

Discovering Your StressType

... your personalized pathway from stress to wellness

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Because people are different

Are you a Drifter, a Speed Freak, or perhaps a Loner when it comes to handling stress? Actually there are six StressTypes. Soon you'll know which you are. And, that's important. Having your personalized prescription for handling stress – not a one-size-fits-all plan – is a key to keeping stress where you want it ... energizing your lifestyle, not draining it.

And, best of all, my advice is based in the 24 years' on-going research I originated with Dr. Hans Selye, known internationally as "the father of the stress field".

In 1980, Dr. Selye invited me to do post-doctoral studies with him. We decided to focus on two research questions he knew we both shared ...

1. Do any of the much touted stress and wellness techniques actually work?
and
2. Since people are quite different in how they become vulnerable to stress build-up, do different people need different wellness strategies?

The answer to both questions was a scientifically solid Yes. First, we discovered there are five basic, proven stress control skills which should, in the proper personalized mix, be in everyone's wellness toolkit. In descending order of their overall power, these vital skills are (1) clarifying your personal values and daily satisfiers; (2) being able to relax-at-will, anywhere, any time; (3) developing rewarding relationships; (4) high performance nutrition; and (5) essential exercise.

Answering our second question, we found that many people who started with the wrong skill actually increased their stress. For example, many in the Worry Wart StressType found that our nutritional guidelines just gave them more "food for worry". Their most successful prescription actually started with cognitive relaxation methods followed by skills to clarify personal values and goals. These two interventions accounted for well over 70% of their stress control progress. Only later were they prepared to beef up their resilience under stress by applying our high performance nutrition advice. Similarly, trying to teach Speed Freaks how to relax too early in our program led a number to drop out of skills training. The very thought of sometimes slowing down was acutely anxiety provoking for them. Where you start your wellness journey is vitally important !

To recap 24 years' research with 89,000 over-stressed Canadians and Americans, here's what we've learned. If you want a stress control program giving you deeply rooted personalized results, with no time wasted on false starts ... on what might work for someone else, but not for you, then ...

1. Personalize your from-stress-to-wellness strategy to match your dominant StressType, focusing on the two skills you most need. They will give you 65+% of your progress.
2. Later, focus on your secondary StressType for the other 35%.
3. Follow our advice on which of your two skills you should start with first.
4. Use “autogenic technology” to reprogram your body~mind habits [i.e. autogenic relaxation + visualization + affirmation methods].

The science underlying your StressType

On the strength of Dr. Selye’s reputation, by 1980 the Institute’s training programs had a waiting list totaling near 1400 individuals from as far away as California and Italy, as well as Toronto. Based on pre-screening, in late 1980 we began screening groups of 40 applicants to our Vitality Quotient skills training. After being profiled on our Stress Inventory System questionnaire, receiving a complete medical exam, and being tested on a five-factor Body Age Index, we selected those who, while not on continuing major medication, did qualify as (a) chronically stressed and as (b) showing a body age of at least 8 years older than their birth date age.

These research subjects then received six ½-days training in 15 of the then widely accepted stress management skills. Upon completion, each subject selected those three skills, for ongoing practice, which they believed would work best for them. Armed with a daily Action Diary, they returned to normal life, supported by twice-a-month 20-minute telephone coaching sessions with one of our staff. Four months and, then eight months later they returned to the Institute for detailed de-briefs plus measurements of their progress on a panel of outcome variables, including:

- ◆ physiological measures of stress reactivity and recovery rate
- ◆ psychological measures of (inter)personal stress
- ◆ immune system strength
- ◆ full medical exam, including lab work
- ◆ Body Age Index
- ◆ visits to family doctor; work absences; prescription drug use
- ◆ plus ten other factors

