

DEBBIE MANDEL

Addicted to Stress

A
Woman's
7-Step
Program



能图书馆

TO RECOVER YOUR SPONTANEITY AND
JOY IN LIFE

Addicted to Stress

A WOMAN'S 7-STEP PROGRAM
TO RECLAIM JOY AND
SPONTANEITY IN LIFE

Debbie Mandel



JOSSEY-BASS

A Wiley Imprint

www.josseybass.com

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Published by Jossey-Bass

A Wiley Imprint

989 Market Street, San Francisco, CA 94103-1741—www.josseybass.com

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Mandel, Debbie Eisenstadt.

Addicted to stress : a woman's 7-step program to reclaim joy and spontaneity in life / Debbie Mandel. — 1st ed.

p. cm.

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-470-34375-3 (cloth)

ISBN 978-0-470-48590-3 (paper)

1. Stress management for women. I. Title.

RA785.M355 2008

616.9'80082—dc22

2008020974

FIRST EDITION

PB Printing 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

MORE PRAISE FOR
Addicted to Stress

"*Addicted to Stress* offers women a wise and insightful way to recognize their patterns of stress, how this damages their daily existence, and the necessary strategies to improve their lives. By guiding us toward self-recognition and honesty, Debbie Mandel advises women to refocus their goals and behaviors in order to achieve rewards and satisfaction."

—Susan Shapiro Barash, author, *Little White Lies*,
Deep Dark Secrets: The Truth about Why Women Lie

"Debbie Mandel has distilled years of experience in helping so many people in this inspirational and useful guide to living a more joyful and full life. Pearls of wisdom fill every chapter. This book is a must-read for everyone who desires better coping skills for stress and anxiety—and take your time!"

—Dr. Mark Liponis, corporate medical director,
Canyon Ranch

"Debbie really hits the nail on the head. I think most of us women suffer from some stress addiction at various points in our lives, and Debbie gives great advice on how to respect and take care of yourself! It's a must-read for all women!"

—Chris Freytag, fitness expert, *Prevention Magazine*,
and author, *Short Cuts to Big Weight Loss*

"This book is an excellent guide for all women like me who don't feel human unless they are pressured. *Addicted to Stress* not only helps us recognize our addiction, but also guides us step-by-step to overcome the effect of this condition and restore balance in our everyday lives. This book should be a mandatory read for every woman entering the workforce and raising a family. I will recommend it in my health care practice."

—Ellen W. Cutler, D.C., author, *Live Free from*
Asthma and Allergies



To my loving family both on earth and in heaven
And to my husband, Steve, "Baby, You're the Greatest"

P R E F A C E

I was about to sit down on a cushioned lawn swing, cup of coffee in hand, and inhale the beauty of my garden. But then I surveyed a few imperfections, a mottled leaf here and a dangling flower there. Oh, look at that awful weed invading my perennial bed! I let my coffee get cold while I set to work pinching and clipping, the envy of any worker bee.

Suddenly, I heard a mocking voice inside my head: “A woman’s work is never done.”

Why did this old line pop into my head? Strange—I couldn’t recall ever having read it.

Then I laughed as it hit me. The crows squawked too as a great white heron flapped his wings. Here I was about to sit down and relax, take a few moments of quiet time in a serene setting; but no, I found a few things to do, as though nature needed me to improve her art and I needed to perform so that others could say, “Wow, look what Debbie did!”

Stress had invaded my safe haven, my garden. I went into the house and Googled the old familiar saying. I found “A Woman’s Work Is Never Done,” written in 1795 by Martha Ballard, stanza after stanza depicting the tedious schedule of an eighteenth-century woman.



There's never a day, from morn to night,
 But I with work am tired quite;
 For when the game with me is at the best,
 I hardly in a day take one hour's rest;
 Sometimes I knit, and sometimes I spin,
 Sometimes I wash, and sometimes I do wring.
 Sometimes I sit, and sew by myself alone,
 And thus a woman's work is never done.



