

Women & Peace:

Finding the Eye of the Hurricane

by Mia Lundin

Contemporary life overflows with stress. In the past, people had fewer conveniences but more downtime. They were not overwhelmed by an endless bombardment from cell phones, ipods, TVs, and computers. Today, we women are inundated with stress — stress that doesn't let up. We live in a society where we believe the more we have and do, the happier we will be. Work harder, work longer, do more, earn more, have more, be more. We are disconnected from nature and friends. Our hands are full: family challenges, chores, impossible schedules, and little down time. We fail to take the time required to plan for healthy meals and end up under-nourished and depleted.

Although our innate sensitivity to our environment and to stress we experience makes itself known, we try to ignore it or self-medicate. We can run but we can't hide. Long-term stress depletes our serotonin storage and causes imbalances in our female hormones, estrogen and progesterone. As things meltdown, even little things will drive us crazy, and suddenly we turn on people who don't deserve it, or are really hard on ourselves. As we ignore our body's symptoms, it screams louder and louder, crying for attention and help. Hopefully, we listen before we deplete our energy, emotional well-being, and health.

Often, when you are unhappy, you believe "if only one or two things in my life would change, everything would be fine." If only you lost ten pounds, got a new car, remodeled the kitchen, you would be happy. The list goes on and on as we set conditions for happiness. We are driven by

wanting better and wanting more. Inside, some taskmaster is saying, "Work harder, and work longer." This is a form of insanity and a big-time stress creator! You have to let go of this voice. Give yourself a break. Only when you stop pushing to get what is always right around the bend, will you be able to find some peace, keep your biochemistry in balance, and devote more of yourself to what you know is truly important.

Letting Go

I recently read a study on women who have lived to one hundred years or longer. They share two basic practices: they were engaged in some form of physical activity, and they had all learned how to let go. Not just once, but over and over again. That is truly grace. I have had the privilege of seeing women of all ages grow and thrive over my many years of practice. I have learned so much from those who seem to know how to open new doors, but also, how to close others behind them. We must move forward, but we must accept that life goes up and down. Women are complex and sensitive beings that have wisdom, resiliency and spirit that allow us to move with and through life. As we age, we all have to learn how to let go while we continue on with our eyes on the horizon, accepting each day for the beautiful gift it is.

Practice the antidotes to stress.

Here is a list of antidotes to stress and fear that you can do on your own. Choose one or two lifestyle-changing activities that

lower your stress and over time, change your life for the better. Most importantly, as you make these changes, make sure you keep your friends in the picture. Your circle of women is crucial in terms of support, love, honest feedback, perspective, and of course, wisdom.

- Breathe.
- Love and forgive yourself and others.
- Hug a lot.
- Stroke a pet. Get next to an animal.
- Laugh.
- Pray.
- Get counseling.
- Meditate or practice yoga.
- Get music or art therapy.
- Join a community (church, spiritual organizations, parent groups, support groups).
- Lower the bar. Stop being a perfectionist.
- Sleep more.
- Take naps.
- Walk in nature.
- Cultivate new friends and nurture and reconnect with old friends.
- Take time for yourself today. Even one minute.
- Do less.
- Watch the sunrise or sunset.
- Gaze at the horizon.
- Walk/be in nature.
- Take a bath. *(continued on page 54)*



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Change Your Life Just A Little To Feel Much Better

Whether we want to or not, most of us get caught up fast-paced striving and driving for material things. Doing and getting seem far more important than simply being. The truth is, people who do too much often end up doing too little of what really matters. They spend their lives buzzing from one chore to the next, instead of focusing on what is really meaningful. Most of us fail to take the time to stop, listen and discover what we want or need that will bring us peace or contentment.

In addition to not bothering to stop, many of us live lopsided lives. We're either heavily into our kids, work or shopping, and ignore or forget that we do have core values and real priorities. Some of us are devoted to keeping a perfectly organized home; others work all of the time and forget what it feels like to play and just hang with friends. This creates an imbalance. Extreme behaviors can drain you, deplete your immune system, and sometimes cause emotional illness as well. And sadly, you end up not being the greatest person to be around. You may even find you stop liking yourself!

Cultivating friendships, relationships and a sense of belonging is essential to all levels of health. Humans are social animals. Your mental health — your happiness, self-esteem, and ability to create, love, and work — is influenced greatly by your relationships with others. Several recent studies indicate that a sense of belonging predicted better health for women. This suggests that connections with others is a key component for well-being. All of the material things in the world cannot replace the feelings of being in a rewarding relationship. On an essential level, that's what truly matters the most.

In other words, lower the bar and relax. You don't need to be perfect. Perfectionism is something that consumes a huge amount of energy while creating stress and anxiety. Perfectionism stems

from the need to control. Sometimes, when the "emotional you" feels out of control, your knee-jerk reaction is to grab more control. It's a full-time job to keep up the appearance of having it all together. This creates even more stress. Before you know it, you may turn into an angry control-monster that no one wants to be around. Enough!

Soul Time

It is time to appreciate your inner beauty, to discover your purpose, and your soulful reason for living. This is a wonderful opportunity to grow and explore, but it

is often ignored. In your thirties and forties your eyes turn outwards. You focus on family, children and your home. You nurture everyone else. In your mid-to-late forties, as the kids grow up, or if you don't have kids, as you move towards fifty, you

inevitably find yourself asking some pretty big questions. You realize you are stuck with yourself! "Who am I?" you wonder. Suddenly, your eyes turn inwards. Do you even know yourself? Have you ever really been with yourself? What makes you, you? What do you love? What gives you pleasure? These questions begin to get louder as the days go by. The truth is, as you ponder the answers and come up with a few along the way, your life will sparkle with a new kind of richness that will help you on your path.

