



# The End of Stress As We Know It

*Bruce S. McEwen, Elizabeth Lasley*

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There's a whole new way to think about stress. Sure, some stress is inevitable, but being 'stressed out' isn't. In fact, we can learn to rechannel the powerful stress activators in our lives to make us even more effective. "Hamlet" spoke of 'suffering the slings and arrows of outrageous fortune.' These days we simply use the word 'stress' to describe that feeling. And if you ask 10 random people if they feel stressed, chances are that at least 9 will reply with a resounding, 'Yes!' Indeed, the very way we use the word implies that we are its victims - as in, 'I'm under so much stress' or 'I'm completely stressed out.' There's now a better way to look at this picture, a way to move from victim to victor. The first step is to look to the science behind it all because in the science lies a whole new message about stress. Science allows us to understand what the stress response is and why our bodies react the way they do. Like all living creatures, we're mapped to respond instinctually in certain ways, and generally for good reasons. We know, for example, that in times of emergency, we effortlessly shift into a different biological mode. Based on our perception of the crisis, our brains initiate the 'stress response' or the 'flight-or-fight reaction.' Our attention becomes keenly focused. Our heart and lungs accelerate to ready us for action. Our glands mobilize extra energy resources and summon the immune system to battle stations. This whole process is Nature's way of empowering us to respond swiftly, sometimes dramatically, to sudden events, while remaining mentally alert and physically prepared to meet a challenge. But what if the crisis situation does not present us with a foe to be fought? Or if fleeing is not the answer? Too often in modern times, the situations that bring on the stress response require neither the fight nor flight response for which our bodies are genetically programmed. The stress response is nevertheless likely to kick in - just as it's programmed to do - even though it cannot help speed us toward a resolution. Deprived of its natural successful result, the very system that's designed to protect us begins to cause wear and tear on our bodies - actually bringing on illnesses as diverse and severe as asthma, diabetes, heart disease, ulcers, and increased susceptibility to colds and infections. The good news is that there are definite things that we can do to prevent this process from ultimately taking this wrong turn. New research in brain functioning allows us to understand the reactions our bodies have to various stressful circumstances. That knowledge is power - the power to harness the energy stored within us and to channel it in positive ways. "The End of Stress as We Know It" leads us to a new appreciation of the mind - body connection so that we learn how to reduce stress and increase our overall sense of health and well-being - and even turn aside the slings and arrows of life. This book is co-published with the Dana Press.

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