Stress

A possibility to unite body, mind and spirit

Mette Mouritsen
In gratitude,

for the loving and omnipresent,

Life
Stress, a possibility to reunite body and mind

By Mette Mouritsen


Contact info: Mette Mouritsen, mettemouritsen0@gmail.com

1. Edition December 2015

The photos are from own collection a part from one of unknown origin.
# Contents

Contents ........................................................................................................................................... 5  
Introduction ..................................................................................................................................... 6  
What is stress? ................................................................................................................................. 6  
The stress phenomenon ................................................................................................................ 7  
The stress response ........................................................................................................................ 13  
   Acute stress and accumulated stress ......................................................................................... 15  
Balancing stress ............................................................................................................................ 18  
End and references ........................................................................................................................ 20
Introduction

This little book is free. It is written with an intention to share the knowledge and wisdom I have received through life experiences and through my work as a medical, holistic doctor.

It is my perspective on stress, and how I perceive stress. It is not “the truth”. It is a part of our common and ever expanding truth.

You may apply what ever of it that makes sense to you, and let the rest pass.

You are free to share the entire book.

I hope the book may inspire you, and as many people as possible around the world.

What is stress?

It is easier to define what stress is not:

It is not a well-defined entity.
It is not a disease.
It is not located on a single gene.

So we cannot relate to it in in the usual way, by saying; “It is inherited” and continuing, “I can’t do anything about it, I have to live with it”

There is a lot to do about it, once we have identified how stress is manifested in us, and yes we can live with it. And we can support each other in doing it.

To explore a bit further into the question about stress we have to look at the stress phenomenon and the stress response.
The stress phenomenon

Unfortunately we don’t have a sufficient and updated description on stress in Denmark. The department of healthcare describes it however in 2013 in this way: *Stress is an increasing public health problem and can be defined as a condition characterized by reluctance and tension. The condition is not a disease in itself, but a response to a load, the person may find it difficult to handle* (1). *In addition it is affecting the well-being and quality of life negatively, stress increases the risk of heart disease and depression* (2). Stress also affects the use of health services, early retirement, early retirement, sick leave, productivity etc. (2)

We often compare us with one of our “bigger brother” like US. I have found some researches, which describes the prevalence of stress in USA. I have gained access to these researches from a congress about stress in Philadelphia in 2015 where I participated:

Statistically it has been found that around 73% of the total population of United States experience Psychological Symptoms of Stress. It should be noted that around 30% people experience stress due to work pressure and around 48% people are facing negative impact of stress on their personal and professional life. The annual expenditure of employers in treatment of stress related disorders is found to be 300 billion $ globally. The total number of cases of stress was found to be 42800 in the year 2011-2012 which constitutes around 40% all work-related illnesses. It has been seen that every 7 out of 10 Americans experiences physical or non-physical symptoms of stress. However, nearly 60% of people who are suffering from stress are trying to reduce their stress level over past 10 years, out of which approximately 53% still could not get rid of it. As per Statistics, United States of America is the country where maximum funds have been allotted for researches on Stress. There are more than 100 universities throughout the country where research on stress is going on and more than 25000 psychiatrists are involved in it. Top Associations and top stress medicine producing Pharmaceutical industries are also located in United States.


It is a great problem in US, so how do stressed people experience stress?

If we ask different people we will get exactly as many different answers as the amount of people we are asking. This could be a reason why there isn’t any general definition on stress, it makes space for all the different individual experiences.

Here is an example of some recurring answers that I have heard; “too many worries and chaotic thoughts”, “a feeling of restlessness and hopelessness”, “a physical pressure in the head and the chest”.

If we ask for the reasons for being stressed, people will offer just as many different answers like; too much work, my boss is stupid, my wife don’t understand me, my friends let me down, my house is a miss, and often many different reasons at the same time.

In this way the stress experience is rather diverse and individual as well as the reason for it at a given time.
Anyway there is something in common. Most people who are stressed experience a loss of control.

