

A photograph of a person and a dog walking on a path through a forest. The person is wearing a dark shirt and shorts, and the dog is a reddish-brown color. The path is dirt and is surrounded by lush green trees and foliage. Sunlight filters through the trees, creating a dappled light effect on the path. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

HOW TO LIVE STRESS-FREE in a STRESS-FILLED WORLD

By Lily Whitehawk

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Stress. Chronic, never-ending stress. It's the modern epidemic, the root cause of so many of those physical, emotional and mental challenges that are breaking down the doors of our reality, invading our personal space and shaking things up to the point that it is becoming difficult - and in some cases, downright impossible - to function.

Our bodies evolved equipped with a healthy survival stress-response mechanism built-in to the most ancient part of our brains. It is this stress factor that allowed us to accelerate from zero to one hundred and ten in a super-human "fight or flight" reaction to escape the occasional threat of club-wielding cavemen, charging tigers, and forest fires in a predominantly peaceful and predictable natural environment. The operative word in the above sentence is "occasional". Surrounded by the deeply familiar harmony of the pre-industrial natural world we were able to easily recalibrate, rebalance and return to a place of inner calm once the threat had passed.

Here's the thing: in the last 100 years, our environment has changed so radically our DNA no longer knows how to handle it. We are assaulted with non-stop stress monsters 24/7: nerve-shredding noise from traffic and construction, alarm bells, sirens, tv blather. Our brains are flooded with horror show headlines accompanied by even more horrific images, impossible schedules, pressure in the workplace, pressure at home, chronic aches and pains, scary physical symptoms and even scarier diagnoses, global crisis, pandemics, confusion and chaos, bills and emails and text messages



that keep coming and just don't stop, Most of us are isolated from anything remotely resembling a natural environment - let's face it - from any kind of environment that will allow us time-out to rest, recuperate, and re-balance from this continuous non-stop fight or flight dance. The peace and recalibration once so readily available to us through communion with nature is now increasingly hard to find. We've gotten so used to being stressed many of us have begun to accept this as our natural state. And we are paying a heavy price for this acceptance - declining health, weakened immune systems, emotional distress and shortened lifespans.

What if I told you there are some really simple yet powerful solutions for this modern dilemma? What if you could empower yourself to create and maintain an inner state of stress-free calm and balance that you can call on whenever you need to sleep better, feel better, think more clearly, perform your best... no matter what situation you find yourself in?

My name is Lily Whitehawk. I am a wellness coach and sound therapist, as well as co-founder and creator of HUSO, a sound frequency therapy technology. I know all too well how it feels to not be able to locate the off switch, to be stuck in full-on fight or flight response to the point that you can no longer think or sleep or heal



or function like a normal human being. I want to share with you the following simple things I learned that you can begin easily integrating into your life today to help you navigate this crazy world with a clear mind, a peaceful heart, and a body that is strong, healthy and in harmony, no matter the chaos or challenges you face.

We may not always be able to choose what happens to us, but we always have a choice when it comes to how we dance with it.

Ready to change your life? Let's get started!

WHY IS STRESS SO BAD FOR YOU?

Stress tears us up... literally. And this is why. When we are in a constant state of chronic stress, we never get a chance to recalibrate, to fix what might be getting off balance, or to rest so we can recharge and heal before things really take a wrong turn and what began as a small glitch in a body system becomes something that is broken beyond



repair. And we don't have to be in full on house-on-fire, fight or flight panic mode for this damage to occur. Even less in-your-face forms of constant unrelenting mild anxiety or stress can wreak havoc with the healthiest of bodies and minds.

If we want to halt the runaway stress train, we have to find something that will shift us out of non-stop fight or flight mode into a deeply calm, relaxed state. Our nervous system has basically two settings: sympathetic - the highly alert, ready for action, adrenaline pumping state, and parasympathetic - the calm, laid-back, relaxed, everything-is-right-with-the-world state. If these two states were musicians, Sympathetic would be the electric guitar shredding lead singer in a heavy metal band, while Ms Parasympathetic would be a harp and flute playing meditator. There is certainly a time and place for Mr Heavy Metal in our lives... he has helped more than one athlete win a race. But right now, we all need an extended visit from Ms Parasympathetic to help us through these challenging times.