The six StressTypes, the six clusters of traits that make people so very different in their response to stress, lay waiting to be discovered in the mountains of screening data we had collected by 1988 on over 6400 subjects. You’ll likely recognize yourself as you meet the StressTypes, and their prescriptions, in just several minutes. For a more precise self-profile, use our mini-VQ test, at no cost, by visiting the Finding Vitality Introductory Program at the Institute’s online Stress OASIS ...www.stresscanada.org

Which skills work best for who became solidly clear as we analyzed the “four and eight months later” data from our subjects’ outcome factors. Some (9%) had dropped out within several months; others (34%) had made significant progress; while others (57%) had outstanding results in reducing both their stress and their body age scores. For the science-minded, “outstanding” meant scores showing greater than one full standard deviation improvement.

Which skills made the difference? Within each of the six StressTypes, we compared the most outstanding individuals against their least successful counterparts. The results ... the skills making the biggest differences ... are summarized as “focus for action” as you “Meet the StressTypes” below. But, first, what exactly are the results you can achieve when you focus on your personalized StressType?

Results – Lower stress, slower aging

Between 1988 and 1993, each of the 3224 new participants in our Vitality Quotient training program were taking action on their completely individualized prescriptions, targeting their primary and secondary StressTypes. You can imagine our pleasure, and theirs, when they returned for their four and eight months later check-ups. Here are the most important improvements we tracked with them.

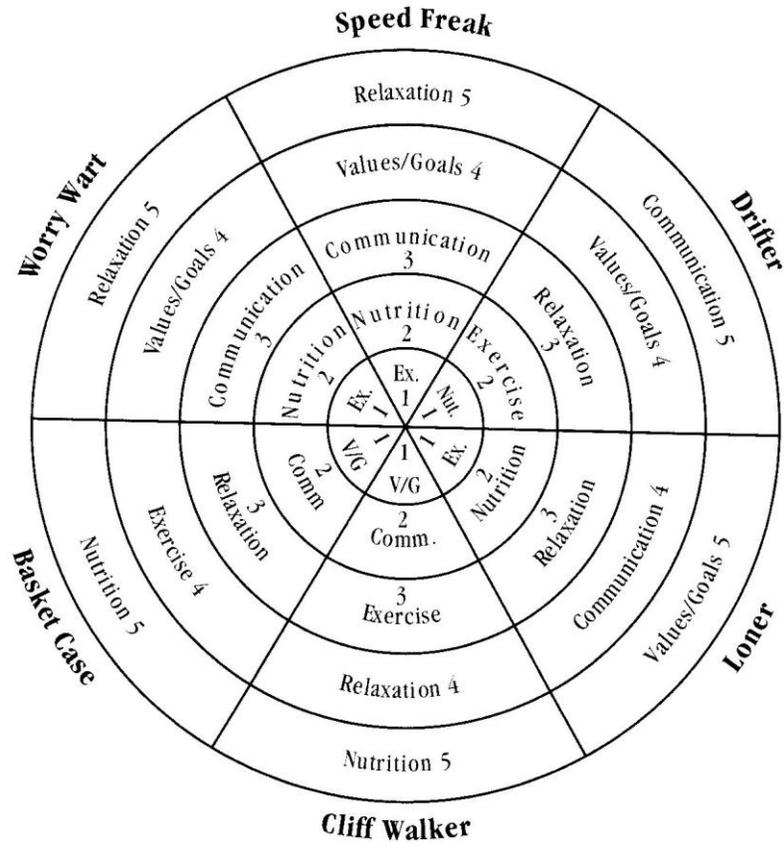
<i>Progress at ...</i>	<u>At 4 Months</u>	<u>At 8 Months</u>
Body age decrease	3.5 years	11.4 years
Days absent from work decrease	42%	56%
Doctor's office visit decrease	28%	53%
Below target blood pressure	51%	91%
Immunoglobulin A increase	24%	31%
T cells increase	21%	28%
Triglycerides within target range	43%	64%
Comfort with self [6 factors] increase	41%	62%
Depressed / anxious mood improvement	32%	68%
Stress hyper-reactivity down **	41%	49%
Stress recovery time down **	28%	38%
Ability to relax at will increase **	17%	37%

** based on EMG and GSR physical measures

Knowing and, then, acting on your unique StressType make-up makes a big difference; not just in superior and lasting results, but even more so on your ability to focus your self-management on your top priorities. “Getting more bang for my wellness buck”, is how one New York City lady described the time she invested in travelling to Toronto.

