

“Why Am I So Stressed Out?”

Understand and Manage Stress
Build Resilience

Timothy Denney
Northwestern Mental Health Center

What is stress?

Normal response to events and conditions that may “threaten” us (threats may be real or imagined)

Stress can be either useful or harmful

- ▶ In what cases might stress be harmful?
 - Unremitting
 - Becoming a pattern
 - Interfering with daily functions or relationships
 - Leads to health or behavioral problems

You are having a stressful day when...



Top Ten Stressful Life Events

Spouse's death

Marriage

Marriage separation

Marriage reconciliation

Death of a close relative

Injury or illness

Divorce

Fired from job

Jail term

Retirement

Others listed in other studies: Changing jobs, moving

Are these chronic, acute, or both?

Stress...Stuff Happens



How Stress Affects You

Stress

- ▶ Characterized by over-engagement
- ▶ Emotions are over-reactive
- ▶ Produces urgency and hyperactivity...or “freezing”
- ▶ May lead to loss of energy
- ▶ Primary damage is physical
- ▶ May make you sick or even kill you prematurely

How Stress Affects You

Stress can cause or exacerbate problems:

- ▶ Pain
- ▶ Heart disease, including stroke and blood pressure
- ▶ Digestive problems
- ▶ Obesity, binge eating, or substance abuse
- ▶ Autoimmune conditions
- ▶ Sleep disruptions
- ▶ Aging of the body systems

How Stress Affects You

Cause or increase mental health difficulties such as:

- ▶ Anxiety
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Can be caused by or exacerbate trauma history
- ▶ Cognitive changes and vulnerabilities
- ▶ Panic attack symptoms
- ▶ “Flooding” with stress chemicals over time



Physiological Response

Switching from fore-brain to mid-brain:

- ▶ **Adrenaline** increases your heart rate, elevates your blood pressure and boosts energy supplies
- ▶ **Cortisol**, the primary stress hormone, increases sugars in the bloodstream, enhances brain's use of glucose, enhances the function and repair of tissues
- ▶ **Cortisol** is intended for a fight-flight-or-freeze situation, alters immune system responses and suppresses the digestive system.



“My calendar is way overbooked and I’m three months behind in my work — I don’t have time to attend a time management seminar!”

How Much is Too Much?

All stress affects us - may be unnoticed or well-managed

Variables in stress management include

- Temperament
- Resiliency factors: confidence, optimism, previous experiences, mental health, faith and spirituality, support network, exercise
- Pessimism and negative self-talk
- Unrealistic expectations

How Much is Too Much?

Emotional Warning Signs and Symptoms:

- ▶ Moodiness, irritability or short temper
- ▶ Agitation, inability to relax
- ▶ Feeling overwhelmed
- ▶ Sense of loneliness and isolation
- ▶ Anxiety that is disruptive

Do I look like

the blue bird of happiness?

How Much is Too Much?

Cognitive Warning Signs and Symptoms:

- ▶ Memory problems or inability to concentrate
- ▶ Poor judgment
- ▶ Seeing only the negative
- ▶ Anxious or racing thoughts, constant worrying

Stress can be distracting



How Much is Too Much?

Physical Warning Signs and Symptoms:

- ▶ Aches and pains, frequent colds and illnesses
- ▶ Diarrhea or constipation, nausea
- ▶ Dizziness or “vertigo”
- ▶ Sleep disruptions
- ▶ Loss of sex drive

Way too much stress



How Much is Too Much?

Warning: some of these symptoms could have a physical or medical basis not involving stress. If you notice significant changes, you should consider getting a check-up. Mention your stress problems to the doctor.

Stress Management

Stressful events are a fact of life but you can take steps to manage the impact these events have on you

The Three R Approach.

- ▶ **Reduce** the stressors in your life
- ▶ **Renew** yourself physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually
- ▶ Build **Resilience** in your life as a protective factor against stress, burnout, and illness

Reducing Stress

Strategies

- Identify your stressors in all life domains
- Brainstorm options for reducing stressors
- Negotiate changes - many are with yourself
- Seek counsel and assistance
- Seek professional help if necessary.



Reducing Stress

Reducing stressors you may not recognize.