This was the “aha” moment when the concept of *Addicted to Stress* was born in my head. The words of thousands of women who attended my classes, workshops, and interactive Web site sang out the modern-day refrain:

“I have to rush.”

“I’m crazy busy.”

“I’ve got a million things to do.”

“I don’t know when I will get everything done.”

“I can’t remember what it feels like to get a good night’s sleep.”

Instead of living happily ever after, women everywhere are forever on high alert, forever responsible, and forever giving. The worst part of this is that women—my students, my colleagues, myself included—all seem to be trapped in a terrible habit of continuing, never-ending, self-driven activities that are in response to what we perceive to be terrible pressures at home and, for many of us, in the workplace. We can’t stop, we’re addicted to stress, we’re stress addicts!

I wrote this book to liberate us: the endless to-do list must end! We can’t keep missing the simple truths in life while trying to be so perfect, clever, and accomplished.

Stress addiction is equivalent to *identity theft*—and we are the thief robbing ourselves of joy and spontaneity. Many of us don't know who we are anymore, let alone know the dreams of the free-spirited girl living inside us, the girl we were before we became the good girl, somebody's wife, mother, colleague, and friend.

You must stop being that good girl. In this book, I'll show you how to turn stress into strength, to cure your addiction as you build up an immunity to outside pressure and learn how to be your true core self again.

Join me and many other women who are overcoming their addiction to stress. And after you read this book, I hope you'll ignite your inner light and let it shine brightly.

Acknowledgments

A special thank-you to my editor, Alan Rinzler, for his eloquent, sequential thinking, which kept pace with my associative mind. What a great wit! He has made me shine.

Thank you to my literary agent, Andrea Hurst, who loved the book and my "Debisms" and took me by the hand to guide me in formulating a winning proposal. Andrea is not only a wonderful writer in her own right but also a warm, nurturing person in a competitive world.

Thank you to Frank Mikulka, who continues to teach me all about fitness. A former Marine, he is an elite and creative trainer and martial artist, popular for his warrior classes for men and women.

Thank you to Nana Twumasi, Carol Hartland, Jennifer Wenzel, Jeff Puda, Paul Foster, and Debra Hunter, all from Jossey-Bass/John Wiley & Sons.

Thank you to my children, Michael, David, Amanda, and daughter-in-law, Lisi, for putting up with me when I talked about the book—constantly—and for eating some of my overcooked dinners when I lost track of time writing the pages.

Thank you to my dear and loving husband, Steve, who has to deal with my feistiness and outrageous sense of humor—does he have a choice?

Addicted to Stress

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STEP 1

Be Aware of Your Own Stress Addiction

The first step in our process of change is to understand ourselves, to accept the fact that yes, we have a problem. But never fear, there's definitely something we can do about it.

My research with thousands of women has taught me that the biggest universal problem women have today is our attitude toward stress, the daily dynamic tension of our lives. In fact, I've learned that living with stress for women these days has become more than a habit: it's an addiction.

That's right. Addiction. Just as with drugs or alcohol. Stress has become so ubiquitous (a fancy word for common, widespread, pervasive) that we're used to it, we expect it, we're actually uncomfortable if we don't have it.

Sisters (and some brothers), listen up. We've reached the point where we've got a "jones" for stress. It has taken over our lives like the extra thirty pounds or unwanted guest at the dining room table who refuses to leave.

Addicted to stress.

How did this happen, and what can we do about it?

Taking a Hard Look at Ourselves

Women today carry massive responsibilities of family, household, and career. It often feels to us as if we're being blown about in so many different directions that we're battered into exhaustion.

Ironically, we call this progress. We need to ask ourselves two questions:

Are we satisfied?

Are we happier?