*Mostly it is the fear of loosing control rather than actually loosing control.*

In inquiring people about the fear some of the recurring answers I have heard is: “the fear of loosing job, home and money”, the fear of loosing friends and love, the fear of losing health and life, the fear of loosing respect and honor,” and much more. There are so many different reasons, still there is a common feature behind them all; the fear, and the “smaller siblings” such as anxiety, worries, frustrations, envy, anger and much more. All the emotions that we usually hide suppress or are unconscious about.

Many different emotions are behind the stress response. Emotions are defined as feelings connected to thoughts. It is often very difficult to differentiate one from the other, as they are anatomically very closely related and the energetic communication between them are very fast, often much faster than our intellect can realize, so that we are not aware of how our thoughts influence our bodily sensations and the other way around. For instance we may be thinking of a person or a situation and feel anger, or we feel angry without exactly knowing the core reason. What is first is like the question about the hen and the egg. The most basic emotion is fear. It is a protective reaction when we feel threaten, no matter if it is a real threat or the mere thought of a threat. The bodily experience is equally uncomfortable. The threat is mostly on our integrity and rarely on our existence, our survival as human beings.

It raises another question;

*What are we humans so fearful of?*

If we look around the world some humans are suffering from hunger, war and violence. This is of course very stressful. Another big part of the world has more than enough supplies, and still they are stressed.

The answers to the latter are many, anyway there are some common features;

- Many people want freedom and independency, and at the same time they may be worried about the responsibility that follows. If we fail in some way, a very common reaction is to feel guilt and shame and direct this feeling either inwards or outwards in the surroundings eventually by complaining. Guilt and shame is very stressful feelings. Most of our reactions and behaviors are automatic and in this sense inherited. Thus we cannot find the first human to blame or shame unless we decide to blame Adam and Eve. If we look at our family tree we will realize, that our behavior as well as our emotions like anger, pride, depressiveness and greed are just as inherited as gout, diabetes and hypertension. So it makes no sense to blame anyone. Still we can take the responsibilities for our actions, and choices. Many societies are marked by guilt and shame and these emotions are major stressors. They may pressurize people to perform beyond their physical and emotional limits, in fear of loosing control and feeling further ashamed.

- The society is increasingly complex. We invent and explore new ideas and our consciousness is constantly expanding. It is impossible to follow the ever-changing news. We may easily get a
feeling of loosing control and a sense of being less worthy.

- The Internet has luckily increased our knowledge, and brings a lot of possibilities to choose between. If we don’t choose or dare not to choose we may get a feeling of loosing control.

- Life is changing fast cause to our expanding knowledge. What was true one day shows up to be untruth the following day. We realize that there are many truths. It makes us unsure on our beliefs, and nurtures a feeling of unsafety and the feeling of loosing control.

- The fear of loosing control promotes competition, which is a major reason for stress in the sense of feeling restless and short of time. It also amplifies the tendency of intellectualization; people think faster, speak faster, walk faster and “do” faster. The subtle sensations, as the emotions in the body, are vibrating in a slower pace. If the intellect, the highly vibrating thoughts, is in charge we might not even realize the lower vibrating emotions. Like the expression; “He is a head in advance”. We may truly be functional disconnected from the emotions in our body, because in our thoughts, with our intellect, we are able to do anything, until our body has a break down cause to stress. The ignored emotions in the body or the many overwhelming thoughts or both, are dominating and we get a feeling of loosing control.

It makes sense if we look at the anatomy, and look at the physical distance between the thinking part of the brain and the central part, where the response to our emotions are manifested in the body. (Fig. 1. next chapter)

When we are competitive, time becomes precious and pace work increases. The feeling of loosing control turns in to a vicious circle; we become increasingly competitive and speed up the processes and become even more stressed.

- It seems that we have forgotten that humans mind invented time.
  That time is space, which we have divided into “before-this-time” and “past-this time “, and the timeless presence exists independently of the human intellect.

- Then there is the longing. Many people are longing for having, being or doing something else than what they are having, being, doing right now. They strive to become wiser, richer, healthier, famous, beautiful, younger-looking and much more.