Luckily for us humans, there are many easily accessible remedies for what is ailing us in the stress arena, many ways to shift ourselves into a parasympathetic state. We evolved to respond favorably to these things; we do not need a prescription or a hefty bank account to utilize them. All that is required is the acknowledgement that, while we may have little to no control over what is happening in our world, we absolutely can change how we are responding to it, how it is affecting our bodies and our minds. When we do this, our experience of life will become more manageable and fulfilling, and we can make space in our being for the three H's to move back in: Health, Happiness and Hope.

BREATHE



By becoming aware of our breath, by paying attention to how we breathe, we can take control of our stress levels. With practice we will begin to recognize those first few moments when stress starts to accelerate and ramp it back down before it takes the wheel and runs us into a wall.

The fact is how we breathe greatly impacts and is directly connected to our physical, mental and emotional states. For instance, when we are relaxed our breathing is deep, slow and steady. When we become stressed our body starts to tense up and muscles contract, including the diaphragm, that muscle dividing the chest cavity from the abdominal cavity at the base of our lungs. When the

diaphragm becomes tight and rigid, our lungs can no longer fully expand or contract. Our breathing patterns become rapid, erratic and shallow, cutting down on the amount of oxygen we receive with each inhalation and the amount of toxic gases we release on each outbreath. This leads to imbalances in our blood composition, triggering and intensifying certain stress responses that cause even more imbalance, anxiety, and stress.

Here is an easy way to tell whether or not you are shallow breathing or abdominal breathing. Place your hand on your abdomen. Now take a few breaths. Do you feel your abdomen “inflating” as you take a breath? Do you feel it “deflate” as you breathe out? If not, then your body is most likely in stress mode.

You can start to take control of your stress response by training yourself to recognize when you are falling in to shallow breathing and to immediately take action to deliberately slow your breath down and shift into abdominal breathing. Slow, deep and steady breathing sends a signal to your body and mind that you are safe.

Close your eyes, put your hand on your abdomen and concentrate on breathing in to a slow count of 4, holding for a count of 2, and then breathing out to a count of 6. As you continue to do this you will reach a point where you feel a “let go” and your diaphragm will soften. Your abdomen and lungs will begin to fully expand and contract naturally and easily and your entire body will relax.

Alternate Nostril Breathing

Another great breathing technique that helps to alleviate tension, anxiety and stress is alternate nostril breathing.

Feeling stressed and anxious can disrupt the balance between the two hemispheres of your brain, leading to a disruption of how your nervous system works. Alternate nostril breathing will re-regulate this imbalance and allow you to return to a calmer state of mind and body. This is how you do it. Take your thumb and forefinger and place them on either side of your



