

# Stress Balance

By Claire Knowles

Joan Borysenko, Ph.D., author, scientist and therapist, noted in a recent interview that "stress is when your gut tells you 'No,' but what comes out of your mouth is 'Yes.'" Can you relate to that?

Stress is what you experience when you believe you cannot cope effectively with a given situation at a particular time. Negative stress (distress) occurs when you perceive that the challenge facing you is, or will be, dangerous, difficult, painful or uncomfortable, and you are concerned that you may lack the resources to cope effectively.

When you have too much to do and a deadline to complete it, combined with a lack of input about how it will unfold, you have a recipe for stress. Remember the "I Love Lucy" episode when Lucy stuffs chocolates in her mouth in a futile attempt to keep up with an unrelenting conveyor belt? That's stress with a hilarious twist!

Any event, thought or situation that causes stress is called a "stressor." Engaging in chronic, negative self-comparisons (a "less than" or "more than" mentality) or negative self-judgements is destructive and exemplifies "distress."

In America, we raise our children trying constantly to avert any problem that might befall them. But life isn't like that. We do our children a disservice by making them think they're always supposed to be happy. Every person must suffer disappointment, loss and negative stress in order to cope successfully with life.

Not all news about stress is bad. Pioneer researcher Hans Selye said, "Stress is the spice of life." He termed good stress "eustress." Stress can be a positive force, and eustress represents things that add to the enjoyment and satisfaction of being alive. Intuitively, we are aware of things that bring a sense of eustress and crave them in our lives.

The key to stress management is to remind yourself of the importance of balancing eustress and distress. It is therapeutic to find and integrate more eustress to offset the weight of distress.

Stress management techniques include learning how to face stress by modifying the environment, as an important first step. For example, does traffic congestion stress you? Leave earlier, or later. Do you have difficulty with deadlines? Finish the project sooner. Are these words easier said than done for you? Even if you can't significantly change the situations or events that trigger your stress, you can change the way you perceive them. An important subset of stress management skills embraces changing the way you view things. Researchers know that most stress is self-

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induced, and people can be taught to see things differently.

Even if you cannot change a situation or your view of that situation, you can still manage your stress by learning coping skills. You can train yourself to relax physically and quiet your mind. You can learn how to become calm and defuse your stress level.

What constructive coping behavior works best for you? Physical exercise? Taking time to relax, breathe and unwind? Confronting the source of stress, and working to change it? Changing your outlook? Seeking out others for connection, support or help? Focusing on what you can control, and accepting what you cannot? Seeking out the bigger picture? Taking one step at a time? Keeping a positive journal? Using affirming statements?

When you add to the eustress side of your

stress balance scale, you'll discover some of your personal passions. Those things that bring you back into balance will be the things that you truly enjoy doing. You'll discover that your eustress is elicited by those activities that bring you joy, ease and perhaps excitement, a true sense of lightness—the very things that lift you up and make you smile. The distress side of the scale is driven by fear, anger, discontent, unease and a clear sense of heaviness—all of which are characterized by complaining.

Stress signifies different things for each of us, and both the level of stress and how we handle stress differ. It is very much like the tension of a balance scale. Too much negative weightiness tilts us away from being right with the world. When harmony, coherence, enjoyment and posi-

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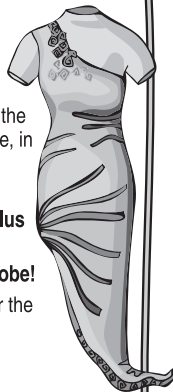
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## Textiles For This World And Beyond: Treasures From Insular Southeast Asia

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*adat*. The exhibition includes two rare and finely embroidered tapis from South Sumatra. The ship symbolizes transitions from one stage of existence to another—a recurring motif in many parts of Southeast Asia. Images of people, elephants, birds, horses and imaginary forms also join with the ship motifs. Such cloths were hung in a house during life transition rites, such as marriage or a boy's circumcision, and used to call ancestors to witness celebrations.

### Batik Textiles

No other country is as closely aligned to a textile tradition as is Indonesia to the wax-resist patterning technique known as batik. It constitutes the national dress and is deemed worthy as a State gift. Although it has come to stand for a nation, Indonesian batik was originally made only on Java, where certain patterns and colors came to exist within the confines of custom. Some patterns were restricted to members of the Central Javanese court and are rendered in a style and color that links the wearer to courtly relations. Along the north coast of Java, home to Chinese, Indians, Islamic traders and Europeans, as well as Javanese traders from the archipelago, a diverse clientele gave rise to different batik patterns and methods of production. Over time, these diverse patterns and color schemes came to characterize particular ethnic groups, and, as such, became largely inappropriate for others to wear. The batik textiles featured in *Textiles for this World and Beyond* exemplify the creativity and precision by which the art form was practiced in the courts and elsewhere.

### Catalogue And Support

The majority of the textiles featured in *Textiles for this World and Beyond* were acquired by the Museum in 2000 with a grant from The Christensen Fund in Palo Alto, California. The exhibition is curated by Dr. Mattiebelle Gittinger, The Textile Museum's research associate for Southeast Asian Textiles. A leading scholar in the field of Southeast Asian textiles and culture, Dr. Gittinger has curated numerous exhibitions and published extensively. The exhibition will be accompanied by a fully-illustrated color catalogue. Generous support for the catalogue and exhibition was provided by The Blakemore Foundation, E. Rhodes and Leona B. Carpenter Foundation, Jeremy and Hannelore Grantham and Peter Reed.

### More Info

The Textile Museum is located at 2320 S Street, NW in Washington, D.C. The Museum is open Monday-Saturday from 10 a.m. to 5 p.m., and Sunday 1 p.m. to 5 p.m. Admission is free; suggested donation is \$5. For further information, call 202-667-0441.

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## Stress Balance

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tive lightness are added, we move back to being centered. It is important to find the correct amount of eustress to allow us to be centered most of the time.

Draw a balance scale. On one side, list all the negative distressors that are currently weighing you down. Then, list all the positive eustressors that lift you up. What does the stress balance scale indicate for you at this time?

Time to get to work!

Claire Knowles, a retired corporate human resources manager, is currently an independent leadership consultant and writer. She is on the board of directors of The Center for Self-Organizing Leadership, Inc., [www.centerforselforganizingleadership.com](http://www.centerforselforganizingleadership.com)