However there is also something much more profound behind the longing, and it is a wish to be happy and loved.
In the search for happiness outside ourselves we may also become stressed because it is a never-ending process. If we can’t fully love ourselves and enjoy our own company who should then at the long term? Few people are able to love unconditionally. Maybe our first caregiver is able to give unconditional love, however they are as well limited by the natural laws of human life, and they may already be in range.

Happiness and love is in our selves and in the act of sharing it with other people. We don’t have to search. It is already there, we just have to rediscover it, share it, and more will be given in return.

These views present some observations why stress has appeared and increased during human’s evolution.

There could also be a higher purpose with the stress phenomenon, a common human reminder of
the interconnectedness of body, mind and spirit to keep on evolving humanity.
To understand how stress related diseases are increasing, we also have to look inside ourselves to find the truth and understanding by heart in trust to our self. With this consciousness from the heart we can support the evolution on earth. The united human has a major influence on the survival of the earth.

It may sound like a doomsday talk, it isn’t! It is just an extrapolation on how it may end, if we exclusively let the human intellect be in power, and ignore that the earth, the air, the water, the trees, the bacteria and the animal’s well being is a part of us and influenced by our beliefs and behavior. An ekstrapolarisation has the power to open our eyes, so that we may find a new balance.

I think a further exploring into the question, “what humans are in fear of loosing control of”, could bring us some more understanding on how stress has separated us from ourselves and each other, and how it may be a possibility to unite body and mind and each other.

Into the core if we keep on inquiring, why humans are in fear of loosing control, a rarely out spoken reason is the fear of loosing power. The wish for power in ourselves, in a situation, of an object or a property or whatever, is an essential reason for separation between humans and other living beings. However the power of the heart is the way to heal ourselves each other and the nature we are a part of. Anyway if humans’ intellect were completely in power, we would still not be able to control life. Even if we think of extremes as homicide, suicide, euthanasia and death penalty, we are not completely controlling life or death, as the energy that disappears in the moment of death and leaves the body pale and powerless, is still “out there” and out of our control. Likewise the energetic vibes, the beliefs and emotions, that the person has emitted while he was alive are still vibrating somewhere in someone out there. (“Out there” is no-where and every-where, the formless universe)
And if we think of in vitro fertilization then the first cell was there before the first human. Something has to bring a live-giving cell at first hand. We cannot control the initiation of life and the final death.

Very little is in fact in our control. To really recognize and live by this recognition brings relief and joy. Life becomes a moment-by-moment adventure. The stressful worries, about what might go wrong or what might be the best, fade away. We simply are where we are, and do our best in the present situation; the rest is out of our control. This perspective implies that people take the responsibility for their choices in life, and live with a deep intention of doing and being the best version of themselves at any time, and in doing this they automatically care for their surroundings in a non-sentimental way. Further on we may begin to understand that suffering is a way to transform old patterns and relate differently to the many unpredictable events in life.

When we unite ourselves by understanding and experiencing how our thoughts and beliefs, influences our emotions and how our emotions are manifested in the body and how it all influences our behavior, as well as other people, we stop judging and start modifying our selves, our egos. This higher consciousness of our own and our common existence, and our common consciousness is the connecting factor; the spirit of human beings.
From a higher perspective, nothing is wrong, it is a matter of understanding, accepting, relating and responding to experiences inside ourselves in life. The full puzzle, of events in life may not be evaluated from a single piece in the corner. Anyway we can still take the responsibility for our own actions and choices.

When we feel united, we understand the interconnectedness between humans and behave in a compassionate way towards other beings. Of course this shift is not done overnight. It is an ongoing process, and it is never too late to get started. There are lots of ways and tools to bring us on the road and we are here together to gently remind each other about the path, if we should forget ourselves for a while.

The motivation to change and to do the inner and outer work is greater, once we have had an acquaintance with stress that reminds us of our vulnerability. We begin to understand how our thoughts and emotions influence our well-being.

