

Emotions & Stress



How to manage them

www.undoyourstress.com

The audio sessions CD and the eformat book can be downloaded from the website www.undoyourstress.com

Emotions Clinic

A clinic in Staffordshire that helps people to manage their emotions and stress better.

Emotions Clinic offers treatments for the following clinical conditions:

- Anxiety, phobias and obsessions
- Depressive disorders
- Relationship and psychosexual problems
- Alcohol and drug problems
- Dependence on prescription drugs
- Bereavement
- Work related stress
- Psychological consequences of trauma and personal injuries
- Psychotic illnesses i.e bipolar and schizophrenic disorders
- Medical unexplained symptoms

Online resources are also available from the website www.undoyourstress.com for individuals who do not require psychotherapy sessions but wish to build up their immunity to stress.

Six Session Stress Management Programme

(An introduction to each of these sessions can be downloaded from the website www.undoyourstress.com/downloads for a small price.)

Dr Chandiramani has developed a six session management programme. This programme is relevant to the needs of clients suffering from anxiety, depression, obsessions, phobias, psychosomatic disorders, relationship problems, work related and general stress symptoms. Dr Chandiramani and his team conduct psychotherapy sessions, both individually and in groups, based on the issues outlined in the sessions for download. It is recommended that clients listen to these sessions and familiarise themselves with issues prior to attending therapy sessions as in-person sessions deal with these very issues in greater depth. These sessions can also be helpful to clients who do not wish to attend the programme but want some help in dealing with their everyday stress.

Sessions 1 – 6 cover the following issues

Session 1

- What causes stress, including making judgements, difficulty accepting change, wanting to be in full control of our lives and issues related to separation and loss.
- The Principle of Impermanence – a specific coping tool to help deal with one's thoughts and emotions.

Session 2

- What gives us stress.
- Explaining symptoms in terms of a model of the mind (the conscious and the unconscious).
- How stress can be undone.
- The Principle of Equanimity.
- Dealing with stress at a physical and psychological level.
- An introduction to Paced breathing and Abdominal breathing.

Session 3

- Understanding how our judgements can increase stress and learning how to fine tune one's judgements.

- Learning how to dis-identify with one's thoughts and emotions.
- An introduction to Breath Awareness.

Session 4

- How we can manage stress at the physical level using bio-feedback treatment and breath regulation techniques.

Session 5

- Understanding stress and its' management using the knowledge from philosophy and psycho-analysis.

Session 6

- What heals in psychotherapy.
- Reflection on the 12 Wellness Tools used in the Stress Management Programme.

Although each sessions is stand alone and these can be listened to in any order it is recommended that clients start with the first session and gradually progress to session six in that order.

Relaxation/Library Facilities

Many of the relaxation skills and breath regulation techniques we teach our clients require regular practice to achieve positive therapeutic benefits; as such we are able to offer a dedicated relaxation room, which is available daily for clients to practice relaxation skills and breath regulation techniques, in a quiet and peaceful environment. Within our relaxation room, clients can utilise a relaxation and massage chair, audio equipment with a selection of relaxation cd's and also a therapy bed to aid relaxation techniques that require a reclining position.

We also have a comprehensive selection of books available on the following topics:

Anger	Anxiety
Grief	Depression
Eating Disorders	Relationships
Psycho-Sexual Problems	Sleep
Spirituality	Positive Thinking
Stress	Therapy

All of the books, cd's and dvd's are available for clients to loan for psycho-educational purposes.

Introduction

This book brings together all the insights that I have come across in my life and found them helpful in dealing with my own stress and that of my clients. I see no major contradictions between modern psychiatric and psychological practices on one hand and the ancient traditions of mankind. This book is an attempt to bring together all of those approaches under one umbrella and also to integrate them as far as possible.

I have found these approaches work for clients suffering from almost all forms of psychiatric problems, psychosomatic disorders, relationship issues, work related stresses and also for individuals who do not suffer from any psychiatric problems, as some chapters address the existential issues that afflict all human beings, may be in different proportions.

There are also spiritual elements that facilitate promotion of mental health and access to inner peace.

Emotions and Stress: How to Manage Them

Introduction		3
Chapter I	What is stress	6
Chapter II	What causes stress	8
Chapter III	Understanding the mind	10
Chapter IV	Emotions: friends or foes	12
Chapter V	Lifestyle and stress	14
Chapter VI	Love, sex and relationships	16
Chapter VII	Counselling and psychotherapy	18
Chapter VIII	Coping with stress	20
Chapter IX	The recovery process	22
Chapter X	Religion and spirituality	24
Chapter XI	Conclusions	26

Chapter 1

What is Stress?

People are not disturbed by things, but by the views they take of them; this nearly 2000 year old quote from Epictetus, a Greek philosopher has received support from scientific research in recent years. Research suggests that individuals who do not perceive a stressful situation as stressful are very much less likely to experience the adverse effects and are able to cope better with stressful events.

We see ourselves taking different views of the same thing at different times, at times just the opposite of each other. We see someone as friendly and caring in the morning and a few hours later realise that they have been very selfish, unhelpful and uncaring. How to know which of these two thoughts represents the reality?

Just because a thought is there in my mind does not mean that it represents the reality out there or my true feelings. It may be a random thought, a wild thought, an adopted thought, an induced thought; and as opposed to all of those a thought that truly represents my core identity and inner feelings.

Unfortunately we become advocates of our thoughts as soon as they enter our mind leaving very little room to challenge them. Different forms of therapies and meditative practices including Vipassana help us recognise our true feelings and thoughts and they also help us see the reality as it is and not as it appears to be. This can enable us to deal with situations more appropriately, thereby reducing our stress.

Stress is defined as the gap between one's perception of the demands placed upon the individual and their ability to cope with it. This does not mean that the actual quantum of the demand is immaterial; it does play a part if the demands cross a certain threshold for the individuals. It's just that the scientific opinion supports the notion that the perception is more important than the actual quantum of the demands.

