

Stress After Trauma

19 Ideas
to Reduce Symptoms
and Reclaim Control

Michele Rosenthal

Author, *Your Life After Trauma: Powerful Practices to Reclaim Control*

Introduction

Survival mode is supposed to be a phase that helps save your life.
It is not meant to be *how you live*.

—Michele Rosenthal

As bad as it feels after significant trauma survival mode is the best decision your mind and body make. In the space of hypervigilance, heightened threat awareness and detection and a general feeling of disorientation your body systems remain activated to keep you safe and infuse you with a feeling of control. This period, while difficult, is also meaningful and necessary for survival: Major trauma creates a feeling of extreme powerlessness—survival mode is a bid to counteract that.

Irony #1: Instead of creating a real context for safety and control survival mode actually amplifies the absence of both. Increasingly extreme symptoms, dysregulated emotions and aberrant thought processes can shift a survivor from coping to crumbling in the space of a few intense moments. When it continues for too long survival mode depletes mental, physical and physiological energy and processes and leaves you open to new experiences of powerlessness in terms of how you think, feel, behave, act and experience both your internal and external worlds.

Learning how to shift out of reactive (fight/flight/freeze) and into responsive (restore) mode becomes critical in both the immediate moments following a trauma and also during the timeframe of recovery and beyond. The following articles cover practices for handling all areas of the post-trauma restore process from how to engage with your body to how to connect with your mind to setting the tone for a healing attitude. The processes all revolve around one central objective: how to create change. Essentially, this one overarching theme is what creates recovery in every arena of your life.

Irony #2: Truly feeling safe and in control requires you to release control. When you connect to the truth of your strength and ability to respond appropriately in any moment you move into a state of being powerful versus powerless. This only happens when you reduce your ongoing stress state. The more flexible and adaptive you become the more you will achieve exactly what survival mode is really all about: being prepared and able to protect yourself should the need arise.

Table of Contents

Two-Minute Stress Relief Technique: Sitting in Power Position	4
How to Reduce Anxiety Naturally	6
How to Reduce Stress by Being More Organized	8
Emotional Acupuncture: Tapping Your Way Past Anxieties	11
Radical Acceptance: Embracing What Is—Without Endorsing It	13
Forgiveness: Who Is It For?	16
Boosting Confidence: Feeling Good About Yourself Every Day	18
7 Ways to Change Your Mind	20
How To Transform Negative Beliefs	24
Mindfulness As An Attitude	27
Feeling Holiday Pressure? 5 Stress-Busting Tips	29
Me, My Mother, and Our Tibetan Crystal Bowl Adventure	31
Didgeridoo: The Art of Relaxing and Energizing	34
I Can't Do Bikram Yoga—Can I?	37
ASMR Videos: “Braingasms” to Promote Relaxation	39
Mood, Music and Expectations: How Your Mind Uplifts Itself	42
7 Tips for Building Community After Disaster	45
Hope: The Art of Expectation and Desire	48
Sorrow, Food and You: How To Manage Mindless Eating	50

*Several of these articles first appeared on RewireMe.com.
Special thanks for allowing the reprint of them here.*

Two-Minute Stress Relief: Sitting in Power Position

I slouched my 5-foot-8-inch frame into Greg's office weighing a mere 108 pounds. For the previous year I'd been battling an undiagnosable illness that had doctors all over Manhattan scratching their heads: An adverse reaction to an antibiotic had catapulted my body into a complete meltdown. With liver, stomach, and intestinal problems, I bounced between specialists trying to determine how to lower rising liver enzymes, stop rapid weight loss, and cheer up what appeared to be a very unhappy duodenum. The effects of painful symptoms, invasive tests, and doctors' collective ignorance left me overwhelmed, learning to live as a chronic patient. When my emotional health started a kamikaze dive, I entered therapy.

Greg's office overlooked Columbus Circle, a busy intersection near Central Park. The décor was deep maroon and dark blue and felt a little like a cave, which was good: I desperately needed to feel safe and secure. We began our first session with an overview of why I needed help. Then I got specific in explaining how out of control I felt.

"I'm constantly falling apart," I said as Greg leaned back in an overstuffed chair. "The smallest thing happens and I lose it—anger, tears. I can't handle the stress. At every doctor appointment, I sink into my chair and go silent and numb and start to shake."

"What if I said I could teach you something simple that would help you shift out of feeling powerless and into a sensation of feeling powerful?" Greg asked.

"I'd say, 'Sign me up!' What do I have to do?"

"Very little. Power postures work with your mind/body feedback loop to create a grounded and centered internal experience. By making your body feel secure, your mind receives the message, 'Everything is all right,' which it translates into stress relief. Just holding a power posture for two minutes can reduce cortisol, a major stress hormone."

Greg coached me through some simple steps, pausing to allow me to experience each adjustment and settle further into the pose. He was right; there was very little to do and it was really easy. The steps looked like this:

- Sit on the edge of your seat with only about 1/4 of your thighs supported by the chair.
- Place your feet flat on the floor parallel to each other, hip width (about 6 to 8 inches) apart.
- Place your palms face down flat on your thighs.

- Roll your hips forward so that you are seated on your sitz bone/tailbone.
- Allow your spine to extend in straight alignment.
- Imagine a string gently pulling your head up toward the ceiling.
- Hold your head up perpendicular to the floor so that your eyes look ahead.
- Roll your shoulders up beneath your ears. Then roll them back as if your shoulder blades are trying to reach each other. Lastly, relax your shoulders down and back until you feel the muscles in your neck extend and settle.
- Stay in this pose for two minutes or longer.

At first the critic in me muttered that it was unlikely a posture could change the way I felt. As my body experienced a difference, however, that voice in my head quieted. By the time the two minutes were up the voice had retreated and what filled the space left behind was a faint hum of well-being, which got my attention.

I began practicing the posture at home just to get comfortable. Then I started employing it during every doctor appointment. The feeling of my feet solidly on the floor, my chest thrust outward as I rolled onto my sitz bones, and my shoulders coming down from my ears eased me into a place in my head where I could take deep breaths, organize my thoughts, and engage in an intelligent medical conversation.

More than a decade has passed. It turns out the medical problems were caused by psychological issues. Once I repaired my mind, my body followed; all my symptoms evaporated. Today I use the power posture as an exercise to remind myself to be present, maintain inner connection, and remember that the ability to shift from powerless to powerful resides in my own body and mind.

How to Reduce Anxiety Naturally

Anxiety easily becomes a lifestyle when your body and mind see threat and danger everywhere. What do you do then? Learn to live in The Worry Zone, or develop daily practices to retrain your body and brain. I spoke with licensed clinical social worker Guy Oberwise for some tips on how to reduce anxiety naturally.

First, can anxiety and its more serious disorders be overcome?

Like panic disorder, generalized anxiety disorder, and PTSD, anxiety is very treatable. If you're able to take a look at what's going on in the mind and body, there are lots of good techniques you can use to help lower anxiety. The key is that the body has to be trained and the mind focused.

The body can be such a powerful source of information. When you talk about helping the body readjust, how can we help the body do that?

The key word that comes to my mind is *practice*. If you've been hyperanxious for a long time, you can't just dabble in diaphragmatic breathing for a week. It takes time for your body to learn what it means to breathe deeply. Ideally, you want to practice anxiety-reduction processes three times a day: morning, afternoon, and evening. And you want to do them when you're in a calm moment so that later, when there's real stress, your body is already adept at regulating itself.

What are some holistic processes we can put into practice to reduce anxiety?

Everything begins by looking at things you can control. Rather than medication, what can you do naturally to lower anxiety? You need to get a good baseline: What are you doing with your sleep, nutrition, and exercise? Right away you can start adjusting for seven to eight hours of sleep and the elimination of sugary and caffeinated drinks. Then, add in:

Diaphragmatic Breathing: The object is to breathe deeply from your diaphragm, not shallowly from your chest cavity. Imagine a red balloon filling up with air in your stomach as you're breathing in, and as you're breathing out seeing the balloon deflating.

Progressive muscle relaxation: The focus here is to consciously and deliberately engage your mind and body in a process of release. Starting with the top of your head and working down to your toes, imagine each muscle and body part individually relaxing.

Mindfulness: The more present you are, the more you control your experience. Take time throughout the day to be aware of what you feel in any moment. Allow those sensations to come up, observe them without judgment, and let them flow through you.

Meditation: There are many ways to meditate with the goal to calm the mind. We're all individual, so you have to find what method feels comfortable. Transcendental meditation, a practice that involves focusing on a mantra, is particularly effective for reducing stress and anxiety.

Dialectical Behavior Therapy Scale: Using a 0 to 5 scale (where 5 equals maximum anxiety), map out how your body feels through the various states of anxiety. Do the same with your mind. Then, build in coping skills for each level, especially 0 to 3. When you start to feel a 2, for example, do some deep breathing. You want to catch the situation before it gets to a 5.

After beginning any of these suggestions, how long does it take to see an improvement?

It depends on how committed you are. If you practice the three-times-per-day rule with any of these processes, you can see some pretty quick results. Maybe not when you're being triggered, but early on in these techniques you'll feel better and over time experience benefits in more stressful moments. You'll see some very nice results, and lower anxiety, if you really commit to the practice in a thirty-day time frame.

Do you have a favorite—and easy!—takeaway exercise that can be used immediately?

Absolutely: *Diffusion techniques* teach your brain to release a negative focus—for example, letting go of obsessive thoughts. Imagine a freight train going by. One by one, put each thought on the train as it travels past. Continue with all thoughts until you feel distance between yourself and any disturbing ideas.

How to Reduce Stress by Being More Organized

In 2010 Brother International funded a study to discover the monetary losses from disorganization. The staggering results revealed that the cost associated with just one problem—employees looking for misplaced items—topped \$89 billion annually! The average employee spends 38 hours a year searching for things. If you experience moments of “I can’t find what I need!” in your life, you know they add up to an enormous amount of stress.

According to Sara Skillen, founder of SkillSet Organizing, a consulting firm in Franklin, TN, anyone can learn how to become organized. In our interview she offered tips for how to make sure your surroundings are set up to support your best performance, both at home and at the office.

How does your mind affect your environment?

