



HELP FOR

Women

UNDER STRESS



*preserving
your sanity*

RANDY AND NANCI ALCORN

help for
women
under
stress

preserving your sanity

RANDY AND NANCI ALCORN

Revised and updated edition



eternal perspective ministries
with author Randy Alcorn

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Randy and Nanci Alcorn

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To our mothers:

Adele Noren,
Always an example of
cheerful servant-heartedness,

and

Lucille Alcorn,
Christ's love, faithfulness,
and encouragement personified.

Two amazing moms,
one united heart for Christ and family.
We miss you so, and look forward daily
to the Great Reunion.

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Though their last names changed eleven years ago, Karina Franklin and Angela Stump continue to inspire us, as do their husbands and

their children Jake and Ty Stump, and Matthew, Jack, and David Franklin.

Foreword

It's been twenty-eight years since I wrote this book with my wife Nanci, and it's been out of print for nearly twenty. When *Women Under Stress* came out I had only one book in print, and it had sold maybe 10,000 copies. *Women Under Stress* went out of print before any of my books made the bestsellers list. By God's grace over seven million copies of my books are now in print. Hence, relatively few people who have read my later books have read this one.

When people asked how a man could possibly write about women and stress, I pointed out that I was the author of many years of stress for my mother. Nanci would no doubt vouch for the stress I've brought into her life.

And by the time they were teenagers I'm sure my beloved daughters Karina and Angela would say I had put them under stress (especially when I insisted on going through a sixteen-page handout with each boy they dated). So I do have some credentials when it comes to women and stress!

Since this book has been unavailable for twenty years, and yet most of it is as relevant as when it first came out, it seemed time for a resurrection. We're republishing this because—not surprisingly—women are still under stress! And perhaps, in our ever-changing, media-saturated, fast-paced world, they're under more stress than ever.

Nanci helped me a great deal with the original book's research, and we talked through every chapter. The writing fell to me. I see now how my writing style has changed over the years, hopefully for the better! I was glad to do what I could to improve the book.

I've kept most of the citations and endnotes from the original book, because most of them have stood the test of time. I could have cited all new sources in the sections on eating and exercise, but the original conclusions are mostly still valid, and when they weren't I

simply deleted them. I added some new endnotes from the current century, actually from the current millennium! Sure, there are now references to smartphones and apps and ebooks, but when it comes to Scripture, what was true in 1987 is still true today. I have to confess that though I have lived well these 27 years by the exercise chapter of the book, I have not been so strict with the nutrition chapter, particularly in reference to the warnings against too much coffee!

Our daughter Karina was seven and Angela was five when the book came out, so needless to say a lot of the illustrations relate to young children. In fact, several of our five grandchildren are the same age now as their mothers were then—a reminder of how quickly the years pass and how important it is to treasure time with our families at every stage.

As I share in the first chapter, Nanci and I wrote this book after experiencing a fair amount of stress ourselves. Since then, we've faced a great deal more stress—including disease and surgeries, lawsuits and job loss—but also more joys from the hands of our God of grace and providence. Now more than ever, we can say: “In my distress I called upon the LORD; to my God I cried for help. From his temple he heard my voice, and my cry to him reached his ears” (Psalm 18:6, ESV).

We hope this new release of *Women Under Stress* will provide a deeper understanding of how stress impacts your life—and how God uses stress to draw us to Himself *and* to encourage us to make necessary changes. (As the thirsty seek water, those under stress often seek God.)

Regardless of what stress you're under, rest assured that our Lord Jesus is ready and willing to meet you at your place of deepest need and use the circumstances of your life to shape you into His image. Missionary Hudson Taylor observed, “It doesn't matter how great the pressure is. What really matters is where the pressure lies, whether it comes between me and God or whether it presses me nearer His heart.”

Randy Alcorn, January 2013

Note from Randy, May 2022:

On Monday, March 28, 2022, Nanci went to be with Jesus. I am so proud of my wife for her dependence on Jesus and her absolute trust in the sovereign plan and love of God. Nanci is and always will be an inspiration to me.