Stress is a very popular term and almost everyone understands it. Almost all psychological problems be it anxiety, depression, anger, relationship problems are forms of stress, and the use of this term does not help distinguish one from another. When discussing mental illness the word stress often causes more confusion, as it fails to convey the precise nature of the problem.

Mental health professionals use the term "stress disorders" only when they fail to categorize the condition into the neat categories of anxiety disorder, depressive illness, obsessive-compulsive disorder etc.

To simplify the matter one can say that stress is an overarching term and it manifests differently in different individuals depending upon their personalities and mental state. It is the cause and also the end result of psychological disorders. The same stress can cause eczema in one person and alcoholism in another, depending upon their mental makeup.

Stress can therefore be understood in terms of the following three ways:

- As a stimulus: Environmental events such as war, earthquake, famine and accidents can cause stress even when the coping abilities of the individual are good.
- Stress as a response (mental and physiological reaction): A stress-prone person experiences high levels of stress even in situations considered normal by most individuals.
- Stress as an interaction between the individual and the environment e.g. relationship problems.

A Washing Machine for the Mind: Most of our daily actions and interactions produce stress, as our psyche is mobilized from the resting state to a state of action in order to meet a demand. The pure mind gets exposed to the environment and picks up stress; very much, like our clothes which pick up dust and grease during the course of the day. We put our clothes in a washing machine for cleaning and the cycle takes about an hour or two for cleaning them.

What about our minds? Where is the washing machine for the mind? What do we do to undo the stress? Just as we wash our clothes every day, we need to de-stress ourselves every day.

Stress management should be seen as a "prevention" rather than a "cure" of a problem when it has already resulted in illness. It should be practiced daily, similar to cleaning our teeth every morning. We clean our teeth everyday irrespective of whether they feel clean or unclean. In a similar fashion we need to practice stress management strategies even when we don't suffer from any stress disorder.

I normally ask people what do you do to de-stress yourself and a common answer I get is "I fix a drink or switch the television on". Unfortunately, there is very little scientific evidence that these two activities will undo stress. We feel that way because these are step down activities rather than anti-stress ones. Drinking alcohol creates a wall between us and our inner selves so that we don't feel stressed, and watching television distracts us from our normal preoccupations and worrying thoughts but makes our minds react emotionally in a subtle way that we don't perceive as stress.

Most people who experience stress do not have a psychiatric illness and do not require professional help but it is a condition that requires proper understanding and careful self-management as it could affect almost every aspect of one's life and eventually lead to psychiatric illness.

The following could be used as a rough guide to assess your stress levels.

Knowing how you feel first thing in the morning: you are connected to the inner most reaches of your mind during sleep and how you feel soon after waking is a good parameter of your inner mental life. Clients with high levels of stress report feeling unwell, unrefreshed or tired

Chapter 2

What causes Stress?

Poverty is stressful; being rich and famous is also stressful

Not having friends is stressful; having too many friends is also stressful

Living alone is stressful; being a householder is also stressful

Being unemployed is stressful; having a job is also stressful

Not having any children is stressful, having children is also stressful

Doing the right thing is stressful; not doing it is also stressful

Nearly every situation is associated with some stress. Life without stress is inconceivable as stress cannot be avoided no matter what we do or choose not to do.

The opposite of it is also true, that almost every situation offers a set of opportunities, doing something offers opportunities and not doing it offers a different set of opportunities; being a householder offers opportunities and living a solitary life also offers opportunities. Keeping our focus on the opportunities can be a way of coping with stress.

Just as it is normal to feel stressed, it is only normal that one makes constant efforts to manage it more effectively. If left unmanaged, stress can lead to emotional, psychological and even physical illnesses, sometimes not known even to the person themselves, and also to health professionals and scientists. Psychological stress affects us in more ways than we normally acknowledge.

Have I bitten off more than I can chew?

- I hardly say anything more than a "hello" or "how are you" to my neighbours.
- I don't even know the personal and family details of people I have worked closely with for years.
- I have got about twenty friends, but no time for intimate talk.
- I multitask – watch television and read newspaper whilst I am eating.
- I receive texts/emails/phone calls at least once every ten minutes; is it too many?
- I use my mobile phone even in my bedroom and bathroom, is it inappropriate?
- I work six days a week, and sometimes late nights preparing reports.
- I go on holiday only once in a year for a couple of weeks is it too little time?
- I have no time for the books and movies of my interest that have been released in recent months.
- I hardly think about issues such as the purpose of life, the meaning in relationships, my true calling and what will become of me after death.
- Is it all too much and too stressful for me?

Overwork can cause stress but the perception of it plays a greater role. Stress is our response to a demanding situation that we feel unable to cope with.

People who have studied the human mind in greater depth tell us that a simple awareness of a situation

does not cause stress. If that were so, then everyone who becomes aware of a difficult situation should get stressed. The fact that they don't indicates that our perception and judgments play a major role in the experience of stress.

Types of Stress

Stress in response to a life situation

It is possible to understand the majority of our stressful experiences as resulting from our encounters with difficult life situations and there is an element of understandability there. We create new negative experiences when we are faced with those situations. It is possible to put a stop to the stress by dealing with situations, objects and people without making strong judgments about them, or by distracting ourselves into something else, even though it may be a negative situation for us. We have a bit more control over these experiences.

Stress that appears out of the blue

Clients who suffer from panic disorder tell us that they can't understand their anxiety in terms of what is going on in their lives. It is the emotion that comes first, out of the blue and makes them interpret things, including their normal bodily functions and sensations, as abnormal and harmful. This stress is different from the one discussed earlier. It may be that this stress is related to our childhood experiences, faulty learning or identifications with an adult figure who had suffered with stress. We can understand this type of stress in terms of a replaying of past emotions that were created in response to a difficult situation. It may be that these emotions were not worked through properly by our mind at the time and they went into the unconscious mind with all their emotional charge.