Often clutter is just a physical manifestation of stress. Your current surroundings represent your level of consciousness at that time. Conversely, becoming aware of your surroundings affects your consciousness. This understanding often leads people to have that “aha” moment: “Oh, my gosh! How have I been living?” That’s when they can start to make changes. Clearing out clutter is freeing and makes a positive difference in how you interact with yourself, others, and the rest of the world.

Is there any science supporting how environment affects your daily experience?

There was a study done at Princeton called “Interactions of Top Down and Bottom Up Mechanisms in the Human Visual Cortex.” The researchers discovered that multiple visual objects compete for your brain’s attention. When you’re sitting in a space that’s full of stuff, it’s almost like there’s a child standing next to you poking your shoulder saying, “Mom!” You may think you can block it out, but overall it has a subconscious effect on how you’re living and working.

Do the same principles of organization apply to everyone?

You have to ask yourself, “Is my environment helping me to succeed, or is it holding me back?” Organization is not a one-size-fits-all proposition. It looks differently for

everyone and depends on varying factors, including age. For some people, being organized means having a spotless desk. For others (especially visual people), it means having things on the desk arranged in a way that they can be immediately found.

How do we start to declutter?

These are my favorite steps:

1) There has to be that little moment of illumination, a spark of desire. You have to be ready.

2) Start with something small that's not too overwhelming. I usually tell people to find a drawer or a cabinet—not an entire space—that they access frequently. Pull everything out and spread it around.

3) Think about what the use of the space really should be. Start making decisions about what you see in front of you. Ask yourself,

- Do I use this?
- Is this something I absolutely love?
- Do I have space for it?
- Is this something I need for future reference?
- Does this item contribute to my success?
- Does this make me better in some way?
- Why am I hanging on to this?

4) Get rid of things by throwing them away, recycling, giving them away, or storing them in a more suitable location.

Some people will go through this process and it ignites a whole transformation and excitement and they move on to organizing other spaces. However, if it becomes difficult and emotionally heavy to make the decisions, place the items in a box and put them away for a while. Give yourself permission to quit and be gentle with yourself. You might not be ready.

If we're taught to save things, how do we learn to get rid of them?

It's tough to break the cycle of clutter. To do so you must be able to see the positive aspects of letting objects go in terms of how the newly opened space looks and feels better. Ask yourself, "If a tornado hit and all of these things were gone, would it really matter?" It all comes down to focusing on what's most important in your life.

While Skillen's points make physical decluttering more manageable her approach also extends to organizing our minds. Perception creates stress; changing perception reduces it. Next time you feel that familiar mental tension twinge ask yourself, 'What's most important in this moment?', then take action around the answer.

Emotional Acupuncture: Tapping Your Way Past Anxieties

According to Mary's relatives, she'd had a severe water phobia since infancy. She couldn't take a bath in a full tub of water or go to the beach. The mere sight of water triggered an extremely disturbing feeling in the pit of her stomach. Mary was so phobic that she was even frightened when it rained and suffered water-related nightmares.

In 1979 Mary worked with psychologist Dr. Roger Callahan to try to reduce her phobia. A wide spectrum of traditional psychotherapeutic tools was tried. After a year, she had only gotten so far as to be able to sit on the edge of a pool and dangle her legs in the water—with enormous anxiety and a splitting headache.

Dr. Callahan had been studying energy meridian points on the body. He'd learned, for example, that the end point of the stomach meridian was directly beneath the eyes. In desperation, one day by the side of the pool he asked Mary to gently tap several times in a row under her eyes. She complied and, to their surprise, the horrible feeling in her stomach disappeared. Fearlessly, Mary slipped herself into the pool. From that day forward, she remained free of all traces of the phobia.

The results of his work with Mary led him to devise the Callahan Techniques, which later became Thought Field Therapy (TFT), a process in which a person taps on acupressure points (the same as those used in acupuncture) while focusing on an emotion or problem. While Dr. Callahan developed a specific acupoint sequence to be applied for differing problems, the energy points always remain the same:

- Top of the head
- Eyebrow
- Side of the eye
- Under the eye
- Under the nose
- Chin
- Collarbone
- Chest sore spot (about four inches above the nipple)Underarm
- Fingertips (all five on either hand)

The goal of every process is to break the connection between the triggering thought and the emotional response by tapping on the energy pathway. The technique has not been fully substantiated by empirical evidence, but TFT became world-renowned for its

efficacy in helping people overcome phobias, traumas, and other emotional disturbances.

In the early 1990s Gary Craig, a Stanford engineer graduate and ordained minister, studied TFT under Dr. Callahan. On a personal development quest since the age of 13, Craig saw the potential for TFT to be used even more widely and simply. While TFT emphasizes the use of individual algorithms unique to each problem, Craig stripped down TFT's complexity by developing Emotional Freedom Technique (EFT), which values tapping over the sequence itself. In fact, Craig contends that the sequence in which you tap the acupoints is irrelevant.

This shift in theory and practice birthed a process so simple that you can use it anytime, anywhere, without professional intervention, to help reduce your emotional response to any situation.

According to Sarah Broughton, an energy practitioner and a member of the Association for the Advancement of Meridian Energy Therapies: "EFT is based on the belief that all negative emotions are a result of an imbalance in the body energy system....A simple way to describe EFT would be that it is like emotional acupuncture, without the needles. An EFT therapist [teaches a client to tap]... with the fingertips on certain meridian points, stimulating the blocked energy so that it starts flowing freely again. Whilst tapping, the client focuses on negative feelings, thoughts and emotions and experiences rapid and often long-lasting relief, as the body and mind become calmed and energetically balanced."

Memories are not eradicated, but their emotional charge is reduced and often eliminated, which leads to the relief of physical symptoms and a renewed freedom in emotional experience. While individual results vary, testimonials often cite almost immediate relief. I can vouch for that: In my own trauma recovery, EFT was one of my favorite modalities for its gentle and effective methods.

See Dr. Roger Callahan's site for a free tapping therapy guide and video:

<http://www.rogercallahan.com/index.php>

Gary Craig's site for an EFT tutorial: <http://www.emofree.com/eft/eft-tutorial.html>

Radical Acceptance: Embracing What Is—Without Endorsing It

Four months ago while bike riding with Paul, her fiancé, my friend Julie experienced a tragedy: A possum darted from the roadside brush and got caught in the spokes of Paul's front wheel, which caused the bike to pitch forward, throwing him over the handlebars. Paul landed on his head and had entered a vegetative coma by the time the ambulance delivered him to the hospital. Ten days later the family took him off life support. Julie's world crumbled.

As I witness my devastated friend learning how to grieve and move forward, I can't help but notice that these challenging tasks are made all the more difficult by the expectations she places on herself for what she thinks her progress should be.

"I'm watching too much television just to numb myself," she confides. "Over entire weekends, sometimes I don't even get dressed or take a shower. I always thought I was a strong person; I should be functional by now, but the process of letting Paul go feels overwhelming. I'm so angry about what happened and what my life has become. I can't believe it. I won't believe that this has happened!" she cries.

As her friend, it pains me to see Julie struggle with the conflicting emotions of grief, anger, and expectation. I've said all the platitudes and clichés. As a trauma coach, I'm looking for something more deeply proactive to help Julie find relief, some way that doesn't demand she devalue her grief, while at the same time encourages her to stop fighting it.

In my research I come across the 1980s psychologist Marsha Linehan, who developed a treatment approach for Borderline Personality Disorder called Dialectical Behavior Therapy (DBT). Way ahead of the curve of today's ubiquitous methodologies, Linehan promoted mindfulness and paced breathing as sources of control over one's psychosocial behaviors. At a time when traditional therapists taught patients that there is only acceptance or choice, Linehan introduced the idea that in every moment we have the options of acceptance and choice. She extended her perspective to suggest "radical acceptance": the idea of ending resistance to reality and instead embracing it for what it is.

Today, Linehan's philosophy of radical acceptance has applications far beyond DBT for the lives of anyone seeking more peace, calm, and equanimity. Imagining it might help Julie, I share the philosophy. Right away she says, "Embrace what is? \$%@# what is!"

I understand Julie's response. Comprehending the intellectual reasons for acceptance is simple; putting it into practice proves more complex. Although embracing reality ultimately opens up space in the mind for positive action, at first blush radical acceptance seems like endorsement of circumstances that cause discomfort.

"I will never, ever accept or embrace this horrific thing that happened," Julie vows.

Naturally, when we observe a moment and allow its attendant feelings to surface, we resist painful or frightening thoughts and feelings. Often, naming and resisting are our only powers. But the labels we assign are 100% responsible for endowing things with an emotional charge. The process of radical acceptance is a lot like mindfulness: It suspends judgment and eschews labels. Removing the label can shift us into a place of more objectivity than subjectivity, which reduces not only uncomfortable feelings but also our attachment to them. Radical acceptance suggests that while acknowledging reality, we validate what exists in the moment without labeling it good or bad; we release ourselves from the pain.

I sit down with Julie and try again.

"Radical acceptance only means that we accept the feelings that come up as a part of life," I say. "We don't endorse the situation itself. The process is really about accepting yourself and your response to what's happened. It's about self-kindness, self-compassion, reducing self-imposed stress and increasing healthy, flexible, and creative responses to all of life's unexpected experiences."

The expression on Julie's face shifts. "I've become very unaccepting of myself since Paul died," she says. "I fight with myself constantly. What I should have done, or should do now."

"The more you fight what is, the longer it holds you hostage."

I wanted the research and ideas to open a door in Julie's mind through which she sprinted to a landscape more peaceful and serene. Of course, healing doesn't happen in big, neon moments; it happens slowly over time. In practicing radical acceptance Julie's attitude toward herself has become kinder and gentler, which reduces the amount of stress she herself adds to her situation. Now, Julie focuses on choices rather than

challenges. Through this deliberate emphasis Julie has begun reclaiming a sense of self that is more powerful after Paul's death than powerless without him. As her friend I walk beside Julie, cheering her and waiting for the day she is finally free to wholly move on.

Forgiveness: Who Is It For?

When you think of forgiveness, does it seem easy to offer? Or do you withhold forgiveness as a way of punishing someone who hurt you? It can seem like the person who benefits most from forgiveness is the person receiving it. The truth about forgiveness, however, is just the opposite: Forgiveness is for you. Dr. Margaret Nagib, a clinical psychologist and key faculty member of Timberline Knolls' Clinical Development Institute, recently schooled me in how the power of forgiveness can set you free.

