

A
Quick-Start
Workbook

5 PRINCIPLES OF PRESSURE-FREE STRESS REDUCTION

by

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The Pressure-Free Method

How to stop the stress
response easily and
effectively for improved
mental and physical health
and performance.



5 PRINCIPLES OF PRESSURE-FREE STRESS REDUCTION

Welcome to Pressure-Free Living!

Maybe you thrive under pressure. Or maybe the pressure has gotten to you so much that your body and your mind are sending you signals that something's got to change. Whether you are fairly calm or a hot mess of stress, this is for you.

No matter what pressures or challenges come your way, I'm going to show you how to prevent the release of the fight-or-flight stress response. Stressors aren't the culprit, stress hormones are.

I created the Pressure-Free Method in 2010 when my two older sons asked me to coach their high school baseball team in my mental performance tips I've taught my violin students for years. I developed expertise on the fight-or-flight stress response and developed my science-based method to improve the performance of the team. I also taught it to our 10-year-old who would get frustrated when he made any errors or mistakes. Learning Pressure-Free transformed his life and 12 years later, he was named Salutatorian of his class at Columbia where he studied psychology.

This workbook contains some material from the first session of my online course and complements the first coaching session I give my private clients. If you find it interesting and you'd like to learn more, you can book a call on my site

www.ElleIngalls.com

I'm so grateful for the opportunity to share this with you and for the support of my own coaches, mentors, and my family. - Elle



Ned and Hugh with the coaches who took a chance on me.



My family: William, me, Hugh, Pete, and Ned



William, Columbia's 2022 Salutatorian

OUT OF OUR MESS COMES OUR MESSAGE

HOW I DEVELOPED THE PRESSURE-FREE METHOD

Many a coach has told me that out of our mess comes our message. There were two messy times in my life that, as I reflect back, led me to the coaching I do today.

The first happened in high school. Going into senior year track season as our top 2-miler, after the first race, my knees buckled and I experienced sharp pains - nothing I'd known before. I'd destroyed my patellas under my knee caps training in the wrong shoes and would need to take at least a year off of running to heal.

Not being with my team was devastating, so I asked to apprentice coach and soon, some of athletes started asking me for tips to calm them down before events. I'd been performing as a violinist for years, and had some useful ways to perform at my best.



Me at the Dartmouth track apprentice coaching Concord HighSchool athletes.



The second messy moment happened at the University Michigan recital hall when, at age 25, for the first time ever, I experienced stage fright - I thought I was having a heart attack.

That episode inspired me to go to Michigan's Medical Library and research what had happened to me. (1987, so no internet!) I then developed specific ways to protect myself from releasing stress hormones in key performance situations.

Throughout my career as a symphony executive, violinist, conductor, financial consultant to nonprofit executives, I thought of myself as a fairly calm, highly-trained professional with a "normal" amount of stress." I honestly didn't think I needed this method I was creating. I was wrong.

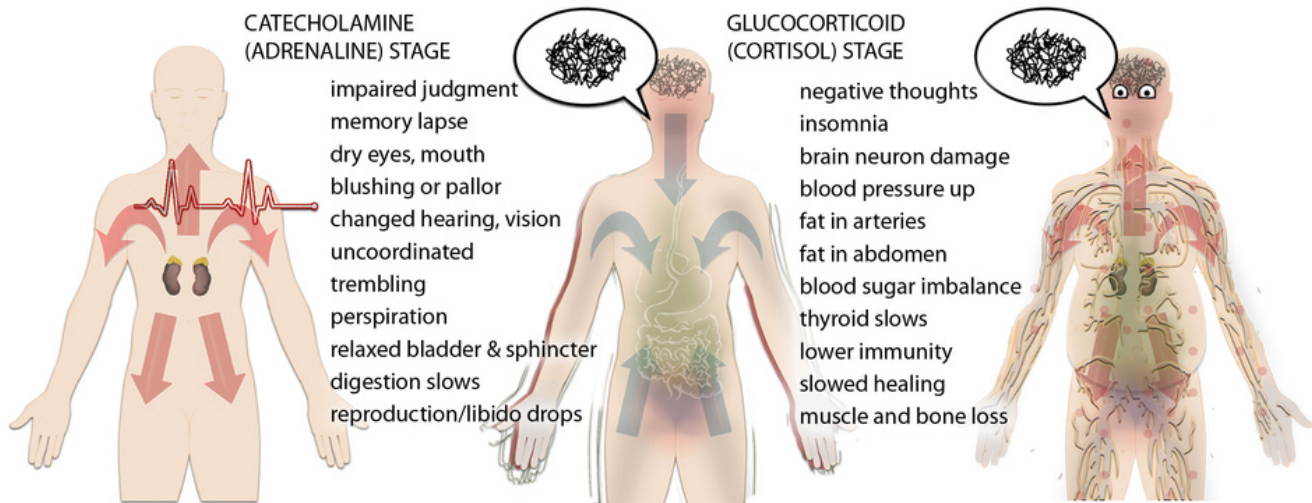
Coupling my original performance tools with the latest research on the stress response has resulted in the Pressure-Free Method. It's changed my life – healed me of chronic issues and upleveled my leadership -- as it's done for so many of my clients. It's my honor to introduce you to the basics.

