exercise your way to health



stress

exercise plans to improve your life

debbie lawrence and sarah bolitho



Other books in the Exercise Your Way to Health series:

Back Pain Arthritis Type 2 Diabetes Osteoporosis Depression

exercise your way to health

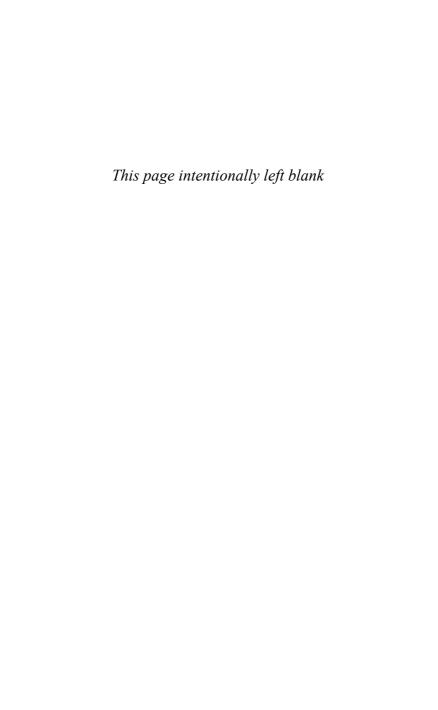


stress

exercise plans to improve your life

debbie lawrence and sarah bolitho

Acknowledgements Foreword Introduction	vii ix xi	
Part 1: understanding stress What is stress? What are the causes of stress? What effect does stress have on me? What are the effects of long-term stress? How do I know I'm stressed?	1 7 10 14 18	contents
Part 2: helping yourself to hea Where to start? Lifestyle focus Super stress saviours	21 21 31 43	
Part 3: the exercises	57	
Exercise and stress The starting point Safety first How often and hard should I exercise? Posture and breathing Exercise programmes Get out and about	58 59 60 63 64 68 96	
Appendix 1: Resource list Appendix 2: Activity log Appendix 3: Food diary Appendix 4: Relaxation script	103 104 106 108	
Bibliography Find out more	111	



acknowledgements

Writing, teaching and learning are my passions, so the opportunity to write this book brings great pleasure (a pleasant stress) and I am thankful to Charlotte Croft of A&C Black for asking me to contribute to the *Exercising Your Way to Health* series.

I give thanks to the 'ups, downs and plateaus' of life and living that I have experienced because they have made me the ever-evolving person that I am; and that we all are.

Special thanks to the 'ups' of life; from the part of me (my inner child) that likes them the most.

Special thanks to my partner, Joe, who, like a diamond, adds a sparkle to my life.

Thanks also to my Mum and Dad and brother for being part of my life!

I also give thanks to my co-writer, Sarah, who has combined her own wealth of experience with mine, to co-create this book.

Dehhie Lawrence

To my father who has instilled in me a sense of honour and ethics that have supported me through many a stressful situation. He taught me that thinking slowly, talking calmly and looking at situations rationally are more productive than over-reacting. Thank you for everything, Dad, but most of all for your unconditional love.

To my children, Lucie, Danny and James, who, over the years, have provided me with much of the experience I needed to write this! You are all very special and I cherish each day with you.

Thank you also to Debbie, with whom I have shared the experience of writing this book – a welcome challenge!

Sarah Bolitho

The publishers would like to thank the David Lloyd Gym in Cardiff and Debbie Lawrence, Mary Sheppard, Jenny Burns, Rob Burns, Ben Burns, Mary Sparks and Paul Conway for their kind assistance with the photo-shoot.

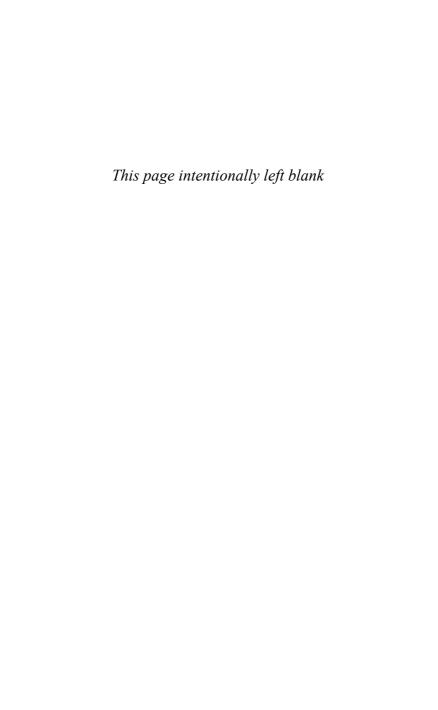
foreword

Stress is, of course, part of our everyday life. All biological functions require a stimulus; hunger and thirst, for instance, are regular stressors that provoke the essential reactions of eating and drinking. Our fight or flight response, by which the body is instantly prepared for physical activity in the face of potential danger, has been a major factor in human survival for millennia.