When we forgive, are we really saying that something is okay? Why can forgiveness be so difficult?

Forgiveness is not saying that it's okay, or that you're not hurt anymore; those things may not ever go away. When we get stuck in unforgiveness, it's more about us than the other person who may have wounded us. It's about our unwillingness to recognize that we're vulnerable. We need to let that go and recognize, "I was hurt, and I will be hurt again. I'm going to release this spiritually so that I can move on." Forgiveness is about recognizing your vulnerability and deciding how you want to deal with it in the future, plus tending your wounds and taking care of yourself. If you don't do that, you stay stuck in your woundedness and it becomes your identity.

We have so many different ideas about spirituality. When you say "release this spiritually," what does that mean?

We're body, soul, and spirit. Our soul is our mind, our will, and our emotion. Ultimately, hurt comes against our spirit—that part of us that is our essence, sense of purpose, meaning, and life. Hurtful experiences are a huge attack against the spirit. We have spiritual ties that are good, and ties that are not so good. When we have things done against us, we can become connected. Forgiveness is about releasing the unhealthy connections and holding on to the good ones. What you're saying is, "I choose to release this person that I'm tied to spiritually because of how they've hurt me."

How can forgiveness revitalize the spirit?

We need to really take our time and be present to process the hurt first. We need to go through that process before we can feel ready to forgive. I wouldn't recommend going to the person and giving forgiveness because they might not be worthy of trust. The simple 4-step process I recommend is really about you:

Step 1: Forgive out loud. Sit down with someone you trust and say out loud, "I forgive _____ for _____" and then get really specific. There's a power in naming

and releasing because you're now taking control. It takes power to let go of someone who's hurt you. Spiritually it's really profound to do this out loud in front of someone you trust.

Step 2: Identify the lies that were created because of how you were wounded. Often what happens is we forgive but still stay stuck. This occurs when we haven't identified the lies that were created because of what that person or event did to us.

Step 3: Renounce the lies. The power of truth is what we speak out into the universe. Say, "I renounce the lie _____" and very specifically state the lie.

Step 4: Identify the truth. Then, ask your higher power, inner wisdom, or any other source, "What's the truth?" This is when you start to see the connection between your head and heart. When you release the lie, a magical thing happens with the truth because it goes down into your core. You can't put something good in if there's something bad there. So you release the bad, then there's room for the good to come back and take residence in your heart.

And the other person can still be held accountable for their actions, correct?

Absolutely; that means you have proper boundaries. There are people I've forgiven in my life whom I will never speak to again. Forgiveness and reconciliation are two different things. Just because I forgive someone doesn't mean reconciliation will happen—or should happen. Reconciliation takes two, but forgiveness is up to me.

Boosting Confidence: Feeling Good About Yourself Every Day

When my brother and I were little, we went grocery shopping with our mother on Thursday afternoons. As the five-year-old, I was in charge of making sure my mother had her grocery list and checkbook. As the two-year-old, my brother's task was simply not to have a screaming fit when told that, no, he could not buy *another* ball out of the big pen at the front of the store. In every aisle my mother assigned both of us the task of choosing what products to purchase. She positioned us in front of shelves of Wonder Bread, for example, and encouraged us to examine and then choose the best loaf. Doubtless, this doubled our shopping time. To my mother, however, it offered opportunities for us to develop our capacity to think, consider, and choose. "Your opinion mattered," she explains today. "It built confidence in who you were."

Forty years later, my mother still makes sure to boost my confidence whenever she can. Recently, she read *Lean In*, by Facebook's COO, Sheryl Sandberg. About women learning to stop holding themselves back, the book became a clarion call for my mother. "Lean in," she advises when I seem reluctant to put forth my full self. "Be bold!"

For all the confidence cheerleading I've received, I still find myself, like many people, sometimes flying below the confidence radar. How do we access, build, and act from a sense of true and unflappable self-assurance?

An article on Oprah's website offers 10 ways to boost self-esteem in under an hour. Techniques include sitting up straight, wearing a nice perfume, nodding your head while listening to someone speak, flirting, and having a cup of coffee. While these simple activities might help in the minute, their effects wouldn't even last an hour. In discovering how to build a philosophy of confidence that endures for a lifetime, clearly it takes more than Chanel No. 5.

G. Richard Shell's new book, *Springboard: Launching Your Personal Search for Success*, offers an approach to confidence that eschews the 10-minute miracle and instead suggests ways to develop "the right kind of confidence." According to Shell, this type of self-possession generates from two sources:

Level One: This area is "your basic and deepest sense of self-belief" regarding autonomy, moral character, and ability to take action. Centered in the experience of

your true, inner self, it's your faith and commitment in the belief that you already possess skills to do a certain thing.

Level Two: This area focuses on "specific skills and activities you undertake." Based on the belief in your ability to learn, this growth mindset develops confidence from a sense of resilience, a willingness to engage in trial and error, a desire to learn, and a focus on effort rather than results.

For Shell, "self-confidence, like motivation, is a renewable source" to be applied in situations that engender any type of risk. In fact, Shell concludes that the only way to master the art of failure (the possibility of which is why you need confidence in the first place) is through amping up confidence. While it may seem silly to let a two-year-old choose just the right loaf of bread for the family, the experience my mom created for my brother ingrained in him, at an early age, both types of Shell's definition of confidence.

Tying confidence to your inner core on two levels of belief, Shell knits a sense of both self-esteem and self-assurance into the essence of personal identity—which is exactly where it belongs. Beliefs drive 100% of your behavior every day. Finding reasons to believe you can do something (Level One) or learn to do it (Level Two) places in your control a power for achievement that originates in something much more high-voltage than a cup of joe: your own immutable self and the energy with which it bursts forth in the world.

7 Ways to Change Your Mind

In the fourth grade I was placed into an advanced math group with four other students. Every day we gathered around a circular table at the back of the classroom and learned algebra. Being part of this special group felt good; when it came to math I was calm, confident, and competent.

One day the teacher announced a math quiz: 12 addition problems (simple equations containing four numbers each) to be done in 6 minutes. “These are very easy,” the teacher explained. “If you can’t get all twelve correct, then you’re just plain stupid.” Stupid? Not me. I set out to answer all 12 problems correctly. This was our first timed math test, and I quickly discovered I didn’t know how to judge how long to spend solving each problem. I tried to add as fast as possible but never felt I could trust the resulting sums. I began to panic. My brain froze. The numbers swam. I couldn’t think. By the time the teacher told us to put down our pencils, I had placed numbers in each answer box but I knew they were all wrong.

The next day our tests were handed back. At the top of mine, written in enormous red letters: “-12”—complete and total failure. I walked home carrying my test, crying all the way.

When I look back I can tell you that was the day I formed and accepted the belief, “I can’t do math.” It’s a belief that continues today. Ask me to do even the most simple math problem in my head and I’ll scramble for a calculator, utterly convinced I can’t add or subtract with any accuracy.

I bet when you look back to your childhood, there are experiences that stand out for you, too. Moments when you know, “That was the day I started to believe ____.” Once the neural pathways of those beliefs are constructed and reinforced, changing your mind—and creating the life you want—can be a real challenge. There are, however, simple daily practices that can be implemented to create the change you seek, including:

1. Create an affirmation – If you’ve ever tried to use affirmations, you know they can be tough to believe initially. In [*The Book of Affirmations: Discovering the Missing Piece to Abundant Health, Wealth, Love, and Happiness*](#) (Hay House), Noah St. John suggests working with the brain’s natural inquisitive nature: Pose a question and your brain

immediately starts seeking the answer. For example, in my own evolution the question looks like, “Why am I able to so easily, comfortably and accurately calculate sums?”

Action step: Identify a belief you want to change and construct a question around it. Ask yourself the question repeatedly when you wake up and just before you go to bed. Don't look for a conscious answer; let your brain's reticular-activating system (a network of nerve pathways that mediates your overall level of consciousness) initiate a scan for solutions.

2. Drop your assumptions – Having the belief that something that happened in the past will always happen that way again in the present or future creates a fantasy that can hold you back. Past lack of success in no way predicts or impacts the outcome of an action this time around. I've had to deliberately practice being open to the fact that I actually *can* accurately compute.

Action step: Practice being open to change. You don't have to believe it will happen or know exactly when. Focus instead on developing an attitude that allows the idea that change *might* occur. For example, say to yourself, “I'm open to shifting my belief about.”

3. Transform resistance – Try to change anything and there will be a part of you that opposes the idea. At the bottom of any resistance is fear—especially fear of change. You can gently decrease resistance when you acknowledge it, identify the fear, and make a plan to ameliorate it. In my own process this means acknowledging I'm afraid to look stupid if I inaccurately compute a sum in front of others. Lessening the fear could mean anything from taking deep breaths to calm myself before calculating so that my mind is clear, to practicing computing at first only in front of people I trust, to giving myself plenty of time and resources to solve the equation.

Action step: Answer the following questions: When it comes to the belief you want to change, what part of you resists changing it? Why? What fear does that relate to? What would it take to lessen the fear?

4. Craft a new story – There are many interpretations of every moment. The one you're carrying around is neither the only nor the only accurate one. It's time to create a new story around the old belief. For a long time my story has been, “I can't do math.” But another story exists: My nine-year-old self got spooked by the pressure to not be “stupid” at the same time that she was attempting to learn a new skill (computing within a set timeframe). For a child who valued being a good student the stress understandably caused a short-term interruption in her ability to effortlessly solve the equations.

Action step: With your older and more mature perspective, look back on the day(s) that formed the belief you want to change. Notice what other stories could be told to explain the situation. Frame four other possible and positive beliefs that are equally represented in the experience.

5. Suspend judgment – Every time you criticize yourself for that old belief you make it stronger, because you weaken your connection to one of your greatest assets: self-compassion. Access instead kindness, humanity, and mindfulness to create an internal support system built on acceptance, appreciation, and optimism. Forgiveness, too, can be a key element in this step. I’ve had to focus on forgiving myself for that long ago ‘failure’ and shift my attention to what I can only describe as transcendence. When I approach a math problem now a part of me rises above the moment, forgives those old doubts, accepts and appreciates my apprehension, and yet believes I can easily arrive at the solution. It’s this strong, calm and peaceful part that proceeds to do the calculation.