Here are the Five Principles of Pressure-Free Stress Reduction:

- 1** You do not need to slow down or take time off to de-stress. This is not how the stress response works. Also, the high-achiever is usually annoyed or even angry when someone suggests that they do so, and this can cause even more stress. Plus, taking too much time off can result in falling behind in one's work which is often a trigger for leaders.
- 2** The typical remedies for stress like meditation, yoga, exercise, medication, even therapy can provide relief, but do not address the moment-by-moment causes of stress hormone release. This is why you may have been trying a variety of strategies, but still have chronic mental, physical, or behavioral symptoms.
- 3** Once you have triggered the stress response and the first flood of hormones, called catecholamines, has released, you are now "under the influence" of those and a second flood called gluco-corticoids. It takes up to nine hours for males and up to 24 hours for females to dissipate these hormones out the cells. I refer to this as the stress cycle.
- 4** The only way to reduce and even eliminate the effects of the stress response is to stop the release of stress hormones. By building awareness of what causes you to trigger the stress response, you can start interrupting it: stressors, challenges, triggers, anytime you feel tense, any time you feel angry, annoyed, anxious, or ashamed.
- 5** The first tools you try may not be effective which is why I've created over fifty ways to interrupt the stress response. The Pressure-Free Method is simple and based on science, but you are complex when it comes to your habits of reactions. Together, we will find the right combination of tools for your specific situations.

EFFECTS OF THE STRESS RESPONSE CATECHOLAMINES, GLUCO-CORTICIDS

EFFECTS OF THE STRESS RESPONSE



Here is what happens when you trigger the stress response:

1. You become alert and attentive to the environment.
2. Your heart rate increases.
3. The center of your adrenal glands, the medulla, releases a flood of catecholamine hormones, the chief one being adrenaline, into the blood stream. These hormones cause many effects.
 - Fat and glucose releases from your brain cells and extremities.
 - Your ability to think logically and your memory are compromised.
 - You are prepared for violent action: fight or flight.
 - Your heart rate and breathing rate accelerate.
 - Your face pales or flushes or alternates between both.
 - Your digestive system slows down or stops.
 - Your reproductive system and libido slow down or stop.
 - Your bladder muscles and sphincter muscles relax. You may feel like you need to urinate or defecate.

- Many of your blood vessels constrict. .
- The cells in your arms, legs and brain become dehydrated.
- Your hands and feet may sweat or feel cold.
- The glands that produce tears and saliva are inhibited, causing dry eyes and dry mouth.
- Your pupils dilate, causing brightness and blurring.
- You experience loss of hearing.
- Your throat may feel tight.
- Your chest may feel tight.
- Your reflexes instantaneously accelerate. You become jumpy and awkward.
- Your body shakes or is fidgety.

4. A second flood of hormones releases when your brain and body feel the threat is over. This flood of hormones helps your brain cells and cells in your extremities get the sugar, salt, and water balanced so that fat can be properly utilized. It also causes many side-effects that you may experience, and that cause chronic issues over time.

