

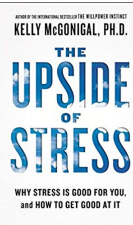


NOTES

# The Upside Of Stress

WHY STRESS IS GOOD FOR YOU, AND HOW TO GET GOOD AT IT  
KELLY MCGONIGAL

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279 PAGES



## KEY POINTS

**Rethink Stress:**

*“Let me start by telling you about the shocking scientific finding that first made me rethink stress. In 1998, thirty thousand adults in the United States were asked how much stress they had experienced in the past year. They were also asked, Do you believe stress is harmful to your health?”*

**Mindsets:**

They Really Matter

*Eight years later, the researchers scoured public records to find out who among the thirty thousand participants had died. Let me deliver the bad news first. High levels of stress increased the risk of dying by 43 percent. But—and this is what got my attention—that increased risk only applied to people who also believed that stress was harming their health. People who reported high levels of stress but who did not view their stress as harmful were not more likely to die. In fact, they had the lowest risk of death of anyone in the study, even lower than those who reported experiencing very little stress.”*

**Stress Mindset:**

What’s yours?

**Mindset**

**Interventions:**

Your new best friend!

Kelly McGonigal from The Upside Of Stress

**Stress and Growth:**

Go hand in hand.

Kelly McGonigal is quickly becoming one of my favourite authors and scientists. I have just this minute discovered that she published a book at the end of last year called ‘The Joy Of Movement’. As a movement nerd I am super excited to read it not only because of the title but because this book ‘The Upside Of Stress’ is a little gem. In this book Kelly is imploring us to take a very different scientifically validated view on stress. Instead of trying to get rid of stress, she is telling us to reframe it: to start thinking of stress and all it’s positive benefits instead of dwelling on the negative aspects of it. It’s all about mindsets and beliefs or attitudes and how these influence our behaviours. It’s been life changing for me to read the book and I highly recommend that you get a copy. So let’s get started by returning to that opening quote.

**What Do You**

**Expect?**

You get what you expect!

**Stress Goals:**

What are yours?

## Rethink Stress

*“Let me start by telling you about the shocking scientific finding that first made me rethink stress. In 1998, thirty thousand adults in the United States were asked how much stress they had experienced in the past year. They were also asked, Do you believe stress is harmful to your health?”*

*Eight years later, the researchers scoured public records to find out who among the thirty thousand participants had died. Let me deliver the bad news first. High levels of stress increased the risk of dying by 43 percent. But—and this is what got my attention—that increased risk only applied to people who also believed that stress was harming their health. People who reported high levels of stress but who did not view their stress as harmful were not more likely to die. In fact, they had the lowest risk of*

*death of anyone in the study, even lower than those who reported experiencing very little stress.”*

High levels of stress + the belief (mindset) that stress is bad for you = a 43 percent increase in the risk of dying!

BUT

High levels of stress + the belief (mindset) that stress is NOT harmful to health = a lower chance of dying than someone with very low levels of stress!

It's not the stress that's bad for us it is THE BELIEF that stress is bad, that is bad for health!

Do you believe that stress is bad?

What's your stress mindset?

## **Mindsets**

Our attitudes, beliefs or mindsets have a powerful effect over what happens to us in our lives. Our attitudes affect the way we act. If we have a growth mindset we understand that we can learn to develop new skills. If we have a fixed mindset we believe that we can't grow. You have a growth mindset, don't you?

*“As we've seen, a mindset is a belief that biases how you think, feel, and act. It's like a filter that you see everything through.”*

*“Mindsets are beliefs that shape your reality, including objective physical reactions, and even long-term health, happiness and success.”*

*“The beliefs that become mindsets transcend preferences, learned facts, or intellectual opinions. They are core beliefs that reflect your philosophy of life. A mindset is usually based on a theory about how the world works”*

What's your dominant mindset about stress? Or Pain? What do you believe about challenges? Do your attitudes help you grow or knock you over? Seeing that you have a fixed mindset is the first step in creating a growth-orientated mindset for yourself. Can you see that growth is possible for you?