*How can stress be the factor that reunion body, mind and spirit?*

When we experience the stress response, as a full body reaction it brings an understanding of how body and mind is interconnected, and this understanding is our growing consciousness. The loving observer of our own existence. If it weren’t a loving observer we would still be captured by feelings like frustration and anger and self-limiting beliefs. In the loving light of a higher consciousness we understand, how we have become the person we are right now. Like the mother looking at her child learning to walk, comforting and encourage it when it falls. So let’s look at the full-body stress response.
The stress response

So how is the stress response? If we look at a simple outline of a human body, it is obvious that we receive input from outside and inside the body, and that all input may trigger thoughts and reflections, and thoughts and reflections may trigger sensations throughout the body.

The easiest way to understand it is to look at the acute stress response in this example:

A person experiences a sudden unexpected threat. It could be a sudden accident, an outburst, an offending remark or act. This event automatically triggers the adrenergic response in hypothalamus. The stress response is turned on; The heart rhythm raises, the pulse and blood pressure elevates, the respiration becomes superficial and fast, the muscles become tense, the skin changes colour and temperature, the blood sugar and cholesterol level raises, the digestive system and the urinary system alters, and the sex life and immune response goes on stand bye. The thoughts are trapped by the situation in a rigid or chaotic way.

It really is a full-body reaction.

Every cell and organ is connected, directly or indirectly, and in this way is our body influenced and shaped by our experiences and sensations. It may be transient, persistent or repetitive input that the body senses. We are constantly affected by the input and the body is in a constant change. Every moment is new. The intellect of recorded experiences often depends on our previous experiences, so the intellect may color our new experiences in the present time. However the intellect also changes.

The cells in our body have a capacity for constant renewal, a kind of self-healing process. The brain cells are largely excluded, however the capacity is large, so it may find new ways.

Where our mind direct our focus, we also direct the energy. The latter may be explained in the following brief exercise: Focus right now on your shoulders, and sense how your shoulder are ........ Before this invitation, you were focusing on this text and not on the shoulder. With the invitation you pay attention to the shoulder and may discover that it is tense, relaxed or whatever. The word shoulder triggered awareness and a sensation of shoulder.

Self-limiting beliefs and old events may maintain new sensations and new impressions in the old way, like the man who experiences pain in his fingers months and years after the entire arm has been amputated. We can perceive a new situation in the same old way. With a greater awareness of the interactions between the intellect and the rest of the body, we can relate to our body in a different way. This higher consciousness, the loving observer of ourselves, may unite the intellect and the rest of the body. What is the quality and location of the formless consciousness? It is another discussion, which there are many opinions about I will refrain here and return to the stress response, as a whole-body response. Which brings up individual symptoms.
To illustrate how the stress response is triggered, I will offer some examples on how stress may show up as pain in the stomach in everyday life:

1) A man is eating his lunch in a hurry in fear of loosing a subsequent appointment with his Boss. He is stressed. He eats fast and far too much of something which is not suitable for him that day. He does not pay attention, and he is not able to sense the needs of his body. Later on he feels pain in his stomach. The pain evokes thoughts and worries. The worry activates hormones in hypothalamus that activates the adrenergic response and other hormones and the response is increased gastric acid and altered peristalsis and more pain in the stomach.

2) A woman has in periods of her life a poor digestion with stomach discomfort. She often listens with empathy to other people, and by coincidence she hear a story about another woman who had stomach pain and ended up dying from cancer. The story, especially the words dying and cancer, evokes worries and anxiety and initiates the hypothalamus and activates the adrenergic response and some other hormones and the response is pain in the stomach.

3) A healthy woman is invited to a screening test, which she accepts because cancer is in her family. The examinations reveal that she has cancer of the intestine. She is treated well and survives, no more cancer cells left in the body, only a tiny scare and the digestive system are functioning as normal. She is cured and from now on she has to take care, is the message she gets from the surgeon. Every time she sense something unusual in her stomach, a worry starts; could it be the cancer once more? The worry activates the hypothalamus and the adrenergic
response and maybe some other central releasing hormones and the response could be more pain in her stomach or pain somewhere else in the body. She is alert, and her energy is directed towards her stomach, because she is in an alert and contracted state of being in her whole body.