Well, certainly men are happier. Two studies from Princeton University and the University of Pennsylvania indicate that a

happiness shift has occurred over the years. In the 1970s, women used to be *slightly happier* than men; now men have exchanged places with women. The reason for this change is that men have cut back on unpleasant activities and now relax more, spending quality time with the family. Research shows that meanwhile, women have been taking on more complex tasks than they did four decades ago. They have replaced housework with paid work, but that doesn't mean that the work at home has disappeared. Women's to-do lists have grown; the number of waking hours to get everything done has not.

When tasks don't get crossed off the list, women experience stress resulting in sleepless nights and days filled with feelings of negativity and inadequacy. The studies emphasize that because women now have opportunities for accomplishment on many new levels, they tend to believe that if they don't "do it all"—the home, the marriage, the job—they don't measure up!

The Impact of Too Much Stress

Bottom line: if you are unhappy with yourself, then all your relationships, including your most intimate, will be filled with unhappiness. And further research from Sigal Barsade of the University of Pennsylvania explains that bad moods are contagious. Your family will absorb and mimic your behavior, thereby perpetuating a negative loop.

Although the medical community has established that a little stress is actually good for you—waking up your creativity, fueling your vitality, and keeping your immune system vigilant—the qualifying and key word here is *little*. When you find yourself rushing from activity to activity, doing chore after chore, with no personal time for yourself, the problem isn't the external world that's landing on your doorstep; rather, it's your own need to constantly open that door and welcome stress into your life!

Why We Love Stress

Most likely you are addicted to stress because of the adrenaline rush—the “look what I can do” syndrome. You’re so productive! You do it all, get it all—mother, wife, worker, with boundless energy 24/7.

However, having plenty of physical energy should not be confused with vital, focused energy. The critical question you must ask is, How do you distinguish a stress addict from a healthy high-energy person? And here’s the answer: the physical energy of a stress addict is always moving forward, living in the future, accomplishing the next task on the addict’s to-do list, or worrying about what will happen later, rather than experiencing reality in the present. In contrast, a high-energy person intensifies her present to experience it fully.

What It’s Like to Be an Addict

You might think that the term *addict* is a harsh word for simply being busy. But it is the right word. You may say that the conventional perception of an addict is of someone so focused on her bad habits that she is a very selfish person, whereas so much of a woman’s time is dedicated to being unselfish, to taking care of her family. But let’s look at the fundamentals of addiction, and we’ll see why *addict* is the right term.

Common to all unacknowledged addicts is the illusion that they have some sort of power and can control their behavior. However, when we take a closer look, we can readily see that this is a totally false perception; addicts are in fact without self-awareness and have little or no control over their compulsive activities. For example, a gambler thinks she can control her luck, an alcoholic her drinking, and a pot addict her smoking. However, an unaware addict cannot tap into her personal power. To numb the pain, the feelings of worthlessness both

overt and subtle, a stress addict hides herself in the great escape of distraction.

The fix of busyness leading to apparent accomplishment gives the stress addict a kind of high that sends pleasure signals to the brain. But, as is true of all addictions, the high is transitory. The addict needs another high and then another, the ever-expanding to-do list, to sustain that false euphoria.

Admit it. Oh, how you love the surge of adrenaline energy as you rush to perform your activities and duties! You feel important.



TALES OF STRESS ADDICTION

Do They Have Adult Cliffs Notes?

Sara had found no time to read the book she had suggested for her book club members. She was agitated about tonight's opening remarks, beating herself up about it. Should she fake it or admit that she didn't read the book and let someone else run the meeting? Perhaps she should not attend the meeting and say she is sick? Sara tried to read the four hundred pages, but couldn't concentrate or get into the book. She felt as if she were back at school and unprepared for a test.

I asked Sara why she had joined a book club in the first place if she is not a reader and is busy with her work and the children. She quickly explained, "For the social benefits. I like to get together with the girls once a month and talk." I suggested that she attend the session and throw out an opening question based on the book jacket, allowing others to run with it. She could join in with examples from life experience, movies, or other books. Fun should not be stressful. Evaluate your clubs and activities. Are you overbooked?