

Week 4 - Stress: Responding vs. Reacting
STOP: The One-minute Breathing Space



Between stimulus
and response there
is a space.

In that space is our
power to choose our
response.

In our response lies
our growth and our
freedom.

- Victor Frankl

This week's videos

We begin with **Stress - Portrait of a Killer**, featuring Robert Sapolsky, a neuroscientist at Stanford University and possibly the world's greatest authority on the causes and effects of stress. This video describes the physiology of stress and how, in modern life, our stress response, designed evolutionarily to protect us from danger, can actually put our lives in danger when it is activated continually and without resolution. This is the bad news.

The good news, **How To Make Stress Your Friend**, comes from Kelly McGonigal, a psychologist specializing in health medicine, who puts stress in perspective, re-framing stress, not as an enemy to health and well-being, but as a response which is protective and even life-giving. She perhaps goes a little too far in saying that health-endangering stress simply comes from a "belief that stress is bad", but her video provides a good counter-balance to the idea that stress is always bad. In the last video, Susan Bauer-Wu describes how mindfulness can counteract a disproportionate stress reaction and introduces you to **STOP**, a mindfulness practice you can use literally anywhere anytime to ground you and help you to be more resilient and effective in the face of difficult situations.

Reading

What Is Stress? distinguishes between acute stress, which is short-term and adaptive, and chronic stress, which is the primary cause of stress-related health problems and **Anatomy of Fear** is a graphic depiction of the stress response. **Understanding the Stress Response** describe the physiological and neurological effects of stress and **Harnessing the Upsides of Stress** talks about the power of recognizing and acknowledging stress, providing specific situations where believing that stress is not bad is helpful, without making the claim that this is true in every situation, as Kelly McGonigal seems to do, above, in her video. **STOP: One-minute Breathing Space** is a one-page description of the process you will be using for this week's informal practice, and **The Magic Quarter Second** is a short article by Tara Brach that weaves in some science to validate "STOP".

Daily Practices

"Yoga 2" is introduced this week. For the **formal practice**, we alternate "Yoga 2" with the Sitting Meditation, doing either yoga or a sitting meditation for each of the six days of practice.

For the **informal practice**, you will look for opportunities to practice **STOP** during the course of the day. Don't expect to remember the precise steps of "STOP" during the most trying parts of the day - it's enough just to remember to stop and take a breath. The best way to make it second nature is to practice it when you aren't stressed, such as during the "in between" times, like waiting in line, walking from one office to another, getting in/out of your car, etc.

Below are your materials for this week:

Videos

Stress - Portrait of a Killer *National Geographic Special with Robert Sapolsky [27 min]*

How To Make Stress Your Friend *by Kelly McGonigal [14 min]*

STOP: A Short Mindfulness Practice *by Susan Bauer-Wu [4 min]*

Reading

What Is Stress?

The Anatomy of Fear - *Discovery Magazine graphic*

Understanding the Stress Response - *Harvard Health Publications*

Harnessing the Upsides of Stress - *Harvard Health Publications*

STOP: One-Minute Breathing Space

The Magic Quarter Second - *Tara Brach*

Practice sheets

Formal Practice [PDF] [or WORD format] - Mindful Yoga (Yoga 2) and Sitting

Informal Practice [PDF] [or WORD format] - STOP: The One Minute Breathing Space

Supplementary materials related to this week's topic

The Science of Anxiety *Time Magazine article*

The Anatomy of Anxiety *Time Magazine graphic*

When Is Stress Good for You *article by Bruce McEwen*

The Psychology of Stress *short video "teaser" by Robert Sapolsky [3 min]*

Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers *book by Robert Sapolsky*

Leaves Falling Gently *book by Susan Bauer-Wu*

The Other Brain Also Deals with Many Woes *article by Harriet Brown*

How Does the Vagus Nerve Convey Gut Instincts to the Brain? *Psychology Today*