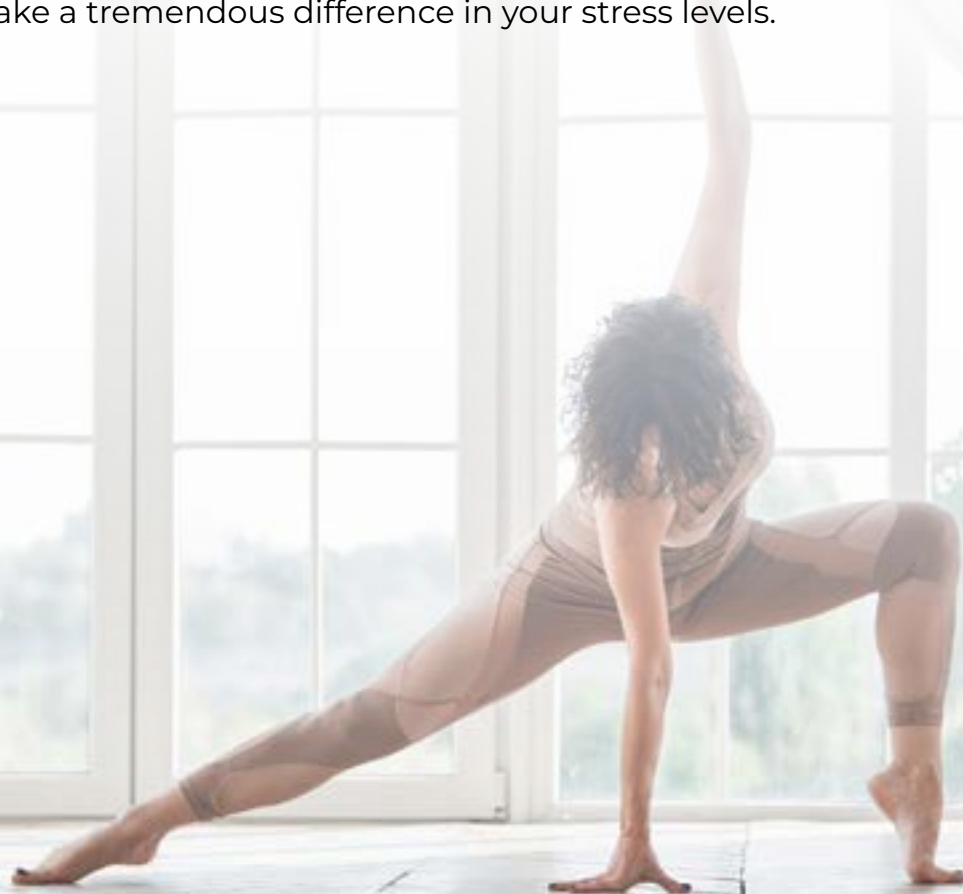
nose. Then gently press against the left side of your nose until that nostril is closed while you breathe in, to a count of 4. Gently press both nostrils closed and hold for a count of 4. Then release the left nostril, continuing to hold the right nostril closed and breathe out to the count of 6. Hold for a count of 4. Then breathe in, to a count of 4 while holding the right nostril closed. Press both nostrils closed and hold for a count of 4, then release the right nostril, continuing to hold the left nostril closed and breath out to the count of 6. Hold for a count of 4. Repeat this process, until you feel your mind begin to slow down, your body begin to soften and let go.

There are other breathing techniques - many of them practiced for thousands of years - designed to elicit specific responses in the body and mind. If you are interested in discovering more about this, you can research Pranayama yoga.

MOVE YOUR BODY

We were designed to move, and when we don't, we eventually pay a price in increased stress and decreased levels of health. A regular exercise routine can greatly benefit how well we metabolize food, eliminate toxins, maintain hormonal balance, optimize circulation, build bone density, and increase muscle mass and joint mobility. Even moderate daily exercise can slow the aging process, help maintain a healthy nervous system and enhance emotional wellbeing. Sweating it out allows our bodies to release toxins created by the stress response. It lights a fire that burns up any excessive adrenaline lurking in our blood and tissues.

You don't have to be a seasoned athlete or a marathon runner. That is not your purpose here. Something as simple as a 15 to 20 minute walk a day, dancing by yourself to three of your favorite tunes back to back or committing to as little as 20 minutes daily of yoga or Qi Gong can make a tremendous difference in your stress levels.



The biggest hurdles to adding this to your de-stress toolbox are 1) convincing yourself that it is a priority, 2) pushing through the resistance that a part of you throws at any attempt to pull you away from those virtual reality screen portals of various sizes, or your desks or your chores, and 3) taking that first step, and then doing it again the next day and the day after that. Before you know it (actually about 2 to 3 weeks or so - that's how long it takes to establish a new behavior) this will become the highlight of your day. If you are having trouble with beginning, enlist a buddy and agree to be cheerleaders for each other.

It is important that you do not bring performance pressure into your activity. This is not about becoming an ultra-runner or a prima ballerina, a bodybuilder or a champion gymnast. This is not about competition or even about improving your personal best... this is about losing yourself in the movement. This is about the rhythmic beautifully coordinated swing of your arms and legs as you walk, the joyous sway of hips and stomp of feet in time to music, the feel of the wind on your face as you cycle down a lane through dappled sunlight between rows of towering trees.

To bring their students back to a relaxed state in the present moment, Qi Gong masters teach this mantra, "Nowhere to go, nothing to do." In other words, this time is not about getting somewhere or accomplishing something. This time is about just being; your only agenda is having no agenda at all.



One bonus of choosing to take it outside when it comes to your exercise routine is you will also be getting your sunshine fix. Because the Vitamin D your body makes when exposed to the light of the sun is critical - and I do mean CRITICAL - for maintaining a balanced and functional body and mind. As little as twenty minutes a day of direct exposure to the sun, sans sunglasses or sunscreen, will reduce your stress level and markedly increase your calm quotient and overall sense of happiness and wellbeing.