These examples are illustrating how the stress response may be initiated either from outside or from inside ourselves. Our way of relating and responding together with our heritage in the broader sense determines the response in the body.

Please do not get worried about this knowledge. The amazing and ever changing cells in the body can manage many imbalances by itself, anyway it is evident that if we continuously ignore and are unconscious about stress, symptoms and diseases may arise.

**Acute stress and accumulated stress**

The response to acute stress is different from the more complex response to accumulated stress. Acute stress is mostly triggered by a single emotion as fear, whereas accumulated stress mainly is caused by several different emotions. An emotion may trigger another emotion, like anxiety may elicit anger and frustrations and jealousy may trigger shame and pride.

If we continuously ignore and suppress our emotions, and don’t give the body a chance to heal itself by relaxing (also in the thoughts), the stress may become accumulated and lead to symptoms and diseases.

The stress response is naturally individual and dependent on the given circumstances, so it is not possible to describe one single way to respond to stress.

Anyway, if the body keep on responding after the threat has gone and the thoughts reinforce the emotions in the body, it turns into a vicious circle, which we could call a panic attack in the short term, and accumulated stress at the long term.

If we explore into the symptoms of a stressed person we may realize that emotions, thoughts and bodily symptoms are present or have been.

It depends on the ability to sense and observe our selves.

Many people are primary intellectual, because this is how we are raised. Since our first step we have been told, more or less, to take care and think before acting.

In past centuries it has been a shame to sense the body and expressing emotions and cause to this we have learned to suppress our emotions. Humans have become increasingly intellectual and more or less forgotten the ability to sense and observe bodily reactions and emotions. In this way our intellect has separated us from ourselves. The stress response that arises in the entire body now invites us to look at the connection between body and mind.

The acute symptoms listed above could easily be extrapolated further on and explain some of the symptoms and diseases that we might get. If we think of hypertension, in medical terms we
call it “essential hypertension”, the kind of hypertension that most people have. Essential means in fact that the doctors don’t know why people get this elevated blood pressure. If we look at the acute stress response it implies elevated blood pressure. If we bring it into the daily clinic, and inquire the people with essential hypertension, most of them have a history of sudden or long-term stress. They just never had this inquiry.

We could do the same with atrial fibrillation. We don’t know why people get these irregular and fast cardiac heartbeats. We know to some extend how to regulate it, by giving medications that lowers the adrenergic response in the cardio-vascular system. So what if we ourselves could regulate the adrenergic response, which happens to be very active during acute and to a lesser extend in accumulated stress. Could we then avoid that the elevated heart beats, turns into atrial fibrillation and perhaps even chest pain? We haven’t done the researches although it seems very likely.

We could as well explore it by ourselves by examination of our full-body condition: our thoughts and emotions when we feel stressed, and do the same while we are relaxed.

Often stress has been going on for years before people realise it cause to the above-mentioned intellectualization, the tendency to ignore our emotions in the body. It may be difficult to scientific prove the relation between stress and many diseases. An ekstrapolarisation has the power to open our eyes, so that we may find a new balance.

Anyway we still have the possibility to prevent it for our descendants, and ourselves by learning how to balance the stress response. This I will return to in the next chapter.

I would just like to mention that if we extrapolate all the above mentioned symptoms on acute stress, it is possible to explain many of the symptoms in our body which we label with diagnosis like, angina pectoris, asthma, diabetes, hypercholesterolemia, skin rash, gout, colon irritable, dyspepsia, muscle and tendon pain, and much more if not all of the many unexplainable symptoms that the body produce by itself.

This is mentioned to bring a greater awareness to the interconnectedness between thoughts, emotions and body, because we doctors still don’t know why a specific person get a symptom at a given time.

You yourself could as well explore on how your body produce a symptom.

There is not any wrong emotions or thoughts or body sensations. It is how we relate to them, and in being able to relate we have to be aware.

However as the stress response is triggered by emotions and we often have several emotions at the same time, it is not that simple to balance stress. Continuously we get new thoughts, worries, impressions and happenings, as life is an on-going process.