Stress that has an element of absurdity

Clients with phobias and obsessive compulsive disorder experience a stress that appears, even to them, as absurd and irrational. It can be understood in terms of evolutionary anxiety that our forefathers had in relation to the natural human fears and insecurities; these were relevant in their times and protective of life, and are passed on to us through our genes or collective unconscious mind. The stress of phobias and OCD can also be explained on the basis of displacement of a real life concern from their original context on to something innocuous. The obsessive compulsive disorder generally has a strong genetic component to it.

Biological stress

One can also experience stress as a result of physical insult to the brain or certain chemical changes in the body. For example clients with brain tumours or traumatic brain injury suffer from anxiety attacks, and clients with hormonal changes during postpartum period or with thyroid problems suffer from depression. These can't be fully explained on the basis of life events.

So far, we have discussed stress mainly in terms of a mental reaction to something and this mental reaction is a consequence of how we perceive and judge different things in this world. One can ask, why in the first place, one person reacts in a certain way and not in other ways. Apart from genetic predisposition, we can understand this in terms of early childhood experiences.

Chapter 3

Understanding the Mind

Is my obsession with work an escape from the dreadful loneliness of my existence, or am I truly actualizing my full potential?

Is my desire to succeed and be powerful compensating for my feelings of being small and helpless, or am I genuinely ambitious?

Is my indifference to you an attempt to hide my attraction for you or am I truly uninterested?

Is my attempt to please you just a way of overcoming my fear of you, or am I a genuinely pleasant person?

Is my politeness covering up my indifference to this world?

Is my rigid moral value system protecting me from an adventurous streak in me, or am I truly a person of high moral values?

Is my anger with you a reflection of my deep attachment and identification with you, and the helplessness that comes with it, or is it a sign of my lack of empathy and understanding?

Is my being judgmental with you a genuine desire for your success and growth?

Is it not normal to feel depressed in this apparently indifferent and unfriendly world?

Is my charity compensating for my guilt?

How can I say that I have understood my mind fully without understanding my dreams? Aren't my dreams more bizarre than the symptoms my clients come up with, even the ones with psychosis?

We can't understand the mind without taking into account the existence of the unconscious mind. It will not be possible to explain dreams, symptoms of psychosis, panic disorder, phobias etc. without acknowledging the existence of the unconscious mind.

In order to understand the psychological symptoms and deal with them it is very important that we understand how the normal mind works.

Functioning of the Mind

The mind can be understood in terms of two broad compartments: the conscious and the unconscious. The conscious mind is just the tip of an iceberg and the rest is the unconscious. According to a rough estimate only about 10% to 20% of our mind is conscious and the rest is unconscious. The psychological implication of this is that when we experience extreme emotions we have to say to ourselves that we are talking about only 10% to 20% of the mind and the rest is unknown to us. The remaining 80% to 90% contains joys and sorrows that may be several times greater than the joys and sorrows we have ever experienced in our lifetime. Jung, a Swiss psychologist, has described confronting this unconscious as the central task of human life.

In modern times the unconscious mind has been popularised by Sigmund Freud. According to his psychoanalytic theories, we can't access the unconscious mind at will, it becomes accessible to us only in dreams, during psychotic episodes or under the influence of drugs etc.

However, in some schools of thought, there is no belief in the unconscious and it is understood only in terms of the unattended aspects of the mind, which can be accessed at any time. We can understand this using the example of a library. When we enter a library there are thousands of books lying folded on the shelves. These are like the unconscious mind and the book that is open in front of us is the conscious mind.

Another way to understand the unconscious mind is by visualizing a dark room that we enter with a torch. The torch lights up only a small patch and the rest is dark and one can move the torch in different directions. Using this analogy for our mind, whatever is in the focus of the light is the conscious mind and the rest unconscious.

What is conscious today can become unconscious tomorrow and vice versa, and according to the psychoanalytic theory it is not under our control to move from conscious to unconscious. Sigmund Freud gave the example of a fountain; the water visible is the conscious mind and what is in the pond is the unconscious, and the two are in constant circulation.

Under normal circumstances the conscious mind, although small, has good control over the unconscious and there is a thick barrier between the two. This does not allow the unconscious to spill out into the conscious mind. However, in certain situations i.e. psychological stress or because of genetic factors, this barrier is weakened and the unconscious mind can spill out into the conscious mind and that's when psychosis and some other psychiatric disorders occur.

We can also understand this model of the mind in terms of a horse and a horseman. The horse can be described as the unconscious mind and the horseman as the conscious mind. Under normal circumstances, the horseman has full control over the horse, but at certain times we find that the horse takes over and that's when psychotic illness occurs. A lot of the psychiatric symptoms can be explained in terms of the unconscious experiences entering into the conscious mind in an uncoordinated fashion.

It would be appropriate to discuss the unconscious mind in a little more detail here as it can help us make some sense of psychiatric symptoms. The unconscious mind is the storehouse of all our past experiences, thoughts, emotions, images, feelings, memories etc., both stressful and neutral.

We collect thousands of experiences on a daily basis and many of them are stressful in nature. If we are good at managing this stress on a daily basis, a lot of them get worked on and do not leave any emotional residue, even though they are being recorded in the unconscious mind. However, if a stressful or emotionally charged experience does not get worked on it goes into the unconscious mind with all its emotional charge and stress in seed form.

Another example to explain this would be to say that the 'camera of our mind' captures every moment of our life, not just in the form of pictures and sound, but all the five sense faculties plus our emotions and thoughts. The DVDs of all these experiences are stored in our unconscious mind. This storage is different from the storage in a library where the DVDs are static and don't go through further changes. The DVDs stored in the unconscious mind constantly go through changes, and emotions can jump from one DVD to another. That explains how emotions from a really stressful but shameful experience are displaced on to innocuous experiences so that they get worked on, otherwise the painful experiences will never get worked on due to the reluctance of the conscious mind to revisit them. It may also be the case that emotions from an experience related to a problem that is perceived by the individual as unsolvable are shifted onto a problem that can be solved e.g. relationship problems manifesting as compulsive cleaning of the house.

