

Coach's Corner Column for the *Journal* newspapers

by Sharon Pahlka, kidney patient and life coach



Reducing the effects of stress on your life

Me...Stres-s-s-sed?

A little stress can help your creativity, but a lot can change your life. While practicing for an important speech last year, I felt a little heaviness in my chest. A week later, life looked very different.

That heaviness in my chest turned out to be due to coronary artery disease. I now have a stent in my right coronary artery and a whole new respect for stress.

If people were more aware of the devastating effects of long-term stress on their health and relationships, they would start making some changes today. Most of us are aware of the need for diet and exercise, but we may not realize that improving our emotional well-being matters just as much. That was me. I am good at eating well and exercising regularly. Managing stress didn't seem necessary. In fact, I had a bit of a stress habit. Stress is such a great little motivator. Need to do something? Wait until a deadline becomes a crisis and use the stress to force a jump start.

We live in a multi-tasking, fast-paced, tense, stress-filled world. All the more reason to incorporate stress reduction in your life right along with a healthy diet, exercise and plenty of sleep. It may not be easy. But the payoff for reduced stress is better health, more happiness, and increased productivity. The secret to effective stress-reduction is to start small and keep at it.

Coaching Question:

What will you do to manage the stress in your life?

Coaching Tip:

Start by making a list of 10 *small* things you can. (Don't start big.)

For example, when I feel stressed, I sing. You wouldn't ask me to sing in your choir but that doesn't matter. I sing. Deep breathing also helps me a lot.

My biggest improvement came when I decided to plan ahead and leave for activities earlier. Think of the difference, stress-wise, of arriving at the airport late or early. I like controlling what I can.

Some other things you can do, starting small and working up:

- Brainstorm ideas on managing stress I your life.
- Feel your feelings and acknowledge your stress. A good cry can help--or maybe not. You decide what works for *you*.
- Make good life choices: eating, exercise, smoking, drinking, and getting enough sleep.

- Cognitive techniques can be useful: self-talk, progressive muscle relaxation, guided imagery, and visualization.
- Add a least one bit of fun to each day your life.
- The procrastination habit creates unnecessary stress. Write down everything you are procrastinating. Go down the list and decide for each on: do it soon? or dump it now?

Homework:

Make a list of personal stress reducers. For the next two weeks, whenever you feel stress building, use one of your personal stress reducers. Evaluate and then try another two weeks.

Quotes:

“If you are distressed by anything external, the pain is not due to the thing itself but to your own estimate of it: and this you have the power to revoke at any moment.” *Marcus Aurelius Antonius*

Resources:

The Relaxation & Stress Reduction Workbook, Fifth Edition
by [Martha Davis](#), [Matthew, Ph.D. McKay](#), [Elizabeth Robbins Eshelman](#),
website: www.dstress.com

Sharon is a life coach specializing in helping those with chronic health challenges live well and meaningfully. She spent 19 years on dialysis, and for the last 14 years has had a kidney transplant. To learn more and read other Coach's Corner articles, visit her Web site: <http://www.lifeisagift.com>.