DISCONNECT

One of the biggest, baddest stressors in the lives of people living through these fast-forward crazy, mixed up times is, hands down, the 24/7 pervasive onslaught of media cacophony we are now subjected to. The remedy for this particular challenge to our peace and wellbeing seems deceptively simple: turn off the computers and TVs, put down the mobile devices, and just walk away. However, once we try it most of us quickly realize this is not so easy to do.

Let's admit it: we are addicted to this technology. It has become such an integral part of our universe that we can no longer imagine life without the constant bombardment of a never-ending stream of information. Much of this content is so confusing, contradictory and downright disturbing to say the least, that our bodies are now consistently on high alert and we can no longer find the "off" switch. Our minds, never designed to deal with so much incoming input without a break, struggle to do the job they are created to do: take in information, analyze it, collate it, decide what response will best ensure our survival, and then send instructions to the rest of the

body to implement that response. This is stressful. Very very stressful. Yet we are so used to it at this point it does not even occur to us to question it. We have forgotten what it was like before all this media madness entered our personal and collective universe. The youngest among us have never lived in a world without it.

The world before virtual reality - that world we evolved to successfully navigate without endangering our health and wellbeing - still exists. We just need to let ourselves find it again and then hang out there for a while.

My challenge to you is this: pledge to take a break from all media for two weeks. No exceptions.

Now... look at how your body and mind just reacted when you read the above sentence. Did you feel resistance? Did your body feel anxious at the very thought of not having that connection constantly at hand? Did your mind immediately begin lecturing you with all the reasons why this absolutely would not work, that it was insane... dangerous even? Then you my friend, like many, many of your fellow humans, are addicted. And that is NEVER a good thing.

We do better at successfully meeting the challenge of any addiction if we enlist help from people around us, if we form a support team to cheer us on and remind us of our purpose. You know those people... they are the "you are strong,



"you've got this" folks who get you through those weak spots when you are trying mightily to convince yourself that you cannot do this, this is not fun, in fact this is probably the dumbest idea you have ever concocted!

Once you reach about the 3rd day of the no media challenge the good stuff will start to kick in: you will begin to sleep better, think better, feel more alive, more present, and much, much, much less stressed. You will actually start to relax. The only thing that will have changed is that you are no longer tethered to those portals that lure you away from the present moment and into a world that is frenetic, moving at lightning speed, creating an experience that is ungrounded and off balance and anxious.

Having done this media detox myself I can tell you from personal experience that if there is something important going on in the world you need to know, then someone - your partner, your parents, your children, your neighbor, someone in line at the supermarket - will tell you about it.

Just try it. The only thing you have to lose is this ridiculously high stress factor we have all agreed to accept as the new normal. And after you stop calling me names for asking you to sacrifice your screen time, you will thank me for the freedom you have gained: freedom from unhealthy levels of anxiety, stress and chaos. You're welcome!