For four years, Nanci modeled yielding to God despite all the stressful things she was constantly uncertain about. While she never knew if the day's diagnosis would change tomorrow, or if the cancer would spread or go into remission, or how long she'd have the strength to handle everyday situations, still she would say, "I am certain of Him, so I will be content with all those things I'm uncertain of." She truly lived out the advice we shared in this book.

Nanci wrote in her journal, "Above all, I am eternally thankful for the incredible growth in my heart spiritually. I honestly would not trade this cancer experience to go back to where I was—which wasn't bad. I believed and experienced God's hand on my life before cancer. But these last months have been used by God to propel me into a deeper understanding and experience of His sovereignty, wisdom, steadfast love, mercy, grace, faithfulness, immanency, and trustworthiness and omnipotence."

While I miss Nanci terribly, I am overwhelmed with the goodness of God for giving me such a wife and for what we were able to experience together in this life. She said to me before she died, "Thank you for my life." And I said, "Thank you for my life."

I can't wait for what is ahead of us in the presence of Christ. I look forward to seeing her again and starting to catch up. Together, according to the promise of Jesus and purely by His grace, we'll enjoy that happy ending that will never end.

A Prayer of Weariness

by Randy Alcorn

I AM WEARY, Lord...bone-tired.
Weary to the point of tears, and past them.
Your Word says you never grow weary;
But I know you understand weariness
because once you dragged a heavy cross up a long lonely hill—
Many times you had nowhere to lay your head—
And people who needed you pressed upon you by day and by night.

My reservoir is depleted, almost dry.
For longer than I can remember I've been
 dredging from its sludgy underside
Giving myself and my loved ones the leftovers
 of a life occupied with endless tasks.
The elastic of my life is so stretched out of shape
 that it doesn't snap back anymore.

Just once I'd like to say "It is finished," like you did.
But you said it just before you died.
I guess my job won't be over till my life is
 and that's OK Lord, if you'll just give me strength to live it.

Deliver me from this limbo of half-life;
 not just surviving, but thriving.
You who know all, You who know me
 far better than I know myself—
Deposit to my account that as I spend myself
 there may be always more to draw from.

Give me strength
 To rest without guilt...
 To run without frenzy...
 To soar like an eagle

Over the broad breathless canyons of the life
you still have for me both here and beyond.

Chapter 2

Stress: What's It All About?

Ruth lives alone and spends most of her days in a dimly lit living room watching soap operas and game shows. She seldom leaves her apartment, has few friends, and is out of touch with her family. Bored with life, she sits and shrivels. Ruth has a problem—too little stress. (Even if she endures the stress of loneliness, it's a stress that could be easily relieved by getting out with people.)

We're mistaken to believe all stress is bad. Without stress, there are no challenges, no accomplishments, no success stories, no art, literature, or athletic feats. Without stress, we would all be unproductive, unmotivated and uncreative.

Stress provides incentive. Without tests, students wouldn't learn as much. Without guests coming over Friday night, we might put off cleaning our house, or we might not get out of bed till the crack of noon.

Most of us can't avoid stress, but even if we could we'd be the losers. In fact, there's a name for the complete lack of stress—death. According to Hans Selye, the father of stress research, “Stress is the spice of life.”¹²

So what's the problem? If stress is the spice of life, many of us are over-seasoned. We have stress to spare—stress running out our ears, running up our blood pressure, and running down our minds and bodies. The problem is not stress *per se*, the problem is too much stress.

String a violin too loosely and it won't make good music. String it too tightly and the string breaks. No tension, no music. Too much tension, no music.

What Is Stress?

Stress is no stranger to you. It was there at your birth when you were rudely introduced to this bright, cold, noisy chaos. Stress was there as a three-month-old when you were wet, hungry, and mad at the world. When you fell down the stairs, got scratched by the kitty, attended your first day of school, played your piano recitals, made your speeches, started your period, went on your first date, got your first job...stress was right there. But what exactly is stress?

In the first chapter, we briefly defined stress as the *wear and tear of life*. While some researchers give highly specific and technical definitions for stress, to most of us, stress is simply a physical and/or psychological sense of pressure or weight, usually triggered by some condition, event, or series of events. Often the word *stress* is used in reference to an external force that places demands on us, such as a stressful occupation, a stressful illness, or a stressful confrontation with a bank teller. But the experts say that stress does not reside in these demands themselves, but in our *response* to these demands.¹³

Suppose you're camping in the woods and see a wolf coming toward your tent. If you're frightened you might think of the wolf as stressful. But it really isn't. To its mate, the wolf means security. And to a mountain man carrying his rifle, one wolf is no threat at all.

