

Managing Stress and Anxiety in Turbulent Times

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“To help the body’s defenses, the best things are love and hugs, warm liquids like chicken soup, and time.”

– Dr. Bruce Rubin, Wake Forest University Baptist Medical Center

Dr. Rubin was actually advising parents about how to help their children overcome colds. But I think his words contain more far-reaching insight. Indeed, don’t the ingredients he mentions comprise a good recipe for healing the wounds we all experience in this life?

Love. Hugs. Warm liquids. Time. In addition to having soothing properties, another thing these ingredients share is that their energy can multiply when mixed with an element of action. For example, a friend of mine says, “The best way to get a good hug is to give one first.” And doesn’t being an actively loving person both enrich your soul and tend to bring more love your way, as opposed to waiting for others to love you? If you’re feeling stressed, instead of anxiously ruminating about your troubles, how would it feel to enjoy a warm beverage in a comforting environment?

Time. Conventional wisdom says it heals all wounds. But, in my experience, the passage of time alone does not heal. If you’re suffering, you have to be willing to take action, in this case to risk sinking into the abyss before you can emerge transformed. Much of this life you can influence. Much of it you simply have to trust in order for it to work its mysterious ways. Blended, taking action and surrendering to the forces of life are powerful beyond description.

In these turbulent times, many people feel overwhelmed with anxiety. As they contemplate personal and professional stressors, their gears are spinning, but they’re not meshing into anything meaningful. A paradoxical aspect of anxiety is that it feels like activity, since your mind is constantly racing, but oftentimes the end result is a frozen state where the only thing

you're producing is more tension and fear.

Untold numbers of self-help books hold millions of words of advice about how to manage stress and anxiety. But I believe they can all be summarized by what has become known as the Serenity Prayer, where you aspire to have the serenity to accept the things you cannot change, the courage to change the things you can and the wisdom to know the difference. I suppose it has to begin with the wisdom, as you examine your life and determine where you can create change and where you cannot. The process of gracefully accepting the unalterable (which often has to do with people you would like to change!) can produce both inner peace and increased energy for efforts more likely to yield fruit.

Once you have quieted the endless mental chatter that comes with anxiety, you create a tranquil space where you can actually hear your wise inner voice. If you listen closely, it will guide you to where you need to go and help you appreciate where you are right now.

During difficult times, holding onto hope is another important component of good mental health. The country's economic woes, and their impact on everyone's lives, have induced a level of fear that can mightily trample on hope. As people feel the financial pinch in their daily lives and watch home equity and investment values plummet, fear can take hold and create self-fulfilling prophecies of doom.

If hopelessness or crippling fear have crept into your life, what would it take for you to connect with stay connected with hope and joy? One way is to stay grounded in the present and consciously taking in the immeasurable beauty of everyday life. The other image relates to the future, as we stand on the shore of today and ponder what lies before us in the endless sea of possibilities. Cherish today. Believe in tomorrow, and then you can start to gather the wood and create the plans that will produce your ship of dreams.