

Learning to Stress Well Choosing a Heart-Centered, Response-able Approach to Being Well ¹

Twenty-some years ago, a single moment stretched into days, months, then more than a year of sensing a total lack of control--over my health and, ultimately, my life. Until I woke up to realize that my body-mind-spirit had simply forgotten how to create health.

By my early 40's, I had accumulated enough mis-managed stress (both personal and professional) that it took its toll on my health. I spent so much time and energy taking care of every person and responsibility other than myself that I drained all my physical and emotional resilience reserves. In the midst of the stress, I had forgotten how to be well.

At first, I struggled alone to create a way back to myself. Initially, I began to realize that I could decide how to live my life—it was my right, my privilege AND my responsibility. Mine alone. I would also come to understand that this lifelong journey involves a simple, yet elegant, two-pronged process that encompasses a capacity to both *manage stress well* and to *stress* (as in, emphasize) *well-being*. Or, as I now describe it: stresswell™.

You've probably heard the phrase: Stress happens--suffering is optional. Early in my healing journey, I learned that, while stress is an everyday part of our lives, over 90% of us deal with it ineffectively. The accumulation of mismanaged everyday stress causes us to get sick and lessens the overall quality of our lives.

Yet, it's not enough to simply eliminate unwanted stress, or even learn to manage it. In contrast, I discovered how to almost enjoy my stress: by bringing self-acceptance, compassion, and curiosity to how I am in any given moment so that I might transform unwanted stress into healing energy. In other words, my goal in life is not to have NO stress, but to be response-able amidst NEW stress.

From this perspective, wellness becomes much more than a static assessment of dietary do's and don'ts, the number of steps I've walked or even a page of lab test scores. I measure well-being less by the current state of my health but by my choice of how to be in each moment, in the here and now. Additionally, being well means listening to my own heart--treasuring my uniqueness and my inner wisdom. And, perhaps, even more importantly, gratefully experiencing myself as my longest-term, most faithful best friend--especially when life becomes challenging.

From this foundation of self-responsibility and love (the first of 12 dimensions of well-being we'll explore throughout the year) the next 11 add richness and depth to the ability to be well. Next time, we'll explore "sensing." I hope you'll choose to join me then!

Mary Elaine Kiener, RN, PhD
www.askmehouse.com
me@askmehouse.com

¹ Kiener, M.E. (2015, January). Learning to stress well. Choosing a heart-centered, response-able approach to being well. *Sibyl Magazine. For the Spirit and Soul of Woman*. Retrieved from www.sibylmagazine.com.