Stress is in the eye of the beholder. The wolf isn't stressful, we are. It simply triggers our stress response, and only then because of our belief—right or wrong—that the wolf poses a threat to us. Likewise, no person or thing or event creates our stress. Stress is rooted in our own response, based on our own perception or interpretation of that person, thing, or event. (We'll take a closer look at this important truth in the following chapter.)

But let's examine what would happen if you really were attacked by a wolf. Your mind and body would accelerate and you'd respond instinctively. You might stay and fight with unusual strength. Or you might run with unusual speed (of course, you'd hope the wolf's strength and speed weren't likewise accelerated). Experts call this stress reaction the "fight or flight" response.

When confronted with any threatening situation, your heart beats faster, your blood pressure rises, and adrenaline pumps through your veins. You are energized to deal with crisis—either to face it (fight) or run from it (flight). Either way, you are moved to action, and either way, you should be thankful for the stress—it may well save your life.

We've all heard the stories of mothers picking up cars to rescue their children pinned underneath. This superhuman strength is the result of the mind's and body's response to crisis. When the crisis is over, the body returns to normal. It's a good thing, because just as a car engine isn't meant to race continuously, we aren't meant to be constantly mobilized for action. It just isn't natural.

It isn't natural, but unfortunately, in our day and age it's common. More and more men and women are characterized by continuously high pulses, high blood pressure, and edgy nerves. It's as if they are constantly traumatized—perpetually hyped up, on call for an emergency. This ongoing condition is called hypertension. And since the body was never meant to maintain such intensity for long, it eventually grinds to a halt. Both conditions—hypertension and exhaustion—are products of stress.

Stressors

Financial problems, sickness, unemployment, weeks of nasty weather, rebellious children, too many responsibilities, unresolved conflicts, poor communication, lack of solitude, a messy house, family members with busy schedules... all of these can be stressors (remember, they can't actually cause stress, but stress may be our response to them).

Physical and mental problems can trigger stress, and stress can trigger physical and mental problems creating a vicious stress cycle. Some people respond to stress in counterproductive ways such as overeating, smoking, excessive drinking, and overuse of tranquilizers. But each of these is itself a stressor. In our attempts to relieve stress, we often magnify it.

Stressors come in many varieties—some external and some internal, some in our bodies, some in our minds. Stressors can be as large as losing a loved one, as medium as a fiasco on Facebook or Twitter where a poorly worded sentence offended friends or church, and as small as poorly fitted eye glasses that place unnatural demands on the facial muscles. But large or small, they trigger our stress response, which always takes its toll.

Change and Stress

“I just don’t know what’s wrong with me,” Sarah sobbed. “I have a good husband, good kids, and I love the Lord. I’m supposed to be happy, but I’m not. This last year I’ve felt like I’m slowly sinking in quicksand and it’s up to my chin. I’m getting desperate. And I’m not only miserable, but I feel so guilty for being miserable that it makes me more miserable. What’s wrong with me?”

What was “wrong” stemmed from an accumulation of changes in Sarah’s life. In the last year her husband changed jobs, they moved to a new neighborhood, they joined a new church, the children changed schools, and her father had major surgery. These changes demanded that Sarah adapt. Instead, she maintained her busy schedule instead of backing off to give herself time and energy to adjust. Finally it all caught up with her.

Much of our stress is triggered by change. Change by its nature is disruptive. Physical changes create hormonal and chemical imbalances, which can throw us off more than we realize. Both our bodies and our minds thrive on the familiar and seek out their own comfort levels. They fall into certain patterns and like to stay there. We are threatened

by whatever is new. That’s why change is often so difficult. It requires significant energy for us to adapt to it—physically, mentally, and emotionally.

