



# HEALTHY LIFESTYLES

## Dealing with Stress

*More than ever, it is time to take care of ourselves and each other*

by KENNETH SILVESTRI, EdD, CCH

Our emotional well-being is extremely dependent on how we deal with “stress” and its ensuing patterns of fear and anxiety. Stress—whether it’s brought on by busy winter holidays, dreary wintry weather, or disturbing world events—can undermine our health and relationships.

An important caveat in this regard is that we should never depend on single words alone to describe a concern, a condition, or an event. Labels cannot make sense of the multitude of contexts that encompass our well-being. When we talk about addressing emotional healing and finding solutions, it is imperative that we determine the source and consequences of our ailments. This begins with our nervous system, a rather complex and amazing system that protects us from danger. It is an autonomic or automatic system, and once it is challenged, it can be very difficult to control.

### Our nervous system

The nervous system consists of a revved-up part (*sympathetic*) and a calm part (*parasympathetic*). Our nervous system doesn’t differentiate a horrible experience, like being the victim of a crime, from a more common upsetting experience, like not finding a parking space.

The sympathetic part of our nervous system is activated through the interaction of the hypothalamus, pituitary, and adrenal glands. When there is a need to defend ourselves, the hypothalamus sends signals via the hormone corticotropin to the pituitary gland (which, when not dealing with stress, secretes oxytocin, the “cuddle” hormone). Next, another hormone (ACTH) is triggered, which travels to the adrenal gland where cortisol is produced, activating our “fight or flight” response. When we are in this fight or flight state, blood leaves the frontal part of our brain, diminishing our cognitive ability as well as that

of our gut, and moves into our arms and legs, enabling us to be able to run from danger. However, our nervous system can get stuck in this pattern. Because we don’t need to save our lives 24 hours a day, this repeated response can perpetuate stress, insecurity, and anxiety.

When this occurs, it negatively effects the amazing vagus nerve (not to be confused with Las Vegas), named for the Latin word for “wandering.” This nerve, the largest in our body, connects our brain with our gut, traveling through the body to regulate our heart rate and metabolism. Most importantly, this is the nerve of compassion, and its natural tendency is to reverse the dangers

Conventional medications in most instances confuse and complicate the body’s system of healing. That is why iatrogenesis—illness inadvertently caused by hospitals, physicians, and conventional medical treatment—is one of the highest causes of death in our society, reportedly well over 100,000 a year.

Homeopathy is a systemic process, based on an individual’s specific needs. All our repertories and materia medicas describe a multitude of contexts that indicate negative symptoms resulting from fear and consequent feelings of insecurity. When we look at an individual’s temperament, whether it is predominantly think-

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of overusing our revved-up state. When the vagus nerve is functioning in its optimal role, it glows; when it is continuously threatened, it constricts and can shut down our bodily functions. It’s believed that, when it is compromised, it is the origin of many dysfunctions, including autism (this theory is called the “polyvagal theory”).

### Relevance to homeopathy

How is this relevant to homeopathy and an integrative approach for emotional healing? No one remedy or intervention will correct the nervous system when it is in continuous “fight or flight.” If the stresses are not addressed, the consequences of panic and anticipatory anxiety, to mention just two symptoms, will take hold and cause enormous discomfort. Even the American Medical Association (AMA) finally admits that stress is the origin of all chronic diseases. Now here is where homeopathy has a wonderful and well-documented role.

ing, feeling, intuitive, or sensational, this becomes the segue to addressing the path for emotional well-being.

Samuel Hahnemann believed that emotional symptoms tipped the scale and held precedence in choosing the needed simillimum (most helpful remedy). His probing would seek out the individual’s core issues and ultimately match what was occurring in one’s nervous system to a needed remedy. Almost 200 years before the recent AMA proclamation, Hahnemann knew that stress is the basis of all chronic diseases.

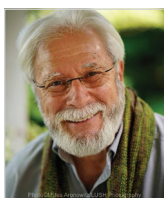
### How to proceed

When searching for solutions to challenging emotional issues, either as a practitioner or consumer of homeopathy, it is necessary to delve into what is occurring. We must consider the wider environmental context and how it is supported, negatively or positively. Here is where looking for possibilities and barriers to celebrate the joys of life that make a difference for your environment is

important. Lastly, recognizing our fallibility allows us to make needed adjustments that are important and relevant to our temperament and being. Once the appropriate homeopathic remedy is found that matches the sensations, modalities, and location of what it is that ails us, then we can complement it with such skills as Coherent Breathing (six-second inhalations and exhalations that soothe the vagus nerve), yoga, qigong, tai chi, aikido, music, poetic expression, psychotherapy, and so on. All these resources can enhance the healing process with no side effects and complement homeopathy. They can also help us to make better use of the above-mentioned “cuddle” hormone, to enable us to take care of each other.

Some recommended resources are: *Homeopathic Guide to Stress* by Miranda Castro; *Homeopathy and Mental Health Care*, edited by Christopher Johannes and Harry van der Zee; and my recent book, *A Wider Lens: How to See Your Life Differently*.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



Kenneth Silvestri, EdD, CCH, has been in private practice as a systemic psychotherapist and homeopath for over 25 years, with offices in Montclair, NJ; Nyack, NY; and at [www.drkennethsilvestri.com](http://www.drkennethsilvestri.com). He holds a doctoral degree from Columbia University in Family Cultural Studies. He is a clinical professor at Daybreak University and a clinical assistant professor at the New York Medical College. He writes a monthly blog for *Psychology Today*, and recently authored the book, *A Wider Lens: How to See Your Life Differently*.

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