

PSYCHOLOGIES
MAGAZINE

REAL CALM



CAPSTONE
A Wiley Brand

REAL CALM

Handle stress and take
back control

PSYCHOLOGIES
MAGAZINE

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FOREWORD

by Suzy Greaves, Editor, *Psychologies*

Many of us are struggling with self-doubt, worry and overwhelm on a daily basis and the aim of this book is to give you a set of tools, tests, techniques and questions to help you to discover how to make some real changes to create real calm in your life.

What is real calm? At *Psychologies*, we believe that creating calm in your life starts with becoming more self-aware. It's about being able to identify what is causing you stress in your life – be it your own negative self-talk or external circumstances – and then finding new ways to deal with how you feel.

It's about taking responsibility for what you decide to put your attention on, and deciding not to give absolute authority to the thoughts that may constantly chip away at your equilibrium.

Real Calm is about learning to be in the present, to breathe and focus on what is really going on right here, right now – versus being haunted by the past or catastrophizing about the future.

Real Calm is also about identifying when you need extra support if feeling stressed has drifted into a chronic condition that might spiral downwards if you don't seek help.

You can't always control what happens to you, but *Real Calm* is about empowering yourself to decide how you react to stress. It's about being able to recognize stressful situations and learning how to influence your attitude. It will take time and attention but you can train yourself to do this. And that has to be the ultimate freedom.

Enjoy!

Suzy Greaves, Editor, *Psychologies*

INTRODUCTION



elcome to *Real Calm* – and let's start by breathing.

If there's one thing you want in your frantic life right now, it's to feel calm. And since you're reading this, it's probably fair to say you're taking the matter seriously. We're excited you've taken this step forward because we have the tools that *can* and *will* help you.

Our lives today are apparently busier than ever. What do most people moan about? 'I'm so busy.' And what does that go hand in hand with? 'I'm so stressed.' There may be significant reasons for you to be carrying more responsibility than you are able to deal with. In a climate of corporations making severe cutbacks, how can you be calm when your job pushes you to your physical and mental limits, which then affects your personal life? The paradox is that even when life is good, feeling calm can still be elusive. Whatever your circumstances, you wonder why you don't feel calm.

First, you're not alone. If there's one thing that unites everybody in modern life to one degree or another it's the umbrella of stress. Keeping on top of everything in a life driven by technology, chronic worry about finances in an uncertain economy, anxiety fuelled by uncertainty in life, and the stress of daily life from commuting to dealing with difficult people and situations are universal issues we are all familiar with.

Anxiety, an extreme form of stress, is a mass epidemic, a condition that has somehow crept up on our society. A recent government report¹ revealed that teenage stress is at an all-time high, and significantly higher than the last investigation in 2005.

REAL CALM

According to Anxiety UK,² one in ten adults in the UK has suffered from debilitating anxiety at some point in their lives. In the past 14 years diagnoses for an anxiety-related condition have increased by nearly 13%. Government figures³ show that in 2014/15, stress was the reason for a staggering 35% of all work-related sickness, and 43% of all working days lost due to ill health. In America,⁴ 18% of the population suffers officially from anxiety. A 2015 poll⁵ found that one in four Americans were experiencing stress in their lives and had been through one stressful event in the previous year. And that's the official figures.

There's a need right now for global calm and a need for individual calm. The recession may be over officially, but buying a home and managing financially are huge concerns. Then there's the fact that terrorism is a real threat and we are on a mass alert. Travelling for business or pleasure now comes with added precautions imposed on us, like longer security checks at airports.

Is it possible to be calm in a world that is anything but calm? This is a real issue. There is nothing we can do about natural disasters, from tsunamis to earthquakes, but as individuals we can learn to ease the process of living and feeling as human beings.

We hope that this book will guide you out of stress into feeling calm whenever you need this.

HOW TO USE THIS BOOK

We've divided this book into three parts:

1. What Does Real Calm Mean To You?
2. What's Stopping You From Feeling Calm?
3. How Can You Be Calm?

In Part One you'll get to grips with the real reasons you don't feel calm and how this affects you on a daily and long-term basis. You may be surprised to learn that there are differences in why you *want* to be calm and why you *need* to be calm. You'll become clear about what exactly you're looking for so that the concept of calm is far from abstract.

