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Pounding heart. Sweaty palms. Shortness of breath. **That's stress**, and it's **bad** for you, right? Research shows 44 per cent of Britons* suffer from it, while a survey of doctors' sick notes found that 25 per cent of **illnesses** are linked to stress, anxiety or depression. Moreover, stress increases the risk of developing everything **from the common cold to heart disease**.

Conclusion: **stress** is our (A). . . isn't it?

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For her first decade as a health psychologist, Stanford University lecturer Dr Kelly McGonigal faithfully **believed** the familiar thinking that **stress is to be dreaded and avoided**. Then **new** research prompted **a 180-degree switch** in her approach. Far from **those familiar symptoms** of **pounding heart, sweaty palms** and so on indicating that **we cannot cope with the situation** we are facing, in fact they indicate the very opposite — **the body is readying us to deal with the difficulty we face.**

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“**My goal** as a health psychologist has changed,” says McGonigal, 37, who lives in New York. “I **no longer want to get rid of your stress**. I want to make you better at stress. We are born with so many instincts for **thriving under stress**. If you can view stress differently as it’s happening, you can alter the effect it has on you. **The key** is changing how we think about it. **If you embrace stress, you can transform fear into courage, isolation into connection, and suffering into meaning.**”

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McGonigal's starting point was a US study that tracked 30,000 adults for eight years.

“They asked people: ‘How much stress have you experienced in the last year?’ They also asked: ‘Do you believe that stress is harmful for your health?’ And then they used public death records to find out who died.”

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The researchers discovered **a key distinction** among those who had experienced a lot of stress. In that group, ^(B1)those who believed their stress was damaging had a 43 per cent increased risk of dying; **but** ^(B2)those who did not worry about the great stress they were under were **not only less likely to die**, as you might imagine — **but they were also less likely to die than** ^(B3)those who experienced relatively little stress.

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“When you change your **mind** about stress, you can change your **body’s response to stress**,” says McGonigal. “So rather than try to slow your pounding heart, you can view it as **your body giving you energy, preparing you to meet the upcoming challenge.**”

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By acknowledging the feelings and thoughts that we have, and gently **redirecting** our attention **to the positive, we can lessen the stress** we are experiencing. **Escaping** the feeling of being crushed under extreme stress **can prompt us to** make better choices, maximising the opportunities ahead.

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McGonigal's conclusion is this: a stress-free life might sound like nirvana*,

but, (C) to achieve it, we **would** probably need to cut out everything that **gives** our lives happiness and meaning —

relationships, challenging work, and so on. And it isn't hard to grasp that a life without happiness or meaning would be entirely bleak*.

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“Stress is a kind of **engagement with** life,” she says. “Go after whatever it is that creates meaning in your life, and trust yourself to (D) the stress that follows.”