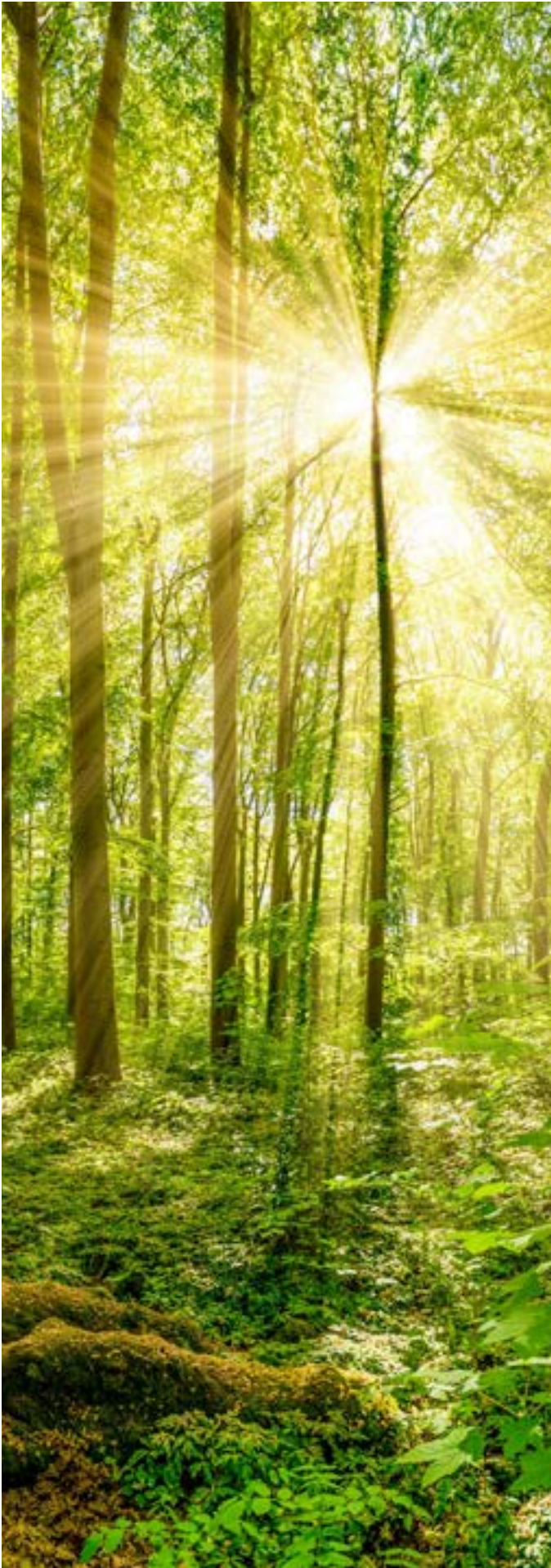


STILL YOUR MIND

A few years ago, Harvard University did a study measuring the effects of meditation. They worked with a group of people who had never meditated. They took initial brain scans of each participant and then taught half of them to meditate. The meditator group met for a weekly class and were instructed to meditate on their own using a recording for 40 minutes each day. Some meditated religiously for the prescribed period every day. Some for less time. Some skipped a day or two. The average time spent in meditation for the group as a whole was about 30 minutes a day. At the end of eight weeks, follow up brain scans were performed on all of the participants. What they found was pretty remarkable. When comparing the beginning and final brain scans of the meditators, they discovered that certain structures in the brain had literally changed in size: specifically that the amygdala - that part of the brain responsible for triggering the flight or fight response- had significantly decreased in size and other structures responsible for learning, focus and cognition had increased in size and thickness. Participants reported feeling much less anxious and stressed and more able to think clearly and stay grounded and focused

So what does this mean for you and me? Well it means that meditating is an awesome tool to help us with the stress factor in our lives. If you have never meditated in your life... no problem. We are not talking rocket science here. It is more a matter of learning the technique that most appeals to you and then committing to a daily practice. There are classes in pretty much every city worldwide eager to teach you this skill. And if - in circumstances like the one we find ourselves in as of the writing of this ebook in the middle of the COVID19 lockdown of 2020 - you are not able to attend a class, there is a myriad of free instructional videos easily accessible on you tube or through apps developed for the purpose of providing meditation tools and guidance. If you prefer meditating with a group, which is really a helpful thing if you are a newbie, think about starting a Zoom meetup to share meditation time with other people who are also committed to holding a space for deep mindfulness.

I know what many of you are thinking: "I already don't have enough time in the day. How can I possibly carve out a space for meditation?" or "There is no way in heck I can sit still and do nothing for half an hour every day." Let's tackle that right now.



Number one:

Subtracting 30 minutes of recreational screen time will give you what you need. It is a matter of prioritizing your wellbeing.

Just think how LOVELY the payout of making meditation your new habit will be: you will no longer walk around all day feeling like your mind and body are plugged in to an electric socket, you will more than likely start sleeping better, thinking more clearly and just feeling all around more and more like the boss you truly are.

Number two:

There are forms of what is called “active meditation” incorporating movement with other things such as sounds or mantras (short repetitive meaningful phrases) to achieve that switch from a sympathetic to a parasympathetic state. As far as duration: once you have established the meditation pathway in your nervous system, as little as 10 minutes a day will give you an enormous dose of calm to carry away with you. Just remember: this is about literally reshaping your brain and nervous system so that your mental, physical and emotional resilience is enhanced and your life becomes more pleasurable.