In Part Two we'll dive into the complex reasons that have brought you to the point of feeling this stressed. You'll be able to unravel the different states of mind so that you can begin to find your unique calm way.

In Part Three we show you exactly what you need to learn and master so that first you can protect yourself from getting into a frazzled state, and second you can develop a sense of calm every day when you need it.

Throughout the book there are simple suggestions for small changes that will lead to noticeable differences in your daily life and help you accumulate a sense of calm. With every step of our analysis there is guidance on how to switch from allowing the process of stress to take over, to embracing calming processes.

At the end of the Chapters 1, 2, 4 and 5, there are tests that will help you assess yourself. There are also 'Ask Yourself' questions to help you reflect and analyse how you feel, so that you can relate each chapter to your personal experience. In this way you can be your own coach.

You will also find case studies from real people who have found different ways to manage stress, harness it in a productive way, and additionally feel better in themselves. (All names and identifying circumstances have been changed.)

We are very excited about the selected panel of six leading experts we have interviewed for this book. Each expert has a particular expertise, knowledge, experience and perspective so

that you can gain a thorough understanding of stress, and have a choice of what advice resonates most with you.

The advice in this book goes deep into the body, the brain, the mind – and the way forward requires commitment to change on your part. We do hope that the evidence we have will motivate you to make the commitment – and that you will be excited to do so.

THE EXPERTS INTERVIEWED FOR REAL CALM

Miriam Akhtar, positive psychologist

Miriam Akhtar is one of the UK's leading positive psychology practitioners. She has created a number of pioneering programmes based on the science of wellbeing, ranging from Positive Youth to Positive Ageing. She is one of 100 experts who contributed to the *World Book of Happiness*.

She is the author of four books including *Positive Psychology for Overcoming Depression* (Watkins). Her new book *What is Post-Traumatic Growth?* (Watkins) is published in 2017.

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Ed Halliwell, mindfulness teacher and writer

Ed Halliwell is one of this country's most popular mindfulness teachers. As well as leading courses in London, Sussex and Surrey, he has introduced mindfulness to major organizations and is an advisor to an All-Party Parliamentary Group to develop mindfulness-based policies for the UK.

He has written the Be Mindful report for the Mental Health Foundation, co-authored one book and written two other

books including his latest, *Into The Heart of Mindfulness* (Piatkus).

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Professor Ian Robertson, psychologist and neuroscientist

Professor Robertson is one of world's leading researchers on neuropsychology. He is a clinical psychologist, neuroscientist and professor at Trinity College Dublin, and founding director of Trinity College Institute of Neuroscience and Co-Director of the Global Brain Health Institute.

He has written over 500 papers on the brain and behaviour and four internationally successful books. His latest book is *The Stress Test – How Pressure Can Make You Stronger and Stronger* (Bloomsbury)

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Jeremy Stockwell is one the UK's leading performance consultants. His clients include high-profile presenters, actors, business leaders, pop stars and politicians. He is a long serving member of the teaching faculty at The Royal Academy of Dramatic Art.

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She has six years post-graduate training at the Analyst Training Program of the C.G. Jung Institute of Los Angeles. Her special interests are dreamwork, the creative process and collage.

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Charlie Walker-Wise, RADA in Business trainer

Charlie Walker-Wise trained as an actor at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art, and worked in TV, film and theatre. He moved from acting into directing theatre and simultaneously developing a parallel career as a trainer. He is a client director at RADA in Business.

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1 WHAT DOES REAL CALM MEAN TO YOU?

CHAPTER 1

DEFINING REAL CALM

The concept of calm can seem abstract and elusive. It's a state of mind that tends to conjure up an image of a sunset from a mountain top or a beach sunrise. And yet you crave that feeling on a more constant level. You know that lighting candles and taking long pampering baths offers tranquility, but you're after something deeper.

In the first instance, feeling calm probably means not feeling the way you do right now: worried, anxious, stressed or possibly depressed. All of these states are on a continuum, so although the extremes might be very different, individually they are difficult to distinguish. One thing is for sure, wherever you are on that continuum it doesn't feel good.

