

Introduction: One Planet Under Stress

“Modern man is sick because he is not whole.”

— Carl Gustav Jung

There is a huge health crisis in the world today that barely gets noticed in the news headlines, even though it underlies nearly every topic of conversation among friends, family, co-workers, acquaintances, consumers, and even young teenagers. The crisis is an epidemic of stress that affects everything in our lives, from our eating habits to the most basic lifestyle behaviors of everyone with whom we interact. Sociologists tell us that stress is one of the few factors that knows no demographic boundaries. As the expression goes, “Stress is the equal opportunity destroyer.”

It is no secret that the world itself is currently under a great amount of stress, particularly with the economic collapse. The waves of political issues, environmental problems, and global concerns crash upon the shores of our personal lives in ways that were unimaginable only a few decades ago. Despite the current issues—massive job layoffs, chronic diseases, financial instability, social unrest, global warming, identity theft, terrorism—solutions to these problems are within our grasp if we make the effort to use our inner resources to reach for help.

Before each of us is a fork in the road. The first path may look appealing, even easy at first, but beware: it’s an illusion, a lifestyle trap. Many people head down this direction and face years, if not decades, of frustration and possible ill health. The other path looks more challenging at first—very steep and perhaps with unsure footing. Soon, however, this path offers better panoramic views and ultimately a better quality of life. This path is uncrowded because few people choose this direction. Don’t let this fact put you off. This book is both a roadmap and a compass to the second path, the path of holistic stress management, the one with the great views and exhilarating experiences.

Holistic stress management is based on the premise of ageless wisdom in which the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts. If you were to ask the shamans, sages, mystics, and healers of all times, of all ages, and of all languages regarding the topic of health—“What are the parts that make up the whole?”—you would hear a unanimous voice among these wisdom keepers saying these words: mind, body, spirit, and emotions. When asked to elaborate further, they would explain that holistic health is the divine alchemy derived from the integration, balance, and harmony of these four components.

Today, the voice of ageless wisdom often is drowned out by the dull roar of a scientific community that tends to look for and associate a specific cause with each effect. Rather than looking at the whole picture, Western culture has opted to dissect and study the pieces that make up the whole, yet, curiously, never getting around to putting the pieces back together. Moreover, Western culture often fails to recognize the significance of the unique unifying synergistic force that gives power to the whole being that is greater than the sum of the parts. Herein lies the danger regarding our current healthcare system. Symptomatic relief, the capstone of the western medical model, does not honor the code of holistic health, wherein both the causes and symptoms of disease and illness are resolved together. Perhaps most importantly, holistic stress management honors the aspect of spiritual well-being, a component that had been long ignored or neglected entirely.

Paradigms often are slow to change, but, with a newly recognized national interest in various forms of complementary and alternative medicine, new insights into health and healing based on ageless wisdom are taking root in U.S. culture. In his acclaimed book *The Best Alternative Medicine: What Works and What Doesn’t*, author Kenneth Pelletier cites that there are more than 600 different modalities of holistic healing, from acupuncture to zero balancing. Despite the plethora of techniques, the purpose (implicit or explicit) of every modality of complementary and

alternative medicine (now called CAM by the medical establishment) is to restore a sense of homeostasis through the integration, balance, and harmony of mind, body, spirit, and emotions. It is no coincidence that virtually every modality of holistic stress management is considered a member of this family of 600 healing modalities because the purpose of effective coping skills and relaxation techniques is the same—to return each person to a sense of homeostasis.

To understand, appreciate, and utilize the wealth of knowledge in the realm of holistic health, it is important to realize that the wisdom of mind-body-spirit stress management draws upon the disciplines of psychology, sociology, physiology, theology, anthropology, mythology, quantum physics, cosmology, and several more areas—all of which come together as a means to create the parameters of “the bigger picture.” By and large, we live in a society where experts focus their specialty on one discipline rather than on a synthesis of all aspects of the human journey, thus creating a dangerous blind spot. In essence, this fragmented approach creates a very myopic view of life, particularly when trying to deal with the complexities that make up the human condition; none of these are held tightly in the domain of one discipline.

Holistic stress management is more than just a theory, although many people end their journeys there. In support of the premise that the whole is always greater than the sum of its parts, holistic stress management goes beyond theory to include the daily application of this knowledge so that effective coping skills and relaxation techniques become part of one’s daily lifestyle, rather than a first aid kit for crises.