## **Stress Mindset**

*“Mindset 1: Stress Is Harmful.*

*Experiencing stress depletes my health and vitality.  
Experiencing stress debilitates my performance and productivity.*

*Experiencing stress inhibits my learning and growth.  
The effects of stress are negative and should be avoided.*

*Mindset 2: Stress Is Enhancing.*

*Experiencing stress enhances my performance and productivity.  
Experiencing stress improves my health and vitality.  
Experiencing stress facilitates my learning and growth.  
The effects of stress are positive and should be utilized.”*

Which stress mindset do you have? Mindset 1: Stress is harmful or Mindset 2: Stress is enhancing?

While you are mulling that over let's consider our pain mindsets. I love helping people to re-think chronic pain and helping them to engage in movements and attitudes that will allow them to move forward with less pain.

What do you think about pain?

Let's replace the word 'stress' with 'pain' in Kelly's stress mindset descriptions and see what happens.

Mindset 1: Pain Is Harmful.

*Experiencing pain depletes my health and vitality.  
Experiencing pain debilitates my performance and productivity.  
Experiencing pain inhibits my learning and growth.  
The effects of pain are negative and should be avoided.*

Mindset 2: Pain Is Enhancing.

*Experiencing pain enhances my performance and productivity.  
Experiencing pain improves my health and vitality.  
Experiencing pain facilitates my learning and growth.  
The effects of pain are positive and should be utilized*

Ummm I like it and I wonder what Kelly would say! Is there science that would back these statements as well?

Many of us think that pain is a reflection of tissue damage but this is not the whole story. Cognitive and emotional factors also influence an individual's pain experience. Beth Darnell is another amazing Stanford University researcher (Kelly is from Stanford too). Beth's research shows that when individuals engage in 'pain catastrophizing' or 'negative pain appraisal' their pain intensity worsens and treatments are rendered less effective. 'Pain catastrophizing' or 'negative pain appraisal' include behaviours such as ruminating on pain, worrying that the pain will get worse, focusing on how helpless one feels or as Dr. Darnell says "Pain catastrophizing or negative pain appraisal is a persistent pattern of having difficulty shifting the focus

away from the worst aspects of pain”. So it is definitely of value to try new beliefs about pain. This makes me think about Josh Waitzkin. In his book ‘The Art Of Learning’ he tells us the story of how he broke his hand seven weeks before the National Tai Chi Push Hands Championships. Instead of dwelling on the pain he turned this seven weeks into a time to train his left hand (he had broken his right hand and was right handed). He turned his pain into a learning experience. A few days after getting his cast off he won the National title. Incredible. Check out my Move Note on his great book ‘The Art Of Learning’ to find out more.

Pick up a pen and write about a time when your pain facilitated learning or growth? If you do you will be engaging in your very own mindset intervention. P.S Kelly and Beth can you please write a book called ‘The Upside Of Pain’!!!! Thanks, oh and can you get Alia to contribute a chapter or two!! ☺

## **Mindset Intervention**

*“The most effective mindset interventions have three parts: 1) Learning the new point of view, 2) doing an exercise that encourages you to adopt and apply the new mindset, and 3) providing an opportunity to share the idea with others”*

The second part of Kelly’s book is called ‘Transform Stress’ and in it are many mindset interventions. She talks us through interventions that will help us ‘turn isolation into common humanity’, ‘turn nerves into excitement’, ‘turn a threat into a challenge’, ‘turn overwhelm into hopeful’ and ‘turn self-focus into bigger-than-self-goals’.

Get the book to discover the specifics on how to do these mindset interventions. To help you get started, if you do have a negative mindset about stress how can you start to develop the ‘stress is enhancing’ mindset? Grab a pen and write about a time when a stressful event turned into a great learning experience. Or write about an event that you initially viewed as negative but later you could see benefits in what happened. Start creating new mindsets and beliefs so that you can move forward in life in a way that inspires you.