It is difficult to imagine that everyone can be “fixed” and stay in peace forever, just as no one can give anyone a guarantee for not dying, because humans can’t control everything and we don’t fully understand how the universe is working, and how life begins and ends.
Just as we cannot decide the moment we fall asleep and the moment to wake up. Anyway we can do something about stress. We can decide to balance it the way we experience is the best way for us. And then we can stand up for each other and ourselves, when the pace and the competitive mind are too dominant.

_A drop in the ocean has a ripple effect_
Balancing stress

The fear of falling and the longing for flying

The first step is to relax.

When we understand how the stress response is a full-body response with increased adrenaline and hormone activity, it makes sense to relax. If we ask people how they feel relaxed, we will naturally get many different answers. There is no definitive way that suites everyone at a given time in life.

Some people relax during exercise, walking, reading, chatting, singing, painting, working, housecleaning, parties, company, nature, massage, laughing, sex. Other people relax in trusting that everything is working our perfectly. They often have less fear.

All these ways and many others may result in a more or less profound relaxation, completely depending on a persons needs at that moment in life. What is then the news? We are already using many of these ways. It is a question of attitude. If we focus on only one way, we may easily get addicted to this, and not recognize that we are tense and contracted somewhere else in the entire body. Just like the small exercise presented in the previous chapter.
Is there also a common way?
I am sure that we can support each other in finding our own ways, and also become more aware of our inner state of being; how we think, how we feel and our bodily sensations.

The next step is to bring it in to daily living, and this is a common way.

At first it is important to choose to take care of ourselves. To remind us of what is really important right now and in general in life; That we are worthy, and that it is important to know the inner state of peace to give the body a possibility to regain strength and clarity, and from there we can make new conscious choices.

In our own company we may easily find a way that is useful. As soon as we move into daily living we may return to our old well known way of reacting to the surroundings. The question is how to balance stress in daily life. How to regain inner peace, once we have been pushed out of balance, which easily happens, by the many inputs in life.

Mindfulness is one method out of many. It is very useful in supporting us to become aware of our inner state of being in the present moment, where life is lived. The practice is gentle, openhearted and open-minded awareness training. It brings calmness and clarity, so that we can make more conscious choices. It is a full body experience. We may carry the technic with us wherever we go, and we can even use it when we are relating to different people. We can practise it together with other people, and this is a really good possibility to explore how we respond to others, and further on we can support each other in doing the work.

Often it is in the relation to other people that we forget our selves and our inner core of peace. Sooner or later this peace may be disturbed by the unpredictable life events. The mindfulness practice also support our ability to remain focused, so that we don’t necessarily react, and just observe how we respond to an impression. In another way; what we think, what we feel and what we have an urge to do, we observe without necessarily reacting to the impressions. The inner war and the outer struggles will automatically decrease in intensity and appearance, during this practice. We become increasingly conscious and able to make more conscious and sustainable choices. We become connected to a higher self, and discover new purposes in life.

It may sound fantastic. Anyway it is a choice to practice awareness, and to keep on doing it also when we loose the balance for a while. Life is an on-going process, like being the river; in flow, sometimes in new directions and sometimes blocked by unexpected happenings.

Perhaps you already are practising mindfulness without giving it a specific name? After all we were all born with this ability. A baby isn’t able to move and hasn’t got a language, so it is forced to use all senses, and learn by experiencing.

If you should be among these gifted people, who rarely loose them selves in the daily rush, then please share your experiences and knowledge with others, so that we can learn and support each other.
End and references

There are so many good people and good books I could refer to, it is difficult to choose. Anyway what I prefer right now is probably not the same as you right now.

I would suggest that you follow your intuition; the inner knowing that shows up in your inner stillness.

If it is too difficult then never give up. You can always keep on with a natural awareness practice in learning by lived experiences. And don’t hesitate, seek support from others.

I hope this little book has brought some further understanding and loving acceptance of your unique stress-response. Please don’t get stressed by this knowledge, and trust the life in your body. It is incredible, unique, beautiful and ever changing, if the mind allows it.

Hope to meet you somewhere, out there 😊

Be free
Be yourself
Be the love you are
And trust life.

Mette