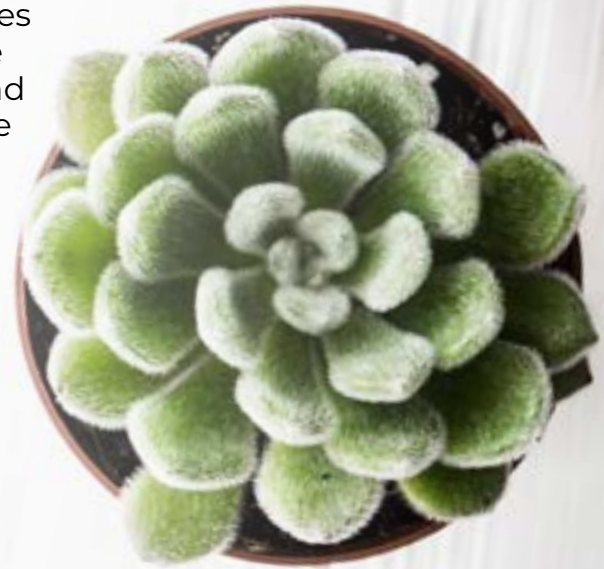


SIMPLIFY

Have you ever noticed that the degree of stress you experience directly correlates to how many complications your life contains? There is a reason all monasteries and retreats incorporate routines, rituals and environments that are orderly, neat and simple. The more things you have, the more clutter filling your space, the more daily distractions and decisions you face, the more your stress quotient increases.

Our bodies and minds respond well to environments that are ordered, harmonious and pleasing to the eye. When we surround ourselves with chaotic clutter, our eyes don't know where to focus first, our attention is pulled one way and then another. Too many of us are faced with the constant dilemma of not knowing where to find things in all the chaos. This can cause low level ongoing stress and an inability to fully relax.

And when we claim ownership of boatloads of things we consciously or unconsciously take on responsibility for those things. For many of us our stuff transforms into hundreds of tiny - and sometimes not so tiny - anchors weighing us down, demanding our constant time and attention, and blocking us from accessing the clarity that comes when we release attachment to the things we own that are no longer serving a vital purpose in our lives. As simple as it may seem, decluttering and letting go of things can directly lead to reduced levels of stress and an increased sense of wellbeing and calm.



Start slowly...

Like many of the suggestions I am offering up to you, the hardest part of implementing this de-stress hack is committing to the process and then taking the first step. You may experience an initial resistance to letting go. In fact, you may be shocked at the extent to which you have become attached to these inanimate objects. So, start slowly if it feels better. Sort through your desk and toss out any old papers and magazines you are still holding on to for absolutely no reason. Clean out kitchen cupboards of any food with an expired date, along with any pots, pans, gadgets or utensils you no longer use. Clear your rooms of any furniture that is not serving a purpose. Pack up all those chotchkes and knick-knacks that seem to multiply when no one is looking and donate them to your local thrift store. Go through your closet and pull out at least ten things you haven't worn in the last year. Find a charity of your choice or someone you know who might love those tie-dyed Grateful Dead tee-shirts and release them to find their way to a new home. Then do it again. And again. The more you give away the more you will begin to notice a feeling of internal lightness. Pretty soon you will become addicted to the significant rush of "feel good" every time you eliminate unnecessary clutter from your environment. I think it may surprise you to find just how much something this simple can reduce your level of internal stress.



There is another benefit to this: the less you own, the fewer decisions you will have to make on things like what to wear or what pan to use. That internal pressure of constantly having to clean or not knowing where anything is or not being able to locate your car keys because you threw them on the desk and they were immediately swallowed up by the chaotic black hole that has appeared where an orderly surface once was will melt away. Your remaining possessions can now be more easily organized and arranged in a way that is pleasing and easy on the eye and the spirit. And then comes the best part: every time you enter your now zen and harmonious space your body and mind will feel relaxed, welcomed, embraced and safe. You will have created your own personal sanctuary.



LET NATURE HEAL YOU

Forest bathing: it's a thing now. In fact, it is gaining so much legitimacy that physicians and wellness practitioners are prescribing it as a significantly effective method of reducing stress. For those of you still in the dark about this phenomenon, the phrase may conjure up images of running naked through the forest before plunging into a beautifully appointed clawfoot tub in the middle of a mossy flower filled clearing surrounded by towering venerable oak trees and twittering birds.

