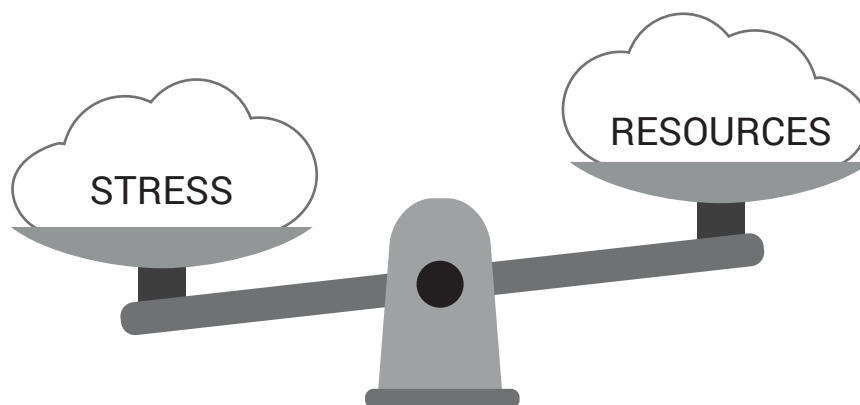




TAKING ACTION TO BALANCE STRESS IN DAILY LIFE

“Stress is like spice — in the right proportion it enhances the flavor of a dish. Too little produces a bland, dull meal; too much may choke you.”
— Donald Tubesing

Mindfulness practice can support us to take action to manage stress and build emotional resilience in daily life. Just the ability to stop and be aware of how we are feeling enables us to assess if we are starting to feel depleted or overwhelmed and need to take care of ourselves. We can create an action plan to balance stress by engaging in nourishing activities and decreasing the stressful ones.



What is stress?

Stress is a natural survival response to what is threatening and can be real danger in the present environment, or perceived threat, created by thoughts or sensations in the body. Stress is necessary as it keeps us alive in the face of danger. Good stress can also make life more interesting by helping us to grow and overcome challenges. Stress becomes a problem when it is chronic and the physical stress response does not turn off even after the threat has passed. Over time, this can lead to mental and physical health problems which need to be treated in order to restore ourselves to health and well-being.

What can we do to build resilience against stress?

We can build resilience to stress by increasing our resources. There are some simple and practical strategies we can take to bring them into balance like eating well, getting enough exercise, spending time in nature, connecting with friends, etc. People who are already struggling with depression or anxiety will have difficulty finding motivation to engage in these activities. It is important to create an action plan to engage in nourishing activities, **even if we don't feel like it**. Regardless of what prevents the desire to do something, people do feel better once they engage in a nourishing activity, rather than abstain from it.

Balancing Activities in Daily Life

1 Exercise 1 – Evaluate your Balance

Think about the kinds of activities you do in a typical day and take a moment to write out a list. When you are done your list, ask yourself which activities are nourishing and give you energy, and which ones feel depleting and draining. Take a moment to reflect on how much balance you have in your life. What did you learn from this exercise? Does anything need to change?

2 Exercise 2 – Brainstorm Resources/ Nourishing Activities for Daily Life

Make a list of different kinds of activities that give you energy and fulfillment. These may be activities that you are currently doing and would like to do more of, or new activities you would like to bring into your life. Use the categories to help you create a list of activities that are realistic and you can consider doing. They do not have to be extravagant or cost a lot of money. Keep it simple.

Social	
Creative	
Physical	
Material	
Intellectual	
Emotional	
Nature	
Spiritual	

Compassion as an Internal Resource

Resources that build resilience can be external factors, like the ones we have discussed so far, and internal factors that reflect positive mind states. Kindness and compassion are qualities of mind that promote well-being and can be strengthened with intentional practices that focus on opening the heart. Compassion and kindness can be felt for all beings, including ourselves. For many people, self-compassion is the most difficult, but most important for developing emotional well-being.

The following meditation helps to develop a sense of self compassion by offering words and intentions to a loved one and then ourselves. Eventually we can expand the practice to different kinds of people and ultimately all beings. Remember, that developing self-kindness takes practice and time, especially for those who have learned a more critical and judgemental attitude towards the self.

STEP 1 – Settle into your Body

Take a moment to sit in an upright, comfortable position. Close the eyes and bring your attention inward. Take a few slow and mindfulness breaths to steady the body and mind.

STEP 2 – Imagine a Loved One

Now bring into your mind's eye the image of a loved one. This could be a child, a dear friend, or a pet. Take some time to hold this image and just notice what feelings arise. Perhaps a warm feeling of friendliness can be felt in the body.

Bring to mind some wishes of well-being for this loved one and offer those wishes through words. An example of the traditional phrases that can be offered are as follows:

May you be happy.
May you be healthy and strong.
May you feel safe and protected.
May you be at peace and live with ease.

As you silently say these phrases, notice what feelings arise in the body.

STEP 3 – Offer yourself compassion

Now that you have evoked a feeling of compassion for a loved one, turn your attention to yourself. You may imagine observing yourself from the outside sitting here. Set an intention to treat yourself with kindness, like your own best friend. And now direct the phrases to yourself.

May I be happy.
May I be healthy and strong.
May I feel safe and protected.
May I be at peace and live with ease.

Sit with what ever feelings arise. Don't expect to feel anything in particular. It may take some time to feel an opening of the heart to oneself.

Germer, C. (2009). The mindful path to self compassion: Freeing yourself from Destructive Thoughts and Emotions. Guilford Press: New York.