And, this greater efficiency from helping people focus in on their unique StressType action plan also shows up in our workplace training. Rather than having to sit through a full-day workshop, waiting for the “that’s for me” pieces, corporate employees now attend a motivating 90-minute briefing, complete their V.Q. profile online, and then sign up for the two 90-minute skills training classes they most need. Results are better, and time off the job is cut almost in half.

PRESCRIPTION WHEEL



Meet the StressTypes

To give you a quick, hands-on familiarity with them, I'm going to introduce each of the six StressTypes this way ... (1) how you can recognize them; (2) which two skills are proven to help them best control their stress and wellbeing; (3) root causes that make them tick; plus (4) key actions resulting in lower stress and slower aging.

(1) The Speed Freak

Recognition signs

- ◆ Constant foot to the floor on their "stress accelerator"
- ◆ Borderline workaholic or perfectionist
- ◆ Everything must get 110% effort, no matter how (un)important it is
- ◆ Rapid speech; interrupt others frequently
- ◆ Periods of deep fatigue after all-out effort

Two skills best for Speed Freaks – First, clarify the life goals you value most, and *then* learn autogenic relaxation to control how you invest energy in those goals.

Root causes -- More often than not, Speed Freaks are victims of faulty learning. They have learned, quite correctly, that success requires effort. But, they have turned this around, coming to believe that "As long as I keep on giving 110% effort, sooner or later I'm bound to be successful". And, when they don't experience feelings of success or lasting satisfaction, in work or personal life, they simply turn up the heat. They speed even more; drive even harder ... expending ever more effort, meaning more stress.

To break this stress-driven cycle of ever-increasing speed, it is obvious that the Speed Freak needs to learn how to slow down ... at least some of the time when the speed is counter-productive. They need to gain greater control over their own stress accelerator. But, for most Speed Freaks, just the thought of slowing down is anxiety provoking or even frightening. It certainly isn't motivating.

Focus for action -- So, to achieve the slow-down-sometimes aim, to gain fuller control over your stress accelerator, a little self-management jujitsu is required. Much research has shown that Speed Freaks become strongly motivated to learn how to relax only when they see how this skill would give them more control, or more of a competitive edge in many business or personal life (e.g. sports) situations.

Therefore, the starting point for most Speed Freaks is to get a more precise handle on "what's really important", and on which situations are truly worth all-out effort. By doing this, by clarifying their values and goals, the Speed Freak sorts out which prizes in life are really worth pursuing at full bore. Second, they quickly place a high value on "not sweating the small stuff" ... on going slower in those situations, on conserving their energy for what really matters (e.g. for a key meeting; or for time with my kids). And, third, control of the stress accelerator becomes a top priority when they see its value in winding down from a busy schedule so as to be more fully "present", not preoccupied, in a highly valued situation later in the day.

At this point, Speed Freaks become the best students, although a little impatient, of how to relax at will. In fact, they often give copies of our Autogenic Relaxation tape to close friends and business associates.

(2) The Worry Wart

Recognition signs

- ◆ Have trouble turning off their thoughts
- ◆ Drive themselves at high RPM, but rarely put themselves in gear for action
- ◆ Paralysis by analysis; useless wheel spinning worry
- ◆ Frequent anxiety; tension headaches
- ◆ Slow to recover or to come down from high-stress situations

Two skills best for Worry Warts – The first step is psychological relaxation or reframing, *then* supported by clarifying values and goals.