- Manage your self-talk and thought processes
- Practice mindfulness to reduce stress
- Reduce your TV time
 - For most people, watching TV wastes time
 - TV does not reduce, renew, build resilience
 - Better options: spouse time, family time, pet time, exercise, productive activities, mindfulness

Reducing Stress



Renewal Strategies

Exercise and activity:

- Walking
- Cardio, weight lifting, swimming, any exercise that elevates heart rate and affects breathing
- Potential benefits for brain health, overall health, weight loss, resilience-building, and more

WARNING: consult a doctor before starting an exercise program

Renewal Strategies

Compensatory activities

- Rewards, positive activities...renew and refresh?

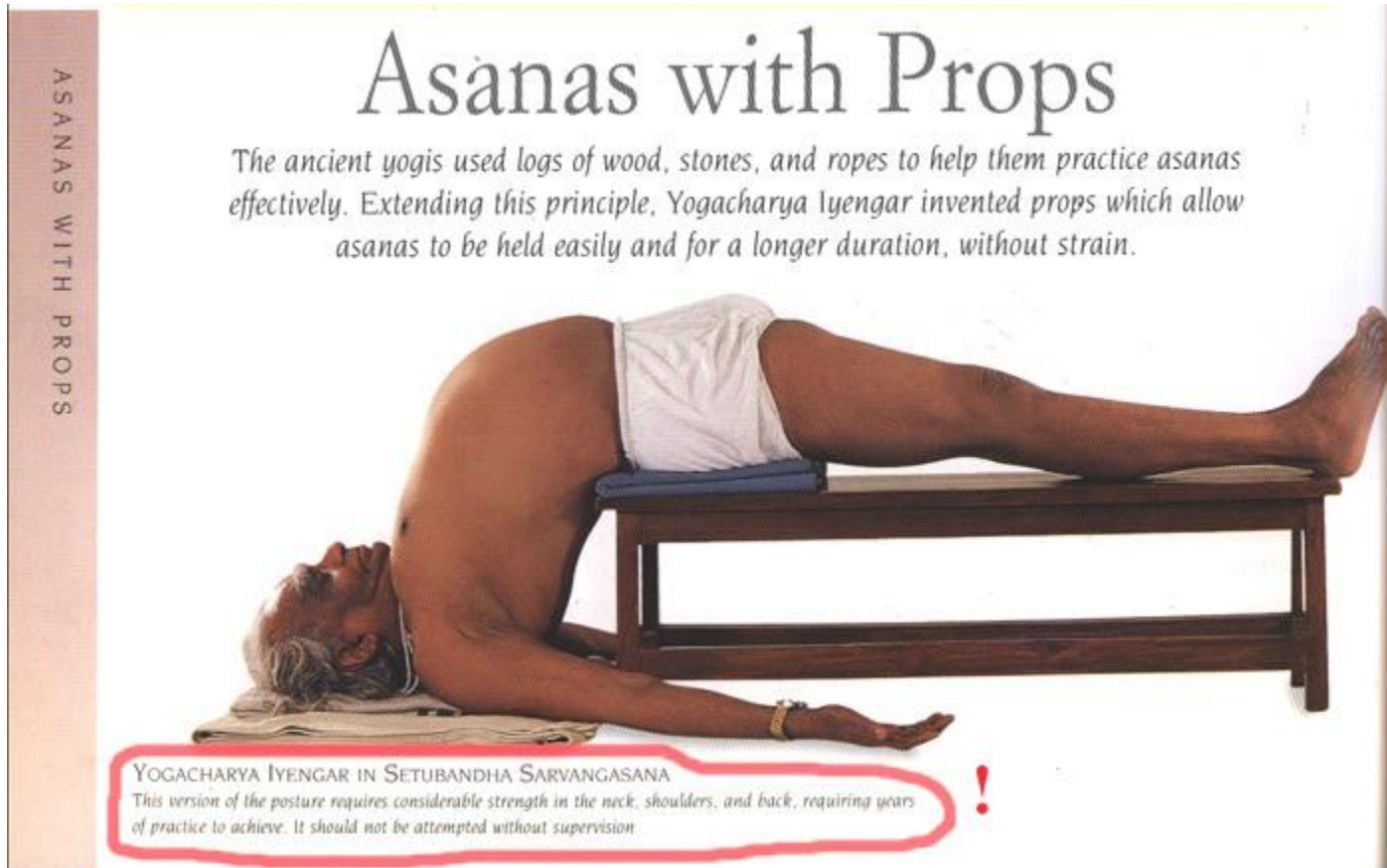
Foster healthy friendships and family relationships

- More than one source of real support
- Invest in your family as your friends

Relaxation techniques: not all work for everybody

- Yoga, massages, reading, gardening or hobbies

Yoga for Yoga Masters



Yoga for Beer Masters



Renewal Strategies

Getting enough sleep

- Average person is sleep-deprived (over 1 hour/day)
- Sleep loss may lead to physical decline, illness
- Stress affects food intake, which may affect sleep

Locate time-wasters and eliminate them...not spouses of children!