## **Stress and Growth**

*“The science, stories, and exercises in this chapter will help you cultivate a growth mindset – one that recognizes the natural human capacity to grow during these times of stress. We’ll explore how to discover this perspective even in the middle of circumstances where hope is hardest to find. Stories will play a special role in this process, as we consider how the stories you hear, and the stories you tell, can help you find meaning in suffering.*

*Throughout, we’ll see one important theme over and over: The good that comes from difficult experiences isn’t from the stressful or traumatic event itself; it comes from you—from the strengths that are awakened by*

*adversity and from the natural human capacity to transform suffering into meaning. Part of embracing stress is to trust this capacity, even when the pain is fresh and the future uncertain.”*

We have all heard it said that ‘it’s not what happens to you but how you perceive what happens to you that determines the outcome of an event’. We have all heard about victim mentality and growth mindsets. One thing is certain and that is that we have a choice over how we respond to an event. If we can find the awareness to pause before we respond to a stimulus we might just have the power to respond in a new way, instead of responding with the same old knee jerk reaction. Can you choose your response to an event? You have a choice! You can change your mindset and stressful events can be the very situations that lead to huge amounts of growth.

### **What Do You Expect?**

*“Crum’s provocative hypothesis is that when two outcomes are possible—in this case, the health benefits of exercise or the strain of physical labour—a person’s expectations influence which outcome is more likely. She concluded that the housekeepers’ perception of their work as healthy exercise transformed its effects on their bodies. In other words “The effect you expect is the effect you get”*

Alia Crum is an Assistant Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. When she was studying at Harvard she completed a study with the amazing Ellen J. Langer. Ellen studies the science of possibility and Alia and Ellen studied housekeepers to see if what they thought about their work changed their bodies’ responses to it.

Indeed it did. Housekeepers, who were given a brief mindset intervention showing them that housework was just like exercise, experienced a slew of health benefits. They did nothing differently in their work except think that they were exercising. Their bodies expected to receive the benefits of exercise and they did. A control group of housekeepers were given no information about their work being like exercise and did not receive the benefits.

*“For a young scientist, Crum has an unusual track record of high-profile findings. Her work gets attention because it shows that our physical reality is more subjective than we believe. By changing how people think about an experience, she can change what’s happening in their bodies. Her findings are so surprising that they make a lot of people scratch their heads and say, “Huh? Is that even possible?”*

*This reaction—Is that even possible?—is a familiar one to researchers who study mindsets. Mindsets are beliefs that shape your reality, including objective physical reactions, and even long-term health, happiness, and success. More important, the new field of mindset science shows that a single brief intervention, designed to change how you think about something, can improve your health, happiness, and success, even years into the future.”*

Do you have an injury? What do you expect will happen? Do you expect to recover quickly and gain new strength because of the injury OR do you expect that the injury will not heal and that it will eventually get worse until the pain is unbearable? Your mindsets matter! Get the book to find out more and especially to read about ‘The Milkshake Study’ it will blow your mind, believe me.

## **Stress Goals**

*“A while back, one of my close friends shared with me that instead of New Year’s resolutions, her family had started to set annual stress goals. Each year, she, her husband, and their teenage son decide how they want to grow in the coming year. Then they choose a personal project that will be both meaningful and difficult. They talk about what their stress edge will be—what they expect to be challenging, what they might feel anxious about, and the strengths that they want to develop”*

Kelly fell in love with this idea and so have I. What’s your next stress goal? What challenges will you rise to and what strengths will you develop? Send me an email [hazel@mindinmovement.co.nz](mailto:hazel@mindinmovement.co.nz) and let me know how you get on.

## **About the Author of ‘The Upside Of Stress’**

### **Kelly McGonigal**

Kelly is truly awesome. “She is a health psychologist and lecturer at Stanford University, and a leading expert in the new field of “science-help.” She is passionate about translating cutting-edge research from psychology, neuroscience, and medicine into practical strategies for health, happiness, and personal success.” That’s from her bio on the Stanford University website. To find out more check out [www.kellymcgonigal.com](http://www.kellymcgonigal.com)

## **About the Author of this Move Note**

### **Hazel Boot**

Hazel has a degree in Exercise and Sports Science. She is also an Anatomy Trains Structural Integrator and a Restorative Exercise Specialist. She works with clients to improve movement and reduce pain. She loves reading and geeking out on movement books. She writes notes on the books she loves to help others learn faster.

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I hope you enjoyed the content of this note but please remember that it is not medical advice and should not be used as such.