Mel Robbins Keypoints — Anxiety, Stress & Overwhelm

Mel Robbins Keypoints

Episodes in this pack: 31

If You Feel Overwhelmed, Stressed, or Stuck, Listen to This

Guest: Kier Gaines
Date: 2026-08-13 · Duration: 1:04:55
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h9a553vDvU8

KEYPOINTS

• Build emotional fitness, not just 'mental health'

Therapist Kier Gaines calls his approach 'emotional readiness architecture', which he describes as a fancy name for emotional fitness: how prepared you are for life's slings and arrows. He argues modern life is engineered against your wellness and most people have no counter-strategy. Mel prefers the framing because it suggests strength. Mental health means being self-aware enough to notice when something outside is getting inside. Gaines says it's never too late to build these tools and he's a strong advocate for therapy.

• Resilience means you keep chopping your feet

Gaines's running-back analogy: between you and the end zone are 300-pound players trying to stop you, and sometimes you get stood up but not tackled. A good coach says keep your feet moving and push forward, even when you're hopeless, unsupported or can't see the end zone. He adds that this takes self-honesty about where you actually are.

• Insecurity has a source, so find it before you treat it

Mel reads from page 24 of his book It All Starts When You Do (chapter: 'Do you accept the uncomfortable truths in life?'). If you keep listening to the deep-down voice that says happiness, love and financial freedom are for other people, you'll never get them. Follow the trail of breadcrumbs to what you're insecure about, because that diagnosis is the first step towards trusting yourself.

• Someone else's situation is not a verdict on you

Mel admits that a daughter struggling in math once made her feel she was a failing parent, and that people nitpick a partner's weight because they're managing what others think. Gaines reframes it: there's a circumstance that needs attention, but it is not a reflection on you. What you do about it is.

• Troubleshoot cheapest-first, and trade blame for accountability

Catastrophic thinking jumps to 'the engine's dead'. Gaines checks the $10 fix (a leaking tube, a seal, the water pump) before the $2,500 one. In relationships and self-talk, ask what else a problem could be caused by besides your failure. Blame grabs all your awareness but doesn't help. Accountability says what's yours and gives you the power to act.

• Men's anger is often a primary emotion covering others

Speaking to men sent the episode by a partner, Gaines says anger is usually the first feeling. Sit with it and you often find disappointment, a secondary emotion, and under that, hopelessness. Treating only the anger is like taking allergy medicine for a migraine. Quoting one of his mentors, he says naming and managing feelings is how you become 'a comprehensive man'. He adds that the old model of masculinity has to adapt.

• Self-trust comes from proving it to yourself, alone

When others' opinions start overriding yours, Gaines's unpopular prescription is to spend time with yourself, by yourself, and practise being the person you say you are through small steps. Be undistracted: fly without headphones, sit in morning silence, stop filling space with words. That's how you stay 'updated software', not the shadow of who you were 10 or 15 years ago.

• With depression, progress can mean stopping the slide

Gaines, who is open about his own depression diagnosis, says you have to shrink your expectations to meet the moment, because you can't run at 100% efficiency. People think progress is going from 2 to 5 on a 1–10 scale. Sometimes it's going from " 5 to " 4, or only slipping to " 6 instead of " 8. Anxiety and depression usually show up together.

• How clinicians assess depression

From memory, Gaines says clinicians look at roughly 10–12 symptoms and you need to meet about five or six that can't be explained by something else. Examples are losing interest in things that used to bring joy, effects on relationships, work and self-care, withdrawing from people, and insomnia or hypersomnia. Feeling bad about your job alone isn't depression, which is why you need a licensed professional and often a screening inventory.

• 60-second overwhelm reset: pause, name it, don't fix it all

First, pause. When everything is urgent, nothing is. Second, name it and localise it: 'I'm overwhelmed in this moment.' Admitting it reflects your circumstances, not your incapability. Third, you don't have to fix it all now. Overwhelm is often a failure of the systems meant to hold you up, and you can't fix systems in a moment. Just slow it down.

EXAMPLES

• Brandon Jacobs and slowing overwhelm down

The New York Giants running back was 6'4" and 264 lb when most backs are around 210. Asked how to stop him, a coach said you don't stop Brandon Jacobs, you slow him down enough for the defence to catch its breath. Gaines says the same goes for overwhelm once you're in it.

• The $1,400 Buick Roadmaster

Gaines's first car, a 1992 Roadmaster from an auto auction ('a refrigerator on wheels'), broke down every other week. He learned to stop assuming the engine was dead and to work through simpler fixes first, which became his model for not catastrophising.

