

# Stress Management Workbook



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### **A brief Note Before We Begin**

- This workbook is NOT a technical, scientific, or scholarly treatise. It is MY interpretation of applying the principles of yoga to stress management.
- Please consult a licensed health care practitioner for professional medical advice before making any changes in your routine. I trust that you are a responsible adult and if you need professional help, please get assistance ASAP.



Dear Friend:

What happens when you hear the word stress? Did your blood pressure just go up? Are you clenching your jaw? Or are you just so sick and tired of 'stress' that you just wish it would just disappear?

First the bad news: STRESS IS HERE TO STAY.

Now for the good news: STRESS IS A SIGNAL TO PAY ATTENTION.

Stress is just a signal to pay attention to something. It could be your phone ringing, an email invitation to a birthday party, or the evening news reporting a devastating earthquake. The phone call could be the doctor's office calling with a negative or a positive test result, the invitation to the birthday party could be from a good friend or someone you've had a falling out with, and the earthquake could be in a country you once lived in or maybe you just continue to move on to other news.

As you can see, STRESS is very personal. It can also be MINOR or MAJOR. What to have for dinner changes when you have nothing in the refrigerator. Stubbing your toe may be minor however if you have a dance audition tomorrow – you now have major stress. There are infinite variables to the stress equation and the first step is to acknowledge and identify and deal with your reality.

This workbook offers several tools to help you Stop, Look, Listen, and Breathe through the pressures in your life. My hope for you is that you will find some pearls of wisdom that will inspire you and bring more joy, peace, and happiness into your life.

*Namaste,*

Margaret Chester, MPH, RYT



## Introduction: How to Identify & Work with Stress

Common definitions of stress are: feeling overwhelmed, pressured, out-of-control, angry, strained, anxious, worried, short-tempered, pissed, annoyed, short-tempered, too many things to do, high blood pressure, tired, depressed, low-energy, time-crunched, and tension. The list goes on. My definition of stress is any *physiological response to change or pressure*.

Our bodies are connected to our minds. And our minds are connected to our bodies. Whatever threatens our mind is perceived and registered in our body. We may choose to fight, flee or freeze, either physically, mentally, or emotionally. To anesthetize the pain of our stress, we may overeat, not eat, over-exercise, over-medicate, become a workaholic or close ourselves off from our family and friends. Over time, we will often use various coping mechanisms, failing to notice how deeply they have become deeply entrenched habits and patterns.

We all have different ways to deal with stress. There is no one-size-fits-all stress buster. However, it is important to learn how to identify stress and work with it. My favorite tools for dealing with stress are journaling, talking with friends, and drawing.

And before you tell me that you can't draw, I want you to take a deep breath and get out of your way. No one is going to look at your drawings unless you choose to share them. There are no grades. You can choose to save, shred, burn, make paper airplanes, or recycle your workbook. It doesn't matter. The important part of this workbook is to connect your heart to paper without any judgments.

- The yogis believe that the arms are extensions of the heart.
- Shake out your arms. Let that stored-up tension dissipate.
- Feel free to draw directly in this workbook, your journal, or any size paper that you choose. It doesn't matter if you use a pen, pencil or markers.
- Remember that this is not a contest. Lighten up, have fun, and enjoy the process.



## **Stress Circles**

- Draw circles all over this page. They don't have to be the same size. If you do want them to be even, just take a mug or glass and trace the bottom to make even circles.
- Taking your pen, pencil, or marker and write the name of a person, thing, situation, or issue that is bothering you right now.
- If you are worried that someone may see this, you may choose to use initials or draw an image.



## Going Deeper

- Now go back to your **Stress Circles**.
- Draw a thicker circle about the three stresses that are bothering you the most right now.
- Remember to NOT judge yourself. You may be tempted to think that your leaky faucet is not important when people all over the world are starving. Please remember that this just a snapshot of this moment. If world hunger is stressing you, please make a circle and add it to your stress circle page.
- Take a deep breath and as you exhale, draw a few sun rays sprouting out of the three circles that you have chosen.
- Can you brainstorm some solutions? For example, for the leaky faucet you may write down: google/YouTube fixing leaky faucets, ask a construction friend for advice, call a plumber? And if you have a circle for world hunger you may write down: research organizations working on world hunger, support your local food bank with groceries, money, or time, or start a garden.
- Remember one of your solutions to a current stressor or dilemma is to just let it go. Maybe you don't have to get that Ph.D., or have a big holiday party, or start a bakery with your best friend. Be very careful about picking up someone else's stress issues. There may be a way to support that person without taking on more pressure.
- There will always be stress in our lives. Drawing **Stress Circles** will NOT eliminate your stresses, however, you will find that over time that making one SMALL change may give you relief, insight, and build resilience for whatever may come your way.



## Identifying Stress in the Body

This next exercise is an excellent stress releaser. Feel free to use the next page or grab a blank piece of paper. Using a pen, pencil, or marker; I want you to CLOSE your eyes and then draw your body. OPEN your eyes. What is the first thought that crosses your mind? Remember, it does not matter if your body does not LOOK like a person with identifiable body parts.

Look closely and see if that figurine says anything to you. Sometimes my head is not connected to the rest of my body, or my left shoulder is huge, or one foot is larger than the other. My drawings make me smile and help me look at my reality: is my head not listening to my body? Am I carrying more tension in my left shoulder? Am I walking evenly or am I leaning more on one foot as I stand and walk?