The reality is much more mundane yet equally as magical if you are willing to push the pause button on your mental chatter and allow yourself to open to the experience. Forest bathing is just a fancy way of describing the act of spending time in the forests and wilderness of the natural world. Anyone who has ever walked through pristine woods and meadows, camped outside in the wilderness under a vast canopy of glittering stars or sat by a stream surrounded by trees, absorbing the sights, sounds and smells of the natural world knows first-hand the profoundly soothing effect this activity can have on your mind and body.

But have you ever wondered why this happens? We evolved to thrive in these types of natural settings untouched by the hand of man, yet most of us are now spending 93 percent of our time indoors and at least ten hours a day on social media. We are seriously suffering from "nature deficit disorder" and paying a tragically high price for this self-imposed alienation.

The good news is that no matter how



long we have gone without a nature fix, once we are re-exposed to our original habitat our bodies will immediately recognize the organic frequencies found in these sylvan realms as something deeply familiar, reassuring and restorative. When we are immersed in a natural environment for 30 minutes or more, the dissonance and static created by exposure to the cacophony and man-made frequencies of the modern world are recalibrated and returned to balance and harmony through resonance and entrainment with the frequencies found in nature.

And then there are the amazing gifts trees and other flora have to offer us in the form of cleaner air, increased oxygen levels and the presence of phytoncides, oils released by trees and other plants that help defend against bacteria, fungi and insects. These substances have a significant effect on humans also, decreasing physical stress and lowering blood pressure as well as heart rate. Evergreen trees produce these phytoncides in the greatest quantity, so an area where there is an abundance of pine, cedar and spruce is the perfect place to walk through slowly while allowing yourself to absorb all the gifts the forest has to give.

Locate a place nearby where you can stroll through the woods. If there is no wildness left within reach, find a park. And if you can't find a park then search out a special tree and make friends. Sit down with your back against the trunk, rest your head against its bark, close your eyes and open to the gifts it has to give you. If you can't leave your house or even if you are bedridden you can still access some of the benefits of this stress reducing technique by purchasing a few essential tree oils and a diffuser and filling the room with the scent of the forest. Then close your eyes and take yourself on a stroll through a sun-dappled enchanted woodland underneath the spreading shelter of emerald green branches.

And THAT is some of the best medicine around!

CREATE

One of the most profoundly beautiful forms of meditation practiced by Tibetan monks is the art of mandala sand painting. A group of monks will gather together in a prayerful manner and create an intricate jewel-like mandala pattern covering the entire floor of a room using multi-colored sand as if it were paint. At the end of this practice, the mandala is swept away. One walks away from witnessing this phenomenon of selfless creation with an overwhelming awareness that the greatest gift lies not in what is created, but rather in the act of intentional creation. The experience itself is what affects you, what can nurture a great peace and stillness in your body and mind.



We all knew this as children, able to lose ourselves for hours using nothing more than a pad of paper and a box of Crayolas, bringing fantastical worlds and magical beings found only in our imaginations to life on the page.

Creating something is one of the most enjoyable, addicting-in-a-good-way methods of stress relief there is. In the same way that meditation quiets mental chatter, creative pursuits encourage your mind to become laser focused on the project at hand. Everything else disappears. The project before you is all that exists. Your heart rate and breathing slows and for this enchanted time-out you are “in the flow”, where your only thoughts are of the present moment and your body drops into a parasympathetic state.

This is not just a theory; there have been many peer reviewed studies backing up the above statements. These studies found that creative endeavors not only reduce stress, anxiety and depression, they can also help process and heal trauma. Immune function is enhanced, the right and left hemispheres of the brain become balanced and our mood improves. When we are absorbed in making something just for the pure enjoyment of it, our brains actually release dopamine, the feel-good neurotransmitter and hormone responsible for sensations of happiness and well-being.



Relax! You don't have to be a Michelangelo or a Jane Austen for this to work for you. All you need is a desire to let yourself do something creative that feels like fun. Projects incorporating repetitive movement such as knitting, crocheting, and felt work are easily learned skills with great benefits.

Gardening is another creative act that offers big payouts in the form of great peace and feelings of well-being and satisfaction. Our DNA remembers this ancient essential connection with plants and dirt. In fact, gardening offers a bonus in that it is probably one of the best ways to lower cortisol, the hormone your body produces when it is under stress. If you don't have a yard to turn into a magical garden, container gardening is always an option.



