



Section 1: Time Management


PRESSURE CREATES BOTH
DIAMONDS AND VOLCANOES

*Good judgment comes from
bad experiences and a lot of that
comes from bad judgment.*

UNKNOWN

Superwoman Has Left the Building

—HEALTH AWARENESS—




The LORD said, “I will go with you and give you peace.”

EXODUS 33:14 CEV

Kick back a moment and take this revealing true-or-false stress test for women:

- T F I am frequently grumpy and I don't know why.
- T F I used to enjoy cooking, but now it's only a necessary chore.
- T F I don't feel appreciated for all the tasks that I do.
- T F I'm embarrassed if caught relaxing or being “unproductive.”
- T F The volume in my voice increases to MAKE MY POINT!
- T F I feel like I live in my car.
- T F I can't remember the last time I laughed till I cried.
- T F A “free” day is exhausting because I must complete all my home duties.
- T F I tend to eat when feeling tense or overwhelmed.
- T F I feel like I'm constantly on the defensive.
- T F I often have unexplained headaches or stomachaches.
- T F My to-do lists have footnotes.

Now count the answers that you marked “true” and check out your status:



4–6: Yellow Alert! You are at risk of becoming stressed out.

7–9: Orange Alert! Look out, girlfriend, you're at toxic stress levels.

10–12: Red Alert!!! You are a bonified *Stress Mess* and need immediate help!

Surprised? I certainly was when I took the test.

But we really shouldn't be stunned if we're tuned in to ourselves. Stress overload symptoms don't appear overnight. When our computers begin to freeze up, we recognize that it's time to turn off and reboot. When the warning light shines on the car dashboard, we wouldn't dream of ignoring it. When the bathroom scale pointer begins to spin like a fan, we know it's time to ditch the brownies.

If we ignore the signs, stress will eventually take a toll on our bodies.

We women tend to internalize stress. We take confrontation and subtle discord very personally. Heated words and even mild disagreements often sink into our innards, depositing a sense of unsettledness and anxiety. When we can't find an outlet for our pent-up frustration, we sometimes resort to self-destructive behavior. We eat too much. We smoke. We drink. We abuse our bodies. We may even isolate ourselves.

We're only deceiving ourselves if we think our loved ones don't notice the external signs of our inner distress—fussing, fuming, and fatigue. I call them the Three Fs. We may not even realize how far we've sunk in the stress-pool until those who care about us point it out, usually by evidence of the Three Fs: outward fussing, inward fuming, and chronic fatigue.

I knew it was time to address my stress issues when my growl grew louder than the dog's, and my fam tactfully suggested I get a rabies shot.

But listen, it's what we don't see, the below-the-surface stress symptoms, that are the scariest. Cortisol, a hormone our bodies

release in the grip of stress, contributes to out-of-control feelings of helplessness and hopelessness. Studies confirm that over time, stress increases blood pressure, contributes to migraines and tension headaches, and results in the plaque that leads to coronary artery and heart disease. Chronic stress has been found to increase cardiovascular risk by up to 50 percent! Not to mention documented ties to ulcers, asthma, insomnia, strokes, cancer, obesity, depression, anxiety attacks, colds, flu, and alcoholism.

And those crying jags when you're frazzled? Not coincidence. Stress lowers estrogen production, which can trigger emotional outbursts. You know, without our hormones we're bubbling volcanoes waiting to erupt.

Am I describing you? If so, please allow me to speak as your new BFF: honey, put on your big-girl panties and face facts. You are *not* superwoman with nerves of steel. Or guts either. Stress is kryptonite, and it's out to rip off your cape and reduce you to a pile of quivering, ineffective mush.

Okay, that's the bad news. How about some good news?

Take a deep breath. Close your eyes. Exhale slowly. There. You've just taken the first step in stress reduction. There are plenty of simple but effective techniques for boosting our body's stress resilience:

- ☞ Add yourself to your daily to-do list. Schedule fifteen minutes twice a day to revive, regroup, and regenerate. Remove yourself from the stress source, even if it means just stepping outside for a few minutes. (I walk laps around the parking lot at work or swing on a hammock in the backyard at home.) Air out your brain. Sing along to your favorite CD. Read an inspirational novel or a magazine. Whatever helps you chill. And don't take no for an answer when other activities try to crowd *you* out. You're important!
- ☞ Take laugh breaks. Lighten up, sister! "The joy of the LORD is

your strength” (Nehemiah 8:10 NIV)! Some say Christians should be sober and serious and silent as the grave, but I say Jesus came *out* of the grave and that’s the best reason in the world to celebrate!

Relax your knotted muscles with five-minute stress-busters throughout the day. Stop thinking. Get physical! Stretch, bend, roll those tense shoulders (more great relaxation stretches in chapter 29), chase the dog—get that reinvigorating blood flowing through your body tissues as your wasted mind takes a break. Crank up the praise music while you do housework: line dance while vacuuming, swing dance while cooking, boogie with the grocery cart in the frozen food aisle. Movement causes your brain to secrete beta-endorphin, which helps calm and de-stress you. You’ll need that for the checkout line.

- ☞ Immerse your weariness. Try a Jacuzzi, if available, a bubble bath up to your chin, dipping in a cool spring, or floating in a relaxing pool. Even just standing in the shower, away from the world, can help wash away exhaustion and rejuvenate gasping body tissues (including brain cells). *Feel* the moment and focus on the water’s refreshing sensory input to your skin; allow it to spread buoyancy to your spirit.
- ☞ Repetitive redundancy. No, this is not the name of a new rock group. It’s what you should do to take your frantic self down a notch: Crochet, do needlepoint, play piano scales, rock out (we’re talking about a rocking chair here, not retro Joan Jett) to soothing sounds like chirping birds or a babbling fountain (get a table model for your porch or den—I *love* mine, except for the fact that listening to all that running water makes me flee to the bathroom). You need a calm, repetitive, manual task that takes minimal brain power. Chopping firewood doesn’t count.
- ☞ Ask for help! Delegate responsibilities and chores. Hire help if you can afford it. If you can’t, beg. I have a wonderful,

organizationally-gifted girlfriend who wades in once a month to keep my house from turning into a nuclear waste site (love you, Teresa!). The rest of the time, chores are divided between family members. If everyone does their part, no one is left exhausted.

☞ Give up perfectionism. Ain't nobody perfect but Jesus, and you're not Him. Let a few things go. Tomorrow, release a few more. In time those tasks will quit nagging at you, and you'll literally feel the stress rocks in your stomach disintegrate into dust.

So when those stress overload signs start popping up and the red cape threatens to sprout over our blue tights, um. . . I mean, jeans, let's do ourselves a favor and remind each other that we don't have to perpetuate the myth of superwoman. She's left the building and lost the key!

Half our life is spent trying to find something to do with the
time we have rushed through life trying to save.

WILL ROGERS



LET'S DECOM-STRESS

1. Which questions on the stress test rated your strongest “true”? Do you ever demonstrate the Three Fs to your family? When and why?
2. So what can you do about it? Which stress resilience technique will you implement and in what specific way? (You don't have to stick with the suggestions I've made. Creatively tailor a technique to your unique situation.)