A research team headed by Dr. Thomas Holmes studied over five thousand patients and concluded that significant life changes greatly increase our likelihood of illness. Why? Because *energy needed to fight off infection is used up in the process of adapting to change.*

What kind of changes are we talking about? Any kind—but the bigger the change for you, the greater the stress it brings. Here is a list of the changes Dr. Holmes noted in his subjects. The point value attributed to each change—which determines the order in which they’re listed—varies slightly from person to person.¹⁴

Rank	Event	Life Change Points
1	Death of spouse	100
2	Divorce	73
3	Marital separation	65
4	Jail term	63
5	Death of close family member	63
6	Personal injury or illness	53
7	Marriage	50
8	Fired at work	47
9	Marital reconciliation	45
10	Retirement	45
11	Change in health of family member	44
12	Pregnancy	40
13	Sex difficulties	39
14	Gain of new family member	39
15	Business adjustment	39
16	Change in financial state	38

17	Death of close friend	37
18	Change to different line of work	36
19	Change in number of arguments with spouse	35
20	Large mortgage or loan	30
21	Foreclosure of mortgage or loan	30
22	Change in responsibilities at work	29
23	Son or daughter leaving home	29
24	Trouble with in-law	29
25	Outstanding personal achievement	28
26	Wife begins or stops work	26
27	Begin or end school	26
28	Change in living conditions	25
29	Revision of personal habits	24
30	Trouble with boss	23
31	Change in work hours or conditions	20
32	Change in residence	20
33	Change in schools	20
34	Change in recreation	19
35	Change in church activities	19
36	Change in social activities	18
37	Moderate mortgage or loan	17
38	Change in sleeping habits	16
39	Change in number of family get-togethers	15
40	Change in eating habits	15
41	Vacation	13
42	Christmas	12
43	Minor violations of the law	11

Before reading on, put a check next to every event or situation that has happened to you in the last eighteen months. Now, add up your

point total. (This is sort of like golf—you're not shooting for a high score, but you need to be honest.)

Did you score less than 150 points? According to Dr. Holmes, you have no more than one chance in three of experiencing a serious decrease in health in the next two years. (Keep in mind that individual tolerance levels vary as much as point levels, so don't swear by this. If your tolerance level is 100 points, you can score 90 and be struggling with stress.)

If you scored between 150 and 300 points, you've scored high. You have an even chance of taking a turn for the worse in your health within the next two years.

If you scored over 300 points, you are very vulnerable to disease and even to injury. Why injury? Because injuries are often caused by mental preoccupation and impaired physical responses. A score of over 300 points means an 80 percent chance of facing a major health change in the next two years.

No matter how high you scored, don't despair. Simply be careful, be aware, and apply the stress reduction and coping techniques we will present in this book. (On the other hand, don't worry about this—we're not trying to raise your point total!)

As you went down the scale, you may have been surprised to see that some of the changes are positive. These include marriage, marital reconciliation, pregnancy, gaining a new family member, an outstanding personal achievement, a vacation, and even Christmas. These may be welcome events, but the stress response is very much the same as to unwelcome events—adrenaline increases, blood pressure elevates, and there is a depletion of physical and emotional resources.

Let's apply the stress scale to sixty-three-year-old Gwen. Six months ago her mother passed away in a rest home. Chris, her husband, retired and soon afterward they moved from Minnesota to Texas. This meant making changes in residence, living conditions, recreation, church activities and social activities. Suddenly, Chris died

of a heart attack. Within six months, Gwen's change points totaled well over 300.

Whether she realizes it or not, Gwen is at a crisis point. She needs to open herself to God's comfort and encouragement and carefully avoid as many additional stressors as she can. She also needs the special support, love, and prayers of family and friends—even if she appears to be holding up well.

The Holmes stress scale is a beginning but it is not the last word on the subject of stress. It focuses on *episodic* stress linked to events which don't happen frequently. There is also *chronic* stress, the wear and tear of daily life that may be triggered by things like broken vases, stained carpets, cars that won't start, and checkbooks that won't balance. Psychologist Richard Lazarus maintains that the everyday hassles and annoyances of life actually contribute more to illness and depression than major life changes. So, although a high score probably means you are under stress, a low score doesn't necessarily mean you're not!

