Women's Secret Handbook to Stress Relief

Helping women to live happier, healthier and more fulfilling lives

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This Handbook has been created as a result of listening to hundreds of women over many years. There are those I have known professionally, as a qualified naturopath in my North Perth practice, but also friends and family. Much of the book also draws upon my own life experience as a wife and a mother.

In my practice I noticed very quickly that many women's physical problems were due to emotional stress. To help these women I had to find out what was going on for people emotionally and address their stressors. That is what led me to branch out and look at people's lives in a holistic way – mind, body and soul.

In this book, I will explain common causes of stress and my philosophy in treating these with the aim of ultimately helping women to live happier, healthier and more fulfilling lives. It will also make it crystal clear how stress can have a negative impact on women's bodies.

Have you ever come across women who seem to be extremely calm and happy? Their husbands and children appear content and you simply don't know how they do it. You may be putting on a brave face for the outside world, yet beneath the calm exterior, you feel totally out of control.

Or are you just not having fun these days? Is life too hard? Are you snappy, tired and overwhelmed more often than not?

"The 6 Simple Steps for Stress Relief" will help you regain your energy, balance and clarity. Some of the techniques are based on Chinese acupressure, while others, such as meditation, originate from India. There are also some very simple ideas such as de-cluttering, which is just good old-fashioned common sense.

Many of these steps have transformed my way of life, creating a more balanced and richer experience for my family and me. A sense of calmness and clarity also enhanced my energy and enjoyment of the things I love.

Firstly, let's look at some common physical and emotional issues women experience, which may hinder their quality of life.

If your body is in pain – you need to listen.

Fatigue

Fatigue is one of the most common problems experienced by many women. I often see women who are simply feeling exhausted. Over commitment and busy lifestyles, both personally and professionally, make it impossible for them to get appropriate rest. Put simply, they are juggling too many balls and there is not enough time left for them to take care of themselves. Their depleted energy reserves simply can't recover.

It is natural for women to be nurturers and to give, but if your cup is empty, you will end up with nothing left to give those you love.

When considering fatigue, it is important to first determine if the fatigue is complicated or uncomplicated. Patients are referred to a doctor to rule out any complicated causes of fatigue, such as disease. Often after a full range of medical tests, there is no apparent problem, but the fatigue persists and the individual is just not feeling 100%.

This is where uncomplicated fatigue may be the problem. Uncomplicated fatigue may have a number of causes, including:

- Iron deficiencies
- Sluggish digestion
- Toxicity
- Reduced cellular energy
- Sub-clinical hypothyroidism
- Adrenal fatigue

The first five causes can usually be helped by nutritional supplements and simple lifestyle changes. However adrenal fatigue can be more problematic and requires a holistic approach. Stress is the major cause of adrenal fatigue. Some signs and symptoms of adrenal fatigue include:

- Feeling unrefreshed and finding it difficult to get up in the morning
- Continuing lack of energy or exhaustion
- The ability to handle stress reduces. Leading to decreased tolerance, increased irritability and anxiousness
- Recurrent infections, especially respiratory. Recovery from illness takes longer
- Light headedness when getting up quickly
- Decreased focus, concentration and memory
- Relying on stimulants – caffeine, energy drinks, sweets, carbohydrates or alcohol to get you through your day
- Mid afternoon slumps

- Mild depression, less enjoyment and a general feeling that you can't be bothered
- Decreased libido
- Pre menstrual syndrome

Excessive Weight

Stress can place your body in fat storing mode. If the stress has started to affect your energy levels and you are feeling tired, often you will crave sweets and stimulants to give you an instant boost. This may impact your blood sugar levels, liver and digestion and may eventually lead to weight gain.

Sometimes, women who are fatigued will also be overweight. They are running on empty so they reach for a quick fix (coffee, cakes or alcohol). These are really empty calories with no nutritional value, but they need them to survive the day.

Low Moods/Mild Depression

Often hand-in-hand with stress and fatigue, comes low moods. Sometimes women feel so down they just cannot be bothered to do everyday tasks or they may be totally overwhelmed. Eventually they are unable to work.

If women are unmotivated and exhausted, the last thing they need is to be bombarded with a radical program to change their diet and lifestyle. It is one step at a time.

Once energy levels and motivation has improved, then we can take it to the next step.

Anxiety

Anxiety may range from mild uneasiness to extreme terror or panic. It can be an unpleasant experience that ranges from brief, almost fleeting events, to a constant, all-day experience.

Some of the signs and symptoms of anxiety include:

- Nervousness
- Panic attacks
- A sense that something is wrong
- Dizziness
- Sweating
- Palpitations
- Chest pain
- Breathlessness
- Pacing
- Foot tapping
- Avoidance

It is not surprising that highly anxious women, often experience various other health problems. Many experience a sensation that makes them feel 'wired', overwhelmed and some may not be able to keep still, constantly tapping their feet for example. Others cannot enjoy the moment and have a head full of jumbled information. They may be too busy worrying about the dinner to enjoy a walk through the park or unable to prioritise at work and so become unproductive.

