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# How to Turn Stress into Ease

Cate Stillman

What if you could turn stress into ease like the flick of a switch? And what if you designed your life to be full, engaging and easeful? Let's investigate how to turn stress into ease from a Yoga and Ayurvedic perspective. First, let's look at how stress happens, what it does to the body and mind and assess your relationship with stress. Lastly, we will discover how to create a habit that allows you to transform stress into ease.

In Ayurveda, the air element within the body is disturbed by rushing, hurrying, scurrying or being overscheduled, which results in emotional overwhelm. The American Psychological Association found 75 percent of Americans report stress levels so high they feel unhealthy, with one third of parents reporting extreme stress levels.<sup>1</sup> Much of stress today is caused by people taking work home or always being 'on' for email and projects, which disrupts leisure time, is wearing on the nervous and endocrine systems and eventually has effect on the immune system. The Mayo Clinic Staff writes, "The long-term activation of the stress-response system — and the subsequent overexposure to cortisol and other stress hormones — can disrupt almost all your body's processes, including anxiety, depression, digestive problems, headaches, heart disease, sleep problems, weight gain, and memory

and concentration impairment."<sup>2</sup>

Clearly, you do not want to hurry and scurry and pack more into your day. Notice how you feel about the week ahead. Do you feel at ease or do you feel overwhelmed? Ask yourself, does next week's schedule meet the needs of your body?

The way to feel most at ease is to support your body's needs by aligning your schedule to the circadian rhythms. Healthy body habits that align to the circadian rhythm, including going to bed early, getting a good night's sleep, rising before the dawn, hydrating, having a great bowel movement in the morning and completing a 20-minute movement practice before launching into your day, are all habits of easeful living. These practices unlock the experience of ease.

Like a toggle switch, you experience reaction or reception based on which part of the nervous system is activated. Activating fight or flight, the stress perspective unconsciously elects shorter, more shallow breathing, generates unconscious tension and perpetuates a stress-related negative feedback loop. The ease perspective, with its slower, deeper breath and receptive body, generates a release of tension and perpetuates an emotional experience of



ease and presence.

The energetic vibrations of stress and ease could not be further apart. Stress creates a dissipating energy, with roots in the emotions of fear or scarcity. Ease creates a field of connectivity, with roots in the experience of possibility and presence.

Find out where you are on the spectrum between ease and stress. From the next two lists, assess how many statements resonate with you. Please do not fret! Further on, we will discover how to shift from stress to ease.

- You spend time daily in silence, inquiry or quiet reflection
- Others experience you as grounded, interesting and inspiring
- Your relationships are deeply honest, in integrity; they are intimate and future-oriented
- You lead when a situation calls for leadership
- You often find yourself in a timeless, spacious experience, both when alone and when with loved ones

Next, let's investigate shifting your nervous system from stress into ease. Yogis of the past observed

*Ease creates a field of connectivity, with roots in the experience of possibility and presence.*

### Do you come from a perspective of stress?

- There is not enough time in your day
- You are overwhelmed
- You wake up feeling rushed into your day
- You often wish you were doing something else
- You are pressed for time and often show up late
- Your body feels heavy and sluggish in the morning
- You feel trapped in your life or your body
- You want to make changes, but it seems too difficult
- You are wired, but tired, and wish you could sleep through the night uninterrupted
- You are depressed by the people in your life

### Do you come from a perspective of ease?

- You wake up in joy
- You work hard and give life your all
- You navigate your life intentionally, with time for reflection and course correction
- You are inspired by the people in your life

that breath changed perspective. This discovery was of such significance, they began measuring their lifetime on Earth in breaths, versus years.<sup>3</sup> Yogis developed deep breathing practices, called pranayama, to lengthen their breath cycles. With ongoing practice, Yogis observed an incredible outcome; deep breathing slows the process of aging. Today, studies on morning breathing practices demonstrate the same results: prolonged lifespan in a range of people, from the general population to those with cancer.<sup>4, 5</sup> In addition to extending longevity, slow diaphragmatic breathing awakens mindfulness and converts stress into relaxation. The yogis use breathing practices to access higher states of consciousness — the spiritual body, or that which is beyond the ordinary mind. From this relaxed and expansive vantage point, subjective time slows down.

The experience or perspective, which opens the door to aligned action, is like seeing the whirlwind from a point of stillness or being the calm in the eye of the hurricane. You can witness your thoughts, gain control over your mind or become more mindful. When you are consciously still, you





are recharging. Your immune system recovers and grows resilient. The body relaxes, biological aging slows, the mind focuses, the endocrine system rebalances and cells are quickly oxygenated, which decreases inflammation.<sup>6</sup> By slowing the breath, you experience a slowing of time and thereby gain access to both ease and focus.

Mindfulness practices including meditation, contemplation and pranayama, which allow greater awareness of the present moment, also shift the subjective experience of time.<sup>7</sup> When you bookend your days with a breath-centered practice, you shift into a subjective experience of time slowing down, relaxation and regeneration.

This pivotal, and sometimes elusive habit — easeful living — is about retraining your intent to navigate towards ease.

This perspective of easeful living is a habit you can generate. Easeful living is defined by how you orient your awareness and what this change perpetuates. This habit awakens the power to shift from victim to victor, from passive to active, from reactionary to evolutionary. You want to upgrade the default mode of your perspective throughout your day.

Below are tips to transition your nervous system from a state of stress to one of ease. Remember, at the core of ease is receptivity:

- Receive the gift of breath
- Receive the earth or ground beneath your feet
- Receive the sky or heavens above
- Receive a drink of water
- Receive the gift of the company you keep

The next time you notice stress, use the emotion as a trigger for the new habit of choosing ease. When you receive, you are shifting out of reacting. Also, allow your senses to shift you from stress to ease by situating yourself in the present. Look for beauty. Listen for wisdom. Speak with connection. Touch with sensitivity. Feel the breeze on your skin. Allow your hearing to

extend as far as you can hear and your vision to extend as far as you can see. Notice as you connect into the experience of expansion.

When you are practicing the habit of easeful living you are a gift to others. You are increasingly available in the moment. You are more receptive to people.

### The Alchemy of Ease

Each of us has the power to choose. Will you toggle toward stress or ease? Half full or half empty? Poison or panacea? Contract or expand? The choice is ours, moment by moment, day by day, year by year, decade by decade. We can alchemize the poison of stress into the elixir of ease.

Easeful living is about showing up every day available and receptive, from a connected and open inner space.

Easeful living makes it possible to operate from a bigger perspective. This mindset balances out the fear of failure, fear of the unknown and fear of incompetence with willingness, miracle-mindedness and opportunity-orientation. We can become a bigger, better version of ourselves.

You are breaking free of a more primitive, reactive, self-centered human reflex. You are building the habit of being receptive, open to possibility, even when you are unsure or afraid. Bit by bit, when you notice you are becoming stressed, use the emotion as your cue to relax and receive. We each have dozens of opportunities each day to remember to flip the switch to ease.

We can always choose ease. You can allow stress, overwhelm or anxiety to fade into the background as you focus on welcoming each day. If you do this, you will enjoy an extraordinary life and become a greater benefit to your people. €



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