Stress Is Cumulative

Stress's cumulative effect is one of its most important and least understood characteristics. Whether episodic or chronic, whether it involves change or not, all stress has its point values and those values add up. Often there are significant residual effects of a stressor even after a year has passed.¹⁵

Kristen is thirty-six, a strong Christian, and wife and mother of an ideal family. A delightful woman with a quick smile, Kristen is loved by everyone, especially in the church office where she works.

One morning, Kristen phoned a salesman regarding a photocopy machine the church was interested in buying. Following instructions, Kristen asked the salesman if his company could bring their price down a little. "What do you want us to do," he snapped, "give it to you?"

Kristen wept uncontrollably, unable to finish the conversation. She couldn't move from her desk, or drive home, and her husband had to come pick her up. For three months she couldn't come near the church

office without the beginnings of an anxiety attack. She couldn't attend church or even go to the grocery store for fear that someone would speak to her. Kristen wondered if she'd ever be normal again.

On the outside, all this seemed strange. How could one rude salesman throw this composed and godly woman into such a tailspin? The truth was that circumstances in the preceding year had laid many pressures on Kristen. A dear friend was having serious marriage problems, another friend had turned her back on the Lord, Kristen's father had experienced an emotional breakdown, and she was living amidst an 18-month remodeling project. Kristen had gone through each of these stressors ministering to everyone who needed her, unaware of the toll it was taking.

Suppose for a moment that Kristen had a stress limit of 200 points. The morning she talked to the salesman she was already at 198. Maybe that conversation was only a three point stressor—but it was enough to take her over her limit.

With strong support from her husband, family, and friends, and a recuperation that included months away from some of her normal responsibilities, Kristen experienced healing. Once she understood the cumulative nature of her stress over the previous year, she wasn't as hard on herself, and gave herself the time and space she desperately needed.

When we understand how stress adds up and why we're a bundle of nerves, why we're exhausted or sick, we are much more prone to take it in stride and allow ourselves to recover. When we don't understand what is happening to us, our stress level increases and we tend to panic, feel hopeless or helpless, and plunge deeper into stress.

Some 200-point women step off the merry-go-round of a hectic life just long enough to let their stress level settle back to a 190, then say, "I feel fine now." But they are still living on the brink. One big stressor, or a few little ones, will send them over again, and this time the results may be more serious. Let your stress level drop significantly

before you charge on—and even then be careful, or you’re asking for a relapse.

Stress and Disease

Dr. Holmes’s study linked stress to disease. What are some of the diseases stress makes us more vulnerable to?

Harmful, invisible processes take place under stress, including the production of excessive lipids (fat) in the blood. Long-term stress tears down the walls of the arteries. The body responds by laying down cholesterol plaques to repair the damage. If the stress continues long enough, the cholesterol continues to build up and the arteries become more and more narrow and hardened. This restricts the blood flow and therefore demands higher blood pressure in order to get blood to the extremities. This in turn creates more pressure against the arterial walls, resulting in more damage and still more excessive production of cholesterol.

It is this vicious cycle that leads to heart disease, heart attacks, and strokes—the nation’s leading killers. (Stress also creates a higher clotting factor in the blood, another leading cause of strokes.)

Statistics indicate that over 750,000 of the 2.4 million deaths in the United States in 2009 were caused by heart disease and strokes.¹⁶ That’s nearly two deaths every minute, and *that makes stress public health enemy number one.*

Other stress-induced or stress-affected diseases include tuberculosis, multiple sclerosis, leukemia, diabetes, and hypoglycemia. Research has also proven that chronic stress inhibits the body’s production of cancer-fighting cells. Many other illnesses we normally think of as purely physical, such as asthma, allergies, and rheumatoid arthritis, are either induced or aggravated by stress. It’s as if we carry in our bodies little locked-up boxes of potential diseases (which ones may be a matter of genetic proneness), and stress is the key that unlocks them.

Often we fail to see the connection between stress and our most common physical problems. Studies have shown, for instance, that over 90 percent of all headaches are caused by prolonged contraction of the neck muscles, which itself is simply a result of stress.

Many people know the dangers of high cholesterol and attempt to control it by eating less red meat and fewer eggs. That's good. But a single outburst of anger throws us into overdrive and can produce in our bodies the cholesterol equivalent of a dozen eggs!