These DVDs from the unconscious mind keep getting replayed in different situations that act as triggers for them to come out into the

Chapter 4

Our Emotions: Friends or foes?

“All emotions reveal our mind to ourselves but hide the true life from us”

Gita

*What a foe may do to a foe,
Or a hater to a hater –
Far worse than that
The mind ill held may do to him*

*Not mother, father, nor even other kinsmen
May do that good to him
Far better than that
The mind well held may do to him*

Dhammapada

Emotions are the spice of life, they give meaning to everything that we experience, and they are the substrate of almost all our experiences.

We cannot imagine a life without emotions; it will not be worth living. They bring joys and ecstasies to us, they bring divine and sublime experiences to us, they bring meaning to life and make it worth living. However, what a pity – it is these very emotions that drive people to commit suicide, kill their fellow beings, torture and rape them. The human suffering is largely dependent upon how we feel in different situations.

Dealing with our emotions should be one of our top priorities. Unfortunately, our parents and teachers only tell us what is the right way of thinking, feeling and doing things but they seldom teach us how not to worry, not to be angry, anxious or depressed. “Don’t worry be happy”, is easier said than done.

The Rainbow of Emotions

Have you ever felt happy or sad for no apparent reason, how do you explain it. Is it because you got out of bed on the wrong side in the morning? Was it driven by some chemical changes happening as a result of some illness? Or was it just a feeling that your unconscious mind created and you had no access to the location and cause of its origin?

All the different types of emotions can be divided into four broad categories;

- pleasant,
- unpleasant,
- mixed
- and neither pleasant nor unpleasant.

The unpleasant emotions are not necessarily unhelpful as there are times when they help us more than the pleasant ones, and the pleasant ones can be harmful to us on certain occasions.

Understanding Emotions

There is no shame in feeling depressed, anxious or angry, but it would be a shame if we got stuck in them

The emotions that we experience at a given point in time could be:

A replay of a past emotion that was recorded in our mind:

Everything that we experience gets recorded in our mind very much like recordings on a tape recorder and these emotions get stored in our unconscious mind. These mood states can get activated from time to time and they seem to appear out of the blue. We cannot understand these mood states on the basis of what is going on in our lives.

It is best not to participate in them and let the emotion run its course without reacting mentally to it. We can stop our mental reactions to these re-lived experiences by understanding the emotions in terms of their impermanent nature and not identifying with them. Non-identification can be achieved by saying to oneself "this is not the real me, I am not this emotion, this emotion is crossing my mind and doesn't belong to my real self". It may be a result of a random or unrealistic thought. Bringing the opposite mood state to undo the thought can be counter-productive as the original emotion might slip back into the unconscious mind unaltered and it can reappear at any time later on.

A new emotion that was created at the time of experiencing it

We constantly create new emotions in response to the situation we are in and also as a result of our desires, fears and the judgments that we make about ourselves and others. We can understand these emotions on the basis of what is going on in our lives and in our conscious mind.

Chapter 5

Lifestyle and Stress

Everything that we do causes stress but it gets worked on in the normal course, unless our natural ability to undo it is impaired. It is easy to understand that doing too much can cause stress, but doing too little can also cause stress. If one has not realized one's potential to a reasonable extent, it can cause stress that comes with feelings of existential guilt.

Lifestyle can cause stress and changing it can result in recovery, there may not be any need for professional help if one can discover the links between one's symptoms and lifestyle, and has normal coping abilities.

I remember a client of mine who had suffered from anxiety associated with a number of physical symptoms such as hyperacidity, tension headaches, tiredness, sleep problems etc. and he reported a complete remission in his symptoms after attending just one therapy session which involved a discussion on how his lifestyle was causing the symptoms.

Lifestyle can be understood in terms of a number of different aspects as described in the following sections

Personality and Stress

It is not difficult to understand that if we asked a poet to work as an accountant or a philosopher to fight a war, they will get stressed. It is therefore important to know one's own personality.

One man's meat is another man's poison. What is a coping mechanism for your friend might be a real stress for you. It is important to know what situations, people and things make you stressed, and what helps you.

- Are you a reserved or a social person?
- Do you have an artistic or scientific mind?
- Are you a philosopher, rebel, warrior, teacher, preacher, healer, mystic, manager, worker etc.?
- Do you like mathematics or music or philosophy?
- Do you prefer security over adventure? Do you stay within conventions or like being unconventional?

Answers to all these questions can help you understand why you get stressed doing certain tasks and in certain situation, and tailor your life in a way that reduces your stress and enhances your life satisfaction.

At the simplest level there are two types of people; introverts and extroverts, and it is not uncommon to see introverts being jealous of the extroverts and vice versa. The extroverts make friends very easily and appear very confident in social situations, making the introverts want to become like them.

However, the down-side of being an extrovert is that they make enemies also too easily and have difficulty bringing intensity in their work. Introverts, on the other hand, have fewer enemies and they can be more focused in their work, the qualities extroverts want. This could be a source of stress as one struggles to imbibe the qualities of the other. The solution to this problem lies in an introvert trying to be a successful introvert, and in an extrovert being a successful extrovert, by way of playing on their own strengths.

The second aspect worth mentioning here is that an introvert's batteries are charged in solitude whereas an extrovert finds social situations rejuvenating. This fact has important implication in coping with stress; i.e. introverts should find time for solitude at the end of a hectic day and the extrovert should have social avenues available to them after finishing work.

Assagioli, an Italian therapist who pioneered a treatment approach called psychosynthesis developed four different questionnaires for different age group clients to help the therapist understand the personalities of their clients whilst treating them. Most of the following questions are taken from his questionnaires.

