

Application Guide

THE STRESS PARADOX: HOW TO HARNESS STRESS TO IMPROVE HEALTH AND PERFORMANCE



BOTTOM LINE:

Not all stress is bad. When leveraged wisely, certain types of stress can build resilience, improve health, and help you grow.

KEY TAKEAWAYS

I. Not all stress is harmful—some stress is essential.

A. The key is differentiating the types of stress that harm and the types of stress that help us heal.

1. **Chronic, uncontrolled** stress can wear us down and lead to burnout.

2. But **brief, purposeful** stress—followed by recovery—can energize and strengthen us.

B. Your biology is wired for **growth through discomfort**.

1. Our bodies are designed to sense stress at the cellular level, and that is the stimulus that starts repair mechanisms.

a) When we enter stress our bodies begin to recycle the damaged parts of our cells, regenerate energy, and build antioxidant responses.

b) Emerging from purposeful stress makes us more resilient in how we bounce back from future stress and ultimately makes us stronger.

2. Think of it like exercise: challenge, recovery, growth.

C. Our lifestyle choices can prevent 80% of chronic diseases that we're facing today, such as heart disease, diabetes, obesity, depression, Alzheimer's disease.

II. Good stress is episodic, intentional, and aligned with purpose.

A. Beneficial stress is mild to moderate, time-limited, has potential for reward, and aligned with our beliefs or goals.

B. It energizes rather than depletes. It's the kind of challenge that motivates and stretches us in meaningful ways.

III. Today, we are not in environments that force us to stretch ourselves. We chase comfort and, therefore, in some ways we must **manufacture episodic stress experiences** in order to **benefit from the good stress**.

A. Eat a diversity of plant-based foods.

1. Plant-based toxins create gentle, episodic stress experiences within our genes.

2. It's not that we're getting the antioxidants from food, but the food itself is turning on a code we have built into our DNA; it's our built-in ability to heal in order to make us our healthiest self.

B. Exercise, using high-intensity interval training.

1. When we have an intense bout of exercise followed by recovery, we build stronger adaptations that translates to our muscles growing stronger because our body wants to be able to handle future stress better.

2. Clinical studies show that people who exercise in intervals (intensity, recovery, intensity, recovery) see greater gains than those who exercise at a continuous pace.

C. Expose yourself to hot/cold environments—like saunas and cold plunges— and incorporate intermittent fasting.

1. These practices activate genes that repair and rejuvenate your body.

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IV. As **leaders**, the goal is to be able to handle high-pressure situations in a manner that is **sustainable**, builds health, and adds to our longevity.

- A. High-capacity leaders aren't stress-free—they've found rhythms of purposeful engagement and intentional rest.
- B. Ignoring recovery leads to burnout. Building it into your life and leadership leads to sustainable performance.
- C. Model this in how you lead and relate to your team.

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR TEAM DISCUSSION

1. How do you currently view stress in your life?
2. Where in your life could you intentionally introduce short bursts of stress for long-term benefit?
3. Do you build recovery rhythms into your week—physically, emotionally, professionally? If not, how can you start?
4. How could you lead your team to adopt a more resilient view of stress—one that fosters growth rather than fear?

RESOURCES MENTIONED

[The Stress Paradox: Why You Need Stress to Live Longer, Healthier, and Happier](#) by Dr. Sharon Bergquist

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