Action step: Create a space in yourself where you have already achieved success, as if the task of change is behind you: Imagine the timeline of your life stretches into the future in one direction and into the past in another. Face the future. Now imagine that in your timeline behind you is an object that represents the old belief. Push it back into your timeline as far as it will go. Then take a deliberate step forward.

6. Change your approach – So often when we want to change something about ourselves, we place our attention on stopping something—for example, changing our health by stopping overeating, drinking, smoking, and so on. Thinking about what you want to *stop* focuses your mind on what you *don’t* want it to do. Switch your attention to the thing you *do* want. Actively, I’ve had to stop hoping I don’t make a mistake and shift my focus instead to how I will be able to be accurate in my calculation.

Action step: Identify the desired end result and develop a new belief to support it. Then strategize how to create the kind of environment and experience necessary to reach success.

7. Shift from expectation to intention – An *expectation* is a strong belief that something will happen in the future. When circumstances beyond your control interfere with success, it’s easy to experience a setback. *Intentions*, however, are how you plan to approach a task or experience. This is always within your locus of control, which means it offers more solid ground on which to build your desire for change. I really love this step because it’s helped me eliminate the expectation that I’ll make a mistake. Now I focus to how I intend to create a successful approach to doing math.

Action step: Set your intention for how you’re going to embody changing this belief: “I intend to ____ by ____.” Use this sentence as a guide for your future actions.

All these years later, I appreciate that the fear of my nine-year-old self that produced the negative belief was understandable for a child striving for excellence. But now, in my 40s, do I need to worry about how long it takes to add in my head? Not really! Which is why I intend to allow myself all the time I need for every math problem as I continue to develop and deepen neural pathways around my new belief: “I can accurately calculate mathematical equations.”

What’s your intention for the belief you choose to change?

How To Transform Negative Beliefs

Your beliefs drive 100% of your behavior. Beliefs are built on your acceptance of the truth of a particular statement. “The grass is green,” for example, is a belief many of us share. Everything you do, see, feel, experience and claim important is based on your belief system. As Wayne Dyer says in his book, *Excuses Begone!*, “You are what you believe.” I like also Tony Robbins, highlighting the power of beliefs, when he says, “Beliefs have the power to create and the power to destroy. Human beings have the awesome ability to take any experience of their lives and create a meaning that disempowers them or one that can literally save their lives.” Wow, how are you doing that in your life? Are you creating or destroying?

The tricky thing about beliefs is that they operate below your level of consciousness. While beliefs are available to your conscious scrutiny—meaning you can be 100% aware of and interactive with them—they operate like habits: driving you to do things without thinking about it or making a conscious choice to take an action. This unchecked cycle is the true epitome of “you are what you believe.” When you behave from unquestioned beliefs you create an identity and experiences around the (false) negative beliefs you hold.

Listen to this real life example of how beliefs cause damage: After my trauma I believed that I didn’t deserve to have survived. Since I felt in my heart this was true, I developed lots of mini-beliefs that included my not deserving to love, laugh, be successful or happy, be compassionate and kind to myself, or even nurture myself in any way. No wonder I was so depressed for so long! There were other destructive beliefs, too. For example, the belief, “I am most alive when I’m in danger and struggling to survive.” Whew, there was a lot of miswiring and distorted ideas that went into this belief that caused me to actually seek and create situations where I felt danger, pain and fear.

Engaging your belief-wrangling capabilities is crucial to reclaiming control. While beliefs operate at lightening speed the truth is you are stronger, faster and more effective than any belief—if you decide to intervene. While beliefs can cause chaos, actively identifying and transforming them offers you a way to shift out of a negative belief cycle and into a more positive stratosphere supportive of your well-being and desires.

HOW TO TRANSFORM NEGATIVE BELIEFS

Step #1

Identify your negative beliefs. If you are what you believe and if beliefs run 100% of your behavior then identifying and, if need be, shifting beliefs is a core factor in resolving

trauma and finding relief from symptoms of posttraumatic stress. What are your beliefs about your trauma and yourself? What are your beliefs about healing and moving on? What are your beliefs about what's possible for your life? Take a look at where you feel stuck, stalled or not making progress. Identify your thoughts in this area. Identify what beliefs are in place that limit your actions. Write them down; making a tangible list helps take the ideas out of your head and into the world, which is a much more easy place to work with them.

Step #2

For each individual limiting belief, ask yourself the following questions and write out your answers:

- What is the limiting belief?
- How is it damaging or hurting you or holding you back?
- What will you be able to achieve when this belief is removed?
- Why are those results important to you?
- How will those results change who you are?
- How will they change the way that you live?
- What belief would be more supportive of achieving those results?
- What (small) proof do you have that let's you know this belief is already true?
- What further proof would deepen this belief?
- How can you get that proof?
- What action(s) can you take that embodies this new belief?

Step #3

By working this process slowly and over a period of time — and reinforcing it — you will shift out of the old belief in to the new one. The most important thing is repetition and also focusing on the importance of the end result.

Using Your Positive Beliefs

While the focus here has been on shifting negative beliefs, you can use positive beliefs to support your process. Make a list of the positive beliefs you hold about yourself and your future. These are the ideas, thoughts, actions and behaviors that can move you

forward with more calm, confidence and control. When you look over your list, which ones can you embrace more deeply? How can you embody them more often on a daily level? Finding ways to place your attention on your positive beliefs while transforming your negative ones can inaugurate a genuine shift in how you process the past, relate to the present, and imagine your future.

Mindfulness As An Attitude

When I first I learned about the importance of mindfulness practice in reducing stress and increasing health, I inwardly whined, *Another thing for the To-Do list!* As a committed transcendental meditation disciple, I thought I was doing enough to train my brain for optimal functioning. Then I interviewed Dr. Ron Siegel, assistant clinical professor of psychology at Harvard Medical School (where he has taught for more than 30 years) and my perspective shifted.

Mindfulness isn't a must-set-time-aside-to-do activity. As Siegel (a longtime student of mindfulness meditation and on the board of directors and faculty of the Institute for Meditation and Psychotherapy) explained it, mindfulness is as easy as breathing and can be incorporated into your life without feeling like a chore.

Dr. Siegel defines "mindfulness" this way:

Mindfulness is actually an attitude toward your experience. In other words, it's a way to relate to whatever arises in the heart, the mind, and the body. There are practices designed to facilitate mindfulness (like forms of meditation), but they are not mindfulness themselves. It's a little like physical fitness, which is strength, endurance, and flexibility. There are exercises we do to cultivate physical fitness, like going to the gym or going for a bike ride or going jogging, but those are not physical fitness itself. So this attitude toward experience which is mindfulness involves awareness of present experience with acceptance.

If you've ever tried to be mindful, you've probably discovered it can be difficult. My friend Jared complains, "When I try being mindful, my mind starts ruminating and then I feel uncomfortable and very antsy." Dr. Siegel explained why this happens:

An emotion not reinforced by a thought only lasts ninety seconds. Things arise and pass unless we think and resist. When people take up mindfulness, they notice it's very hard to accept the distasteful things that come up in the mind. It's either frightening or a little bit painful, so there's a lot of resistance. We have to remember that mindfulness is about training the mind to accept what comes up, to have a kind of loving and warm attitude, even toward the uncomfortable thoughts and feelings that arise. Thoughts take us out of the present moment; mindfulness takes us out of the thought stream and back into the present moment. We train the mind to bring attention away from the constant stream of words flowing through our heads and more toward our senses. This helps us to have some perspective on our thoughts, which helps us to take those thoughts less seriously and become more comfortable.

The challenges posed by developing a mindful attitude can make it tough to commit to. I invited Dr. Siegel to share some tips that make mindfulness more accessible . Here's what he recommends:

Anything that helps the mind become more aware of experience with acceptance becomes a mindfulness practice. Informal mindfulness involves just making some shifts in how you do normal daily activities so that you do them in ways that make you more mindful. For example, beginning to do things that allow you to pay attention: going out for a walk and simply bringing attention to the sensation of your feet touching the ground. You walk normally but notice the contact of your feet, and then the lack of contact. Or, notice the details of what is around you: the colors, sounds, and smells. Decide each time you walk you're going to make that an opportunity of mindfulness practice. Or taking a shower, which is a very rich, sensual experience in terms of the feeling of the water, the fragrance of the soap, etc. You can decide that every time you go into the shower, you're going to pay attention to how it feels. There are many opportunities in the day that you can commit to paying more attention to your experience while you continue about your normal routine. A more formal practice involves setting time aside and being with some object of awareness. For example, closing your eyes and bringing your attention to the sensation of the breath, or a listening meditation.

Another useful tip Dr. Siegel shared explains how mindfulness raises awareness of the sequence of events in your mind and body. For example, someone may say something you don't notice in the moment but then later find yourself feeling angry, sad or frightened; not knowing why. When you're mindful you notice the emotional impact of subtle events so you can quickly identify and resolve disturbances.

Feeling Holiday Pressure? 5 Stress-Busting Tips

This year's holidays are causing a lot of stress for my friend Amanda and her husband, Jerry. As new parents they're juggling an infant and their two dysfunctional families, located a couple of hours apart. By the time they finished a whirlwind 24-hour road trip to satisfy everyone wanting to see the baby for Thanksgiving, Amanda was exhausted. "Next year, we're just going on vacation so we don't have to deal with any of this stress!" she declared.

Actually, that's not a bad idea. While research indicates that 38% of people experience an overall increase in stress during the holidays, 8% of respondents say they experience a *decrease* in stress during that time. Who are those lucky souls? College students on vacation.

From Thanksgiving through New Year's, the amped-up energy can raise your degree of stress the way a fever raises your temperature. Holiday stress statistics reported by the American Psychological Association show that 69% of people are stressed from feeling a "lack of time"; 69% are stressed by a perceived "lack of money"; and 51% feel stressed over the "pressure to give or get gifts."

Independent research results from Greenberg Quinlan Rosser show that while the holidays are a time of positive emotions, including happiness (78%), love (75%), and high spirits (60%), they also have a tendency to induce fatigue. Women particularly feel the added pressure (44% versus 31% in men) as they assume the traditional tasks of cleaning, decorating, and cooking. Carrying a heavier load—and not giving any priority to relaxation—easily leads to stress that can cause a plunge into poor coping skills, including less exercise than usual and more comfort eating.

While it's not always possible to skip town, it is possible to get through this time of year with less stress and more resilience. Try any of these five tips to keep yourself in balance and, more important, in control.