- Who is your ideal person? And what do you admire most in them and why?
- What kinds of books/songs do you like most? Which books have caused you harm; and why?
- Which films have impressed you most?
- If you had a great deal of money how would you spend it?
- What significance and value has friendship for you?
- How do you distinguish good from evil?
- Which studies and activities do you prefer most?
- How do you see yourself in five years' time?
- What are the factors limiting your psychological growth?
- Do you prefer to be in the country, at the sea or in town/city?
- What is your attitude towards love? What do you think of the opposite sex?
- What events and what inner conditions make or made you suffer most?
- What events and what inner conditions give, or have given you, the greatest joy? In what situations/activities you get your peak experiences?
- What do you think of the present political and economic conditions of the world?

According to the Jungian psychology every man has a feminine side and every woman has a masculine side to them. Life could become richer and more complete if men developed the feminine side of their psyche and women their masculine. I am not suggesting that men should adopt feminine roles and women masculine, but to acquire the sensitivity to be able to look at this world and appreciate things from each other's perspective.

Nietzsche argued that man has to go through the ordeal of the three metamorphoses, through which the spirit will become a camel, a lion, and then a child. The spirit as camel will not refuse anything that needs to be borne, but will bear it, no matter how heavy. The next step i.e. spirit of a lion, captures freedom in order to rule and be independent of duty. The final stage is that of a child, of innocence and forgetfulness, a new beginning and a 'sacred Yes' (in Deurzen, 1997)

Work and Stress

For the majority of us, work is a means to something and not an end in itself. We tend to fantasise about a time when we will have plenty of money so that we won't have to work. Some individuals work harder than others so that they can afford to retire earlier. This supports the assumption that the desire not to work is stronger than the desire to work.

Chapter 6

Love, Sex and Relationships

"It is not for the sake of the husband (or the wife) that the husband is loved, but for the sake of the Self that the husband is loved"

BrhadaranyakaUpanishad(2.4.5)

If you think you haven't found true love or the right partner there is no need to worry too much; you are in the majority. It is my rough estimate that about 60% of the general population live with the thought that they haven't found true love or the right partner, another 20% suffer from delusion of love i.e. believe they have found true love when they haven't, and it's only the remaining 20% who have truly found their soul mates and would still want to be with the same partner in their next life, if there is one.

You can't create the magic of love, nor can you make it disappear instantly. You can't choose to fall in love or fall out of it by will. It just happens to you. You can only create conditions to increase its likelihood of happening or fade away, but the results are not guaranteed.

However, you can certainly do the following:

- Make your love grow and mature
- Slowly destroy or cripple it
- Not see when it's there
- Imagine that it's there when it is not
- Know it's not real although in the beginning you thought it was
- Know it's real now although you first thought it wasn't.

What is love?

It's a very straightforward question but the answer is not that easy. How to know whether you are truly in love or whether it's just infatuation? Reflection on the following might help.

- When you have butterfly feelings and feel on cloud nine all the time
- When you become obsessed with the person and can't free your mind
- When you want to spend the rest of your life with that person
- When the person makes you feel very special
- When you know that the person is completely honest and genuine with you and you want to be the same
- When you put the needs of your beloved above your needs or on a level with your needs
- When you want to be the same person in your next life as well, if you believe in rebirth.

Types of love:

1. Self-gratifying love: The person who is in love is thinking about only their own needs and not that of the loved one. This can also be described as selfish love. It can be subdivided into several categories.
 - A. Beautiful love/puppy love: the individual loves the act of falling in love with someone. It doesn't matter who this person is, nor their attributes. This is commonly seen in teenagers who have never been in love and are desperate to have this experience

- B. Honey type of love: The person is attracted to certain attributes that the other person holds, the emphasis again is on what they can get from the other person rather than what they are giving in relationship. The love ends when the imagined or actual attributes that attracted in the first place are missing.
- C. Heroic love: Generally seen in men who can go to any length to protect and support their loved ones. They can fight wars, leave their jobs, friends and relatives for the sake of love but will not do the little things that their partners need or want. They will not be good at looking after their loved ones when they are unwell.
2. Self-sacrificing love: It is also described as melting butter type of love, wherein the person sacrifices their self-interests to support their loved ones. It is unhealthy for the individual as there may be an element of being abused or exploited by the other person.
 3. Balanced love: When one is able to strike a balance between what they are giving and what they are getting. This type of love is mutually rewarding but it can run into problems if there is an imbalance in the give-get equation.
 4. Mature: Love matures when the connection is deep and this type of love is irreversible. A break in relationship is never right once the love matures as it will never fade, not even after the death of the person. The identities of the two persons are unified and the individual is happy to put the needs of the other person above their own needs. The cost-benefit analysis, as to who is giving and getting how much goes out of the equation.
 5. Love of a leader: It's the love for one's clan, community and nation. It goes beyond one's family and friends. The individual identifies with a group of people and their needs become more important than their own needs.
 6. Spiritual love: It is the ultimate expression of the self's deepest desire and its tendencies towards its source. It is universal and it can cross national and racial boundaries. The person sees every other human being, even animals in the same way as a mother sees her own children. Just as a mother thinks that she owes something to the child all the time, similarly a spiritual person has this constant feeling that they owe something to the humanity. Unfortunately, this and the love of a leader can create conflicts within the family if the family members do not understand it properly. They feel let down and begin to feel that what belongs to them is being distributed freely to all and sundry. A typical example of this in modern times is that of Nelson Mandela who was forced to choose between his marriage and his political life.

Chapter 7

What is Psychotherapy, and how does it work?

"What is the point in narrating the whole sad story to yet another therapist who is there just to listen?. They can't change the reality of my life. It will bring back all the bad memories and I will end up feeling worse than how I am feeling now."