Be thoughtful about choosing renewal strategies – will this really renew and refresh?



Resilience Defined

The ability to return to the original form or position after being bent, compressed, or stretched; elasticity.
The ability to recover readily; buoyancy.

Resilience is the capacity to withstand stress or catastrophe, and recover to our original position.



Resilience Includes

Temperament

Courage

Character

Supports

Will power

Faith

Previous stress experiences

Training and preparation

Culture

Skills

Traditions

Relationships

Understanding

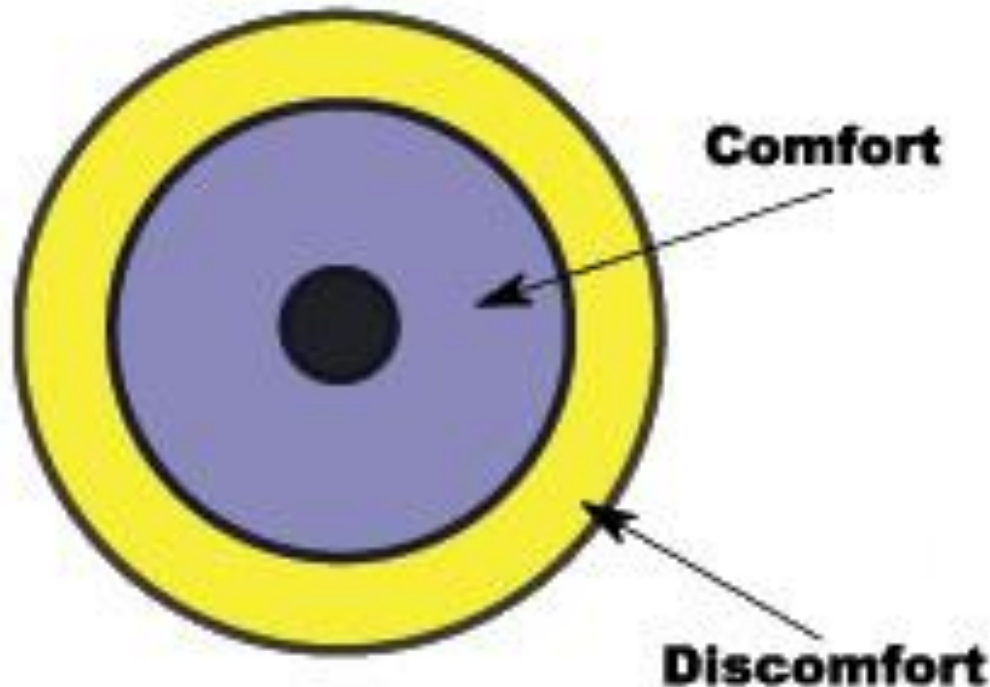
Three Points

1. There are strengths and resilience factors present in your life now
2. You can develop life perspectives that support resilience
3. You can build or improve upon your resilience