1 – Stay in the moment; don't think ahead. Anxiety comes from worrying about the future. Keeping yourself grounded in the present immediately reduces stress by eliminating a large source of it: your imagination.

2 – **Strategize your holidays.** It's okay to say, "No!" Decide in advance who you want to see and who you don't; what you will do and what you won't. Plan activities so that you spend the most time doing what feels good and meaningful to you.

3 – **Have an escape plan.** When you commit to things you really don't want to do but feel you must, have a backup plan so that if you need to make a quick getaway you have an out.

4 – **Incorporate alone time.** In the holiday hustle and bustle, it's imperative to carve out space for decompression. Decide in advance when that will be and stick to it so that you have built in periods to regroup.

5 - **Shift your perspective.** Stress comes from your perceptions. Notice where your stress originates and see how your beliefs, expectations, and thoughts feed into it. When you feel you're getting too caught up and overcommitted, slow down and deliberately change your point of view to something that better supports your well-being.

How do the 54% of those polled who say the holidays do *not* increase their stress level escape the madness? Aside from the college students (who are mostly free of their obligations without new pressures taking their place), one speculation may be through power of choice. They simply *choose* to take a step back, maintaining an observational attitude that allows them to engage but not be swept away. You, too, can make this choice by setting a specific intention for your holiday experience and finding ways to create that reality. Above all, place your focus on a major purpose of this season: having fun. John Clayton said, "Just as a puppy can be more of a challenge than a gift, so too can the holidays." True, but properly managed they also both offer opportunities for enormous pleasure. That's my holiday wish for you!

Me, My Mother, and Our Tibetan Crystal Bowl Adventure

I needed to have a new experience. Lately, I've been feeling a bit like my mom on her 60th birthday when she announced, "No more physical presents! From now on, just give me experiences. I want to see more, hear more, feel more." So when I discovered an upcoming Tibetan Crystal Bowl concert at a local enlightenment center, it piqued my interest. I decided my mom and I had to go.

Tibetan Crystal Bowls have a healing history dating back centuries, when Buddhist monks incorporated them into meditation practices. Today, alternative medicine practitioners and laypeople integrate the singing bowls into strategies to relieve stress and pain. Advocates claim that the bowls' deep, rich-toned vibrations can stimulate the immune system, produce positive brain change, "harmonize" the body's cells, "balance" the body's energy systems, and promote healing from a variety of conditions, including stress, depression, and disease.

Theoretically, all this happens because the bowls' pure sonic sound range

1. Recalibrates to normal the vibratory frequencies of "diseased" parts of the mind, body, and soul
2. Enables brainwaves to synchronize with the perfect resonance of the bowls' tones
3. Which creates an optimal environment for deep meditation, creativity, and intuitive connection—a trance state conducive to healing.

In short, the bowls facilitate an experience that goes beyond hearing into the deeper aspects of the mind/body health connection.

Even hard-core science devotees recognize the healing power of Tibetan Crystal Bowls. Dr. Mitchell Gaynor, director of medical oncology and integrative medicine at the Cornell Cancer Prevention Center in New York, uses them to help cancer patients. He believes the sound can alter the immune system. Specifically, levels of Interleukin 1 (the index of your immune system) increase 12.5 to 15% after listening to Gregorian chanting or specific musical forms. And it takes only 20 minutes of listening for your immunoglobulin levels (proteins that function as antibodies in your immune system) to increase. Dr. David Simon, medical director of the Deepak Chopra Center in California,

discovered that sound vibrations from the bowls chemically metabolize into “endogenous opiates,” the body’s natural painkillers.

My mom and I head to the enlightenment center on a sunny Sunday afternoon. The door to the center sits invitingly open and the smell of incense wafts past a large Buddha statue. While my mother and I register for the concert, three women huddle in an aisle debating whether or not to sign up for an angel reading event.

We enter the large yoga studio. About 50 people are sitting on yoga mats. Many of them look sick, weak, sad, and frail. My mother and I take two of the last remaining mats in the back.

At the front of the room a set of 12 white bowls of varying sizes (similar to a set of mixing bowls) are set up in a semicircle. The concert will be performed by Robert, a Tibetan Crystal Bowl expert. Short, stocky, in his 60s with a crew cut, Robert sports a printed tunic over loose meditation pants. He welcomes us and talks about the bowls’ healing qualities, including that each note/tone is related to a chakra beginning at middle C (corresponding to your root chakra) and moving up the scale. After sharing some remarkable healing stories, Robert turns out the lights so that only the sun streaming in through a set of windows provides illumination.

“Get comfortable on your mat, close your eyes, and focus on energy coming in,” Robert suggests in a low and soft voice. “This is your time. Don’t try to analyze what happens over the next hour; just receive. Set an intention to release any pain you hold by redirecting that energy to move out through your fingers and toes. Let any discomfort wash away in the sound.”

The bowls sound almost like gongs, each note resonating long after it has been played. The instrument with which Robert plays them looks similar to what you would use to play a xylophone. He hits a bowl with the instrument to begin the note and then runs the padded tip along the bowl’s lip or walls to extend the sound. After a while he begins to chant in tones that expand each note.

Within the first five minutes, a woman in the row ahead of me begins snoring loudly. To the left, a woman keeps rustling and readjusting her pillow. Snuggled under a blanket, shoes off, I block out the distractions and let my mind drift in the meditative sounds. The notes seem to rise and fall, expand and contract. I imagine the vibration entering me, its force pushing any stress down the length of my body and out my toes. I take deep, cleansing breaths and allow myself to become suspended in the moment, where I drift into an altered state of focus.

An hour later Robert's voice gently guides us back to the present, instructing us to notice our bodies. Several people raise their hands to share stories of an intense and then diminished pain in backs, hands, sides, and heads. Robert adds stories of people who have healed back pain, nerve issues—even a dog's arthritis.

The presentation ends and my mother and I link arms, sauntering out of the center with a sense of calm well-being. We agree the concert was soothing, the sounds beautiful. Neither of us experienced a sea change in mood or physical health, but that wasn't our goal. We just wanted to see more, hear more, feel more. Which we did, together. As we climb into the car, my mom says, "Let's come back for an angel reading."

Didgeridoo: The Art of Relaxing and Energizing

I'm sitting in yoga position in a darkened room lit mostly by candles surrounding a Buddha altar in the corner. On the mat to my right Julie says, "My boyfriend would never attend something like this. He says it's too woo-woo." She sighs and tucks a lock of hair behind her ear.

"This" is the didgeridoo concert we've come to experience. About 25 people have drifted into the room and set up their mats. Speaking in hushed tones, one by one they settle into a comfortable position and prepare for what will be an hour-long meditation to the sounds of the ancient aboriginal instrument played by Richard Wyzanski.

It's a Sunday afternoon in South Florida circa 2014 but the "didj" was developed around 1,500 years ago by indigenous Australians in the northern part of the country. A sort of wooden trumpet, the didg usually comes in the form of hardwoods, especially eucalyptus. The instrument is literally crafted by termites that attack a living tree, removing the dead heartwood. Afterward, the tree is harvested and cleaned out, the bark removed, and the exterior shaped. Some instruments look like a long pole. Many have elaborate carved decorations or are themselves carved into elaborate shapes.

The traditional purpose was to use the didj as a musical instrument during ceremonial occasions. These days, however, because of its low-frequency ultrasound waves that can be both heard and felt, the didgeridoo is also used as a healing instrument to promote both relaxation and energy. The biggest benefits come to the musicians themselves through the circular breathing practice necessary to play the didj. This fast, sustained, pulsating rhythmic breathing (that engages continual movement of the muscles controlling the diaphragm, stomach, cheek, mouth, and tongue) is equivalent to a low-impact cardiovascular exercise, which means it can contribute to improved blood flow, stamina, and general health. Wyzanski explains, "Circular breathing is the beauty, the 'magic' that enables a player to experience the full potential of self-healing benefits from playing the didgeridoo and maximal therapeutic benefits for others being played for....To circular breathe is to be completely in tune with your breath and the instrument as one, a simultaneous harmonious flow of awareness between the breath and the air pressure, vibrational, and energetic shifts."

Playing the didj also promotes a deep understanding of the body and its breath function, creating a heightened sense of awareness and breath/body connection. The

relaxation achieved after playing combats tension, stress, anxiety. It can even—according to an article published in the *British Medical Journal*—be used as a complementary treatment for sleep disorders. According to Wyzanski, after playing he has “a feeling almost beyond description. A true earth connection and deepest expression. I feel alive, plus an amazing amount of deep love and gratitude. Also, I feel that I am nourishing my spirit and whole self every time I play. I believe I feel all of this because it is within the clear and deep intention that I play: I play to share love, be a part of the healing process, and share a greater awareness with others; sharing from the heart. I believe when the intention within is so clear and resonates the highest vibration, the universe blesses and allows for someone to share this connection because it is not about self; it is about building and connecting all as love, as one.”

Many of the didj benefits stem from the effects of Vibroacoustic Therapy (VAT), so dubbed by Norwegian therapist/educator Olav Skille in the 1980s. VAT functions on a very scientific (as in, not woo-woo) theory: The body is over 70% water. Sound travels five times more efficiently through water than air. Your brainwaves clock in at 2 to 20 Hertz, while a typical didj records 50 to 200 Hertz. The result is that sound frequency stimulation (especially when applied directly into the body) efficiently stimulates the body on a deep cellular level.

For didj listeners, then, vibroacoustic sound healing offers many benefits, including

- low-frequency, ultrasound-induced deep meditation that promotes theta and delta brainwaves
- stimulation of blood circulation
- blood pressure reduction
- decreased experience of physical pain sensations and overwhelming or intense emotions related to stress ,
- reduction of nausea, headache, anxiety, fatigue, and depression
- promotion of calm and peace
- reduced hyperactivity
- sensory awareness development
- stress-hormone level reduction (cortisol, beta-endorphin and ACTH)
- central nervous system, auditory, and physical stimulation

In his work Wyzanski has witnessed the didj's effectiveness for "musculoskeletal pain relief, clearing chakras, breaking up energetic stagnation and increasing injury recovery time... [Plus a] positive sensation of tingling throughout the body (cellular and nerve stimulation), intestinal cleansing after session, deep emotional release, relief from pain caused by arthritis or bone injury."