This is a common sentiment I come across during my psychiatric assessments. Perhaps the individual who says this is right, as they may not know how to deal with what is uncovered during therapy. Such individuals need to equip themselves with tools in coping with their stress before they undertake any exploratory work.

Research carried out in recent years on debriefing (narrating traumatic experiences to a professional colleague after experiencing a stressful event) supports the observation that debriefing can be both helpful and harmful. It seems that debriefing helps those who are able to process the negative experiences at their own pace and in a secure setting, but makes things worse for those who cannot manage the anxiety involved in relating the painful experience. If you belong to the second category you need to discuss issues of safety and timing with your therapist, so that together you can modify the therapeutic relationship and setting.

Counselling and psychotherapy have been used as a panacea for all psychological problems, and there is a justification for doing so. Coming into contact with a caring and genuine human being who has received special training and has worked through their own inner stresses and mental conflict can be helpful. Unfortunately there are so many who need psychotherapy and very few who can deliver the goods or are honest enough to admit to their clients that they cannot help. This creates a situation where the demand outstrips the supply. As a result many who can benefit from psychotherapy go without it. This problem can be solved only when psychotherapeutic principles move beyond the confines of professional settings and into mainstream life.

Formal versus informal forms of psychotherapy

Advice from a wise person, or careful listening from a friend, can bring about the same sort of results as formal psychotherapy but there are differences between the two. It's important to decide whether formal psychotherapy is needed from professionals in a given situation or the problems can be tackled using either self-help techniques described in this book or making use of the informal systems of help from friends, relatives and the wider network of support in the community, including spiritual practices such as yoga and meditation.

Clients are well advised to take full responsibility to make use of the space in therapy by being active and bringing issues for discussions. What is in the unconscious will gradually come to the surface of the mind and get worked on. Sometimes clients discover new elements in their thinking for the first time when they are narrating their problems to the therapist. It's very much like thinking about your problems before going to bed so that your unconscious dreaming mind can act on them whilst you are still asleep. For many people this is a naturally occurring healing process, but for others their dreams will take the form of disturbing nightmares. Those of us that can dream happily probably do not need professional or formal psychotherapy. Those of us who are suffering from nightmares and flashbacks might do better to call in some additional help in the form of psychotherapy.

What Heals in Psychotherapy?

Several years ago I asked my teacher this question and his prompt reply was - a relationship. I wasn't fully satisfied with this answer as I wanted to know what was in a therapeutic relationship that was not there in other relationships i.e. with our spouse, relatives, friends and teachers. I asked for further clarification and his answer was - through the therapeutic relationship you are brought closer to "the reality". So it was about understanding "reality" in a more complete fashion which is normally beyond us. It has something to do with getting honest and open feedback in a secure setting where feedback is a two-way process that is welcomed by the therapist as well as by the patient.

Our friends and family can offer feedback which will put us in touch with this "reality"; but their opinions are likely to be biased and may not have the same impact. Our friends are probably too kind to give us an honest opinion and may try to portray our weaknesses in a positive light. Our parents may have the need to maintain that they were good parents and the difficulties we feel we faced as children were somehow imaginary. This is an understandable thing given that for most of us quite a bit of our self-esteem is bound up with the idea of ourselves as caring loving parents.

Therapy is an opportunity to get a less biased opinion on one's life situations. In essence, all psychotherapy can do is tell you what it's like for someone to be in a relationship with you and you should feel free to evaluate this feedback. Psychotherapists, like parents, will have their own prejudices and these may include wanting to portray themselves as therapists in a good light. However a well-trained psychotherapist should be aware of these prejudices and should be able to talk to you about difficult aspects of the helping relationship including ways in which you may feel distressed by the psychotherapy at times. Be wary of therapists who were not open to your comments about doubts or difficulties you are having early on with the psychotherapy process! However, a well conducted psychotherapy will give you the opportunity to look at past unresolved issues in a more objective way, informed by modern understanding of child development.

Another way of describing this involves talking about early attachments to our parents or first caretakers. About two thirds of us make secure bonds with our parents. These are relationships where we feel our parents love and understand us. For this to happen our parents need to have been in a position where they can give most of their attention to looking after us as children. For about a third of us this situation did not occur and we never felt securely bonded to our parents. This insecure attachment gives rise to problems later on in life. Many people without secure attachments feel they cannot trust

Chapter 8

Coping with Stress

How do people cope normally? What is normal coping? And what is abnormal? Am I suffering from stress that needs management? Is it possible that normal individual also use unhealthy coping mechanisms or need stress management? How to know whether my coping style is healthy or unhealthy?

These questions come to mind quite normally but generally people don't go to great lengths in trying to find answers to them. It seems appropriate to think deeply about these issues if one is looking for ways of improving one's well being.

Psychoanalysis teaches us how to find meaning in our thoughts and feelings, and cognitive therapists help us find alternate and more rational thoughts that can replace our existing illogical thoughts. The experiential therapists on the other hand emphasise the need to undo our negative feelings without bothering about the thoughts.

Gotama the Buddha on the other hand suggested a totally different and unique solution to the problems which is becoming very popular worldwide in modern times and science community seems to have embraced it. His approach discourages us from fighting with our thoughts and feelings, and explains how we can detach ourselves from them with the objective of managing them better. Every thought and every feeling dies its natural death if we don't – make a judgement about it, join in with it, react to it, resist it, identify with it etc. Instead if we can simply observe it with our emotionally neutral consciousness it loses its hold on us and we can manage it better. No matter how horrible or exciting the thought is, we don't question their coming to our mind and choose not to react to it emotionally during the time of reflection, and this help deal with it better.

An understanding of the normal healing mechanisms and how stress is produced is essential here before we can discuss coping mechanisms and specific strategies of coping with stress.

The following basic assumptions can help us understand stress and coping with it.

