ignoring self-care in the pursuit of success, especially for energy management. We know the end feelings of exhaustion, meltdown, or pain, but we need to learn the subtle cues for when it’s time to recharge before we get to those extremes. (Think early warning alerts!)

- Reflect on what matters most to you. Being intentional with your values builds motivation, gives you direction, and creates meaning which is a natural “stress antidote.”

- How do you first know when you are getting stressed? What are your best cues that you need recharging? _____
- What tends to trigger you? _____
- What’s your typical stress response? _____
- What strengths do you bring to challenges?

- What tends to work for you in stressful situations?

- Pause to check in. You must interrupt your “busy” mind to build awareness. Experiment with your cell phone alarm or one of the many apps that help you build habits around self-care. When it dings, self-scan your physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual energy in that moment. (= Energy audit) Make this a team habit or family habit.
- Learn to routinely ask yourself what you really need in that moment- a stretch, a break, some water, a connection? *What if you pay as much attention to your own energy needs as you do your cellphone battery?* 😊
- Notice thought and behavior patterns/choices that ramp you up or calm you down.
- Experiment both with ways to reduce demand and increase capacity.

WHO

HOW

BREATHE AGAIN: 5 in, 5 out and ask yourself 3 questions:

1. How am I physically, mentally, emotionally, spiritually?
2. What do I need or what is needed right now?
3. Who do I want to BE right now?

2. Learn a way to **Calm Down - Power Up** in the moment. You can use your body to calm your mind! Activate your PS nervous system with deep breathing, progressive relaxation, or any form of “active relaxation.” This returns blood flow to your frontal lobe, increasing your brainpower to handle the situation.

What works best for you to calm down quickly in the moment?

3. Practice MINDSET SUPERPOWERS! The 5 C's  and a G.

- **Calm** – Use your body to calm your mind and reboot your brain to access your best thinking. [Breathe!](#) Learn a “Cool Down to Power Up” technique that works for you and practice it.
- **Clear** – Take a few moments and clear your thinking. What’s really at risk? What really matters in this moment? What values do you want to live by?
- **Curious** – Your brainpower, creativity, and ability to find solutions ramp up when you ask non-judgmental questions about your situation. What are you learning? What has worked for you before? How would advise a friend to handle this?
- **Courageous** – Yup, it takes courage to improve self-care, to set boundaries, to stand up for your values, to take the risk of trying new things, to allow your emotions space, to stay focused on what matters most when the going gets tough. What gives you courage?
- **Compassionate** (especially self-compassionate) – Stress narrows your perspective, makes you more judgmental, self-critical, more “black and white.” Take a moment to find compassion for yourself and others. (Check out [Kristen Neff's Ted talk!](#))
- **And Grateful!** Focusing on what you appreciate is a powerful stress antidote! When you take a few moments to really feel gratitude you improve your heart and brain rhythms and make it easier to get “unstuck.” Start or end the day with gratitude’s. Celebrate your wins—this actually wires your brain for more success.

4. RECHARGE! Create habits to build up your energy, capacity, and resilience.

You can increase your strength, fitness, and adaptability to meet the challenges of life by choosing habits that recharge your energy- physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. Humans (and brains!) have universal critical needs – nutrition, exercise, sleep, rest, play, social connection – that must be met to function well. In addition, you have individual needs that help you feel complete or energized. Just as stress is additive, so is every recharge!

- a. How can you shift the conversations (even the ones between your ears 😊) to energy management?
- b. How can you use feelings/emotions non-judgmentally as data for recharging?

- c. Brainstorm small shifts that you can make to meet your needs—go for at least 25 to spark your creative powers.
- d. Then experiment (with curiosity!) to find what works well to support your best life.

	Need more (energizers)	Need less (drains)
PHYSICAL sleep/rest/hydration nutrition/conditioning/ exercise		
MENTAL focus vs. distraction flexibility/creativity stimulation/rest time for processing		
EMOTIONAL mood regulation health		
SPIRITUAL meaning/purpose connection to others, bigger picture, and your why		

What habits do you commit to experimenting with after today to take better care of YOU?

5. Practice kindness... to others, to you, to the earth. This does NOT mean letting people walk all over you. Setting boundaries is kind. Speaking up for yourself or others is kind. Showing compassion and gratitude is good for your heart and mind.

TAKE CARE OF YOU! Others depend on you!

Questions, comments, suggestions? Please ask!

Check out more resources and sign up for newsletters on my website: www.cynthiaackrill.com and [YouTube](https://www.youtube.com). We need all the inspiration and collaboration we can get to stay on our best paths!

Gratefully, Cindi
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Answer Key-- 1. Normal, 2. Safety, 3. Energy, 4. Additive, 5. contagious