

Praise for *Too Blessed to Be Stressed*

☘ Dealing with unrealistic expectations and with that stun-gunned-in-the-forehead kind of stress? *Too Blessed to Be Stressed* is a fun-filled read overflowing with insights and practical tips. Perfectly delicious for living happily ever after!

—Rhonda Rhea, www.RhondaRhea.org
Bestselling author of *Whatever Things Are Lovely*

☘ Deb's new book, *Too Blessed to Be Stressed*, will have you laughing so hard you'll wonder what it was you were stressed about in the first place. Debbie's humorous take on life, her clever way with words, and her well-honed skill of bringing the reader into her zany world is worth four times the price of this book. They say you can't buy happiness, but you can sure buy a couple hundred pages of laughs, and they're right here!

—Martha Bolton
Emmy-nominated writer and author of over eighty books, including *Didn't My Skin Used to Fit?* and *The Whole World's Changing and I'm Too Hot to Care*

☘ *Too Blessed to Be Stressed*, Debora Coty's delightful collection of wit and humor, is written in Coty's distinctive style and humorous approach to the stresses of our daily lives. An inspiring read that leaves you laughing, crying, and truly blessed.

—Ruth Carmichael Ellinger
Award-winning author of the Wildrose Inspirational series

☘ Deb Coty has a way of drawing you in and making you feel as if you're swapping stories with your best friend. She's a gifted writer who understands womanhood in all its pain and glory. *Too Blessed to Be Stressed* invites readers to embrace God's grace as they cope with life and its sticky messes.

—Suzanne Woods Fisher
Bestselling author of *The Choice* and *Amish Peace: Simple Wisdom for a Complicated World*

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Too Blessed
to be
Stressed

—
Debora M. Coty

A JOURNAL

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Dedication

To the godly women in my life who have taught me,
by example, how to handle stress: my mother,
Adele Rogers Mitchell; sister, Cindy Hardee;
and daughter, Christina Ruth,
my namesake and best friend, who reminds
me daily that my blessings far outweigh my stressings.

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Introduction

So, girl, are you feeling the pulse throb in your temples as the spike in blood pressure melts your earrings? Are you as busy as the proverbial one-armed wallpaper hanger? Is *frenzy* too tame a word for the hair-ripping, hand-trembling anxiety that keeps your heart in a vise and your humor imprisoned by the joy-sucking dully-funks?

Welcome to the slightly frazzled sisterhood that shares your distress about stress. With the hectic lifestyles we lead in these unpredictable times, we just can't seem to avoid worrying about choking finances, impossible schedules, unstable health issues, or a myriad of other stressors that steal our peace.

My goal in writing *Too Blessed to Be Stressed* is to help you rejuvenate your desperate heart by discovering simple-to-implement, practical ways to attain that peace we all crave. The peace that passes all understanding. The amazing, empowering peace that enables us to actually *feel* blessed in the delirium of the fray.

Together, let's learn creative coping techniques and calm our fretful spirits through bite-sized, digestible doses of the Bread of Life. Maybe a hunk of Godiva, too!

Above all, I want to remind you how to laugh. A real, honest-to-goodness, gurgling-from-the-guts giggle. The kind that acts as a catalyst to release the joy of the Lord in your soul and color your future with hope for a better tomorrow.

"A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones" (Proverbs 17:22 NIV). C'mon, sister, open wide and let's take our medicine!

Love,
Deb



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 of 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 brainpower. 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



Martha on Steroids

—SETTING PRIORITIES—



*Let all things be done
decently and in order.*

1 CORINTHIANS 14:40 KJV

Are you a filer or a piler? Do you file things away in their proper places and organize your home in delightful Martha Stewart fashion? Or do you leave little piles all over like shrines to the clutter god, which eventually turn into lurching Stonehenge precipices that threaten to avalanche and bury your living room?

I tend to be a little of both. You'll rarely find crumbs beside my toaster; just don't look underneath. A pair of dust bunnies may dance in the dining room, but whole squads play hockey with the roaches beneath the beds. Cat hair tumbleweeds aren't usually rolling down the hallway; just don't sit on the couch wearing black pants. A few grimy corners may grace the tub, but you'll never be privy to them. Hey, that's what shower curtains are for.

Housework is something nobody notices until you ignore it. Then *everybody* becomes your mother: Do you live in a barn? I don't remember an indoor blizzard! I forget—what color is this carpet?

So I'm not Martha Stewart. Or even the biblical Martha who zipped around cleaning, cooking, and organizing when the Son of God came to visit (see Luke 10:38–42). But isn't that a good thing? Didn't Jesus rebuke Martha for her preoccupation as a human *do-ing* rather than a human *be-ing*?

I'm neat, but not immaculate. Orderly, but not obsessed. Clean enough for health, dirty enough for happiness. And I'm not alone.

“Clean enough” seems to be the new mantra sweeping our bustlingly busy country as women find little time for once-sacred housekeeping duties. I



understand that an average of 26.5 hours per week was spent housecleaning in 1965 compared to 17 hours today. The latter is roughly 2.4 hours per day.