- The human body is largely self-renewing so is the mind. Nature has given us all the ability to undo stress. There are no new lessons to be learned in managing stress, all we need is to unlearn the lessons of stress that we have learned so far. It is easy to understand that we all get stressed in difficult situations and we would reach a breaking point if we did not have the ability to neutralise this stress. The fact that we don't reach a breaking point proves that there must be inner healing mechanisms.
- This natural ability to undo stress operates through a homeostatic mechanism that works in our minds and is driven by biological processes that result in lowering of stress levels. These homeostatic mechanisms comes into force only when we come into contact with our inner stress. These mechanisms are switched off if we cut ourselves off from the inner stress signals. The mechanism is similar to that of a thermostat - higher room temperature leads to switching off of the heating system and a lower temperature switches it on. Health professionals are aware that a similar mechanism governs our blood pressure, blood sugar, hormonal secretions and many other functions in the body.
- The mind heals itself best when it is not constantly receiving new experiences through the five senses. It may be that when we feel that nothing much is happening in our lives, deep in our minds healing is taking place. It is therefore important to seek periods of solitude for this daily repair to take place

- Stress is made up of our mental reactions, with their accompanying physiological changes, to a given situation. This mental reaction happens as a result of our judgments about people, things and situations. The stress response can be modified by changing the way we make judgments about things, people and situations.
- Even positive experiences can generate stress. Seeking excitement that our minds are not used to can lead to stress. Seeing life as one big party and trying to get the maximum out of it can be counter-productive. Constant focus on achieving goals can lead to increased levels of stress. Being always on the go and doing something positive does not allow our minds to rest, heal, and grow psychologically.
- Distraction into something “positive” is not a good solution to the problem. It is good to be able to switch off and turn our attention to something positive as it helps us distance ourselves from the negative but it does not make the negative disappear. The negative then gets buried in our unconscious mind. It has to be dealt with on its own terms.
- Living in the present moment reduces stress, whereas preoccupation with the past and the future can lead to increased levels of stress. If we think deeply, we mostly get stressed when we think about what has just happened or what is going to happen soon. If we have the ability to switch off thoughts of the past and the future we can cut out a lot of stress for ourselves. One might argue that planning for the future and learning from the mistakes of the past are important, but these should not require more than just 5% of our time and can also be seen as present tasks. What is undesirable is brooding over past and future.
- There are two types of happiness: inner and outer. The happiness of the external world is about achieving something that is important to you. This happiness is dependent upon external conditions and it disappears when the conditions change. The second kind of happiness can be described as inner peace or tranquility, which is not dependent on the external conditions. It can happen as a result of letting go of one’s obsession with worldly happiness.

The coping mechanisms that we normally use are:

- Taking a break from one’s normal routine by going on holiday.
- Distraction oneself into something else, e.g. watching television, going to a party, seeking friends etc. This works on the same principle of suspending the activity that was causing the stress in the first place.
- Drinking or taking drugs that lead to alterations in consciousness and obliteration of the feelings and sensation of stress.
- Suppression; adopting a stiff upper lip attitude. The individual makes a conscious attempt to modify one’s actions or expression of one’s emotions. The emotions remain under control, but don’t disappear.
- Repression; thoughts and emotions are suppressed into the unconscious mind but this happens without the awareness of the individual and is outside the control of the individual.

Chapter 9

Recovery Process:

"Magical cures can disappear magically"

In the beginning there was an idea

And then an intention

And then a decision, followed by an action

And then there were problems and the experience of failure

Followed by loss of motivation

And then there was a phase of no action, and return to old habits

And then there was experience of more suffering

And then there was a renewed motivation and action

And then there was a small taste of success

And then there was more action, and perseverance

And then there was more success and some failures

And then, there was much more success and very little failure

If I count the number of failures, they were greater than the number of successes

But I have arrived at the destination and

I am happy

Are you inside an emotion or outside of it?

The same reality hurts very badly at one time and we can put up with it at other times, why is it so? Perhaps we move in and out of the emotion without being aware of or intention to do so.

A client came to me after attending a few therapy sessions and said he was back to square one, as he was feeling exactly the same as he felt when he started the journey. I asked him how long did the feeling last. He said a few hours, which was slightly less than the duration he was unwell before. His worry was that the intensity of his feeling was the same. I asked him to visualize a journey between two cities which involves crossing five tunnels. When one is crossing the last tunnel, may be after driving a 100 miles stretch, the feeling may be exactly the same when one is crossing the first tunnel. Someone who is not mindful might think he is back to square one.

When you are inside a particular emotion you are likely to lose objectivity . Emotions make us think in absolutistic terms, things are black or white, there are no grey zones. When we deal with emotions the yardstick of progress in the initial stages should not be the intensity of our feelings but whether we know how to deal with them and feel able to do so. The real progress happens in small chunks, bit by bit, and the journey is very long. Magical cures can disappear magically. One has to work hard with oneself and against oneself. There are no external enemies.

Secondly changing the mind requires disagreeing with oneself, hence one needs a sounding board or a therapist who can act as a mirror to one's mind. In addition to other things, therapy also involves confronting one's own inner mind which can be a stressful experience. This confronting can sometimes reactivate symptoms that appear in remission at the moment. It is therefore important to understand that experiencing a symptom in a controlled setting can be an opportunity to work on them as these feeling can't be worked on when they are buried deep in the unconscious mind.

Why do we seek help?

It is not the abnormal behaviour per se that makes us seek help, but the problem it causes to us. Once the problem is resolved the motivation to seek help drops, and one drops out of treatment. At times we find that clients have achieved a comfort level with their symptoms that they are familiar with. Any change, even if for betterment, can appear as the uncertainty that comes with confronting an unknown devil.

There are two main reasons why people come for help; firstly, when they encounter an unpleasant and humiliating experience; secondly, the lure of a better life if the symptoms disappear. The first reason leads to drastic actions, whereas the second one is a weak motivating factor and works slowly.

