

ABC of Stress Management

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What is the ABC of stress reduction? This question takes us to the root cause of stress, and the one effective way out of it. The very root of stress is really the lack of compassion and kindness we have towards ourselves. This is the A of the ABC of Stress.

A The root of stress

It may sound odd, but if we dive deep inside when we are really under pressure, we will see that it is not only the toothache, or the upcoming mortgage payment, or the feeling low and depressed, but the fact that we do not want to feel the pain or the worry that makes us suffer.

The closing of ourselves to life and what we are going through at difficult times is what causes us the most pain. Put it this way: it is not only the stressor that determines our level of suffering, but the quality of our relationship with it.

Here is an example: first consider a day when you wake up early in the morning, spend some quiet time with yourself, walking, reading, breathing and stretching, before starting your working day. Then take a day when you jump out of bed and hit the road, hurrying all the way through your day. Your reactions to life and what it brings you are different. I welcome

you to test it. An incident of, say, somebody cutting you out on the expressway will affect you differently on those two days. Perhaps on the first day you have more space for life. This brings us to the question: what can I do to deal with stress in a better way? This is the B of the ABC of Stress.

B What can I do?

The answer is in the question. If the root cause of suffering is the lack of kindness, then the remedy is compassion and gentleness towards ourselves at all times, even when things are really stressful and out of our control. Having a soft corner in ourselves for the bad and miserable to come, stay and leave, maintains a degree of balance and reduces suffering tremendously. It is like being in the midst of a storm, but not getting lost in it; being in the water but not getting drowned. This is possible if we permit ourselves to be the way we are moment-by-moment, no matter how unwell we feel.

How can we do this? This is the C of the ABC of Stress.

C How can I do it?

Cultivate heartfulness and compassion. Take time to practise opening up to ourselves – to the way we are and the way we feel, in whatever way it works for us. This gives us the ability to do so even when things are not that good in our lives. There are numerous ways of training the heart to rest and return to its original state of openness and acceptance. Here are some of my favourites:

1. A slow and silent walk in nature, with no aim in mind. Just walk and take in nature the way it is through our inner and outer senses.

2. Sit silently and in a relaxed way with the mobile phone switched off. If you wish, you can bring the attention to the heart very gently and allow the heart to be the way it is without forcing anything.
3. Lie down, staying awake, and pay attention to the way your body is, however it might be from moment to moment.
4. Eat a meal with your awareness in the present with the food. Stay with how it tastes and feels to be nurtured by nature, thankfully.
5. When feeling peace and gratitude, share these feelings with others by allowing the heart to open up and send joy and calm to all beings ●