Remember we need a bit of body tension to get up off the couch and walk outside. The purpose of this exercise is to help us become more aware of where we may be holding tension in our bodies. It is easier to release something once we have identified it. If you have any injuries or recent surgeries be very gentle, the idea is to RELEASE tension, not create more tension. Please honor your amazing body because it is communicating with you all the time – all we need to do is listen and honor the systems that are supporting us 24/7.



## **Drawing my Body with my Eyes Closed**





## The Joy and Pleasure List

There will always be chores in our life, even getting out of bed in the morning when we've had a rough night can be difficult. Instead of being upset, irritated, and angry; why not shift your energy? Draw or write down fifteen activities that you love to do. ***No one pays you to do these things, you do them simply because they give you pleasure and joy.***

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.
- 4.
- 5.
- 6.
- 7.
- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.
- 13.
- 14.
- 15.

Now, every day for the next week, be sure to do at least one activity on your list. Another way to use this list is when you are feeling pressured, upset, or stressed do something on the list. It may not eliminate your stress, but it may give you some relief.



## Walking Tall

Did you know that walking is the oldest form of transportation? Walking can also offer a wonderful opportunity to practice yoga! Please take all these instructions with a grain of salt or sugar – they are simply suggestions. You are responsible for figuring out what feels good and what movements you should avoid. Remember to always take care of yourself.

- Begin by standing up as straight and tall as you can.
- On your next inhale, bring your shoulders up towards your ears, squeeze and on an exhale, release your shoulders. Do this one to three times. This should feel good. ***If you feel any pain whatsoever – please immediately back off and skip this instruction.***
- Let your arms hang heavy at your sides and feel your fingertips moving towards the floor. You may feel your shoulders pulling down and away from your ears as your chest expands. Relax your face by simply smiling. (Yes, it is more difficult to be tense when you are smiling!)
- Gently tuck your pelvis in by pulling your belly button gently towards your spine. ***If you are pregnant or have gastrointestinal issues including surgery – just place your hand gently on your belly.***
- Drop your sit bones and continue to take long deep inhales, pauses, and exhales.
- On your next inhale, squeeze your thighs and feel your knee caps lifting. Pause. Then exhale and release your thighs. Feel your kneecaps relax. ***If you have had recent knee surgery or this does not feel good, then simply skip this instruction.***
- On your next inhale, lift your toes off the floor and spread them as wide as you can, like fingers on your hand. Pause. And then as you exhale, slowly release your toes back to the floor.
- Take a moment to enjoy and savor how firmly your feet are planted on the floor. Feel the weight equally distributed between the toes, sides of your feet, and your heels.

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- Let your attention move up from your feet, to your calves, knees, thighs, hips, rib cage, feel the upper chest lifting as the crown of your head extends toward the sky and your shoulders pull down and away from your ears.
- Now with a smile on your face – *Walk On!*

Do not underestimate this very simple posture. Walking Tall will lift your spirits and assist you on where ever you are going.



## Questions to Ask Yourself Throughout the Day

One of the best stress-busters I know is to get up and DO something. Even brushing your teeth, washing your face, or taking a bath/shower can lift your spirits. I have also found that whenever I am stuck, digging in and spinning my wheels – I change the scene – even just walking to the mailbox and back may give me an insight. Have fun with the suggestions below and be sure to add your own.

1. Am I breathing?
2. What is the best use of my time right now?
3. What would I do right now if I knew I was going to die tonight?
4. Is there someone who I've been thinking about? Can I phone them? Send them a text, a note, or an email?
5. Is there something in my physical living space that I can give away today?
6. Are there dishes in the sink? Laundry to be done? Bills to be paid? Is there trash to be taken out to the garbage container or place in the recycling bins?
7. Is this a good time to just sit for five minutes, focus on my breathing, and recharge my batteries? This includes sitting silently or listening to music, observing a cat or dog sleeping, or watching a bird out the window.

Can you add to this list?

- 8.
- 9.
- 10.
- 11.
- 12.



## **The Truth**

Whenever & wherever  
you get stuck or need a boost  
physically, mentally, emotionally, or spiritually  
simply do the following:

***Inhale...***

***Pause...***

***Exhale...***

***Inhale...***

***Pause...***

***Exhale...***

***Pause...***

***Inhale...***

***Pause...***

***Exhale...***

Continue doing this for the rest of your life!

It is the secret to the universe and  
It will give you much health, love, and happiness.

*Namaste.*



Thank you for joining me on this journey of self-discovery.  
I hope you enjoyed some of the exercises and will continue to  
Find creative ways to nurture your body, mind, and spirit.  
Please feel free to forward this PDF to anyone who would enjoy it  
If I may be of further assistance,  
please contact me at [breathing@chocolateyoga.com](mailto:breathing@chocolateyoga.com)

Margaret Chester, MPH, RYT is the author of *Chocolate Yoga: A System of Yoga Techniques for Stress and Weight Management; A Chocolate Yoga Action Workbook*, and her latest: *Yoga for Ageless Seniors – Daily Prescriptions for Increasing Strength, Balance, and Resilience*. She is passionate about finding practical and fun ways to bring yoga techniques to your everyday life. This yoga is not about standing on your head or folding yourself into a pretzel. It's all about living in the body that you have today. As Margaret likes to say: “*If you can breathe, you can do this yoga.*”

The books are available on Amazon.com

For more information: [www.chocolateyoga.com](http://www.chocolateyoga.com)