Anxiety is so easy to manage! There are many effective herbs that can help you and guided meditation can ease anxiousness very quickly.

Insomnia

Closely linked to anxiety and fatigue is insomnia. There are several types of insomnia and sleep disorders, including: sleep onset insomnia, sleep maintenance insomnia, and non-restorative sleep.

Sleep onset insomnia is difficulty falling asleep. Some causes may include anxiety, pain, caffeine or alcohol.

Initially people are so wired they find it hard to fall asleep, it may take 30 minutes to an hour.

Sleep maintenance insomnia is awakening during the night and experiencing difficulty getting back to sleep. Causes may be adrenal depletion, muscle pain, depression, low blood sugar levels or alcohol.

Non-restorative sleep on the other hand is a sense of not having enough sleep, even if they have slept 9-12 hours. These people wake up feeling non-refreshed. Chronic Fatigue Syndrome sufferers commonly experience such sleep disorders.

Pre Menstrual Syndrome

Pre Menstrual Syndrome is caused by hormonal imbalances. There are many different symptoms of PMT. You could be moody, irritable or depressed before your period. Other symptoms include: fluid retention, breast soreness or, for some women, it is simply the pain – either cramping or spasmodic. Some also crave sweets or refined carbohydrates.

Irritable Bowel Syndrome (IBS)

IBS is a condition which is characterised by abdominal pain, constipation /diarrhoea (or alternating between both), bloating, heart burn or indigestion. All other gastrointestinal diseases need to be ruled out prior to a Doctor giving an IBS diagnosis. Stress, anxiety and strong emotional responses can trigger a bout of IBS.

Some women, who may have had ongoing bowel problems for many years, think it is normal but it's not.

Stress the Common Linkage

All of the above conditions have a common linkage in stress. Stress is caused by the sum of the individual stressors within our lives. Whether these are physical, emotional, psychological or environmental in nature, they will all initiate a stress response in the body. Stressors may be major life events, trauma, lifestyle, infections and illness.

Eventually an accumulation of stressors and excessive stress responses may lead to adrenal fatigue which affects many other parts of the body. The adrenal glands are essential in helping our body respond to stress and improve energy.

So What Can We Do About It?

If you are unhappy and experiencing one or more of the above conditions, I advise you to read on and start changing your life one step at a time. I hope my six steps for stress relief can slowly help your life be more balanced and fulfilling.

My Story

At one time, I had over-committed in all aspects of my life and was exhausted and trying to juggle everything, it became a nightmare. I was working two jobs and caring for our two children while, at the same time, my husband was working long hours. To top it all off, we were also renovating our home and my dear dad's health was rapidly deteriorating due to Alzheimer's.

No one could have maintained the pace I kept and the subsequent pressure I was under. I was completely stressed, overwhelmed and exhausted. The family life I'd always wanted was at breaking point as I constantly snapped at those closest to me. In addition, I no longer enjoyed activities I previously had loved. Homemaking, walks to the park and other simple things were too much trouble. My life felt out of control. Something had to change!

Six Simple Steps for Stress Relief

1. Support
2. Spaciousness
3. Creating
4. Appreciation
5. Inspiration
6. Transformation

Support

Identify What Support You Need

Ask yourself – What causes stress in my daily life? Write a list and be specific. Think of environmental, physical and emotional stressors. Think clearly about what makes you unhappy.

Some examples of stressors are:

- Working too many hours and not enough play
- Continuous worrying thoughts about the future or regretting the past
- Feeling overwhelmed and anxious, 'there is too much to do'
- Relationship difficulties – partner, children, family, friends
- Financial insecurity or pressure
- Death or illness of someone close to you
- Mother with little or no support from family and friends
- Shift work at night
- Repeated stresses without enough time in between to recover and rest
- Relocation without support of family and friends
- Repeated or prolonged respiratory infections
- Any severe emotional trauma
- Drug or alcohol abuser
- Unhappy marriage
- Unrelieved pressure or frequent dramas at home or work
- Single parent
- Poor food choices
- Constantly driving yourself, trying to be perfect

- Lack of enjoyable and rejuvenating activities
- The supermarket shop
- Maintaining a large garden
- Driving in the traffic
- Job dissatisfaction

Imagine what your life might look like without these stressors and how would you feel if those stressors were reduced? It is important to note that most of these are within your control. For those stressors that you can't change, you still have the power to change your perception.

Find the Support You Need!

Once you understand the major stressors in your life, the next step is to identify the support that you need.