Stress wears down our immune systems and increases our susceptibility to almost every disease. One year I was under a particularly great amount of stress. I developed a cold and a sore throat during a family vacation in August. The stress did not let up so neither did the illness. I didn't shake it until February—six months later.

Have you ever worked particularly hard for a big occasion—perhaps an important dinner, final exam, or your daughter's wedding—then gotten sick immediately afterward? You've poured out your energy and not enough is left to resist getting sick. You've earned a good illness and now you're going to get it!

Some time ago I discovered I was getting sick almost every Friday—but only on Fridays. Why? Because Friday was my day off. I was working so hard to get everything done by Thursday night that when I finally relaxed my guard on my day off, I was giving my body permission to collapse under the stress I had heaped on it.

Stress and Mental Illness

While the link between stress and physical diseases is more widely accepted, so-called mental diseases are often just as attributable to stress. We have talked with many women, many Christian women, who say, "I'm afraid I'm losing my mind." Usually these women are perfectly normal and are experiencing perfectly normal stress symptoms. But because they don't know that their anxiety and forgetfulness and inability to concentrate and a host of other problems are stress-induced, their stress is compounded with the fear that they

are going crazy. Ironically, it is that fear which often becomes the greatest threat to their mental health. Once they learn proper coping methods, their mental health returns.

Unfortunately, our tendency as Christians is often to treat our material self (body) as totally separate from our immaterial self (called in Scripture the mind, heart, soul or spirit). Christians readily admit we're imperfect physically, but we're ashamed to admit mental and emotional imperfection. Denying these struggles only intensifies them.

Because God has made us whole people, our approach to stress in this book is holistic—recognizing that we are spirit, soul, and body, and that each is critically important and all are interrelated.

Are You Under Stress?

Ever driven on ice? Lost your children in a crowd? You know all too well some of the major stress symptoms!

Our facial expressions are often a great indicator of stress. Nanci and I enjoy watching football (Nanci is the more avid fan), and we often remark about one particular coach. Even when he's winning, he's incredibly intense. His brow is constantly furled; his face screwed up and contorted. He looks like a pressure cooker about to explode, a heart attack waiting to happen.

Try standing in front of a mirror. Close your eyes and let your face adopt its normal appearance. Don't smile or twist your face the way you do when you're checking your makeup. Now, open your eyes. Is this a happy, calm, relaxed, and lighthearted face? Or does it reflect tension, impatience, anger, depression?

Now let's take a closer look at your own stress level. Which of these following signs of stress are you experiencing?

Worry

Fatigue

Nervousness

Frustration

Tension

Hyperactivity

Irritability

Unexplained itching

Anger	Problems swallowing
Impatience	Heart racing
Fears	Heart palpitations
Insecurity	Preoccupation
Insomnia	Restlessness
Irregular breathing	Loss of concentration
High blood pressure	Nervous tics
Low blood pressure	Ulcers
Trembling	Unexplained aches and pains
Depression	Swings in blood sugar
Inability to sit still	Inability to relax
Inability to have fun	Guilt
Lack of contentment	Helplessness
Indigestion	Hopelessness
Stomach problems	Sinking feeling
Headaches	Irregular bowel movements
Backaches	Increased allergic symptoms
Dizziness/lightheadedness	Increase of appetite
Mood swings	Loss of appetite
Desire to avoid people	Cold hands and feet
Excessive sleep and naps	Crying spells
Excessive daydreaming	Smoking
Nightmares	Taking tranquilizers
Excessive drinking	Facial wrinkles
Unexplained rashes	Skin problems (acne, eczema)
Frequents colds, sore throats	
Unexplained menstrual changes	

All of these are red flags, warning signs that something isn't right. We need to view stress and its effects on our bodies and minds like the little red lights on the car's dashboard. When they come on, we've been fairly warned. If we ignore them, it's only a matter of time before we'll be sorry.

So take note of your own warning lights and read on!

The Stress-Prone Personality

To cope with stress, we must not just understand it, we must understand ourselves. The question is not "What is stressful?" but "What makes me feel stressed?" A ride on a roller coaster exhilarates some women, but terrifies others. Some women thrive on weaving their way through noisy, crowded shopping malls, while the very thought of doing so leaves others fearful, tense, irritable, and suffering from migraines. One woman functions best at another woman's breaking point. Socrates said it thousands of years ago and it's still good advice: "Know yourself."

