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Possibilities: Take chances

March 2015 Newsletter



The many faces
 of chance

Stress stamina:
 Your key to resilience

Fear: Friend or foe?

e-Thoughts —
 In like a lion...



“Chances” come to us in many ways over the course of a lifetime. But the real question is: What do you do when a chance is there for the taking? **More...**

Experiencing stress is normal. Improving your “stress stamina” can help you manage and even thrive while coping with stressors. **More...**

Fear can keep you from moving forward. Or it can be the very thing that motivates you to confront the challenges of life. **More...**

Life is unpredictable. Sometimes that’s scary. But it can also be thrilling. **More...**

Getting help

Confidential support, information and resource referrals are available for a variety of concerns — both work and personal. Call for assistance for you, your household members or your adult children under age 26, whether they live at home or not. Call or visit us online today!

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The many faces of chance

March 2015 Newsletter



[Return to index page](#)

When you hear the word “chance,” what comes to your mind?

- **“Taking a chance”** by stepping outside your comfort zone?
- **“Getting a chance”** to try something new, scary or exciting?
- **“Chancing it”** by holding your breath and taking a leap of faith?

Chance can mean lots of things. Over the course of a lifetime, it can come your way in many forms. But the real question is...

What do you do when chance appears?

Chance can create stress and suspense. You don’t exactly know what it will lead to or how it will turn out.

Can you remember a time when you backed off from a chance to try something, go somewhere or meet someone new? Maybe it seemed too risky. Maybe it was out of your comfort zone. Maybe the timing wasn’t right.

Who hasn’t shied away from an opportunity at some time? And who doesn’t have a few second thoughts about certain “roads not taken”?

What’s so stressful about taking a chance?

Taking a chance means venturing into the unknown. This can be frightening. Even adventurous souls may find certain chances beyond their risk tolerance.

What’s interesting is that some people who are open to physical risks (like skydiving or extreme skiing) may be very hesitant to take emotional risks. They may find new relationships scarier than bungee jumping.

And the opposite can be true, of course. People with lots of interpersonal skills may be scared stiff to put themselves into physically risky situations. What makes people so different?

How you see risk is highly personal

Your perception of risk affects how you react. Perhaps you come from a long line of folks who’d rather sit on the sidelines than jump into the fray. Or maybe you’ve taken risks that didn’t pay off — or even caused you pain or harm. Perhaps it’s a little of both.

Whatever the reason, you can learn new ways to size up, approach and consider taking chances — if you want to. You don’t have to become the famous daredevil Evel Knievel. But, if you decide to take some measured chances, you could change your life in meaningful ways.

When and how to start

If you’re completely satisfied with all aspects of your life, it can be hard to take a risk. But, to be honest, how often are we 100% satisfied — without any wish for improvement?

If you take a chance, you may feel you’re putting everything you know at risk and losing control. But, in fact, our lives are not really in our control. For better or worse, our lives can change in an instant.

Read on for articles about boosting your stress hardiness and learning to face fear. Both relate to your decisions about taking chances. See what you can learn and apply to your own life.



Stress stamina: Your key to resilience

March 2015 Newsletter

Experiencing stress in life is the norm, not the exception. The key to managing it is to develop “stress stamina”—the ability to endure stressors, bounce back and realize that you can learn and grow from every situation.¹

Improving your stress stamina can help you manage and even thrive while taking chances and handling other pressures in your life.

Steps to resiliency

1. Recover. After a stressful event, you need to get your sense of balance and routine back. To begin healing, take a break.

Plan a short getaway or just make time to “chill out” at home. Even mini-breaks like going to the movies can help you gain perspective. Other good stress reducers include exercise and sharing with others.

2. Refocus. Try to step back and see “the big picture.” Take time to think about what’s happened, why and what it may mean. Work on finding the positive side of change.

You might have mixed feelings. For example, if you’ve been promoted to a leadership role, you might be happy and also nervous about managing a staff.

You may feel sad or angry about having to let go of people and routines you know. All these feelings are valid. Work on identifying — and accepting — all your reactions.

3. Regenerate. Your body needs time to mend after stress. Give yourself permission to rest. Eat regularly. Have some fun and get support by connecting with new people or old friends.

Stress: It’s an old (ancient!) story

Stress is a response your body gives to any demand made upon it.

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44.22.903.1-ARFLM D (03/15)

Return to index page

Your body responds in many ways. Hormones such as adrenalin surge. Your heartbeat and blood pressure increase. Your blood sugar rises.

These effects — unchanged for thousands of years — helped our cave-dwelling relatives survive. This “fight-or-flight” response helped them run away faster or fight harder against the dangers (or stressors) of their daily lives.²

Modern-day stress: both positive and negative

Today we may not need to hunt or fight for food and shelter. But we still have stress. Some stressors are negative like traffic jams, difficult jobs or the breakup of relationships.