I have been a follower of the holistic model of health all my life. Although the premise of the wellness paradigm is clearly intuitive, it is disappointing to me not to see it being more widely embraced. We do not have a healthcare system in this country; we have a sick care system where the focus is on symptomatic relief. In the late 1970s, I made a decision to focus my efforts as a health educator on being an advocate for holistic health. Soon after I completed my master’s degree in exercise physiology, a culmination of events opened the door to make this happen with relative ease, not the least of which was the distinct honor of meeting Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, MD. She was the keynote speaker at the American Holistic Medical Association meeting held in La Crosse, Wisconsin, in 1981. Although she was renowned all over the world for her work on the topic of death and dying, she gave a stunning presentation on the nature of holistic healing. Her presentation—as well as my subsequent meetings with her—galvanized the direction of my professional career. The perspective I bring to *Essentials of Managing Stress, Fourth Edition* is a culmination of the knowledge, wisdom, and experience I have gathered over three decades.

An ancient proverb often quoted in the halls of Wall Street states, “To know and not do is not to know.” In simple terms, this means that you can know all of the information that supports a powerful strategy for holistic stress management, yet, by not practicing these techniques and making them part of your daily routine, the knowledge is quite useless. Perhaps in simplest terms, holistic stress management is an adaptation process involving all aspects of mind, body, spirit, and emotions to reach one’s highest potential.

Specifically, what is holistic stress management? Here are some insights that collectively shine light on this timeless wisdom:

- Holistic stress management conveys the essence of uniting the powers of the conscious and unconscious minds to work in unison for one’s highest potential.
- Holistic stress management suggests a dynamic approach to one’s personal energy where one lives in the present moment rather than feeling guilty about things done in the past or worrying about things that may occur in the future.
- Holistic stress management implies using a combination of coping skills to resolve issues that can cause perceptions of stress to linger and relaxation techniques to reduce or eliminate the symptoms of stress and return the body to homeostasis.
- Holistic stress management also can be described as moving from a motivation of fear to a place of unconditional love.

If there is one theme to this text (and, actually, there are many), it is the theme of balance, for without balance in one's life, nothing else is really possible. Every skill and technique described here carries with it the premise of restoring a sense of balance, homeostasis, or inner peace to mind, body, spirit, and emotions.

The contents of *Essentials of Managing Stress, Fourth Edition* are based on the collective wisdom of a great many 20th- and 21st-century luminaries in the fields of psychology, physiology, sociology, theology, and mythology, including Carl Jung, Abraham Maslow, Ken Cooper, Elisabeth Kübler-Ross, Albert Einstein, Victor Frankl, Joseph Campbell, Carolyn Myss, Richard Gerber, Hans Selye, Wayne Dyer, Dean Ornish, Don Campbell, Norman Cousins, Andrew Weil, Deepak Chopra, Candace Pert, Donna Eden, Jean Houston, and many, many others. The purpose of this text is to increase your awareness regarding the various aspects of wellness through the mind-body-spirit nexus as well as to utilize any and all ideas so that you may fully integrate them into your life. By doing so, you begin to take an active role in the process of cultivating inner peace, rather than feeling like a passive victim in a hostile world.

This new edition includes new information on telomeres and stress, stress and insomnia, happiness, laughter yoga, art therapy, anxiety breathing, pranayama, brain research, mindfulness-based stress reduction, chair (cubicle) yoga, stress from food allergies, and over nine new corresponding workbook exercises. In addition to these updates I have included a new chapter in Part 3: Effective Relaxation Techniques. This new Chapter 24 is titled Ecotherapy: The Healing Power of Nature, and covers the significant impact that immersion in nature can have on one's wellbeing.

At the end of each chapter there is a series of exercises based on specific chapter contents, many of which are new or revised for this *Fourth Edition*. These exercises are designed to be stepping stones to your soul-searching efforts. They have been created specifically to help you process the informational content for the most comprehensive understanding. Although you are encouraged to complete the exercises, you may find it best to read each exercise first and then return to it when you are truly ready. Whereas some exercises were designed specifically for this text, the majority of them were created for workshop participants and college students over a period of two decades. They have proven to be very valuable and, in some cases, life changing. It is my wish that you find them to be equally valuable in seeking that place of inner peace in both your heart and soul.

Best wishes and inner peace,

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