EFFECTS OF THE STRESS RESPONSE CATECHOLAMINES, GLUCO-CORTICOIDS

Side effects of the gluco-corticoids:

- Neurons in your brain's cortex and hippocampus become very fragile and endangered, affecting our ability to learn and remember.
- You may experience increased feelings of anxiety, which can trigger the stress response all over again.
- You may experience sleeplessness.
- Your cognitive performance is impaired.
- Your thyroid function is suppressed.
- Blood sugar imbalances occur.
- Your bone density decreases.
- Your amount of muscle tissue decreases.
- Your blood pressure rises.
- Your immune system is suppressed.
- Your inflammatory response is suppressed.
- Wounds and torn tissues like muscle fibers repair more slowly.
- Your level of abdominal fat increases, which is associated with a host of diseases and health problems.
- A fatty hump develops between the shoulder blades. This condition is a sign of Cushing's disease.
- Fat cells in general expand.
- Your levels of "bad" cholesterol (LDL) increase and your levels of "good" cholesterol (HDL) decrease.

Some of the side effects of both of the floods of hormones are:

- Compromised immune system.
- Blood pressure spikes.
- Lack of nutrients to your cells.
- Mood swings.
- Bursts of energy followed by fatigue.
- Acidic environment which enhances cancer and bacteria growth.

When you look at all of these lists of side effects, what ones have you experienced? What ones do you want to prevent?

All chronic mental and physical disease is either directly caused by stress hormones or made worse by them. If you have a particular genetic predisposition to a particular disease, science is now showing that you have much more power over whether or not that disease will manifest for you, and preventing stress hormone release is at the top of the list for experiencing your greatest potential for well-being.

When we are under the influence of stress hormones, we might as well slap an out-of-order sign on our foreheads!



EXERCISE 1: WHAT SIDE-EFFECTS OF THE STRESS RESPONSE DO YOU NOTICE?

What do you notice about yourself when you feel stressed? Where do feel tension?
What side effects have you experienced?

Think of someone you work closely with. How does stress present in them?

Now think of someone close to you personally. How do you know they are stressed?

THE PRESSURE-FREE METHOD

There are three simple steps to The Pressure-Free Method: Targets, Triggers, Tools and the Ten-Second Solution. From a resting heart rate, it takes 10 seconds before your brain can tell your heart rate to rise and to release the first flood of stress hormones.

Once the stress hormone cycle begins, it can take up to **nine hours for males and up to 24 hours for females** to dissipate all of these hormones out of the cells. This is simply too long to compromise our ability to perform, our health and our behavior.

The only way to truly de-stress is to stop the release of these hormones. Anything else, like most of the things you read about in articles on reducing stress, is simply a band-aid approach and often a waste of time. In fact, instead of having to do things like exercise, yoga, meditation, prayer to de-stress, you will get to experience these things at a much deeper and impactful level of enjoyment when you are practicing The Pressure-Free Method.

We will always experience challenges, stressors, triggers in our lives. But what we don't have to do is release an over-abundance of stress hormones that affect our mental and physical health and performance.

Here are the three steps:

- **Targets:** clarifying what you want and don't want for your health, your wealth, your relationships.
- **Triggers:** expanding awareness and identifying what might cause your stress response.
- **Tools** and the Ten Second Solution: how to easily interrupt the release of stress hormones.



1 Targets

Define your aims, goals, or what you want to change.

Targets. What are you aiming for? What goals, aspirations, dreams, or visions do you have for yourself, for those you love, for your life? What would you like to shift or change that isn't working for you?

When I began performance coaching, this first step was not explicitly a part of my process. But as I observed the progress of my clients, I decided that it was important for us to get clear about what they truly wanted for themselves. With that clarity, it was as if their targets fueled them to accelerate steps 2 and 3 for more success.

I encourage you to dream big. Your past does not define your future. Open yourself to the hope and possibility that you can create a beautiful future. If anyone would have told me that my eczema and dense fibrous breast tissue I'd had for decades would heal in just eight weeks, I would have said it was impossible. But that and many other things changed for me when I used Pressure-Free on myself!

What do you desire? What would be incredible for you? What would you love to let go of? Here are some possibilities to get you started.