Root causes -- Typical Worry Warts spend as much as 30% of their time and energy just worrying. And, perhaps surprisingly, they don't worry about an endless list of things, usually they are preoccupied with from three to five worry situations.

The effectiveness of the two top priority skills recommended above arises because they address and, then, progressively reduce the central driving force in chronic worry ... namely, worry is usually done as a substitute for taking action. Actually, worry is a form of action. And endless mental rehearsal of "What should I do IF ...?" is used by Worry Warts to convince themselves they are actually moving towards a solution ... by worrying about the various ways their situation is likely to turn out badly. Energy is spent uselessly; hence the drain on vitality.

Focus for action – Here's how the Worry Wart's two top skills work for them. Psychological relaxation means, first, becoming very specific about one of your recurrent worries, really nailing it down by itemizing very concretely all the terrible things that you imagine may happen to you IF the situation you are worried about actually does turn out badly for you.

And, then, as your second step, honestly answering these three questions. Writing down your answers is a very good idea.

1. (a) Can I change the situation I'm worried about? No ___ Yes ___(how?)
 (b) If I can change it, will I actually do that? No ___ Yes ___ (how?)
2. If the situation does turn out badly, what are the worst REALISTIC effects on me?
3. Assuming it does turn out badly, what's my plan? How will I handle that?

Practice using these three questions until they become second nature for you.

For Worry Warts, clarifying values and goals means getting very specific and clear about what you want or who you want to be [e.g. an honest employee; a caring parent] in the situation you're worried about. This is effective in several ways. First, it provides the additional motivation you'll need to follow through on the actions you identify for yourself in the psychological relaxation exercise. And, second, because much worry can arise when trying to keep too many options open, clarifying what's important to you will help to sort through your options, shutting down those that aren't very worthwhile.

(3) The Drifter

Recognition signs

- ◆ Tend to shotgun their energy across many options
- ◆ In perpetual “mid-life crisis”
- ◆ Often feel dissatisfied; that life is not “adding up”; or that something is seriously missing in their lives
- ◆ Doubt their existing goals; don’t buy into anything very deeply

Two skills best for Drifters – First, focus on more self-affirming relationships, *then* follow up by pinpointing the satisfying experiences you value most in those relationships.

Root cause -- There are two basic types of Drifters. The first, Drifter(1), dabbles in many pursuits. The other, Drifter(2), typically has one all-consuming involvement ... usually work ... within an otherwise quite barren lifestyle.

The Drifter(1) often seems like a walking paradox. By shotgunning their energy across many involvements, trying to keep all their options open, they typically don’t explore or develop any of them in any depth. So, in effect, they often have no personally meaningful, deeply involving options at all. They become a prisoner of their own freedom ... that’s the paradox.

The Drifter(1)’s feelings of low vitality come only secondarily from the very considerable amounts of energy (i.e. stress) they spend across the many possibilities in their life. More so, their vitality is low because they are experiencing so little satisfaction in return from their sizable across-the-board stress investments.

The Drifter(2) has usually been the victim of a slow seduction (of their energy), often beginning early in life. In the early days, one activity (usually work, dating or school) provided relatively high levels of satisfaction, security, meaning, etc. for moderate investments of time and energy. Increasing amounts of effort in, and reliance on this activity, of course, were followed with less and less attention to other areas. As life progressed, returns on energy invested gradually reduced, leading the Drifter(2) simply to try harder, with yet fewer outside interests being pursued. It’s only as this downward trend line in satisfaction becomes painfully undeniable that the Drifter(2) will take action to regain more balanced fulfillment.

Focus for action -- Your two top priority skills are (i) developing one or two more self-affirming relationships, and then (ii) clarifying your values and goals ... in work or personal life. The following synopsis of these two skills-in-action applies equally for both types of Drifter.

