

A simple acronym for healthy living

Follow these four steps to de-stress

Most people live with a haunting feeling that something is fundamentally wrong with the way he or she lives, knowing deeply that we live in a fragile world riddled with tremendous stress.

I believe that stress—physical, emotional and spiritual—can fracture us when we become alienated or distracted from our true purpose and the calling of our lives.

These stresses compare to the image of the storms in nature. After living on our farm at Oak Haven for many years, I developed a great respect for the sudden shock of a violent thunderstorm as it rips through the farm on a blistering, sultry summer afternoon. Rooted deep in the earth, the strong trunks of the venerable trees hold steady, while the branches are flexible, yielding with humility to the wind and the rain. If these branches could not surrender and be flexible to outside storms, the tree could not survive and flourish. The utter chaos Mother Nature imposes may appear as destructive or violent on the exterior, however the experience eventually brings pruning, rebalance and health to our natural world.



The trees in these storms have taught me much about the human soul. It is not *if* suffering, loss, disappointment, and disease come into our lives, but *when* they show up. I have found that, like the trees on our farm, we all have the capacity to weather the storms of our lives when we are deeply rooted in a strong foundation and we can emerge transformed. The crucial element to remember is not to fear the magnitude of the storm, but to trust that we have cultivated the roots that anchor and sustain us in the face of the events of our lives. We do so not merely to survive, but to create an incredibly prosperous, balanced life rooted in love, compassion and happiness.

Some of us have lost our deep awareness and reverence of the sacred after losing confidence and becoming distracted with our busy, frenetic lives. Yet when we disconnect from the sacred and the holy, we lose our reverence, awe and humility for all of life.

Instead of attempting to change the weather, or running from the storms, or fleeing the stresses of our life, we can choose to turn within and cultivate deep roots, a strong trunk and flexible branches. When we turn within, we create the opportunity to emerge transformed by the storm, more resilient, creating a new sense of strength, power, confidence and health. As you weather the seasons of life,

be courageous and confident that your authentic self is evolving and unfolding your purpose.

Research shows that stress prematurely ages you, shrinks your brain, hurts your memory and makes you gain weight. Stress drives depression, a leading cause of illness and disability according to the World Health Organization. Stress is the epidemic of the 21st century. Every thought, word, emotion and feeling you experience creates a chemical release in your body. Stress is the driver for most diseases, weakening the immune system, and raising your risk of heart disease, stroke, cancer, insomnia, obesity and most other chronic diseases.

S.E.L.F. Care® is a simple, easy to remember acronym derived from illustrious scientific research institutions at Duke University, Harvard University, the University of Texas MD Anderson Cancer Center, and Johns Hopkins University on how to reduce stress.

S—Serenity

Serenity is the opposite of stress. Learn a few simple practices that scientific research has proven lowers blood pressure, lowers heart rate, provides an immune boost and reduces stress hormones. These practices also help your body produce calming, healing hormones that de-stress the mind and body.

1. Be silent, pray, take deep, slow breaths and be grateful.
2. Repeat a positive affirmation. Make it something uplifting like “I am enough” or “Everything has a purpose.”
3. Listen to relaxing music.
4. Listen to nature sounds. Download bird, water or nature sounds to or take a walk in nature.
5. Visualize. Download a guided-imagery audio or create your own by imagining you are at your favorite place on earth. Visualize yourself there, smell this place, feel your presence, hear the sounds and touch the flora.

E—Exercise

Research tells us that exercise produces endorphins and can be as effective as antidepressants in reducing stress and depression. It also helps to reduce your risk of contracting disease.

1. Walk. When you are stressed, walk around your office building or up and down the stairs.
2. Work out. Going to a gym, at home or away, reduces stress and makes you resilient to future stress. Download workouts, such as yoga or dance moves to your smartphone, iPad or computer.
3. Family exercise. Keep a basketball hoop or badminton net in the back yard. When the family is stressed over a situation, get outside and play or go for a walk. A family walk after dinner each night creates a time of communication, intimacy and play.

L—Love

Sharing your stress and concerns helps the mind and body relax and renew. Research tells us there

is a positive relationship between having a community and our health.

1. Meet with a friend or coworker. Being with someone you care about produces endorphins and oxytocin in your body.
2. Get in a group. Create a study group, a walking group, a gardening group, or a group around an interest you have. When you have friends that support you, there is less stress in your life.
3. Phone or text support. Keep at least three close friends or family on your phone list who you can call when you need support. It will help you de-stress to realize you are not alone and someone cares about you.

Read more by Kathleen Hall:

Uncommon H.O.P.E (Sourcebooks, 2010)

A Life in Balance: Nourishing the Four Roots of True Happiness (AMACOM, 2006)

Alter Your Life: Overbooked? Overworked? Overwhelmed? (Oak Haven, 2005)

F—Food

Food is medicine. Food is healing. Food regulates your moods, your sleep, and your health. Stress can be regulated by what you eat.

1. Eat breakfast, which increases metabolism, helps keep weight down, and helps with mood swings.
2. Eat omega 3's—such as fish and nuts—which help with anxiety, stress and depression.
3. Eat Vitamin B6—such as bananas, tuna, turkey, salmon, rice, sweet potatoes and sunflower seeds—which increases the serotonin in your body that calms and heals.

Take responsibility for your own S.E.L.F. Care and teach it to your spouse, children and co-workers. Practice S.E.L.F. Care every day and discover the benefits of a happy, healthier life.

Does S.E.L.F. Care really work? “Alter Your Life” is a reality show that followed six people as they transform their lives using stress resilience techniques taught by Dr. Kathleen Hall at Oak Haven.

[You can watch the show here.](#)