

HOW TO  
**DE-STRESS**

in *7 Steps*

By Irene Lyon

# Welcome To A New, Stress-Free Day

## What is YOUR favorite stress trigger?

We all have things that get to us, that bring our blood to boil, that slow us down, that make us want to hide, that stress us out in some way, large or small, every day.

Is it one (or all) of the following ...

- Getting cut-off in traffic?
- Nagging worries about paying your bills?
- A fight with your kids or partner?
- Project deadlines at work?
- Old memories that keep triggering you?
- Or, maybe it's something else that's very specific to you?

Here's something I want you to know right away:

Our society today is **not designed to support a low-stress life.**

In fact, our world rewards "success" which often translates into presenting a confident public face while tamping down stresses and fears, pushing through physical exhaustion to achieve, and ignoring our body's stress signals so we can keep "going" and "doing."

Sound familiar?

While it may help us succeed in the short-term, these habits over the long-term ultimately will make us fail – in our health, relationships, work-life, and frankly, in living the life that we desire and deserve.

The stark truth is that stress can kill us. But it doesn't have to.

So congratulations for valuing your health, and your life by taking this first step with me!

You're about to learn that when you deal with stress from the **root cause**, you can experience profound improvement – not only around stress, but in almost every area of your life: your physical health, general well-being, the way you age, and **living every day with more energy, focus, presence, and peace of mind.**

Here's another powerful reality:

**You have the capacity to heal yourself;** your system isn't broken. What you require is a new set of patterns to replace the old, toxic programming that is no longer serving you.

This guide, **How to De-Stress in 7 Steps**, is the beginning of this game-changing process.

So, let's dive in....



*Irene*

## How stress and our survival instincts create toxicity in the body.

Have you heard people talk about the “fight-flight-freeze” response to stress?

The general concept is this: If you were chased by a tiger, your survival responses would mobilize by sending a massive surge of chemicals (namely cortisol and adrenaline) throughout your body to protect you. The same survival protection can kick in when you’re faced with typical daily stresses, whether or not they warrant such an extreme response.

We live in a society that triggers many fight-flight-freeze responses – perhaps not the daily threats to survival that our early ancestors faced (like tigers or woolly mammoths), but triggers that can have debilitating effects on our health over time.

You see, when we have stress in our daily life (too much to do, emotional expression, etc.) and we don’t “let go” of or “come down” from this stress at the physiological level, we get stuck in those fight-flight-freeze responses. When we don’t “come down” (I’ll explain more about this in the 7 steps), then somewhere in our physiology we’re still caught up, unconsciously, in a stress response that happened last week, or last year, or 40 years ago.

**And every day, new stress accumulates in your body, toxic and unreleased, building up, building up, building up.**

**Doesn’t sound healthy, does it?**

**+** *You see, when we have stress in our daily life and we don’t “let go” of, or “come down” from this stress at the physiological level, we get stuck in those fight-flight-freeze responses.*

## We need fight, flight and freeze to survive and we need them to turn off to thrive.

**+** *We need to learn how to stop and re-boot in day-to-day life so that stress doesn't accumulate in our body.*

If a vicious dog is chasing us, we **do** want the fight-flight-freeze response to protect us. After the chase is over, our biology wants us to 'recover,' to come down from the stress response, which means to shake, tremble, cry a bit, feel our body sensations, and then engage back into the external world with awareness to bring the stress response completely down to zero, or baseline.

The problem arises when we *don't* shake, *don't* tremble, *don't* cry, *don't* express our anger, *don't* feel the pain, grief, sadness and all the other emotions associated with an overwhelming event - this seriously screws us up. We need to learn how to stop and re-boot in our day-to-day life so that stress doesn't accumulate in our body.

### **Think about a cup filling up with water.**

If you keep adding water to the cup, it will overflow. It's the same with your nervous system, which is responsible for managing those fight-flight-freeze responses. Keep adding stresses without fully releasing them, and sooner or later the system will be full and start to overflow in the form of symptoms: burnout, chronic pain, weakened immune system, digestive and sleep troubles, fatigue, chronic tension, anxiety, depression, etc.