However, in our less primitive, more industrialised society, physical action in the face of threat and pressure is often impossible. An impoverished single mother, receiving yet another bill, cannot simply attack the postman; a driver caught in a traffic jam and late for an important meeting cannot simply leave his car and jog to the office. Under these circumstances, the stresses are not released and, over time, they can lead to serious health problems including high blood pressure, heart disease, sleep disturbance and bowel disorders.

Learning to manage stress appropriately and to react to it in a less-damaging fashion is a vital skill of modern living, and using exercise as the tool is the perfect biological response. This clear guide on specific exercise programmes designed to help you cope with stress is written by two very experienced professionals in the field; it is an excellent means of both prevention of ill-heath and promotion of wellness. I recommend it to anyone who has ever felt stressed!

Dr C P Crosby MA (Oxon), FFSEM (UK), FFSEM (I), MB BS (Lond), LRCP MRCS Consultant in Sport and Exercise Medicine



introduction

The chances are that if you have picked up this book you want to know more about stress, how it affects your body and how you can manage or reduce your own stress levels. Perhaps you are concerned about your health because you are using other habits (alcohol, drugs, medication and/or cigarettes) to manage your stress? Well done! This is your first step in taking positive action to help yourself.

This book provides a simple overview explaining how stress levels can build up and the impact they have on our health. It is also full of valuable lifestyle tips and exercise ideas to help you make changes to your own stress levels and cope with stress.

Start exercising your way to health now!



part

understanding stress

>> What is stress?

Although most of us will feel stressed or under pressure at some point in our life, stress is not actually an easy thing to define. Stress is a psychological condition that influences how we feel, think about and respond to the events, demands and challenges in our daily lives, and affects our perception of our ability to cope with these demands and experiences.

Life provides us with many potential *stimuli* or *stressors* both big and small: the work we do, the state of the economy, paying our bills, our relationships with friends and family, the way we think about ourselves, queuing in a supermarket, driving in traffic, world peace, exams, whether we take enough exercise, our habits, getting married or divorced ... The list of potential stressors is endless and will change at different times throughout our lives.

However, not all stress is bad – we need some stimuli to function and to develop. It is when we are overwhelmed with stimuli or are less able to cope with them that stress takes over. It is a bit like watching a film: if it has a very complicated plot our minds have to work hard to try to make

sense of it so we may leave the cinema with a sense of frustration. Too simple and we may get so bored that we fall asleep. If we'd read the reviews or the plot line before going to the cinema, we might have had a clearer idea of the plot and been able to follow it – or decided it wasn't for us and chosen a different film instead. The reviews would have been a useful source of information, or 'resource'.

Coping with stress requires us to use our own resources – things that help us cope with the demands of life. They are often simple habits such as taking a breath before we speak, spending five minutes a day in quiet reflection, getting tomorrow's clothes or bag ready the night before, having a list of due dates for insurance and bills, and so on. Resources may also be more complex or may come from other sources such as visiting a therapist or learning new skills to help with our personal development; or they may be from the people around us such as babysitters, parents, friends and family, who already do, or would like to, help out.

So what are your existing resources? Try taking a pen and paper and writing them down, using the resources log in the appendices on page 000. On one side put your resources, and on the other describe how you use them. For example:

Resource

- Keeping close to my family
- My computer
- Being organised with paperwork

Uses

- Advice and emergencies
- Online shopping / banking
- Paving bills on time

If our coping resources are strong and we use them, we are better equipped to recognise and deal with unwanted stress, but if they are weak or we are reluctant to use them, we may not be able to identify when we are stressed or be able to cope with it. Developing these coping resources is like learning anything – practise, practise! The more we do something, the better we get at it so the more we take a deep breath before we react in a stressful situation, the easier it is to do and it will eventually become automatic – which is good.