While their beginning to make committed lifestyle choices based on clarifying their values and goals might seem the obvious starting point in a Drifter’s action plan, our research shows that it isn’t. Most Drifters strongly resist getting clear about what really matters ... i.e. about what will give them deeper fulfillment.

Only those Drifters who, as an essential first step, become more fully and actively involved in one or two important relationships actually seem to possess the

perseverance and the social support that is required to get them to settle down and then to make some more self-fulfilling choices.

So, the Drifter's starting point is (a) to seriously recognize the pleasure they get, or used to get, from spending time with a compatible someone [not another Drifter], and then (b) to plan the early steps in their action plan around one or two enjoyable activities that really benefit from having a partner.

A real flesh and blood partner gives both the stimulation and the feedback the Drifter needs in order to realize (a) that some activities are more enjoyable than others and, then (b) that they are going to have to set some priorities and make some action choices if they want this pleasure on a regular basis. Only at this point does clarifying their values and goals become motivating for the Drifter.

(4) The Loner

Recognition signs

- ◆ Difficulty in giving or receiving easy, relaxed closeness or intimate sharing
- ◆ Feel uncomfortable with others; often masked with a smile
- ◆ Feel lonely, often unfulfilled in relationships
- ◆ Feel alone in carrying burdens or worries
- ◆ Often drop out of or cancel social events at the last minute

Two skills best for Loners -- First, clarify what you value and truly enjoy in work or personal life, *then* cultivate relationships which affirm what you value.

Root cause -- Because they rely so little on others and, therefore, tend to receive less support from others, Loners suffer from “relationship malnutrition”. While the “keep a low profile” emotional habits of Lone Rangers can help to avoid some stress, the supportive quality of our relationships is an even more important resource for reducing stress. The key driver of stress is high levels of uncertainty ... uncertainties about what our options really are, about what we should do, about how well we’re handling things, and about what support we can count on in tough situations. And much of the information and feedback that keeps those uncertainties at a healthy level come from our key relationships ... at work and in personal life. Loners, in short, tend to carry a much heavier load of stress than their more socially nourished counterparts.

Becoming a Loner is usually a slow, often lifelong process. And, it’s always a self-reinforcing cycle, because (a) relationships form and deepen around the values and interests that two or more people bring to them, and because (b) most of us become clear about our values and interests in the process of relating with others. Therefore many Loners find themselves caught in an ever-deepening Catch-22. In short, most Loners tend to be fuzzy about what activities they really enjoy, so they have less reason to seek out partners for any activities. Having, therefore, few shared experiences, they tend to remain unclear about their real preferences ... which just might involve other people. So the next cycle in the Loner’s Catch-22 begins ... they become even more likely to remain socially on the fringe.

Focus for action -- You might think that the linchpin solution is simply for the Loner to set about (re-)cultivating one or two close relationships in their family or with friends. It isn’t.

Developing such relationships is, in fact, the second skillful step. The first skill to be honed is to clarify one’s core values and, then, the goals which best express those values. The starting point for Loners is to pinpoint one or two experiences or activities in work or personal life which (a) they know from past experience have provided real satisfaction, and (b) require someone else’s involvement for fullest satisfaction.

Because Loners are often skeptical, or sometimes anxious, about enjoying things with others, it’s important that they get clearly focused on and strongly motivated by the satisfaction they will get from sharing one of their valued experiences. Creating a short-list of “Things I really enjoy doing that would involve someone else” is difficult for many

of us, especially for Loners. So, to get started, here are several examples from other recovering Loners:

- ◆ Read the (auto)biography of someone you admire or find interesting, and try to pinpoint what role any of their relationships played in their life. Share what you discover with someone you feel comfortable with.
- ◆ Pick a charity or community activity you think is worthwhile, and volunteer some of your time (not your money) to help out in an activity that involves other people.
- ◆ If you know an elderly person who might be lonely, give them a little of your time and company.