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### **It comes down to this: burnout is caused by too much stress and by your survival instincts being trapped in your body.**

### **You want the opposite of this overflowing cup.**

When you properly digest and release stress responses that are stuck, your system doesn't fill up with stress. You then get to cultivate space in the system not only to release stored-up stress more easily, but also to have more energy for work, for play, for your relationships and all that you love to do.

The coming out of that stress response *can be* controlled by your higher brain. Your higher brain is the part of your brain that can think and reason - it is pretty much what makes human beings what we are. It's what allows us to create and innovate, to love

and learn, but it can also overpower your more primitive lower brain centers that just want to act, react and protect your well-being.

**What if you learned how to take healthy control of your higher brain, and become a better listener to your lower brain, also sometimes called your “lizard brain”, so that you could metabolize and release stress when it hits you, so it doesn’t become toxic and debilitating?**

This is the crux of my work, and the basis of this guide **How to De-Stress in 7 Steps**.

**Healthy nervous system pathway wiring starts here.**

**+** *Your brain and nervous system, when wired well, and in a very healthy way, do know the difference between an actual tiger chasing you, versus a stressful project deadline that isn't life-threatening.*

Remember how I said that you have the capacity to heal yourself? You’re about to learn the good news (and why I do the work I do). Over many years of study and practice (and my own healing process), I’ve discovered an essential, fundamental link to stress, burnout, pain and disease that is being overlooked in virtually all stress, wellness and self-help literature, as well as most medical and alternative health practices. It’s the foundation of my private practice and my signature online course - *SmartBody SmartMind: A 12-Week Nervous System Reboot*. With it, people have experienced profound, life-changing improvements.

The missing link is this: your brain and nervous system, **when wired well, and in a very healthy way**, do know the difference between an actual tiger chasing you, versus a stressful project deadline that isn’t life-threatening.

When you learn how to listen to your nervous system, and its fight-flight-freeze responses, you will also learn how to release stress immediately. When this happens you can take an active role in changing your health, wellness and outlook at this fundamental level.

## So where do you start?

There is no getting around the fact that releasing deeply held stress, as well as rewiring your nervous system pathways to better respond to new stress, takes time. It has taken years (literally from birth) for stress to accumulate in your body, and for the programming in your brain that doesn't cue you to release that stress to develop. Later, I'll tell you about other ways we can work together so that you can go deeper into this powerful work.

But beginning right now – today – you can start to release the stress you come into contact with in day-to-day life.

By using the 7 step process I'm about to share with you, implementing it daily and as needed, you'll be able to fend off new stress from getting trapped in your system.

You'll begin to have the tools you need to approach your daily situations with relaxed alertness, in a more calm and confident manner, and you'll begin to see changes in your life in unexpected and wonderful ways.

Here are the key concepts of the 7 steps:

- It's super important to be able to tune into your body and its inner landscape to know whether or not a survival response that is happening **might not actually be necessary for the situation you're in**. Then your body can know what kind of stress response is needed for that situation.
- **Being present and quieting the mind are key**. So often our dis-ease is caused by our waiting for something awful to happen, when in fact it never will. Rather than focus on the 'what-ifs' in your mind, focus on the **here and now**.
- It's also key to allow yourself to **go through the natural biological process your body needs** to experience, in order to digest and release the stress, including the emotions that may come up.

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For right now, you don't have to know all the whys of how this works. Go with your 'gut' as much as you're able. Trust the process. Even though it seems simple, it's powerful! This will become more evident, the more you practice. Over time, and with a little more apprenticeship, what you're about to learn can become second nature.

## VERY IMPORTANT TIP BEFORE YOU BEGIN

Please remember that for this to be effective, **bringing yourself INTO your body sensations is key** - this isn't just a reflection or thought-based exercise. Your body is what initially feels the stress. What typically happens is your higher brain protects you from feeling uncomfortable sensations in your body, when in fact *the exact opposite* is needed to get on the right pathway to releasing the stress. **It's about feeling, not thinking.** The stress is initially picked up by the body (not the higher brain), so we need to go within the body to let it out. Make sense?

+ *It's about feeling,  
not thinking.*

## OK. Let's begin...

The next time you're in a stressful situation, or you feel you're getting stressed-out, rather than ignoring it and pushing through the stress, give these 7 steps a try.