Writing, dance, painting, working with clay, learning to play an instrument, crafting songs and perfecting your vocal skills... really the list of possible creative options is endless, and most of them require little to no monetary outlay to get started. The only thing stopping you is YOU! So, go ahead. Pick something and then jump in with both feet. Even a few hours a week will begin a metamorphosis in you, and you will find yourself anticipating with growing excitement the time spent wearing your creator hat.

LISTEN

We are deeply affected by sound. It can rev us up, set our teeth on edge and jangle our nerves, or put us in a state of calm, ecstasy and even - dare I say - bliss!

I am sure you don't need to be reminded of the sounds that you don't like. You know the ones: jackhammers, honking horns, sirens, the neighbor's dog's bark permanently tuned to the note of ear-pierce. Blaring tv's, fire alarms, constant never-ending phone alerts. We are in fact drowning in a sea of sound pollution. This takes a tremendous toll on our bodies and minds and is one of the biggest contributors to stress.

Fortunately for us, there is an easy fix for this. By bathing ourselves in sounds that are pleasing to the ear and calming to the body we can easily dive into that deeply relaxed parasympathetic state where the effects of stress can begin to heal. However, not just any sound will do. There are certain sounds from particular sources that are better than others for getting the job done.

Take birdsong for instance. Did you know that there is a specific area of our brain that is calibrated to respond to the exact frequency range found in the songs of birds? If you think about it this makes complete sense. When we humans made our first appearance on the planet and began programming evolutionary survival skills into our DNA, those programs were dictated pretty much by the environment we found ourselves in. We quickly learned that the presence of birdsong signaled a safe environment with food and water sources, and that if we followed those sounds in the distance, we would find conditions favorable for living the good life, caveman style. Conversely when there was an absence of the sounds of chirping singing feathered creatures, or the avian orchestra abruptly left the building so to speak we knew there was danger coming our way. And although we no longer rely on the presence or absence of birdsong as our primary early warning system, we will still find ourselves markedly relaxing whenever the sound of birdsong fills the air.



If you don't believe me, then check it out for yourself. Find a place where there is an abundant bird population. If you are not near a park or land outside the city, then you can lure some feathered friends to take up residence in your backyard or even visit your apartment balcony by creating feeding stations and supplying the seed mix favored by songbirds. Then all you have to do is sit back and listen. Allow yourself time out each day for 15 to 30 minutes to sit still and listen to the sweet sound of birds singing their little hearts out just for the pure joy of being alive. There are also recordings of birdsong you can download and then play, filling your interior environment with the happy trill of nature's orchestra.

The natural world offers us other auditory delights that have a calming effect on our nervous system. Wind through trees, the sound of a leaping stream flowing over rocks, the lullaby of rhythmic ocean waves, the patter of rain: all these sounds are ear candy to us humans.

If you prefer music, then just be aware that the more natural and analog the source, the more beneficial the effect will

be. Digitally produced sound is compressed, thus eliminating many of the harmonics and high and low frequencies. It is those subtle sound frequencies that add tremendous substance and richness to our experience of sound. Tibetan and crystal singing bowls, stringed instruments, flutes, drums... all of these are great sources of sound that the body loves. If you are looking for probably the best source of beneficial sound when it comes to encouraging a deep sense of relaxation and balance in the body, there is nothing better than the sound of the human voice. We are hard wired to respond favorably to the frequencies found in vocal melodies. And if there is a harmonic resonance created by the blending of more than one voice, that is even better. One of the best ways to experience this is to expose yourself to the live celebration of spirit through groups of humans such as choirs, monks, or indigenous tribal members raising their voices in a unified expression of sacred song. Whether you are just listening, or you are singing yourself, this can be a truly transcendent experience that takes you from a stressed-out anxious state to a deeply relaxed, calm and centered place of wellbeing and inner harmony.

So, there you have it. All I ask is that you pick one or two of these suggestions and commit to giving them a try for several weeks. It will cost you little to nothing and is more than worth a shot. I know how profound a change these things have made in my life. I am willing to bet they will bring the gift of less stress and more calm and centeredness to you too. My parting reminder for you is this: happiness is a choice. You have the power to begin the journey back to wholeness and joy, so what are you waiting for? Let's get crackin'!

With love,
Lily



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