(5 & 6) The Basket Case and The Cliff Walker

Recognition signs

Basket Cases

- + In constant “energy crisis”
- + Energy often fades by mid-day
- + Frequent aches / pains in muscles or joints
- + Sometimes depressed; feel most activities are too much to do

Cliff Walkers

- + A walking life insurance company “risk factor chart” ... high blood pressure; smoking; alcohol misuse; no exercise
- + Believe “It will never happen to me”
- + Usually a somewhat worn appearance
- + Difficulty sustaining energy

While the secondary StressTypes for Basket Cases and for Cliff Walkers are usually different, I’ve combined these two Types here because the start-up prescriptions for both are very similar.

Two skills best for Basket Cases and Cliff Walkers -- The first foundation skill is high performance nutrition, *then* supported by essential exercise.

Root causes -- Feelings of low energy, more frequent minor illnesses, or aches, pains and other “run down” feelings can arise from a number of interacting sources, including poor nutrition, sleep or cardio-respiratory fitness, as well as from impairment on any of the other four vital factors at the heart of your secondary StressType.

For example, a low score on the factors of Control-of-Stress or Worry Control means that you are relying too frequently on the high octane hormones of stress to drive your activities. If this is habitual, you will also experience longer and longer periods of fatigue because (a) all body systems [e.g. digestive, immune, etc.] function less and less efficiently under chronic high stress; and (b) your body’s self-protective hormones will periodically induce fatigue-like time-outs in order to repair and reverse stress-driven inefficiencies.

Alternatively, low scores on the factors of Fulfillment or Personal Relationships can also lead to stress-based fatigue experiences. Low scores on either factor are invariably associated with feelings of frustration, deprivation, and anxious or depressed mood. All these drive the person to “try harder”, to generate more stress until fatigue or illness inevitably set in.

Focus for action -- To regain peak vitality, the action plan for these two StressTypes is usually best pursued in two stages.

First, rebuild a reliable store of energy on tap, focusing on (i) high performance nutrition and then, within two to six weeks, build in (ii) essential exercise to improve cardio-respiratory fitness.

And, then, when both these factors are solidly re-established, you should learn simple energy conservation techniques to protect against future overdrafts on your energy account. Daily take-a-break sessions with a 10-minute autogenic relaxation tape are a

vitaly important tool for re-programming the body to a more even keel biochemistry. Basket Case and Cliff Walkers' stress hormones have become locked in at chronically high levels because they rely on adrenaline so frequently to compensate for the inadequate energy they get from (a) their diets and from (b) typically inefficient cardiorespiratory systems.

High performance nutrition does not require mega-doses of anything. In fact, such radical solutions almost always fail radically. Rather, it requires consistent practice of the following eight vital guidelines. While none of these guidelines is miraculous, their combined effects on feelings of energy and on resistance to colds, flu etc. are very impressive.

- (a) Eat a variety
- (b) Of unprocessed and little processed foods
- (c) With high nutrient density
- (d) In moderate amounts
- (e) During at least three regular meals a day, definitely including breakfast
- (f) Combined with smart snacking patterns
- (g) While drinking at least six to eight glasses of fluid daily, with at least four of them being water
- (h) And taking a broad-based vitamin-mineral supplement.

As you phase in your exercise program, make sure it is realistic and truly motivating for you. Be sure it builds in the “seven S’s”, namely that it targets: stamina; suppleness; strength; stress recovery; self-image; sensory pleasure; and social stimulation.

Now, you're on your way. While it takes years of self-neglect to become a Basket Case or Cliff Walker, within two months you'll have all the energy you need to make solid progress on turning around the strain drains coming from your secondary StressType.

Harnessing your StressType

As you get to know your StressType, and then begin personalizing your stress control, you will discover you now have the most powerful success factor needed in any wellness plan ... stronger, more focused motivation. You can now pinpoint your unique vulnerabilities. And, by seeing your stumbling blocks, you become more energized to transform them into stepping stones for action.