In Coty math (read: not reproducible), that means we're picking up something every 12 minutes!

Four decades ago the scouring, of course, would have been performed mostly by women, the majority of whom didn't work outside the home and considered their sparkling terrazzo a reflection of personal worth. Thankfully, menfolk do more these days. The Council on Contemporary Families reports that the masculine contribution to household duties has doubled in the past fifty years, and help with child care has tripled.

I can't complain there. The good Lord blessed me with a 50-50 husband. Well, since writing began devouring my spare time, his share has burgeoned to more like 75 percent. Hey, I'm not vain. I'll admit he's a much better scrubber than me. I'm a lick-and-a-promise gal, but he's into minute details, and since he took over, my gleaming pot bottoms double as NASA solar reflectors. Our polka-dot carpet turned out to be tan. There's actually a face behind all the toothpaste flicks on the bathroom mirror.

I don't even refer to the kitchen sink as "The Promised Land" anymore. On a trip to Israel, we learned that excavation down through layers of previous civilizations' left-behind refuse reveals interesting facets of history. Hey, I could do the same thing with the food layers coating my sink. Want to know how many potatoes I peeled for Easter dinner in 2006?

Look, it's not my fault. Who can withstand the relentless forces of spontaneous degeneration, one of the biggest stressors of domesticated life? Never heard of that infamous Coty near-fact of science? Took me years of dedicated observation and study to discover the reason my house looks like it does. Please, let me enlighten you.

The theory of spontaneous degeneration declares that when left in an unnaturally clean state, matter will spontaneously atrophy into indiscriminant disarray.

You, too, have witnessed the ravages of spontaneous degeneration: an hour after you triumphantly finish slaving over a clean house, mold begins sprouting on shiny faucets, green slime oozes from the vegetable crisper, tiny hairs creep



up from the drain and embed themselves in the bathroom sink, and dust bunnies proliferate for a closet reunion.

Black dirt erupts like lava from the carpet nap, clothing magically appears on every piece of sit-able furniture, dirty panties peek from behind hampers just in time for the dog to proudly present them to dinner guests. And most mysterious of all, pairs of clean wet socks innocently entering the dryer become tragically widowed as their mates are magically transported to the parallel universe of the Pogo People, who hop around on one foot wearing Junior's sports high-tops.

Housekeeping is a perpetual lesson in futility. Cleaning an occupied house is like combing your hair in a hurricane.

The way I see it, I'm actually being thoughtful by ignoring my mop and dust rag. I'm eliminating the sinful temptation for friends who might fall short in comparison. In fact, they've learned to appreciate my dust decor and even occasionally leave cute little DON'T EAT HERE messages finger-etched on the coffee table.

I *try* to clean up, but sometimes my efforts backfire. Like the south Florida woman who accidentally rammed an alligator with her car. Seriously. She dutifully cleaned up the road but crashed into a parked car when the possum-playing gator began thrashing around in her backseat. The poor dear was charged with a felony: possession of an alligator. (We can't count votes down here, but we're sure on top of illegal reptiles!)

So when we're tempted to forsake our devotional moments, family time, or prayer walks to toothbrush the grout, disinfect the toilets, or scrub the baseboards like Martha on steroids, let's remember Jesus' words to His beloved spiritual sister: "Martha, dear Martha, you're fussing far too much and getting yourself worked up over nothing" (Luke 10:41 MSG).

Only one thing is truly of eternal importance: Papa God. And He created dirt.

*My second favorite household chore is ironing.
My first being hitting my head on the top
bunk bed until I faint.*

ERMA BOMBECK





Can I Hear Me Now?

—SELF-TALK—



*If our minds are ruled by our desires,
we will die. But if our minds are ruled by
the Spirit, we will have life and peace.*

ROMANS 8:6 CEV

“I just *cannot* learn this new system.”

“That’s impossible!”

“There’s no way I’ll ever get along with her.”

Have you ever spouted loaded statements like these birthed from frustration? If you’re like me, they’re typical of your speech during a single day. Sometimes a single hour. But what impact does this type of self-talk really have when we make such sweeping, absolute declarations?

My tennis coach, Pete, used to stop cold in the middle of a drill when he sensed my negative attitude beginning to rear its ugly head. It was probably my primal scream and the way I slammed my racket into the net that tipped him off.

“I can’t make this shot!” I’d seethe through gritted teeth after the tenth straight drop shot into the net. “Just forget it! I. Am. Not. Able. I won’t keep wasting time on something that will *never* happen.”

Pete, in his calm, nonjudgmental way, would turn his palms upward, shrug his shoulders, and say, “Debbie, what are you telling yourself?”

“Only the facts,” I’d mutter, stubbornly refusing to acknowledge his point.

“Ah, but facts change. If you tell yourself, ‘I can’t,’ then it’s a fact that you won’t. Ever. But if you tell yourself, ‘I haven’t yet, but with a few minor adjustments, I will,’ that becomes an even stronger fact and it supersedes the first.”



He was right, of course, and proof was in the wicked drop shot I eventually developed after a mere four thousand more tries.