I settle onto my mat, close my eyes and wait for the didj concert to begin. Wyzanski has placed a quartz crystal at the head of my mat to increase the sound's resonance. I've been instructed to point to a particular place on my body if I want it to receive special attention when he plays the didj over me personally. I hear him take a deep breath and then the music begins. The sound of a didj is difficult to describe. Part underwater electric bass, part rubberband twang, with occasional higher notes that sound almost elephantine—all occurring simultaneously. It's easy to hear why a meditative state results: The sound circles the room and also in on itself. There is the constant rhythm of the bass to keep you grounded and focused, and then accentual sounds that rescue your mind from monotony. While the sound itself is intriguing and hypnotic, when Wyzanski plays the didj over me I feel the full impact of its resonance. He begins with my feet. Immediately I feel the sensation of waves moving over my skin. As he moves up the core of my body (along the chakra line) the sensation deepens: It is warm and rolling and radiates out in all directions through my body from where the original sound hits me. In its wake I relax deeply, my body limp and languid, my mind empty of all but the good feeling.

By the time the concert has ended, Wyzanski has worked his way twice around the room, playing on each of us and using four different didgeridoos (each with a different sound). When, in the post-concert silence, he softly says, "Blessings to you," it's clear no one in the room is ready to move. We all continue to lie still. It seems almost sinful to utter a word and break the spell.

I Can't Do Bikram Yoga—Can I?

I need to do more yoga. After a busy year that included two book deals, extensive travel, and a stint in the ICU, I've decided there's too much energy going out and not enough coming in. I want to hook myself up to a karmic energy spout and refuel. Naturally, yoga leaps to mind. The question: What kind of practice do I want?

In the past I've done hatha and vinyasa yoga. Recently, though, a close friend has been raving about the strenuous workout she receives from her Bikram yoga class. She drinks half her weight in ounces of water before every class, sweats it all out, and finishes her practice feeling like she can conquer the world. I love heat and humidity and I love yoga, but am I hardcore enough to put the two together? I decided to find out.

Twenty-six hatha yoga postures done at 105 degrees, Bikram yoga is named after its founder, Bikram Choudhury. Originally from Calcutta, Choudhury was a yoga champion when he settled in Los Angeles in 1973; there he developed an international phenomenon. According to Choudhury, Bikram yoga has attracted more than 11,000 trainers and many more devotees, some of whom are seeking ways to reclaim emotional control or spiritually and physically detox. Celebs love it, too: George Clooney, Lady Gaga, Raquel Welch, Shirley MacLaine, Michael Jackson, Herbie Hancock, Barbra Streisand, Quincy Jones, Tom Smothers, Jeff Bridges, Jamie Lee Curtis, and even Kareem Abdul-Jabbar have sweated it out on the mat. I feel I'm in good company when I sign up for a Sunday afternoon class. I grab my mat and a bottle of water and head off to the studio, which is beautiful: all etched glass, mirrors, and white walls.

The smell of verbena trickles out of the showers and into the lobby. Upon entering the yoga studio, I take a deep breath and release a happy sigh. I instantly relax in the heat and look for a place to set down my mat. When the class begins, it's close to 40 people, mostly women. The teacher sits on a stool at the front of the room. She turns up the heat, presses a button to pump in fresh oxygen, and begins our standing breath exercise. From here we flow at a crisp pace through the postures. We're told not to leave but to sit or lie down if we feel lightheaded, nauseous, or dizzy, which a few people do.

Surprisingly, I feel fine. I drank the suggested amount of water and adapt easily to the temperature. My body feels limber and lithe. I recognize every pose, twisting and bending into them through rhythmic breath. Before class, I was apprehensive. I expected the postures to be excessively difficult and the heat to feel oppressive.

Instead, this feels like doing a moderate yoga practice in a sauna. When we reach savassana, the final pose of total relaxation, I lie on my back like a corpse, eyes closed, and reflect. I feared that Bikram yoga might be too much of a stretch. What I've discovered in these 90 minutes, however, is that my mind doesn't always accurately assess what my body can handle. I am more hardcore than I realized.

In proving I can do something I thought would be too difficult for me, I've unintentionally proved something else, too: I'm stronger than I expect. At a time when I'm focusing on being supportive of myself, it's good to be reminded of that. I'm strong; I can give myself permission to relax.

In the end, I like the concept of Bikram yoga, but if I'm drawn back to practice yoga for respite and restoration, then I have to admit this is not the yoga practice for me. I miss the sense of quiet spirituality of the more traditional methods. I miss being meditative in a suspended mind versus constant physical motion. I want something more soft, like the new vinyasa class I've found where we arrange our mats in a circle and practice by candlelight.

ASMR Videos: “Braingasms” to Promote Relaxation

How would your life change if you could have what ABC News reports as “an orgasm for the brain”? Let’s set the stage.

Think back to a time when you experienced pleasure from the feeling of being touched (nonsexually). Maybe it was your back or your forehead or the nape of your neck. Or perhaps you were receiving a shave, a makeover, or face paint. Remember the soft, delicate feeling of the touch lightly trailing across your skin. Remember how your whole body relaxed: your muscles released, your eyes closed, your head nodded, you gave in to the touch and experienced the sense-driven pleasure of your skin’s response to stimulation. Perhaps you felt tingly or shivered or got goose bumps.

Now, add to that feeling the sound of someone whispering in your ear. Imagine the feeling of soft breath on your earlobe and inside your ear. Hear the sound of the person’s tongue, teeth, and lips forming the words of the whisper. Remember what that felt like. Did it cause your brain enormous waves of pleasure or, as thousands of people call it, a “braingasm”?

Technically speaking, neuroscientists wouldn’t exactly call such a sensory experience a braingasm. For example, Dr. Steven Novella, an academic clinical neurologist at Yale University School of Medicine, explains the term is “a bit misleading, since the regular kind of orgasm occurs in the brain with some peripheral manifestations.” But let’s just say we take the linguistic leap and consider feeling orgasmically good in your brain just from combining sounds, imagination, the association of past experiences or the creation of new ones.

If you’ve encountered this pleasurable feeling or the idea appeals to you, then you’re probably a good candidate for enjoying an autonomous sensory meridian response, or ASMR, video (see link below). Created by Ilse in her soft Dutch-accented voice (she’s one of the most popular ASMR artists on the web), “13 Intense ASMR Triggers for Sleep & Brain Tingles” boasts nearly 100,000 views and is a great introduction to an experience that just might create waves of pleasure in your brain:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vDvYe9IRfvA>

What Is ASMR?

Einstein famously said, "Imagination is more important than knowledge." When it comes to finding a way to relax and even get some sleep, his words might be more appropriate now than ever, especially when it comes to ASMR videos, in which sounds provoke a soothing tingle that starts in your head and scalp and can move down your spine and into your extremities. The range of sounds that can evoke this feeling (triggers and responses are different for everyone) spans a soothing voice describing attending to you in a variety of ways (including brushing your hair and other personal attention activities) to softly reciting all Latin words that begin with the letter "a," to filling up and spritzing a bottle of water, crinkling a plastic bag, or painting your face to look like a tiger. Sound weird and fetishistic? It sometimes is. Yet the videos are not meant to be. They are nonsensual, intended to help viewers find a way to destress in a stressful world.

A very scientific label for the pleasant shivers, scalp tingles, and other feelings you experience in response to what you hear, ASMR is a robust video industry (a Google search reveals 23+mm results and there are more than 64,000 members in an ASMR sub-Reddit community) that can help you relax and fall asleep. According to ABC News "[for] those who say they experience the neurological phenomenon ASMR, sounds of crumpling paper, hushed voice tones or finger-tapping can be as stimulating as an 'orgasm for the brain.'" It does this by provoking involuntary responses to a sensory-stimulating experience. Ilse offers, "ASMR is basically a term for a feeling a lot of people get when they listen to different kinds of sounds." In fact, she credits her first ASMR experience to a childhood game that included whispering in each other's ears, an action that made her feel "tingles."

How ASMR Created a Global Community

With a dearth of pure, scientific research, ASMR is more a personal experiential science; the World Wide Web allowed it to grow into a shared communal experience. In response to an increase in ASMR Internet searches, plus the advent of ASMR online forums and communities, self-proclaimed ASMR artists began increasing the number of available videos around the middle of 2011. According to the research group ASMR-Research.Org, ASMR sensations can be categorized into two types: Type A are triggered by thought patterns and include no external stimuli; Type B sensations activate in response to external stimuli triggered by one or more of the senses. Similarly, ASMR viewers can be categorized into two groups: Those who experienced ASMR in childhood and those who seek the experience as adults.

Ilse explains, “The people who associate it with when they were a kid, they get triggered by something they remember.... For example, when their mom would read them a story or a grandma who would touch their hand or a little kid that would whisper in their ear.” For this category of ASMR viewers, the quest is usually to search for triggers to experience that pleasure again. That quest ranges wide: The ASMR community has developed an enormous catalog of videos so that viewers can easily search for specific triggers. The scope of videos spans a few minutes to almost an hour, lending flexibility to how viewers can create their own personalized ASMR experience.

Depending on your personal and individual response, ASMR videos have the potential to do more than make you remember a childhood experience. Thousands of ASMR viewers, including those with post-traumatic stress disorder, report that the videos help them relax, plus reduce anxiety and depression. Writing on Oprah.com, Kate Sztabnik swears Ilse’s ASMR videos cured her insomnia during a particularly stressful period at work. Sztabnik explains, “I decided to search online for relaxation videos. This produced sterile waterfalls, classical music—and Ilse. Pretty, with no makeup and charmingly crooked teeth, Ilse breathed her channel's name—“The Waaaterwhisspers Ilse”—and a tickly feeling spread through my scalp, a burst of prickly warmth followed by a sense of deep relaxation. She leaned in to the camera, pretending to examine my pores and give me a facial. *Whoa, sister*, I thought. But then something even stranger happened. My arm went slack; I was snoring within minutes.”

Whether a “braingasm” is a true, scientific phenomenon or just jargon for feeling good, ASMR videos are really about engaging in a sensory experience designed to activate pleasurable and relaxing brain responses. Admittedly, the idea can seem strange, disturbing, or funny, but when you get past any initial resistance, you just might find yourself thinking back to what made you feel tingly as a kid, or what sensory stimulation you enjoy as an adult and then, on a night you can’t sleep, thinking maybe, just maybe, an ASMR video is exactly what you need to relax and drift off.