If you could somehow not feel *constantly* stressed that would make a huge difference. It's the *constantly* that wears you out – the looping thoughts, the knot in your stomach, the eating too much or not being able to eat, the feeling that you're stuck in a pressure cooker or a boiling kettle. The worst part is having to appear together around other people – like colleagues, bosses or people you manage – and others you have to deal with in daily life, from neighbours to your child's teachers.

In theory you can be honest with friends and family about how you feel, but what if you're too busy to see them? What if you don't want to or can't admit how you feel? What if you don't want to moan or 'bother' them? Or what if you *are* letting off steam or moaning and then feeling guilty?

Modern life is stressful – that's the message we keep receiving, and that's the message we perpetuate. Stress becomes the norm, and if it's the norm and it makes you unhappy then you feel there's something wrong with you. You might be thinking, 'What's wrong with me? Why can't I be calm?' We'll aim to answer these questions in the course of this book.

But let's start with stress. Is modern life really more stressful? Aren't we living longer, finding cures for diseases, looking more youthful and engaging in hobbies and even new careers way into the Third Age (the stage after middle age and before old age)? The answer is complex. Yes, life is better and more advanced in many ways. As stress expert, psychologist and neuroscientist Professor Ian Robertson confirms, life has become less stressful compared to 100 years ago: 'Gone are the days of hunger, daunting high levels of infant and maternal death and diseases like tuberculosis and diphtheria.'

These advances have brought about radical changes. In fact, asking the question whether life is more stressful now than centuries or decades ago is misplaced. How the nature of stress has changed, and how we as individuals and communities deal with stress, are the more pertinent issues.

“In some ways modern life is more stressful than it was a hundred years ago. We are faced with fragmented communities, broken families, work pressures and ruthless competition.”

Professor Ian Robertson, psychologist and neuroscientist

In this chapter we hope to give a starting point for calm that is relevant to life as we live it. You are unique, and what you need to feel calm is not what somebody else needs. By the end of this book we hope that you will be clear on what calm means to you and how to attain this.

CHOOSING WHAT REAL CALM MEANS TO YOU

The word ‘calm’ originates¹ from the Greek word *kauma* for heat which became *cauma* in Latin for the sun’s midday heat, the time to rest and be still. It was adopted in late fourteenth-century French as *calme* for tranquility and quiet, finding its way into late Middle English.

When we hear the word calm in relation to people it’s mostly because they need to ‘calm down’ and stop being angry and agitated, or anxious and stressed. In terms of word associations, calm is bookended with two more words to describe a person who is cool, calm and collected. Who wouldn’t want to be described as cool, calm and collected when it’s universally considered a positive description?

When we look at synonyms for calm, the words that come up as qualities in people are self-control and self-possession. Yet if we go back to the origin of the word calm, there’s no control in the midday heat is there? The same sea that is rough can also be calm – absolutely still with not a single wave. If you associate calm with an innate state of mind this leaves you with no leeway for change. Performance consultant and TV coach Jeremy Stockwell reminds us that ‘change is the only constant truth in the universe’ and since we too are part of the universe, inevitably everything about us as human beings changes, down to the cells in our bodies.

“When you are worried, tell yourself: this will change. If you’re feeling stressed, tell yourself a little while later you’ll feel calm.”

Jeremy Stockwell, performance consultant and TV coach



GET A CALMNESS APP

When leading psychologist and neuroscientist Professor Robertson says he uses an app every day to keep him calm, then you can be sure it works on the mind. The award-winning Buddhify² app has meditations to cover everything from waking up to not being able to sleep, from difficult emotions to stressful situations.

Recently, various calmness trackers have been launched so you can monitor exactly how stressed you are and how well you're doing at de-stressing. Spire,³ developed by Stanford University's Calming Technology Lab, lets you know through vibration when you're tense, focused or calm by measuring your breathing patterns. It's like a fitness tracker that measures your steps. You can monitor which activities or situations affect your stress levels and there are breathing guidelines to help you learn to take action.

Composure comes from the word 'compose', which originally meant to form something through putting together elements, and then came to mean creating music. If you think of calm as (mental) composure, and composure as creating a positive state of mind from the various elements of you, it becomes more attainable.

Equanimity is a wonderful word that means to be calm and composed especially during a difficult situation. It's a word infused with strength, choice and power. One of the worst things about feeling anxious is that it comes with feeling powerless, that sense