For now, if you aren't stressed-out, think of something that recently stressed you out. Go within to sense how your body and mind might have responded to this stress and then follow the 7 steps. At the end, go back to the idea of this stressful event, and then see what you notice in your body.

### 1. PAUSE

When you sense you're a bit stressed-out or coming into a stressful situation, STOP what you're doing (if it's safe to do so).

## 2. FEEL IT

Start noticing how stress enters your body. If you aren't sure what to pay attention to, that's OK! Lean in and feel the stress, whatever form it's taking. One of the problems we have is that we want to avoid, ignore or power through stress. Well, as you now know, it's still there and being held in your body. So this is an important step to tuning into your stress so you can respond to it and release it.

As simple as they seem, just doing Steps 1 and 2 - **pausing and feeling** what's going on INSIDE - can make a world of difference for you!

What you might feel here are tensions in the physical body, or some heated emotions such as sadness or anger in response to the stress. This is OK. This is actually really good. When you tap into your body response, and all its shades of emotions (yes, even emotions like rage and disgust) and sensations, you become aware of your stress response from a more nuanced and body-based point of view. Bring the body into this game and actually follow what it wants and you'll have the secret to coming out of your stress.

If tuning into your internal body state feels a little tricky and you can't seem to access any specific sensations or emotions try noticing your connection with your immediate environment. Simply sense your physical body in relation to your surroundings. For example, if you're sitting, just notice the contact between your butt and the chair. If your back is against a chair, sense the pressure and contact you make with your back and the seat. There is no need to change how you're sitting, unless of course you sense the need to re-adjust to make yourself more comfortable. Just notice. If your feet are on the ground, simply pay attention to the pressure of each foot. Same goes for it you're standing.

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### 3. NOTICE ANY SENSATIONS IN YOUR BODY

Noticing and staying present with the often uncomfortable sensations in our body is something we tend to avoid. Most times we try to get rid of the stress by “taking a deep breath” or by thinking about how awful it is and then staying in our head. You need to get out of your mind and thoughts, and into the body sensation that’s actually happening. Don’t avoid or ignore what’s happening – stay with it.

Take a moment to actually sense the physicality of this stress that’s happening to you and where it resides in your body. People often depict this as an energy, heat, or tightness in a certain body area. Common areas that people feel this are the belly, chest, throat and jaw. Often there is an increase in heart rate, or a shallowness of breath; whatever it is that you notice, pay attention to the physicality of it.

### 4. BE SELF-AWARE

Self-awareness is a largely lost skill in our world. Just notice yourself and all that you did in Steps 1-3; it sounds really simple but it can be challenging. Practicing helps it become easier.

As the experience begins to diminish, start to gently touch and squeeze body parts. Maybe rub your hands together as if you are washing them with warm soapy water. Look at your hands as you do this. Really see some details on your skin, your nails, etc. Then do the same with your wrists, elbows, knees and thighs. What this does is returns your body back to you. You’re **re-connecting** and **re-orienting** to your system that just went on major alert mode.

### 5. NOTICE YOUR BREATH

Don’t change it, just notice what it’s doing as opposed to breathing deeply. I know some experts will tell you to breathe deeply to calm down, but you should NOT and

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*If anything, increase the length of your exhale breath.*

here's why: Taking in a deep breath actually increases your heart rate and what you *don't* want is to increase your arousal, right? Rather, just notice your breathing, and wait for it to naturally come down. If anything, increase the length of your *exhale* breath. When we exhale, our heart rate decreases.

## 6. PAUSE AGAIN

More pausing, more self-awareness. Give yourself time to allow the adrenaline level to come down. Imagine it coming down while you pause. Don't rush to the next errand or interaction. Adrenaline is our key stress-response chemical, and even just having the intention of it lowering will make a difference. Seriously, it will!

## 7. ENGAGE

Open your eyes and see the world around you. Say HELLO to your plants and books, or whatever is in front of you. When you do this you're activating a part of your nervous system that detects your current position in the environment. Basically, you're seeing that you're safe and that "no tiger is chasing you." Again, it's about being with what's actually happening.

