

# CHOOSING BALANCE

The ABCs of Stress® Management

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# dynamic equilibrium

## PART 1

# DYNAMIC EQUILIBRIUM

*The future belongs to those who can  
learn, unlearn and relearn.*

—Adapted from Alvin Toffler

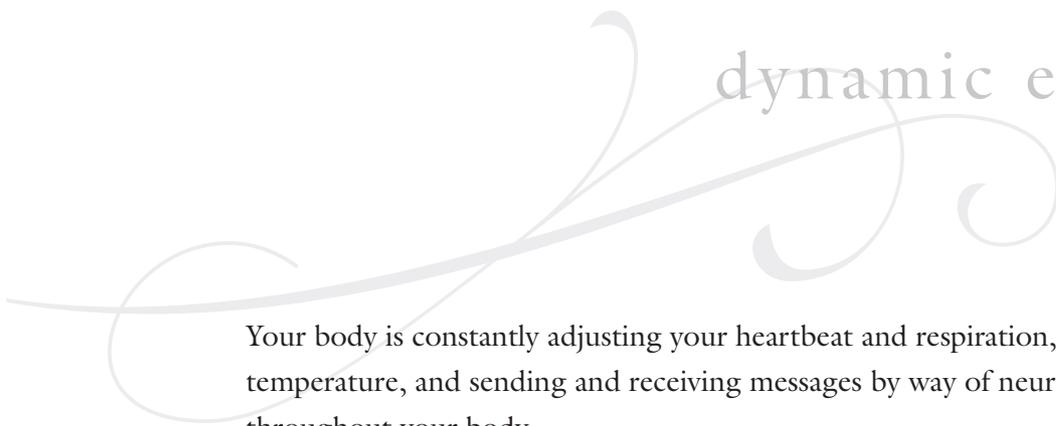


If you are reading these words, you probably don't need to be told how stress affects our daily lives. You know the relationship between stress and most major illnesses. You've read the statistics on healthcare costs and lost productivity. You may have experienced the sheer misery of relentless, grinding stress. Even reading these words may be causing you stress.

The good news is that you can choose to find a healthy balance in your life by developing appropriate responses to stressors. This book will walk you through the process that has enabled thousands of people over the past twenty-plus years to change their stress levels by learning and continuing to practice healthy thinking patterns that produce healthy behaviors and healthy emotions.

The concept of balance is deeply embedded in every aspect of our lives. Whether we are observing the planets in their orbits or microorganisms within the human body, balance is central to survival and life as we know it.

Exceptional feats of balance, as in gymnastics, are the result of discipline and hard work. Yet your primary source of balance is controlled by your involuntary nervous system.



# dynamic equilibrium

Your body is constantly adjusting your heartbeat and respiration, regulating your body temperature, and sending and receiving messages by way of neurons and nerves throughout your body.

Early on, this process describing the body's capacity to remain stable when its environment is changing was called biological homeostasis. Today we call it dynamic equilibrium.

DEFINING  
STRESS

Although there are other forms of stress, *Choosing Balance* focuses only on psychological stress. The psychological dimension of stress is able to create disease or speed healing, enhance a relationship or destroy it, contribute to resilience or lead to depression.

Some stress is necessary, even productive. Other stress is unnecessary, nonproductive and debilitating. It takes a toll on us emotionally and physically. This negative stress, i.e., *distress*, is based on and fueled by unhealthy, distorted thinking. We have the capacity to identify these nonproductive thought patterns, correct them and change the behaviors and emotions they produce.<sup>1</sup>

There are a wide range of definitions given to the study of stress. My **definition of stress** and the definition I use throughout this book actually describes *the condition existing when the stress response occurs*:

*Psychological stress is the mismatch between an individual's coping skills and the demands of the environment.*

My definition of **the stress response** is:

*The biophysical means by which the body attempts to mobilize itself for resolving a real or perceived threat to its survival.*

<sup>1</sup> In our workshops, titled *Choosing Balance: ABCs of Stress® Management*, we use a four-dimensional model of stress, which includes biological, social and spiritual aspects of stress, as well as psychological stress. It is my hope that you will have the opportunity, if you haven't already, to participate in one of our workshops. All four dimensions of stress are dealt with in depth.

## THE ABCS OF STRESS®



The psychological dimension of stress may be divided into three functional domains:

- A – Affective Domain or *emotions*
- B – Behavioral Domain or *actions*
- C – Cognitive Domain or *thoughts*

It is sometimes difficult to determine which came first when experiencing a stressful event. Emotions, thoughts and actions interact and seem to take turns “causing” each other.

The *ABCs of Stress*® Model helps us consider how these domains interact in our distinct and personal stressful events. You will use this model in your work. A detailed model is located in *Resources*.

In addition to the ABC triangle, a second tool has been developed to help you analyze your stress events, “McGee’s ABC Stress Assessment®.” Together these tools give you a structure for identifying the origin of your stress and how you might respond differently.

### ABCs of Stress® Model

*Three Functional Domains  
of Psychological Stress*