One of the most helpful ways to look at our own vulnerability to stress is in light of the "type A" and "type B" designations popularized by Drs. Friedman and Rosenman in their landmark book *Type A Behavior and Your Heart*.¹⁷ While most of their original research was on men, recent findings indicate that the Type A and B distinctions also apply to women.¹⁸ While some of the differences can be attributed to personality and temperament, which are difficult to change, many of the differences are a matter of habit, and can certainly be changed, especially by calling upon God's Holy Spirit to transform us more into the image of Christ.

Type A's tend to be characterized by most or all of the following:

Achievement orientation

Free-floating anxiety

Time urgency

Trying to do several things at once

Excessively high expectations of self and others
Uneasiness
Impatience
Intolerance
Aggressiveness
Competitiveness
Frustration
Anger
Strained relationships
Driven personality
Guilt feelings when relaxing

Type B's are defined by the absence of type A traits. The type A is a stress-prone personality with a much higher risk of heart attacks, strokes, and many other serious ailments. The type B is a stress-resistant personality. Two people may have similar natural temperaments and identical occupations, but one can be a type A and the other a type B. Furthermore, though it's not easy, type A's can become type B's (just as type B's can become type A's) by implementing certain changes in attitudes and behavior.¹⁹

A type A is preoccupied with the clock. She is afflicted with what Friedman and Rosenman call the "hurry sickness." Everything is done quickly, with regular glances at the watch. Type A Martha is impatient and hates to wait in line or in a doctor's office. Type B Mary will make the best of the situation by talking to people in line or writing out a grocery list, and she'll enjoy the wait in the doctor's office by catching up on her reading or knitting.

Type B's are mellower, low-key, less driven, unhurried, more patient with others, and generally have less to prove than type A's. Not only can they take a vacation, they can have a great time on it. Type B's enjoy life more, and have more time for people. B's tend to be

people-oriented, while A's are task-oriented. B's are concerned about life's process, while A's focus on life's products.

It is important to emphasize that type B's can be just as successful as type A's. Ultimately they can be much more successful since they are healthier, happier, and will probably live much longer than type A's. A's run a seven-times-greater risk of heart attacks than type B's. In fact, type A behavior has been found to precede coronary heart disease 72–85 percent of the time!

Type B's very rarely contract heart disease prior to their seventies, while type A's often develop heart disease in their forties, fifties, and sixties, and sometimes even in their twenties and thirties.

Type A's treat life as a 100-meter sprint—and die at 150 meters. Type B's treat life as a marathon, and pace themselves to finish.

Studies show that women who work outside the home are more often type A's, though plenty of homemakers are also A's. Like type A men, these women are more likely than B's to have unhappy marriages.²⁰

Not sure whether you're type A, B, or somewhere in between? The following test should help you find out.²¹

Circle the appropriate numbers before each statement. Choose the number on the scale which best describes your usual reaction or behavior. You may use the test to rate yourself or someone else. You can also ask someone to rate you and then compare your answers.

KEY: 1. Never 2. Seldom 3. Sometimes 4. Often 5. Usually

1 2 3 4 5	A.	Emphasize or accentuate key words in your ordinary speech, even when it's not necessary to do so.
1 2 3 4 5	B.	Speak rapidly to people or utter the last few words of your sentences more rapidly than the opening words.
1 2 3 4 5	C.	Move, walk, and eat rapidly.

1 2 3 4 5	D.	Feel and sometimes express impatience with the rate at which most events take place.
1 2 3 4 5	E.	Attempt to finish other people's sentences before they can.
1 2 3 4 5	F.	Become irritated or angry when the car ahead of you is going too slow, you have to wait in line, or you see someone plodding away at a task that you can do faster.
1 2 3 4 5	G.	Try to do or think about two or more things simultaneously (such as eating, reading, driving, talking on the phone, etc.)
1 2 3 4 5	H.	Find it difficult to refrain from guiding the conversation to those subjects which especially interest and intrigue you. If unable to do this, you pretend to listen but remain preoccupied with your own thoughts.
1 2 3 4 5	I.	Feel vaguely uneasy when relaxing for several hours or on vacation for several days.
1 2 3 4 5	J.	Fail to observe or appreciate the beautiful or interesting things you encounter in daily life.
1 2 3 4 5	K.	Find that you do not have time to spare on becoming a person worth being because you are so preoccupied with getting the things worth having.
1 2 3 4 5	L.	Attempt to schedule more and more in less and less time, and make fewer allowances for unforeseen contingencies.

