

## 8. Master Stress in 10 Minutes by Dharma Singh Khalsa.

By Dharma Singh Khalsa

As I write this article, the stock market continues its wild gyrations and the economic and other rampant stress of our times is beginning to take its toll on our health.

This is not just my opinion, it's also been shown in a recent poll published by the American Psychological Association (APA). Money and the economy topped the list of stressors for at least 80% of those surveyed. Finances now overshadow the more usual daily stressors of work and relationships, with 46% of people reporting that their stress is due to worries about providing for their family's basic needs.

My own research clarifies that when you feel you have less control over your stress, it definitely causes you more concern. It raises your internal mind, body, and emotional threat level.'

### **Women Worse Off**

Unfortunately, the brunt of this economic stress is falling upon women more than men. According to the APA's poll, compared with men, more women say they are stressed about money, the economy, job stability, housing costs, and health problems affecting their families.

Ladies of the boomer generation (ages 44-62) and Matures (aged 63+) are most likely to report the economy as a significant stressor. While women in general rank financial worries above personal health. Female Boomers report increases in stress associated with their job stability and health problems affecting their families.

Moreover, mature women are reporting dramatic increases in stress associated with family health concerns (87%), the economy (92%), and money (77%).

Beyond that, Generation Xers (ages 30-43) and Millennials (ages 18-29) are not immune from financial worries either. Generation Xers are the women most concerned about money (89% report money as a source of stress) and Millennials are most concerned about housing costs as a source of stress (75%).

The current work from the APA clearly reveals that our economic stress is causing more than half of Americans to report irritability, anger, fatigue, headaches, and sleeplessness. What's worse, these stress sufferers say they self-medicate by overeating unhealthy foods, over drinking, and generally straying from healthy habits.

In addition to the above-mentioned symptoms, the rise in stress-related issues can:

1. Weaken your immune system

2. Raise your blood pressure
3. Disturb your sleep
4. Lead to depression
5. Cause memory loss

So What Can You Do?

As seen in the picture below, in 1949, a Swiss physiologist named Dr. Walter Hess, won the Nobel Prize in Physiology and Medicine by revealing that two separate and distinct centers exist in your brain. The one on the left is the stress center, while the other one is an anti-stress center."

An x-ray of the brain's stress (left) and relaxation centers (right).

When you are able to activate the anti-stress spot by following the directions below, many wonderful health-promoting events occur. Your blood pressure goes down, your pulse decreases, your unhealthy stress chemicals plummet, and, perhaps most importantly, the amount of oxygen your body needs goes down.

This puts you into a true anti-aging zone, because, when you use less oxygen, you create fewer free radicals, which are a hallmark of the aging process.

Additionally, as emerging medical research shows, the relaxation response changes your genetic expression for the better. The reason is because unbalanced stress shortens the tip of your gene called the telomere, and relaxation lengthens your telomere because it stops the harmful effects of stress on your genes.

This new search shows that relaxation techniques such as meditation, actually "turn off the disease-promoting process stress causes.

Over the years, there have been hundreds, if not thousands of research studies revealing many health and healing benefits of regular relaxation techniques such as meditation, prayer, visualization, and so on, including the picture of a much younger brain. Regions involved in memory and attention were thicker in people who meditated regularly. While these areas tend to shrink with age, older meditators were able to ward off some of this shrinkage.

Meditation has many other positive benefits as well. As seen in the illustration below, in many research studies over three decades, meditation has been shown to help your heart, reduce anxiety, soften chronic pain, and increase longevity.

Regular meditation improves health and reduces disease.

A compilation of studies modeled after an article published by the Transcendental Meditation people many years ago. I wrote about it in Meditation as Medicine.

Here are the four steps needed to enter into the stress-mastering relaxation zone:

1. Comfort: You don't have to sit like a pretzel to meditate. You can enter the zone in a soft chair. One caveat is that you don't want to be so comfortable that you fall asleep.

2. Quiet: Your relaxation time is a special time, not to be interrupted by checking e-mail, blackberries, cell phones, or pets. Your time to meditate is sacred. If your spouse or significant other doesn't meditate, they shouldn't be in the room with you. The same holds true for children.

3. A Tool: In the basic form of relaxation, your tool can be any thought, sound, short prayer, or phrase upon that you wish to focus. It can literally be anything.

Even paying attention to your breath works well. Ideally your word should be something easy. Examples are peace, love, heal, or the word one, which has a long history of being used in the research on basic relaxation and meditation.

4. An Attitude: Once you begin the process, you'll be surprised to discover that your mind reacts like a four-year-old child. If you ask a four-year-old to sit still, they will probably end up running all around the room. It's the same with your mind. At a time when you expect your mind to calm down, it actually speeds up. Why is this so? Well, all the pressure you have stored inside your mind is pent up in there. So, when we begin to elicit the response, it's as if a trap door opens and "boom," all these thoughts come flying out:

- "Why didn't I go to the bathroom before I started?"
- "I have to balance my checkbook."
- "I sure hope we get that mortgage."
- "Where's my brother? He was supposed to be here an hour ago."
- "Whatever happened to Joan from the first grade?"

When you practice this technique, your mind will be bombarded by thoughts.

I've been doing it for three decades and it still happens to me every day. Not to worry. This is simply the normal stress-releasing process and is expected. It's what you do with the thoughts that really count.

*And what you do is - just let them go and return to your word.*

As one of my patients from England once said in a great Beatles accent, "Oh, Dr. Dharma. You mean you just start all over again?" That's right. When other thoughts enter your mind, you just start all over again. The way you do that is by going back to your focus word. For example, let's say your word is one. When other thoughts enter into your mind, you simply say to yourself: "Oh, well, [your name], "relax, one." That's all there is to it.

To end the technique, simply inhale, hold your breath for a moment, and exhale. Then inhale again, slowly stretch your arms up, exhale, and relax. Slowly open your eyes and hold your gaze on whatever you see, for about one minute. Then inhale, exhale, and take your time getting up.

Believe it or not, you only have to do this for 10 minutes at least once every day, preferably before breakfast, to get the full effect. If you can do it a second time in the afternoon, all the better.

You can use a digital clock or even open your eyes and look at your wristwatch. Just don't use an alarm, because it's too startling. What you'll find, with time, is that your mind will automatically know when the time is up.

It's easy.

#### References

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- [Ed. Note: The author of seven best-selling books, Dharma Singh Khalsa, M.D., often referred to as Dr. Dharma, is America's # 1 Brain Longevity Specialist.]