–The role of discipline:

Without discipline we are like a rudderless ship which is at the mercy of the gales, and may never reach its destination. It's important during the recovery process that we make certain rules and live by them. The rules should make us push our boundaries a little bit and not too much, and we should keep revising the rules if they are not working for us or are too difficult to follow.

Chapter 10

Spirituality: The Fourth dimension of life

People are not disturbed by things, but by the views they take of them; this nearly 2000 year old quote from Epictetus, a Greek philosopher has received support from scientific research in recent years. Research suggests that individuals who do not perceive a stressful situation as stressful are very much less likely to experience the adverse effects and are able to cope better with stressful events.

We see ourselves taking different views of the same thing at different times, at times just the opposite of each other. We see someone as friendly and caring in the morning and a few hours later realise that they have been very selfish, unhelpful and uncaring. How to know which of these two thoughts represents the reality?

Just because a thought is there in my mind does not mean that it represents the reality out there or my true feelings. It may be a random thought, a wild thought, an adopted thought, an induced thought; and as opposed to all of those a thought that truly represents my core identity and inner feelings.

Unfortunately we become advocates of our thoughts as soon as they enter our mind leaving very little room to challenge them. Different forms of therapies and meditative practices including Vipassana help us recognise our true feelings and thoughts and they also help us see the reality as it is and not as it appears to be. This can enable us to deal with situations more appropriately, thereby reducing our stress.

Stress is defined as the gap between one's perception of the demands placed upon the individual and their ability to cope with it. This does not mean that the actual quantum of the demand is immaterial; it does play a part if the demands cross a certain threshold for the individuals. It's just that the scientific opinion supports the notion that the perception is more important than the actual quantum of the demands.

Stress is a very popular term and almost everyone understands it. Almost all psychological problems be it anxiety, depression, anger, relationship problems are forms of stress, and the use of this term does not help distinguish one from another. When discussing mental illness the word stress often causes more confusion, as it fails to convey the precise nature of the problem.

Mental health professionals use the term "stress disorders" only when they fail to categorize the condition into the neat categories of anxiety disorder, depressive illness, obsessive-compulsive disorder etc.

To simplify the matter one can say that stress is an overarching term and it manifests differently in different individuals depending upon their personalities and mental state. It is the cause and also the end result of psychological disorders. The same stress can cause eczema in one person and alcoholism in another, depending upon their mental makeup.

Stress can therefore be understood in terms of the following three ways:

- As a stimulus: Environmental events such as war, earthquake, famine and accidents can cause stress even when the coping abilities of the individual are good.
- Stress as a response (mental and physiological reaction): A stress-prone person experiences high levels of stress even in situations considered normal by most individuals.
- Stress as an interaction between the individual and the environment e.g. relationship problems.

A Washing Machine for the Mind: Most of our daily actions and interactions produce stress, as our psyche is mobilized from the resting state to a state of action in order to meet a demand. The pure mind gets

exposed to the environment and picks up stress; very much, like our clothes which pick up dust and grease during the course of the day. We put our clothes in a washing machine for cleaning and the cycle takes about an hour or two for cleaning them.

What about our minds? Where is the washing machine for the mind? What do we do to undo the stress? Just as we wash our clothes every day, we need to de-stress ourselves every day.

Stress management should be seen as a “prevention” rather than a “cure” of a problem when it has already resulted in illness. It should be practiced daily, similar to cleaning our teeth every morning. We clean our teeth everyday irrespective of whether they feel clean or unclean. In a similar fashion we need to practice stress management strategies even when we don’t suffer from any stress disorder.

I normally ask people what do you do to de-stress yourself and a common answer I get is “I fix a drink or switch the television on”. Unfortunately, there is very little scientific evidence that these two activities will undo stress. We feel that way because these are step down activities rather than anti-stress ones. Drinking alcohol creates a wall between us and our inner selves so that we don’t feel stressed, and watching television distracts us from our normal preoccupations and worrying thoughts but makes our minds react emotionally in a subtle way that we don’t perceive as stress.

Most people who experience stress do not have a psychiatric illness and do not require professional help but it is a condition that requires proper understanding and careful self-management as it could affect almost every aspect of one’s life and eventually lead to psychiatric illness.

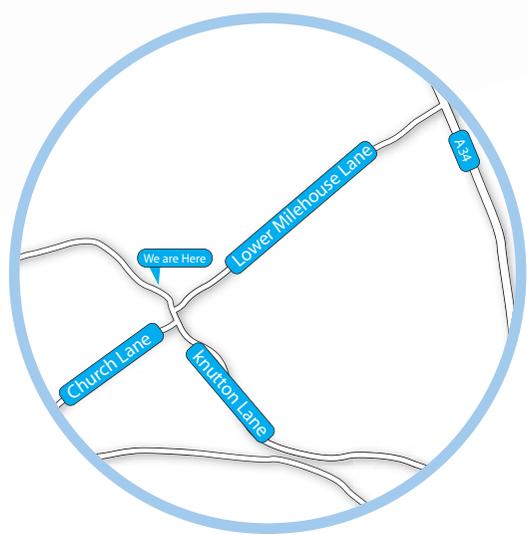
The following could be used as a rough guide to assess your stress levels.

Knowing how you feel first thing in the morning: you are connected to the inner most reaches of your mind during sleep and how you feel soon after waking is a good parameter of your inner mental life. Clients with high levels of stress report feeling unwell, unrefreshed or tired first thing in

Manage your Everyday Stress

Available in CD format (three cd's containing all six sessions) from Emotions Clinic Tel: 01782 768656 or email: admin@emotions-clinic.co.uk or all six sessions can be downloaded from the website www.undoyourstress.com





Nature Consultancy Limited
Emotions Clinic
1 Lawson Terrace, Knutton
Newcastle-under-Lyme
Staffordshire, ST5 6DS

Telephone: 01782 768656 Fax: 01782 499099

Hard copy from www.lulu.com
Published by Nature Consultancy Limited
www.undoyourstress.com