Not Breathing?

It's amazing what it's like to inhale deeply and shock the bottom of your lungs with some oxygen. Of course your lungs are smiling! I'm guilty too — I have to watch myself as I shut down my chest and hold my breath, even when I am engaged in enjoying a simple TV show. Why do we forget to breathe? It's a bad habit, a habit from living in a stressful environment, and

we have all become creatures of these habits of stress.

Sleep Is a Balm and Repairs Damage Caused By Stress

An old Italian proverb says, "Bed is a medicine." It's true. Lack of sleep increases your stress hormone cortisol, and can cause weight gain, mood swings, fatigue, increased irritability, memory loss and decreased focus. These stress hormones also, unfortunately, make it harder for you to sleep. You know that enough sleep is essential for daily body repair and rejuvenation. Something you may not know, is that your cells produce more protein while you are sleeping; these protein molecules form the building blocks of your hormones and brain chemistry. This helps you repair and rebalance.

Instead of ingesting pills to find "The Land of Nod," find a way to make going to bed at night something you look forward to. The key is to go to sleep when you need to, in a room that is quiet and as dark as possible. It isn't always easy to give up the day! There is so much still to do and so many distractions. At last, it is quiet and you can slide into Internet or TV land. You think you've been sitting there a few minutes, and suddenly it is midnight. The truth is, you need to find a way to love sleep again and give it the priority it deserves. Of course, you will look and feel better after a good night's sleep, with clearer thoughts, faster reactions, and less fragile emotions. Get those Zzzzs back into your life.

You Snooze. You Gain

Napping is also a wonderful habit to cultivate. It benefits heart function, maintains hormones, enables brain neurons, and helps cell repair. It also reduces your stress hormones, improves alertness, cognition and memory. Instead of napping, women gulp some coffee or black tea to keep themselves from nodding off. You may think you are having a bad day when all you need is to curl up somewhere with a cozy pillow and doze off.

In a recent study, researchers at NASA showed that a thirty-minute power nap increased cognitive faculties by approximately 40 percent. In concordance with NASA's work, biology students at Berkeley determined that, in order to achieve maximum effectiveness, the nap must not be too long. If you nap for over forty-five

minutes, the beneficial effects disappear, so I suggest you try fifteen to thirty five minute "power naps."

Take a break each day from the stress. Find or create a comfortable spot and take a nap. Lie down! Admit it, you might never ever get up! But you will, and you'll be better for it. Even five minutes of shut-eye will help you feel refreshed, renewed, and more focused. You will be a new woman.

Get Off the Computer and Spend More Time with People

As our lifestyles become increasingly dependent on technology—with growing popularity of online banking, telecommuting, and personal websites, and email—it's inevitable we spend less time with family and friends. This fact is confirmed by recent research: according to a 2007 study with a representative sample of over 1000 Americans, 65% of consumers are spending more time with their personal computer than with their spouse. Well, that is not healthy and long hours in front of the computer causes increased stress.

Computer screens are bright. Constantly staring at your computer screen can cause a condition called Computer Vision Syndrome (CVS), which results in neck and back pain, blurred vision, headaches, and a number of other symptoms of stress. Also, constant background noise is distracting and annoying. It can cause headaches and irritability, two sure signs of stress.

- Consider NOT turning your computer on the moment you wake up.
- Consider NOT checking your email the moment you get up.
- Spend more time with friends and family. Consider actually talking to them in person.

Intimacy

Intimacy is the experience of being fully ourselves in the presence of another

who also feels fully who they are. Healthy human beings have a natural need for closeness with others. Intimacy involves both emotional and physical closeness, and is essential for healthy longevity. When we are intimate with another, we can understand and express who we truly are. This gives us meaning and motivation for living happily and joyfully. Intimate relationships are important for managing anxiety and depression. In the recent past, marriage and family counselors believed that conflict, including arguments, antagonism, and lack of respect for differences, was what eventually led to divorce. But current research now shows that loss of intimacy and affection are the two factors most likely to send a relationship spiraling apart. While fighting and conflict usually precede a breakup, conflict is the result of lack of intimacy, not the cause. To protect and preserve your relationship with your significant others, focus on maintaining intimacy and closeness with your partner.

When your hormones change or serotonin levels are low, your sexual drive and need for intimacy may change. This

can cause tension in relationships and marriages. It's important to note: men have sex to feel good, women have sex when they feel good. Truth be told, it is so easy to make us women feel good! It's not that difficult to entice us into being erotic, sexual, intimate playmates and

lovers, but it does take some basic knowledge about our essential needs and desires. Bottom line, women want to be appreciated, adored, and cherished. And we want to hear how much we are appreciated, adored, and cherished. Yes, we want it in words, not just in actions. Sometimes, it is difficult for men to recognize our ears are waiting to be seduced before we are.

The Real "Honey Do List"

You have probably heard of the "Honey Do List" such as "fix the drippy sink" or "mow the lawn." Here are some examples of the real "Honey Do" list:

- Listen to me.
- Talk to me.
- Ask me how my day was.
- Tell me you are proud of me.
- Tell me you are a better man or your life is better because of me.
- Make my favorite cup of tea and tell me about your day.
- Stoke my forehead and/or play with my hair.
- Complement me. Just tell me I look beautiful.
- Gift me a bouquet of fresh flowers. (Please not the ones from the supermarket.)
- Tell me I'm sexy.
- Tell me you want to hold me. Then hold me.
- Thank me for something I did.
- Make up something to do outside of the normal routine for us to do.
- How about a romantic dinner, a hike for a picnic, a weekend away.
- Surprise me.

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