Performance targets may include:

- Financial goals. Promotions.
- Athletic performance.
- Cognitive performance.
- Skills and talents.
- How you perform throughout your day.

Health targets may include:

- Mental wellness.
- Physical wellness.
- Improved sleep.
- Less illness and disease.
- Fewer colds and flus.
- Fewer allergies.
- Improved digestion.
- Improved fertility and libido.
- Disease prevention.
- Less tension.
- Faster healing from injury and surgery.

Relationship targets may include:

- Less loneliness or isolation.
- Reduced social anxiety.
- Improved intimacy with partner.
- Deeper connection to family.
- Improved friendships.
- Better work environment with co-workers.
- Less volatile reactions with those whose opinion differs from your own.

EXERCISE 2: WHAT ARE YOUR TARGETS?

List what is top-of-mind that you would like to see come to fruition. What do you really want (or not want) in terms of your performance, your health, your behavior, your emotions, and your relationships?

TRIGGERS

ANGRY, ANNOYED, ANXIOUS, AFRAID, ASHAMED



2 Recognize your triggers

Triggers. Step 2 of the Pressure-Free Method is to identify what causes you to trigger the stress response. It is usually because you are sensing or feeling something.

What causes you to feel annoyed or angry? Anxious or afraid? Ashamed or abused? Argumentative? Here are some possible triggers that you may want to become more aware of:

- A medical appointment.
- Receiving a diagnosis.
- Receiving health test results.
- Needing a stress test done.
- Someone near you is ill.
- A chronic pain you have.
- An injury.
- Watching the news about health.
- Health advertisements.
- Needing to take medicine.
- Knowing the side effects of medicines.
- Speaking or performing in front of others.
- Someone crying or upset.
- Noises.
- Sounds.
- Smells.
- Tastes.
- Touch or how things feel.
- Change in environment.
- Seeing someone else get hurt.
- Making a mistake.
- Under-performing.
- The weather. Too hot. Too cold.
- Driving in traffic.
- Traveling.
- Feeling like a failure.
- Get yelled at.
- Feeling mis-understood.
- Not meeting expectations.
- An upcoming event.
- Memory of a time you failed.
- Being late.
- Not sleeping well.
- Taking any sort of test.
- Not being included.
- Comparing yourself to others.
- Feeling strange about food.
- Food allergies.
- Food compulsions.
- Being overweight.



EXERCISE 3: IDENTIFY TRIGGERS ANGRY, ANNOYED, ANXIOUS, AFRAID, ASHAMED

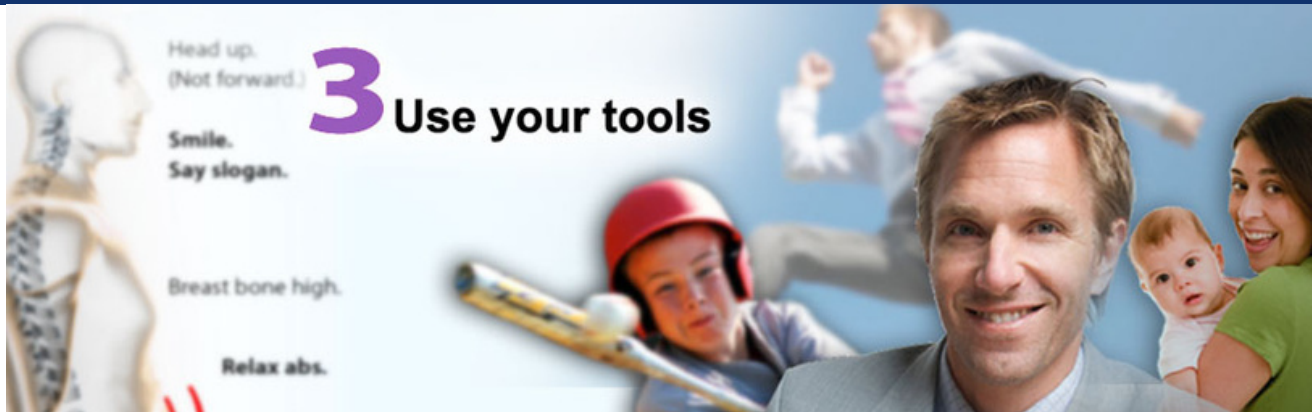
What triggers can you identify?

