

## Ask Your Therapist

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### Stress Reduction Part 2

I received a letter from one of my readers telling me that my last column on “Stress Reduction for Stressful Times” had greatly increased her stress because it gave her more things to do without any clear idea of how to do them. I offer my genuine apologies to her and to anyone else who had a similar experience.

So today, let’s take a look at the emotional, psychological and spiritual faces of stress reduction. Let me start with a story from my own life. In the 1990’s I went back to school to get my Master’s degree in Social Work. I enrolled in a part-time program so that I could continue to see my clients while I was in school. In the third year I was away from my house for 70 hours every week. I was completely exhausted - and stressed. One day I took a step back and asked myself what I was doing to contribute to my stress and I generated a list. The number one thing on that list was that I had forgotten a very simple truth: “In this moment, I am fine.” The first part, “In this moment” meant that I was focused here and now, not looking with regret or shame about the past (over which I had no control) and not looking ahead to try to control the fear and anxiety I had about the future. I was just in the moment, and I was fine. When I awoke to a new day where I had to drive in the snow for an hour to a 7am staff meeting, see clients as a student intern, then drive to Boston to go to a class, and then drive to see my own clients and get out at 10 or 11pm and drive home, I would feel the adrenalin begin to surge in my body as I anticipated the day. In the past, I would have made my first stop the coffee shop to load up on caffeine (and sugar) and then head out filled with anxiety. After my insight, I began each day by reminding myself “Right now, I am fine”. I was fine driving to staff meeting. In that moment, all I had to do was drive and I enjoy driving. I was fine. Then I had staff meeting, which was fine. Then I saw clients and I made sure I made a personal connection with each person which reminded me of why I was back in school, and that was fine. This is how I went through each hour of each day. When I would forget to do this, I would feel my anxiety shooting up, my hands start to shake, my grim, frowny self would return and I would feel miserable. Then that would remind me that I was not being here, now, and I would return to my personal mantra. And I made it through that final year relatively intact because I kept realizing “In this moment, I am fine”.

The second part of that statement “I am fine” meant I had to define “fine” and I decided that meant I was connected to myself, I felt real and authentically myself. Sometimes I was authentically exhausted beyond words but I still had a sense of humor. I could still find myself.

The other things on my list were fairly simple. I decided not to feed into the belief that to be busy meant that I was important. I decided it really meant I did not

know how to set appropriate limits and priorities and that I needed to learn those skills. I stopped taking pride in how well I could cram 70 minutes of tasks into 55 or 60 minutes regardless of the stress it caused me. Finally, I learned to create "Time just for me" which sometimes meant eating my homemade salad by the tires and abandoned refrigerators along the Merrimack River rather than skipping lunch or gulping fast food down as I sat in my car just down the block from my next client.

I suggest you try my simple approach to stress reduction. Just check in right now. Aren't you fine in this moment?

Next month I am going to explore the idea of "Baby steps" as a tool for successful incremental change.

To read all the prior Ask Your Therapist columns go to [www.krishnabai.com](http://www.krishnabai.com) where you can also send Krishnabai a general question for her column.

Krishnabai, MSW is a therapist in Ashby and Wellesley Hills where she sees adults, older teens and couples. The core of her work is the discovery and expression of the Authentic Self. She focuses on the identification, expression, and resolution of emotions, commitment to honesty and the use of remedial education and information. The Ashby Center for Counseling 978-827-1181.