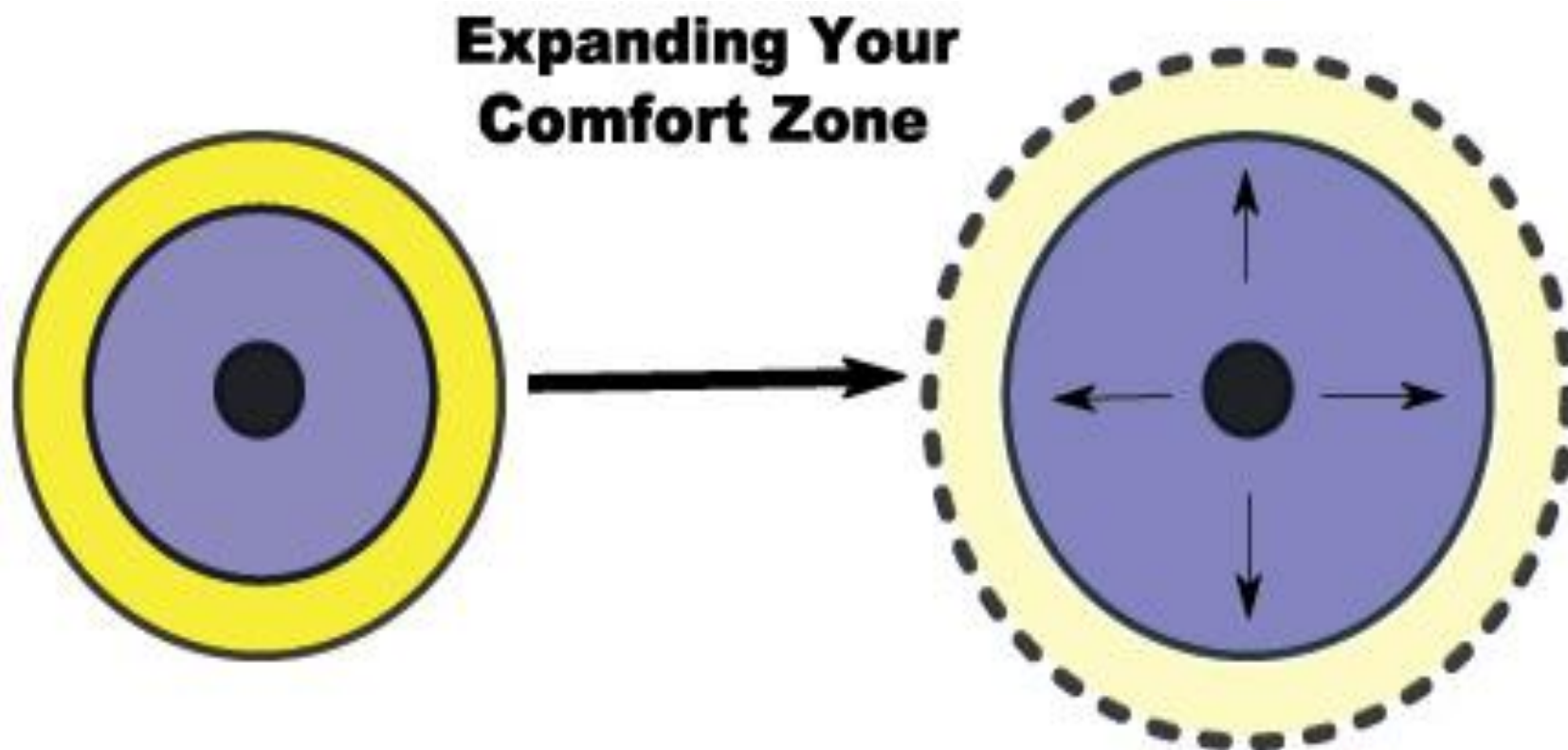
Expansion

Level of Operation



We can expand our resilience by expanding our experience in a number of areas important to our performance.

Expansion



Expansion

Another way of looking at expansion: moving from comfort to growth, which takes courage and confidence. Even the terror zone can build resilience.



The Swap



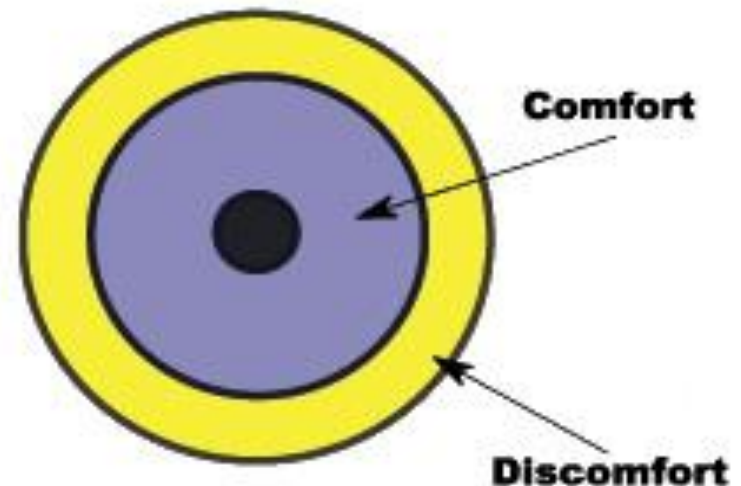
Trading what is comfortable, habitual or safe for what challenges us and builds resilience

Physical Conditioning

“The more you sweat in times of peace, the less you bleed in times of war.”

Seek daily opportunities
to get into discomfort
zone

Level of Operation



Questions and Discussion

Timothy Denney, Training Director
Northwestern Mental Health Center
tdenney@nwmhc.org
218.281.0272