Think of someone you work closely with. What are their triggers?

Now think of someone close to you personally. What are their triggers?

TOOLS

THE TEN-SECOND SOLUTION



Tools. The third step is to interrupt the stress response before the first flood of hormones can release.

From a resting heart rate, it takes about ten seconds for your brain, heart, and adrenal glands to make the connection that you need to release stress hormones to mobilize fat and glucose and fight or run away.

What can you do in that 10-second interval to prevent the release of the hormones? In this course, I'll be showing you dozens of ways you can interrupt the stress response. I refer to these ways as tools. You can imagine strapping on a tool belt, like the one below, and loading up your tools to protect you from stress, anger, anxiety, and overwhelm each day. Some of my clients sleep with their imaginary belt on, too!



The tools that I will share with you fall into three categories: Body tools, Mind tools, and life-design tools.

You can use each tool on its own, or combine tools into systems. The tool I will share at the end of this session to help you get started is a combination tool.

To be able to use your tools in time, you must notice the early onset of these emotions.

Here are some signs:

- Tension in your shoulders, jaw, forehead, or any other area.
- Sinking feeling in your stomach.
- Twitching in any body part.
- Racing heart rate.
- Change in your tone of voice, posture, or facial expression.
- Biting your fingernails, pens, pencils.
- Jiggling your leg.
- Furrowing your brow.
- Negative thoughts.
- Complaining.
- Blaming.

TOOLS

THE TEN-SECOND SOLUTION

Your Starter Tool: The Celebration Ferris Wheel.

Every time you feel one of the “A” emotions start to well up in your body, imagine a small Ferris wheel right in front of you. Put your hands on one of the cars of the Ferris wheel and push it up toward the sky! The spinning is representative of the energy of your life.

In his book *Good to Great*, Jim Collins says that successful companies create positive momentum by celebrating even the smallest incremental gains. Want you to celebrate that you noticed a trigger, even if you still release stress hormones. It will get easier for you to interrupt the stress response with greater awareness.

This tool has been very effective for my clients, and here are some reasons why:

- It is a gross motor motion which allows your brain to create new neural pathways, making it easier to break a habit or create a new one.
- It will probably make you smile. A smile keeps neurotransmitters flowing in your brain that allow you to think well.
- It improves your posture, which gives your brain a sense of confidence and helps you get up and over the situation so that you can find solutions.

Try pushing your Celebration Ferris Wheel, and leave your arms in the air for a moment. Then bring them down slowly without moving your ribs, and you will notice that your heart is open and your head is up, just two of the many body tools I show my clients.



Once you keep pushing your imaginary Ferris wheel and interrupt the stress response, you'll start to notice some subtle changes. Then, while you are sleeping, your body will be able to refresh, regenerate, and rejuvenate, and the glymphatic system in your brain can do its work, resulting in a deep Delta-wave, REM sleep.

In my coaching programs, I share over fifty ways to interrupt the stress response because our habits of reaction are complex and it can take a variety of tools to experience a complete break-through day where you haven't triggered the stress response at all. The method is simple, but it took you years to create your habits, so be patient and gentle with yourself.

The way stress affects you, and the triggers you experience are very unique, which is why I encourage you to "play" with these concepts. It's easy to try too hard, and that will trigger the stress response. Just play!

If you found this information about how the stress response of use, and you'd like to go deeper, we can have a conversation about what that looks like. Individuals, families, and teams of all sizes can benefit.

You can book a complimentary coaching session with me and check out my site at:

ElleIngalls.com
or e-mail me at
Elle@Pressure-Free.com



Elle Ingalls helps you break the stress cycle and experience your full potential. She draws on her experience as a performance coach, speaker, author, symphony executive, professional musician, athletic coach, community leader, and parent of three grown sons.

She holds three degrees from the University of Michigan (two music degrees and an MBA) where she won the Branstrom Freshman Prize, was the first woman in the orchestral conducting program, and was a 3-year member of the Varsity 8 crew that won a silver medal at the Head of Charles Regatta.