

CALMER LIFE

Session 2

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Resources

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Disclaimer

I'm not a doctor or a nurse. I can't prescribe, I can't give you advise on individual health issues. You need to talk to your GP about those. I'm here to guide you to make your own healthy choices, and to coach you to discover what's right for you.

The purpose of the Calmer Life course

We'll look at where stress comes from, and the tools needed to deal with it.

WHAT DOES SUCCESS LOOK LIKE at the end of the course? I want you to feel empowered and knowledgeable about what right for your own journey to a calmer life. I'd like you to have that toolkit and ideas to turn to when things get stressful. And I'd like you feel you have a little more perspective on the stress you experience.

EXERCISE: GROUNDING

Find a chair where your feet can touch the floor while seated. Close your eyes and focus on your breath. Pay attention to the pace of your breaths and how deeply you inhale and exhale. Breathe in for a count of three, then out slowly. Bring your mind's focus to your body. How does your body feel sitting in the chair? Straighten your back and lengthen your spine. Try to feel the contact between your body and the chair's surface. Pay attention to the sense of touch; notice what you feel about the chair – materials, fabrics, softness, etc. Try focusing on the flow of energy from the top of your head down to your feet, which should be planted on the ground. Visualize the energy draining from your head, down through your body and feet, and into the ground. Scan how each body part feels and responds to this movement of energy. Imagine any negative energy and feelings escaping

your body and leaving through your feet on the floor. Continue this cycle for at least two or three minutes.

Use the five senses to return to the present. Open your eyes and look around you. Make observations and name out loud:

- 5 things you can see (within the room and out the window)
- 4 things you can feel (e.g., the softness of your skin, the texture of the furniture material, the feeling of your hair, etc.)
- 3 things you can hear (e.g., traffic, birds, airplanes, etc.). Notice any sounds that may be constant or regular background noise, yet you typically do not hear due to distractions.
- 2 things you can smell (e.g., essential oils, a leatherbound book, perfume, etc.)
- 1 thing you can taste.

Take a long, exaggerated deep breath to end the exercise and pay attention to how you feel afterward.

HEALTH: AGEING AND PERCEIVED STRESS

In 2004, researchers at the University of California compared a group of mothers looking after children with chronic illness, with those caring for healthy children. Those with chronically-ill kids aged more quickly. The researchers pointed out that the issue was also one of *perceived* stress – some carers *perceived* their situation as less stressful than others, and so aged less rapidly¹.

But why is stress ageing? It's linked to our telomeres, protective caps at the ends of our chromosomes which help protect our DNA – the very essence of who we are. Every time a cell divides, telomeres get shorter. In the natural ageing process, the telomeres eventually get so short cells can no longer divide, and they die. In the 2004 Californian study, the mothers with the highest levels of perceived stress had telomeres which were around a decade 'shorter' than those of the less-stressed women.

Work-related stress can have a similar impact. A Finnish study found that participants with the most job stress had the shortest telomeres while those who didn't experience work exhaustion had longer telomeres².

The positive thing to take from this research is that we can alter our perception of stress, even if we can't alter the stress itself. That's what we'll work on in these sessions.

How do we alter our perception of stress?

¹ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC534658/>

² <https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0040186>

"I am not my thoughts, emotions, sense perceptions, and experiences. I am not the content of my life. I am Life. I am the space in which all things happen. I am consciousness. I am the Now. I Am."

ECKHART TOLLE

FIVE POWER QUESTIONS TO HELP US WORK ON OUR MINDSET AND OUR RESPONSE TO STRESS

1. What is my mindset about stress?
2. Can I accept my stressful feelings?
3. Why am I feeling this?
4. What are my priorities?
5. What have I accomplished today?