Mood, Music and Expectations: How Your Mind Uplifts Itself

This is embarrassing to admit, but there was a phase during my sophomore year of high school when my favorite thing to do was lock myself in my room and, as the day wound down into darkness, sit on the floor near my stereo speaker listening to Air Supply's "Making Love Out of Nothing at All" over and over and over again. The song is absolute 80s schmaltz. To me, though, having been dumped by a boy who found a girl with a driver's license, it salvaged my broken heart.

What made this song the antidote to my pain wasn't that the words (other than the chorus) particularly applied to my situation; what got me every time was the deeply felt emotion the music seemed to carry as the notes and singers' voices rose, fell, surged, and plummeted again. In my lonely teenage heartbreak I was unhappy, but I wasn't alone in that unhappiness. Air Supply felt the sadness, too. By the 50th replay, I'd feel better and ready to accept reality.

How can one song create such an uplifting experience in a listener? The answer lies in your perceptions, plus how those perceptions are driven by your brain's expectations.

HOW YOUR BODY AND BRAIN RESPOND TO MUSIC

Music has been a part of human culture since prehistoric times, when hollow pieces of wood were blown to make sound. While we can't say exactly how music came into being, the science behind how our bodies respond to music suggests it might have been a natural outcome of two instinctive interactions.

First, when you listen to a rhythm, your heart actually begins to get in sync with it. A slowed heartbeat sends a message to your brain that something sad, depressing, or heavy is occurring. A fast heartbeat communicates excitement.

Second, tone ranks equally in importance in terms of how your body responds to music. Your brain understands cheerfulness from pieces played in a major key and sadness from the way minor key pieces mirror soft sighs.

While signals of rhythm and tone combine to direct your psyche in how to understand a piece of music, the effects go both ways. Researchers at the University of Missouri discovered that you can deliberately boost your mood by listening to upbeat music. Published in *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, that information probably comes as no

surprise, but to lead author Yuna Ferguson, the significance lies in the fact that the work “provides support for what many people already do—listen to music to improve their moods.”

This process becomes very interesting when the research shows that music can not only improve your mood but change your entire perception of yourself, a moment, or the world. It has been shown that music can change your perception so much that you can see things that aren't even there. Jacob Jolij and Maaïke Meurs of the psychology department of the University of Groningen, the Netherlands, asked participants to identify happy or sad smiley faces while listening to happy or sad music. The results: Smileys that reflected the mood of the music were matched with higher accuracy. However, *even when no smiley was shown*, participants reported happy or sad smileys in accordance with the type of music being played.

Jolij explains this by saying, “Seeing things that are not there is the result of top-down processes in the brain. Conscious perception is largely based on these top-down processes: your brain continuously compares the information that comes in through your eyes with what it expects on the basis of what you know about the world. The final result of this comparison process is what we eventually experience as reality. Our research results suggest that the brain builds up expectations not just on the basis of experience but on your mood as well.”

THE ROLE OF EXPECTATION IN MUSIC AND MOOD ENHANCEMENT

Investigating the effects on mood in relation to what researchers call Self-Identified Sad Music, psychologists at the universities of Kent and Limerick in the United Kingdom focused on why people choose the music they do when they're sad and how it affects them. The study, recently published in *The Psychology of Music*, asked 220 people to think back to an emotional event and recall the music they listened to afterward that they felt reflected their unhappy experience. They discovered varying motives for choosing “sad” music. As predicted by results of the team's earlier experiments, people did choose to listen to sad music for the purpose of reflecting their sadness. However, others chose music they identified as “beautiful.” For these respondents, the expectation of beauty in the music actually produced mood enhancement.

Dr. Annemieke van den Tol, lecturer in social psychology at Kent's School of Psychology explains, “We found in our research that people's music choice is linked to the individual's own expectations for listening to music and its effects on them....The only selection strategy that was found to directly predict mood enhancement was where the

music was perceived by the listener to have high aesthetic value.” In other words, when you expect to hear something beautiful it can make you feel better, while expecting to hear something sad can serve to reinforce the sadness you’re already experiencing.

From today’s perspective, I admit, Air Supply doesn’t have quite the aesthetic value to thoroughly enhance a mood. At the time, I probably would have been better off if I could have somehow known about future research that would be published in the *International Journal of Yoga* citing a study that found that chanting “om” was almost equally effective at improving mood as implanting a vagus nerve stimulator (VNS). Often used as a technique to treat epilepsy and depression, a VNS is similar to a pacemaker. It generates pulses of electricity to stimulate the vagus nerve, a cranial nerve that supplies organs in your chest and abdomen. Both the VNS and chanting “om” deactivate the limbic system, which controls your mood and emotions.

It turns out we can make our own mood-enhancing music. With my lovelorn vocal cords, a little well-placed chanting, plus an expectation of the beautiful sounds I could create I might have made music that lifted me to an even better feeling than Air Supply’s over-the-top crooning.

7 Tips for Building Community After Disaster

When I was a teen growing up outside New York City, my mom was a big country and western fan. I remember the collective groans from my brother, Bret, and me as she ferried us and our friends to after-school activities to the honky-tonk sounds of what I heard as hillbilly twang. One of my mom's favorite songs was about what to do when you face challenges in life. The lyrics were simple, "There ain't no easy horses but you gotta learn to ride." Mom reminded us of that often.

Many years later, Bret and I were living in New York City on 9/11. Afterward, our parents begged us to move to the suburbs, where they hoped we'd be out of danger. For Bret and me, leaving Manhattan was not an option; it was our home. Weeks of tense family discussions ensued. My parents lobbied for safety and against the new terrorist threat. Bret and I held firm in our refusal to be chased out of the city we loved. From 9/11 to Malaysia Airlines 370 to the Chile earthquake and Washington mudslide to the Fort Hood murders (both times), the news of a community rocked by tragedy continually reminds us of our collective vulnerability. Who are we as individuals after these calamities? Who are we as a community when the boundaries of civility, safety, and certainty shatter? The aftermath of such traumas and the answers to these questions offer us opportunities to engage in, explore, and expand both our independent and collective strength, including opportunities to:

1. Recognize differences. Not everyone responds to tragedy in the same way. Individual responses to trauma generally divide by gender: Men gravitate toward isolation; women engage in what researchers call "tend and befriend"—that is, women like to gather and connect versus the male tendency to retreat to a private space. Offering community options that support both needs encourages everyone to engage in his or her own natural process.

2. Look back. For some, the first step in moving through trauma is to glance behind: to note, study, and catalog what has occurred. Activities that encourage discussion, fact finding, story building, and investigation offer ways for community members to work together on tasks that can help make meaning out of a tragedy.

3. Focus forward. Others rebound by assessing what to do now and later. Resilience, hope, and release come from making choices and taking actions that bring change and reduce fear. Inviting individuals to participate in activities, functions, and programs that

project ahead not only helps them process trauma but strengthens the rebirth of the community as a whole.

4. Promote education. A study conducted after 9/11 revealed that those who were given 30 minutes of trauma training (defining trauma, its effects, and likely post-trauma symptoms) were far more successful at being resilient and steering clear of symptoms than those who received no training or were given counseling only. Trauma training can activate individual resilience that becomes shared and extended through community connection.

5. Honor what's been lost. At the heart of grief is the pain of losing someone or something we love. Whether that loss is physical, emotional, or philosophical, it deserves its time center stage—not solely for the somber moments, but for the life-affirming ones as well. The idea is to create an event or experience designed not to place specific memorial attention on the loss but to feature the aspect of love instead. One way to facilitate the letting-go process is through the creation of an uplifting public ritual that celebrates the love. For example, an event (i.e. a concert) that focuses on how the love lives on..

6. Define a healing intention. Facilitating resilience gains momentum with a clear plan. Moving through a traumatic event isn't just about getting through the crisis but about choosing what the final healthy outcome will be. Creating a plan for communal renewal and rebuilding begins with the simplicity of foresight and the construction of a vision: "We want _____ because _____ so that _____." Filling in the blanks with details related to ways in which the past will be processed, the present will be dealt with, and the future will be created activates creativity, flexibility, and collective energy that can be channeled into healing actions.

7. Deliberately create a post-trauma identity. Communities define themselves by their collective expression, which can change dramatically after a trauma. Opening healthy discussions about how the community wants to be known, perceived, and remembered in relation to a traumatic time encourages decisions that shape policies and procedures to develop strategies for entire communities to find direction, buoyancy, and familiarity.

Strengthening cultural bonds can dramatically impact the direction of recovery. In the aftermath of the Haitian earthquake in 2010, many well-meaning mental health practitioners from the United States converged on Haiti to help survivors process the trauma. But, due to cultural differences, their methods were useless. Haitians preferred dancing, singing, and comfort from their ministers to the evidence-based methods the American practitioners tried to introduce.

Communal post-traumatic growth can emerge from many kinds of meaningful social moments. We are all individual in our response to trauma, and we are all unique in our recovery process. In the middle, however, we meet within the confines of our community's well-defined culture. In this space we can create significant experiences that allow every type of individual to find ways to release the present pain while also beginning the process of connecting to a new future.

"You gotta learn to ride."

Hope: The Art of Expectation and Desire

You want something, maybe it's a car, a job, a dream vacation, the end of an illness, the start of a relationship—whatever it is, you set your sights on it and then.... As the Stones so eloquently said, "You can't always get what you want." But will you be satisfied to only get what you need?

In a life where free will offers us the opportunity to create the world we wish to live in, most of us know that actually getting what we want depends on our own actions. We begin with clarity, put in place a strategy, execute a plan, and await the results—which don't always materialize.

In those moments when everything goes wrong, how do we keep the dream alive? By fanning the flames of expected success, plus desiring to have that thing that means so much.

In other words, it's important to foster *hope*.

According to Maryann Makekau, founder of Hope Matters, an organization in Destin, FL, dedicated to inspiring hope for those dealing with critical difficulties, "Hope is the most essential tool in any journey. It's an anchor that gets you through the tough, dark times, and an opportunity to nurture and celebrate one another when we're going through challenges."

Technically, hope is an anticipatory feeling. It is also the beginning of any success, the small voice that says, "I believe things can be different." The hard part about hope is that it's an action-oriented resource you have to manufacture internally. You can't buy it (although you can borrow it by believing in the hope someone else harbors), and you can't depend on someone else to give it to you. Hope, as Makekau explains, is a *decision*.

