

# Anxiety and Stress



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**S**tress is the biological manifestation of anxiety, which is the feeling of impending catastrophe. The stress response prepares you to deal with whatever threat you perceive by fighting or fleeing from it. Stress is healthy for about 15 minutes, which is how long it took our distant ancestors to resolve their typical impending catastrophe, one way or the other, before returning to the serenity of grazing, sleeping and digestion. If the stress response is prolonged it becomes a medical and psychiatric problem. Since civilization has made actual danger so rare in our

daily lives, modern anxiety and stress are now commonly associated with questions of social standing and financial security, which do not fall within the 15 minute resolution window that is optimal for health and happiness.

Most people speak as though they believe stress is something external that oppresses them rather than something they do in response to certain situations. This perspective is partially correct, but it limits the range of potential solutions to those that actually eliminate or change the stressful circumstances themselves. If the circumstance in question is something like gravity, your family or the inevitability of death, then the solution will have to entail some shift in perspective rather than any alteration of physics or the human condition. Unlike the world itself, there is no limit to the malleability of perspective. Perhaps this insight is what some people call enlightenment.

Fortunately, each link in the chain leading from anxiety to stress can be broken. When stressful circumstances are immutable and your perspective is inflexible, it is still possible to neutralize the stress response by means of skills like bravery and poise. Even when these fail you can learn to relax in the same reflexive way that you raise your arm or wiggle your ears. This may sound like a trick but it isn't. Trust me. Call me.

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