1 2 3 4 5	M.	Exhibit nervous tics such as jerking the corners of your mouth, clenching your jaw, or grinding your teeth. (Teeth grinding often happens while sleeping—ask your spouse or dentist.)
1 2 3 4 5	N.	Believe that whatever success you have enjoyed has been due to your ability to get things done faster than others.
1 2 3 4 5	O.	Find yourself translating and evaluating your own activities and those of others in terms of numbers. (e.g. How much you make, how fast you run, how many jars of peaches you canned this year, how much you saved on a sale, etc.)
1 2 3 4 5	P.	Competitive in your work or play; winning is important to you.
1 2 3 4 5	Q.	Compare your own or your children's achievements with others.
1 2 3 4 5	R.	Relate aggressively with others, at times even with hostility if you are upset with the person.
1 2 3 4 5	S.	Find yourself rushing out the door, cutting off conversations, and telling your children to "Hurry up."
1 2 3 4 5	T.	Feel uptight and uneasy even when you don't know why.

Add up all the numbers you circled to arrive at your total. If you scored 20-50 you are a type B, if you scored 70-100 you are a type A. If you are between 50 and 70 you are somewhere between an A and a B.

No matter how you scored, you will still experience stress. But remember, type A's needlessly experience much greater stress than type B's, and ultimately pay the price for it.

If you are a type B, there is still much you can learn about coping with stress. But the closer you are to type A, the more urgent it is that you start learning now. If you are a type A or an in-betweener, by understanding yourself and applying stress reduction techniques, you can become a type B, or at least significantly adjust your perspectives and habits. That's what this book is all about.

Discussion Questions

1. How would you define or describe “stress”?
2. What is the “fight or flight” response? What triggers it? How does it affect our bodies and minds?
3. What are some stressors in your life? How and why do you feel stressed by these particular things?
4. Why does change cause stress?
5. What changes have taken place in your life this last year, and how has each affected you?
6. Using specific illustrations, describe how a person’s stress can be cumulative.
7. Why do physical problems seem more acceptable than psychological problems? Does this stigma help or hurt us? How?
8. What stress symptoms do you currently have?
9. What are some of the characteristics of a stress-prone (type A) personality? Are you a type A, a type B, or somewhere in between?



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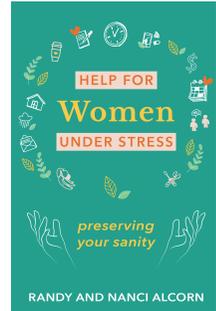
with author Randy Alcorn

Learn more about *Help for Women Under Stress*

Stress. It's part of our everyday lives, sometimes as the spark that keeps us moving forward and sometimes as the avalanche that threatens to bury us. Chances are, since this book's title has caught your eye, you are looking for some relief from stress, or at least hope that relief is possible.

In this thoroughly revised and updated edition of *Help for Women Under Stress* originally published in 1986, Randy and Nanci offer you both the hope and the help you're looking for.

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About Randy Alcorn

Randy is the founder and director of Eternal Perspective Ministries and the best-selling author of over 50 books (over nine million in print) including *Heaven*, *The Treasure Principle*, and the Gold Medallion winner *Safely Home*.

Randy and Nanci reside in Gresham, Oregon. They have two married daughters, five grandsons, and a Golden Retriever named Maggie. They both love spending time with their family.



About Eternal Perspective Ministries

Eternal Perspective Ministries (EPM) is a nonprofit ministry dedicated to teaching principles of God's Word and assisting the church in ministering to the unreached, unfed, unborn, uneducated, and unsupported people around the world.

You can order all of Randy's books and products through EPM's online store at www.epm.org.