Take notice of any more changes in your body, such as the belly softening, the jaw loosening, the hands relaxing.

Are there any tears? Think about what you do when you hold back tears after an accident or emotional upset: The mouth tightens, the throat constricts. You're essentially holding in those tears as well as the emotion, energy and stress of the situation. If tears are coming, allow them to come. Cry if you feel it. Don't hold back tears.

Is there any energy or tension in the legs or arms that needs releasing?

**+** *The more you can 'break-up' your day and time into these little snippets of orientation, the more you'll be able to release the stress as it enters so that it doesn't become toxic.*

**+** *As your skills become more honed, going through this 7 step process will become natural and instinctive.*

Is there any tightness in the jaw?

Is there any anger or rage that's surfacing?

Notice how you relate to the stress now. If there's still some intense sensation in the body, go through the steps again. If not, **let it go**.

This 7-step exercise is of course helpful as soon as you detect that you're in a stressful situation.

It's also a good way to take a break in the middle of a workday and requires nothing special except the ability to pause and bring your attention to your surroundings (and your body from a kinesthetic point of view). The more you can 'break-up' your day and time into these little snippets of orientation, the more you'll be able to release the stress as it enters so that it doesn't become toxic.

## Final Tips for Practicing

*How long should this take?*

When you're just learning this, you'll want to take 5-10 minutes to practice. Everyone will be different based on their past experiences of tuning in and sensing their body in this manner. As your skills become more honed, going through this 7 step process will become natural and instinctive, and can be completed in minutes, even seconds when you're really tuned in. Eventually, you'll not even need to refer to the "steps" per se, rather just be able to zone in on the stress and dissolve it instinctually.

*How do I know if I'm doing this right?*

**There is no right or wrong.**

Go easy on yourself, and remember that this kind of practice, since it's not your "norm," may seem really odd, and that's OK. This is especially true if you've been storing up stress for a long

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time and you're a master at keeping things bottled up inside. The key is to be **curious** and know that your body wants to release stress - remember that in actuality, these 7 steps are just the first step.

*What if I start to feel uncomfortable stuff like body pain, intense emotion or difficult memories coming up?*

When sensations, emotions and memories that are unpleasant come into our awareness, we want to, as much as possible, befriend them and invite them in. We don't want to push them away (like we might think) as this is most likely why they are there - they never got a fair chance to be processed and tended to. Rather than take deep breaths to soothe the unpleasant qualities (remember, this can actually suppress and drive the pain deeper into the nervous system), **just breathe a natural breath**. Stay present to the unpleasant qualities (notice I use the term "unpleasant quality," not pain) and continue to follow the 7 steps. As I tell my clients, pain is a trapped sensation that simply wants to get out.

*This seems silly and too simple.*

Yes, you're correct. It may seem too simple compared to other stress-management strategies that bring in mindfulness and breathing techniques. The truth is that this process IS very simple because our bodies are a part of nature, along with the natural world and its ecosystems, all designed to flow and work without any outside help. But we humans tend to make things more complicated than need be at times, and we easily stray from the natural flow. So the 7 steps, as well as my deeper work with clients, take the body and nervous system back to basics, so we can tune into our natural state with ease and efficiency.

*These 7 steps are a perfect starting point so you can begin to tame your survival instincts and get back into the game of life. But, without the toxic stress.*

## Professional Biography

Irene Lyon, MSC., is a nervous system specialist and therapeutic coach who helps everyone — from the mom next door to the next big thought leaders — transform their bodies, businesses, relationships and lives through regulating their nervous systems. She helps people release their deepest traumas from their nervous systems, allowing them to finally heal from chronic mental, physical, and emotional conditions they've tried everything to fix.



Irene uses these same tools to help entrepreneurs break through the mental, physical, and emotional blocks that arise when taking big leaps in their businesses. As a result, together they create a huge ripple effect across the planet. Irene has intensively studied and practices the work of Dr. Moshe Feldenkrais, Peter Levine (founder of Somatic Experiencing) and Kathy Kain (founder of Somatic Practice). Irene has a master's degree in research in the fields of biomedical and health science. She regularly appears on podcasts and online summits teaching all things nervous system health, healing trauma and neuroplasticity.

### Contact Irene

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