On a down day, how can you find that resolve against all odds? Here are some practical ways:

Choose to find hopeful moments, experiences, or instances. Studies have proven that what we see isn't necessarily what exists; what exists is what we see. The world organizes itself through your perspective. Deciding to perceive through a veil of hope (in even the smallest detail) develops an optimistic attitude that shapes your experiences throughout the day.

Offer hope to others who need it as a way to practice developing it in yourself. Much like compassion, hope is sometimes easier to give than receive. If you find it difficult to have hope for your own life, offer hope to someone else. Expecting and desiring for others subconsciously models how to be hopeful for yourself.

Be flexible and open to change. Hope can be squashed if your preconceived notion is that there is only one way for you to receive what you want. Practicing flexibility strengthens optimism as your mind learns that while events don't always happen the way you expect, your goals can still happen another way. This allows hope to always exist.

Think small. While it's great to see the big picture, it can be overwhelming. Hoping for small, incremental events that will lead up to the big result actually promotes more hands-on hope in the long run. Every small success wires your brain for a future success, which establishes a sort of hope relay that keeps up your spirits.

Imagine big. Getting what you want will change your life in many ways. You will hear, think, see, smell, taste, dress, talk, walk, etc., differently due to even the tiniest success in any area. The more you close your eyes and imagine these changes, the more your brain primes to the hope—and creation—of these specific outcomes and collaborates with you to bring them into existence.

Doubt, like a shadow, can creep in just about anywhere. Lack of patience, negative input from others, and low self-esteem all contribute to unsettled feelings. In those moments, Makekau suggests that you “demonstrate, understand, and communicate your doubt. Give a voice to worry; if you don't, it will suffocate hope.”

Speaking out about doubt may actually reverse engineer hope: Sharing your uncertainty can inspire those around you to supply fresh ideas, thoughts and scenarios that make hope more tangible. Plus, tapping into community can alleviate loneliness during a stressful time. Feeling connected renews energy, stimulating your own creativity so that hope can become not only a decision but an expression of your problem-solving self.

Sorrow, Food & You: How to Manage Mindless Eating

Years ago in our family hedge fund business, we hired an assistant who was ... chunky. Anne was maybe 50 pounds overweight, with the excess distributed equally around her body. She was very pretty (gorgeous hair, electric blue eyes, and creamy skin), a terrific asset to the team, and lots of fun to work with. We had a good time churning out projects. Anne wasn't happy with her weight but couldn't get herself to stick to any diet. She'd laugh and say, "I think I just have to accept that I love ice cream more than I love the idea of myself as a skinny girl!"

After a few years Anne moved on to launch her own business and we didn't see her for several months. Then one day as I took a lunch break on the beach, someone called my name. I looked around, didn't recognize a soul, and kept walking until I heard my name again. When I turned around this time, a woman was jogging to catch up. It wasn't until she stood directly in front of me that I realized it was Anne—looking as if she'd just stepped out of a *Sports Illustrated* swimsuit issue. Slim and toned, Anne had curves in all the right places; her body looked long and lean. Her face, minus the excess weight, revealed high, chiseled cheekbones, enormous eyes that took center stage over a perfect nose, and a chin that delicately gave shape to everything above it.

We hugged, then Anne stepped back. "What do you think?" she said, turning 360 degrees.

"I think you finally decided you don't love ice cream so much! You found a diet that works," I smiled. "Congratulations. What did the trick?"

At this Anne's face became serious. "Depression."

Anne's answer sounds counterintuitive, but research supports what she discovered: Sorrow can be a powerfully effective enhancement to any diet regime.

In a research led by Professor Brian Wansink at Cornell University, 86% of participants sought comfort foods—ice cream, cookies, and chocolate for women; ice cream, soup, and pizza/pasta for men—when they were *happy* versus only 36% who ate comfort foods when depressed.

A new study published in the *Journal of Consumer Research* suggests you can combat destructive eating habits by being a little bit sad. The story goes like this:

Researchers exposed participants to indulgent or neutral words or images. For example, one group looked at print ads that featured pleasurable foods like pizza or chocolate cake, while another was fed images featuring washing machines and electric cars. Immediately following, participants engaged in a writing exercise designed to make them feel sad. At the end of the assignment, participants were offered indulgent foods, including M&Ms and chocolate chip cookies.

Those participants who were initially exposed to pleasurable information (made to feel good) and subsequently made to feel sad experienced (1) a decrease in indulgent food consumption, and (2) an increase in recognizing how consuming such decadent foods might lead to health issues. Conversely, the group exposed to neutral images and then made to feel sad increased their indulgent food consumption.

Study authors Anthony Salerno and Juliano Laran from the University of Miami, and Chris Janiszewski from the University of Florida, conclude: “when people who are sad are exposed to pictures of indulgent food or indulgent words, their sadness highlights the negative consequences of indulging and encourages them to indulge less.”

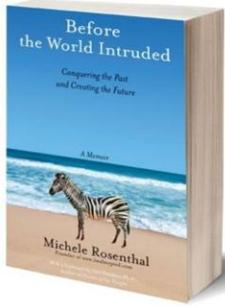
So there’s science behind Anne’s response, and also a good bit of urban-myth debunking: We are actually more indulgent when we’re happy. In Anne’s case, she reported that eating all the fun things she used to indulge in didn’t seem fun in her depressed state. Disconnected from the joy of her usual robust appetite, she watched the pounds melt off.

Whether you’re too sad to eat or more aware of the consequences because of a case of the blues, the moral to (the science of) the story suggests a revision in our perspective on both indulgent foods and how to manage a propensity for their overconsumption. Wansink’s exploration of our urge to overeat goes beyond the science of why we do it. His book, *Mindless Eating: Why We Eat More Than We Think*, suggests—as the title gives away—that we don’t just overeat because we’re hungry. Often, we overeat because we don’t focus on what we’re eating. In guidelines he offers to the American Heart Association, Wansink’s solution is to become more proactive about your experience with food: chew more slowly and take the time to savor each bite; pay attention to your dish rather than other technological distractions like television and cell phones; use smaller plates and serving utensils; put away serving dishes so you’re not tempted with more; eat when you’re hungry and prepare healthy snacks in advance so that you can make positive choices.

Anne’s period of depression is long past now, but she remains at a healthy, comfortable and beautiful weight. When I ask what’s changed in her eating habits she responds,

“Well, I still love ice cream! But I also love how I feel at this weight. The desire to hold onto this feeling helps me make better choices.”

Certainly, mood can influence behavior, but as Anne has discovered, the element of choice always exists. To being, we can choose to become more mindful of what, how, when and why we eat. Then, we can extend that mindfulness to noticing our moods and also changing our response them.



Praise for triple award-nominated *Before the World Intruded: Conquering the Past and Creating the Future*

*... addictively readable By the end of the book you will be crying and laughing at once, and applauding Michele Rosenthal for her courage. ~ Jessica Stern, Author, *Denial: A Memoir of Terror and Terror in the Name of God**

*Before the World Intruded is stunning in its intimacy... Michele's courage in deciding to face her PTSD and heal it is the message of this story. ~ Bill Krill, Jr., MSPC, Author, *Gentling: A Practical Guide to Treating PTSD in Abused Children**

*... this book is important for anyone who has personally experienced trauma or knows someone who has. Don't wait for the movie. Read this book now. ~ Nancy O'Reilly, PsyD, Author, *Timeless Women Speak: Feeling Youthful**

*The twenty-six year journey beautifully described in Before the World Intruded shows how deeply rooted trauma can become. Much can be learned by reading this book. ~ Ron Ruden, MD, PhD, Author, *When the Past Is Always Present: Emotional Traumatization, Causes, and Cures**





MICHELE ROSENTHAL inspires and guides audiences to overcome depression, anxiety and fear as they rebuild their lives after trauma and adversity. A popular keynote speaker, award-winning blogger, award-nominated author, workshop/seminar leader and certified professional coach, Michele hosts the radio program, *Changing Direction*, and is the founder of HealMyPTSD.com.

Michele is also a trauma survivor who struggled with posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) for over twenty-five years. After successfully completing her “healing rampage” several years ago (she remains 100% free of PTSD symptoms,) Michele now dedicates her professional career to helping survivors, caregivers and healing professionals learn about the effects of trauma and more efficiently navigate the recovery process.

Michele is the author of *Before The World Intruded: Conquering the Past and Creating the Future*, selected as a finalist for the Books For A Better Life Award, Next Generation Indie Book Award, and the International Book Award.

Michele’s forthcoming books include:

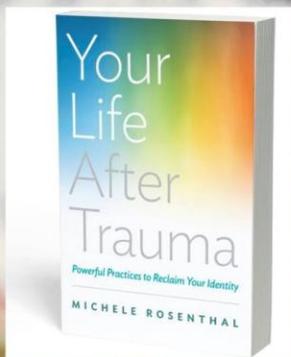
Your Life After Trauma: Powerful Practices for Reclaiming Your Identity, (W.W. Norton, Spring 2015)

Heal Your PTSD: Thoughts, Comfort and Action Steps for Recovery from Posttraumatic Stress (Conari Press, Fall 2015).

Connect with Michele:
ChangeYouChoose.com

Michele Rosenthal has written a wise, compassionate and comprehensive book on the profound loss of identity that occurs with posttraumatic stress, and offers a grounded, realistic approach for establishing a new sense of self. ~ Belleruth Naparstek, Author, *Invisible Heroes: Survivors of Trauma and How They Heal*

This study of trauma and identity is really the cutting edge of where the field is going and Rosenthal's work has applications for all of us, no matter what the specifics of our journeys. ~ Lee Woodruff, NYT Best-Selling Author, *Those We Love Most*



Praise for the only book helping survivors answer the question:

Who am I now?

Michele Rosenthal ... shows readers how to eliminate what is destroying them to save their lives.... Michele's wisdom can make it happen for you. ~ Bernie Siegel, MD, NYT Best-Selling Author, *A Book of Miracles*

Michele Rosenthal's book... shows how PTSD, whatever the cause, can be transformed from weakness to strength, and how one can grow strong from the breaks. ~ Larry Dossey, MD, Author, *One Mind: How Our Individual Mind Is Part of a Greater Consciousness and Why It Matters*