Ask yourself, what is causing the most stress for me at the moment?

For every woman this will be different. For me, seeing a counsellor with my husband was vital, as this taught us the valuable communication skills we required to nurture our relationship. If you are in a good relationship, it makes everything run so much more smoothly. We had reached a stage where we needed external support.

We cared about each other but we were bickering all the time and had to admit we couldn't fix it on our own, so we found a brilliant relationship councillor in the local newspaper.

For other women, it could be financial worries. Maybe dealing with your finances in an open way with a financial advisor, or cutting back expenditure, could help.

The support you need could be practical – hire a cleaner or babysitter to free up a few extra hours during the week so you can do that pilates, yoga or meditation class.

It may also be a good time to seek career advice as job dissatisfaction can make some women extremely unhappy. Initially you may need to reduce working hours or even chose a different career that is more family friendly.

Even though it might be scary, you may need to take a new direction in your career. A lot of people don't have the courage to do that, but sometimes it is necessary.

Sometimes, the main source of stress in our life is simply too large to deal with head on. In some situations, it can be beneficial to reduce smaller stressors first. This allows us the space to deal with the larger stressor. Remember one step at a time.

Accept what you can't change and work on the things you can change.

Above all listen to your intuition. Learn to feel and recognise which things are really bothering you and which you can ignore. Figure out what stressors are causing the most grief.

Now is a great time to do your own brainstorming, as every single person will have different sets of stresses to deal with.

Here are some more ideas regarding support to consider:

- Physical Support - Massage, Naturopath, Herbalist, Doctor, exercise, yoga, Osteopath, Acupuncture and Bowen Therapy.
- Emotional Support - counsellor, psychologist, communication tools, techniques to release emotions, tapping. Consider using books, DVD's, a personal session or workshops.

"Grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can and the wisdom to know the difference."

Saint Francis of Assisi

Spaciousness

It is all well and good to identify your stressors but now you have to create space and time for yourself to deal with them.

Grant yourself permission and make appointments with yourself!

Get out your diary and make yourself a priority. Looking after your mind and body is just as important as the many other responsibilities you have.

Delegating can also free up time. You can't do it all, so why not hire a cleaner or gardener? Ask for help from friends and family. Encourage the children to take an active role in the running of the home. This may seem hard at first, but persevere! The rewards will benefit both yourself and your children in the long run.

Don't do things for your children that they can do for themselves, it is a disservice.

Carefully think about what you would love to do. Not what the children or your spouse prefers. Looking after yourself is not a bad thing, everyone needs some time to herself, including you.

Clearing clutter in your home or office can bring a sense of organisation, emotional clarity and control into your life.

Learn to say "No" to social events. Another approach is to say, "I will get back to you." This provides an opportunity to reflect on how busy you are before accepting additional commitments or engagements. Your real friends will understand.

Slow down. Halve your list of 'things to do' and spend some time just "being".

The precious time you create can be used for whatever you feel like.

Discuss your need to make space with your spouse and your family, so that they understand the changes you are trying to make. Change is always easier if you get the support of those around you.

"Learn to get in touch with silence within yourself, and know that everything in this life has a purpose. There are no mistakes, no coincidences. All events are blessings given to us to learn from."

Elisabeth Kubler – Ross

Creating

Now that you have the space, you have the opportunity to create some fun in your life. Many people will now often experience one or several of their physical symptoms subside.

It is a simplistic way of looking at depression, but it often occurs when there is too much responsibility and not enough fun!

Think carefully about what you would like to create – a new garden, craft or sport/hobby shared with friends. Art classes often give people a sense of achievement they can build on and painting with others can bring meditative time for being reflective.

But this is not about piling up your life with activities, the focus is on fun.

My list of feel good things to do

- Stop and breathe, slow deep breaths in and out
- Count to 10 instead of exploding
- Book a regular massage
- Share your feelings with a friend, a problem shared is a problem halved
- Find 15 minutes daily to meditate
- Find time to spend in nature – watch a river, walk along the beach at dusk, look at the night sky or read under a tree
- Keep a journal of thoughts, feelings, dreams and goals
- Read a good book
- If you feel like you are going to blow your top, put your joggers on and go for a run around the block
- Regular exercise can do wonders
- Find time to rest and rejuvenate

- Take time out to watch a sunset or sunrise
- Daydream a little
- Play your favourite music that makes you feel good
- Look at the big picture; imagine looking back on your life in 50 years this problem will be a small dot along the long line of your life

Continue to create your own list of things you love to do

Congratulations you are well on your way – you have found some new tools and created the time for yourself. You are bound to be feeling more balanced, refreshed, energised, uplifted and calmer

A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step

Lao Tzu

Appreciation

Daily appreciation is a powerful tool that helps the mind become more positive.