Stressors can also be positive. Think of events like having a baby, winning the lottery or completing a project. These are happy events, yet they can still cause stress.

The long-term effects of stress

Your body reacts the same way to positive and negative stressors. And chronic stress can be harmful. You may feel tired, depressed or anxious. You may have physical symptoms such as head-, stomach- or backaches.

Use stress to your advantage

Stress is like body temperature: If it’s too low or too high for a long time, it can threaten your wellbeing. But the right balance can keep you strong. You can use stress energy to meet life’s challenges, experiences and goals.

You can’t escape stress, but you can build stress stamina by taking good care of yourself. That way, you’ll be better able to accept and master the challenges in your life.

¹<http://dictionary.reference.com>

²<http://psychology.about.com>

Fear: Friend or foe?

March 2015 Newsletter



[Return to index page](#)

“We have nothing to fear but fear itself.”¹ This famous quote by Franklin D. Roosevelt speaks to the power of fear — as well as your power to beat it.

Fear can be overwhelming. It can paralyze you and keep you from moving forward in life. Yet fear can also be an important teacher. You can make fear the very thing that motivates you to move on and confront the challenges of everyday life.

Facing fear gives you strength

Fear often comes down to this: You worry about losing control or feeling out of control. In either case, you do have the power to find a path through the fear to a place of greater wisdom or insight. Here's how:

- **Monitor your inner dialogue.** We all talk to ourselves. First there's the “inner critic”. This negative internal voice gives you messages like, “How could I be so stupid?”, “No one likes me” or “I'm not smart enough to do this.”

Then there's the “inner compassionate witness”. This is your internal voice that's supportive and kind. When it seems like your compassionate witness has taken a day off, you need to remind yourself that it's equally a part of you. In fact, it's your best friend. Your compassionate witness gives positive messages like, “Nice job!” and “Yes, I can!”

You also give yourself messages about fear like, “I'm afraid of presenting my business idea in front of others at a team meeting because they may not think it's very good.” Or you can tell yourself something much more positive like, “I have a good idea and I bet others would like to hear about it.” Notice the messages you give yourself and see if you can make them more positive.

- **Figure out what the fear is about.** Is your fear reasonable? Or are old messages telling you not to take a risk? Are they voices from your childhood? What (or whose?) beliefs are the fears based on? Are they still relevant to who you are as a capable adult?
- **Test the reality.** If you're afraid of presenting your idea, why not test the reality? Notice what happens when others speak in front of your team. Do they get laughed at or embarrassed? Are their ideas put down?

Thinking through the realities may help you to change your inner dialogue. Now you might think: “I'm going to present my idea at the meeting because it's a good idea, I can do a good job explaining it and my team is open to hearing new thoughts.”

Likewise, check out the facts on other things that frighten you. Once you wrap your mind around them, you may be ready to test your fears.

- **Take sound chances and see where they get you.** Once you're ready to challenge a fear, take a deep breath and try something a little scary. You're likely to learn from your courage and move on to tackle other fears that might be keeping you from achieving all you could!

¹www.brainyquote.com

e-Thoughts — In like a lion...

March 2015 Newsletter



[Return to index page](#)

Our e-Thoughts feature provides close-up views on topics and areas of interest from everyday life.

March is an unpredictable month. “In like a lion, out like a lamb” pretty much says it all. You just don’t know which way the wind is going to blow. Or, as Forrest Gump said in the movie of the same name: “Life is like a box of chocolates. You never know what you’re going to get.”

Sometimes that’s scary. But it can also be thrilling. I’m far from a real risk-taker. Yet there is something quite exciting about not knowing what’s around every corner. For instance:

- **If it weren’t for chance, I would never have met my husband.** I would never have married him — three months after meeting! I might never have had the wonderful life and children I have. Who knows?
- **If not for risk, I might never have started writing.** I might’ve stayed comfortable doing my “just out of school” job. It was stable work. But it lacked the creativity I knew I had somewhere inside.

- **If I hadn’t tried, I wouldn’t know I could teach exercise dance classes.** I was never trained to dance. So taking on aerobic dance classes was a little terrifying. But, oh, so much fun as it turns out!

In other words, if you never take chances, you never know what you can do, where you can go and who you might meet. You never know what you can become.

Of course, I haven’t mentioned the disappointing chances I’ve taken. But we’ve all had those, haven’t we? Those are the times you pick yourself up, dust yourself off and move on.

All in all, I think life would be pretty boring if we only stuck to our ruts and never ventured outside the lines.

Possibilities: *Take chances*

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Monthly Newsletter — March 2015

[Return to index page](#)

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