Positive self-talk isn't just crucial in sports; it's a *huge* part of everyday stress management. When we tell ourselves something over and over, we eventually buy into it, and it becomes a part of our inner makeup, our self-esteem, our performance motivation—for better or worse. In essence, we choose our attitude and that attitude dictates our stress level.

“Okay, that first soufflé flopped, but so did Julia Child’s. I’ll make a few adjustments and the next one will be the chef d’oeuvre.” By choosing an upbeat attitude, our outlook becomes much more optimistic and consequently less stress-producing.

The trouble is that we often don’t recognize we’re engaging in negative self-talk. Negativity is habit-forming. We unconsciously develop a compromised view of ourselves when we consistently think things like, “I’m such a loser,” “This is too hard,” or “Why even try?”

Channeling Eeyore becomes the soundtrack for our subconscious thoughts. Those mopey, self-deprecating donkey thoughts wear us down and wear us out before we even realize the source of erosion. We’re actually sabotaging ourselves. We settle for defeat when, with a few minor attitude adjustments, we could open the door for amazing possibilities.

Pessimism affects us physically as well as mentally and emotionally. Negativity has a direct correlation to heart disease, immune system deficits, and our ability to cope with physical pain. A thirty-year Mayo Clinic study of eight hundred patients revealed that pessimists’ risk of early death was 19 percent higher than that of optimists. Dr. Martin Seligman of the University of Pennsylvania concludes, “Optimism and pessimism affect health almost as clearly as do physical factors.”

The worst part of negative self-talk is that we’re not only limiting ourselves; we’re limiting our God. The Creator of the universe. The One who is ready to fill us with expectancy and hope and potential and wants us to instead tell ourselves, “I can do *everything* through Christ, who gives me strength” (Philippians 4:13 NLT, emphasis mine).

So is the glass half empty or only half the calories?

How do we reboot ourselves with a fresh perspective and, in the process,



significantly reduce the strain and drain produced by negative self-talk?

✿ Cut and paste. We must train ourselves to recognize negative inner chatter the minute it starts and delete immediately. Shake the mental Etch-A-Sketch. Get out the attitude chain saw. It helps me to make a “time out” signal with my hands as a physical cue. But don’t stop there. Replace those negative thoughts with a positive spin. Let’s transpose the negative self-talk at the beginning of this chapter as an example:

“What can I do to learn this new system?”

“How can I break down this mammoth task into small, doable steps?”

“I’ve learned to get along with my mother-in-law. I can learn to get along with anybody.”

✿ Tweak your tone. You know how your doctor says, “This may pinch a little,” as he jams the needle into your arm? Borrow his technique and reduce big ugly *blackhead* wordage to smaller, unthreatening *blemish* terms. “Impossible” is a brick wall compared to “this may take some work.” Wouldn’t you rather tackle a project that’s “challenging” rather than “unmanageable”?

✿ Be your own BFF (Blessed Friend Forever). Using your BFF voice, intentionally over-dub that Eeyore voice droning inside. Speak to yourself like you would your very best friend. Make it a point to be encouraging, uplifting, affirming, light, and humorous (you’ll listen better!).

✿ Avoid comparisons. Everyone has a different skill set. You are unique. The way you do things may differ from the techniques of others, but that doesn’t make it wrong. To quote my granddaddy (and yours): “There’s more than one way to skin a cat.” (Try not to imagine how that adage originated!) Self-inflicted competition is unfair and only fosters more negativity. Unless you’re the reigning world champion, there will always be someone better than you at a specific skill. So what? You don’t need another tiara.

✿ Be creative. Open your mind to new possibilities. Pretend you’re Michael Jordan and belt out, “I believe I can fly. . .” Okay, skip the MJ part but, really, solutions are only found by those who search for them.

✿ Memorize Philippians 4:13. Repeat frequently. Trust God and act on it!



- ❧ Tack on hope. Add that magical three-letter word, *yet*. When tacked on at the end of a negative thought, it miraculously transforms “I can’t” perspectives into “I can with a little more time.” The difference is subtle but profound:
“I can’t make this work. . .yet.”
“I’m not smart enough to figure this out. . .yet.”
“I’m not handling this well. . .yet.”
See? With one word, you’ve just added instant hope, girlfriend!
- ❧ Act positive to actually become positive. In his book *Winning the Stress Challenge*, Dr. Nick Hall cites a study he conducted proving that signals transmitted to a person’s brain when she’s behaving a certain way provoke similar physical and mental changes to those elicited by real emotional responses. In other words, putting on a happy-face mask truly makes us feel happier!

We believe and internalize what we tell ourselves. Words are powerful. They have the ability to change our perception of our own abilities from limited to limitless. It’s incredible how much difference a little optimism makes in reducing everyday stress. Everything looks surprisingly brighter, warmer, more hopeful.

Positive self-talk is not a new concept. We just need to pick up what the apostle Paul put down in Philippians 4:8: “Fix your thoughts on what is true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (NLT).

And keep going after those drop shots!

Whether you think you can or
think you can’t—you are right.

HENRY FORD