Spend 10-15 minutes a day to find things to be thankful for in your life. This could be people, relationships, places or even an object. The important thing is to focus on the things you like. As your focus shifts, you will feel better and better. Appreciating your life is a very effective way to shift negative emotions to more positive emotions.

For example – Imagine going for a walk and noticing a beautiful sunset, you might say:

"WOW what a lovely sunset" or "I am so lucky to live in ....." , and "It is a beautiful place to bring up children in."

As you can see, it can easily be incorporated into your daily life. Keep it fun and easy.

Family appreciation is a great way of strengthening relationships – at dinner you can start a family tradition of giving one appreciation about your day and then one for each of your family members. You will be surprised what your children notice and what they love about each other.

Write a list or keep a book of appreciations.

It's all about focusing on what you love in your life.

"There are only two ways to live your life. One as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle."

Albert Einstein

Inspiration

By this point you should be feeling much calmer and happier. You may feel much more in control of day-to-day activities and enjoy the company of those who are close to you.

Keep your eyes open to further inspiration, it could come from friends, DVDs or further reading. It may mean spending time with friends who uplift you, reading a book that jumps out at you in a bookshop or attending a seminar or workshop that is of interest to you. For example, if yoga is a passion, booking a weekend retreat may be an idea to keep your further inspired.

Do things that make you feel great and encourage you to stay empowered and excited about your personal transformation and inner calm.

Continue to grow, learn, share and stay connected with like-minded people.

"Life is not measured by the number of breathes we take, but by the moments that take our breath away."

Maya Angelou

Transformation

My wish is that during this process, you will have rediscovered the true essence of who you are. Subsequently, you will feel energised, refreshed, uplifted, calm and more in control of your life.

During this incredible time of growth and transformation you will learn ways to relieve stress allowing you the space to discover more about yourself, your purpose and the gifts and talents you have to share with others.

Many people say they don't really have any gifts, talents or dreams – I ask them to think about themselves as children. What did they enjoy doing then? What do other people say about your attributes?

Now that you have calm and clarity, it is a wonderful time to consider the big picture. Take the time to ask yourself the following questions.

- What do you want in your life?
- What is your soul purpose?
- What gifts and talents do you have?
- How can you share your gifts and talents with others?
- How would you like to feel most of the time?
- What actions can you take to achieve what you want?

"Don't ask what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive and go do it. Because what the world needs is more people who have come alive."

Howard Thurman

Rebecca's Story

Many women who come to see me are unwell and stressed. Then a few months later they begin to turn their lives around for the better. Watching their journey is tremendously rewarding. Rebecca, a Perth mum with two children, who first came to my clinic last year, has an inspirational story which I would like to share.

When I met Rebecca she had recently separated from her husband with two small children. She worked in a busy job full-time and if you rated her stress level out of ten, I would have given her an 11! But her energy was only at 4/10.

She was getting to bed at midnight and rising at 6.30am, experiencing panic attacks, anxiety and feeling totally overwhelmed. Her ability to concentrate had also fallen and she had some memory loss.

Additionally, Rebecca suffered from numerous infections and had no appetite.

Three months later, after following her program and making some changes to her lifestyle, she was feeling balanced and centered. Energy was good at 8/10 and stress fell to 3/10. After she started to feel better, Rebecca started to consider long-term changes. She realised she wanted to leave work but felt, literally, nauseated thinking about such a huge change. She knew she wanted to spend more time with the kids. She constantly felt guilty about emotionally neglecting the kids while she was at work but was frightened of the financial insecurity of leaving her job.

Then a month later, while on long service leave, she visited both a personal development counselor and career counselor. Subsequently, Rebecca made a decision to study teaching next year. It will be part time for one year while working part time. She feels much more relaxed and is happy and excited about the study and thrilled that her future job as a teacher will enable her to spend more time with the children.

Rebecca is now enjoying the study and so much happier. Her children's behavior has improved and they all feel like part of a team. Stress is 5/10 but she is handling the pressure better and not overwhelmed. She is very organised, still busy of course, but loves what she is doing.

Where to from here?

Imagine feeling calmer and more energised with the freedom to enjoy your life. By choosing to rejuvenate your Body, Mind and Soul you'll find the transformation you've been looking for.

It is important to consider the support you will need as you begin this journey. In some areas, this will be available from friends or family, however it is important to recognise when professional help is required.

In my practice I have developed a range of services especially designed to assist people to work through this process. These include:

- Naturopathic Consultation
- Wellness mentoring
- A variety of Workshops focused on Meditation and Stress Relief

When you are ready to start your journey I would love to assist you through the process.

Don't hesitate to pick up the phone for a chat. I am here to help or answer any questions or to point you in the right direction.

I hope the tools and techniques you have learnt continue to enrich your life and the lives of those who are lucky enough to be touched by you.

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