• Mel's jealous 40s

Mel says she was miserable in her 40s. With liens on the house and money tight, she burned inside watching friends build kitchens, take vacations and join clubs. She was only happy for others if she was doing better. She decided she didn't want to stay that person and wanted to celebrate others' success authentically.

• Gaines's own maintenance routine

He reads books he enjoys, eats alone and lets his thoughts wander, gets sunlight first thing, and goes to bed 'on purpose'

around 9:30–10 at a consistent time instead of falling asleep on the couch. Mel says her happiness and success track how early she goes to bed.

- **Cleaning his cousin's garage**
  Realising he wasn't spending enough time with family, Gaines helped a cousin in her 70s clean out her garage. Small acts like that prove to him that he is the family-centred person he says he is.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Ask people you trust 'What do you see when you see me?'**
  Gaines asks how he usually reacts to things. He admits it stings when they 'keep it too real', but it shows blind spots you can't see alone.
- **Ask yourself the uncomfortable question**
  Don't 'lollipop' yourself like interviewees who say their weakness is caring too much. Ask whether you're willing to pay the price of the comfort you get from avoiding hard truths.
- **Peel back anger in three layers**
  When you're angry, ask 'What else?' twice, for example anger to disappointment to hopelessness, and respond to the deepest layer.
- **Get assessed if symptoms persist**
  If several signs (lost interest, sleep changes, withdrawal, slipping at work) last, see a licensed clinician rather than self-diagnosing.

How to Feel Better Fast: 5 Things That Shift Your Mood Instantly

Guest: Dr. Wendy Suzuki, Dr. Adam Alter, Chelsea Handler, Dr. Martha Beck
Date: 2026-08-08 · Duration: 0:59:02
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=knxzN5Y-_p4

KEYPOINTS

- **Five feelings came up again and again when Mel asked half a million people what they need help with**
  Mel asked Instagram 'What do you need help with right now?' and got over 500,000 replies repeating the same words: anxious, irritated, tired, stuck, flat. Her team grouped them into five states (drained, foggy, brain-fried, hard on yourself, heavy/lost) and matched each with one tool from a past guest.
- **The fastest way to change how you feel is to change what your body is doing**
  Neuroscientist Dr. Wendy Suzuki (NYU) says every bout of movement releases dopamine, serotonin, noradrenaline, endorphins and growth factors. She calls it a 'neurochemical bubble bath for your brain.' You don't need a marathon: a 10-minute walk starts it, and getting your heart rate up adds more. The growth factors reach the hippocampus, where new cells form. She adds that people assigned to exercise grow more motivated to exercise, and the post-workout energy likely comes from the same chemicals.
- **A single walk sharpens focus right away, and regular exercise raises your baseline**
  Suzuki says improved focus is the most commonly reported brain effect in exercise studies, involving the prefrontal cortex, likely via new synapses (the mechanism is less clear there). Common antidepressant and anti-anxiety drugs act on the same chemicals, so movement is a natural complement, not a replacement for treatment.
- **A cold finish to your shower is a natural adrenaline jolt for a foggy mood**
  For the 'dirty window' fog, Suzuki ends every hot shower on maximum cold; colder means a bigger boost, lasting 'easy the rest of the morning.' Stay only until you feel the shock. Mel does a warm shower, then about 20 seconds cold, instead of extra coffee or Diet Coke that wrecks sleep. It shifts body state; it won't fix big problems.
- **A fried brain may need different input, not more effort**
  Mel describes overload as a drawbridge that won't close: you lose sentences, forget appointments, walk into rooms and forget why, and snap at the nicest people. Scrolling, reacting, worrying and trying to keep up all count as input. Her reframe is that you may not need to focus harder; you may need to change what your brain is looking at.
- **Nature restores the attention that screens and focused work drain**
  Dr. Adam Alter (NYU Stern, Princeton psychology PhD) calls nature's effects 'among the most profound I've ever seen in any research.' Focused attention on screens and work drains you like a falling body-battery reading; apart from sleep, nature refills it, because birdsong, water and trees hold attention gently. He ties this to research on attention restoration.
- **Being your own cheerleader is a skill, and it will feel cringey at first**
  For people exhausted by holding everything together and moving the goalposts after every win, Mel says to stop waiting for someone else to pick you up, because 'the person that looks at you and says, I got you, needs to be you.' Not everything is that deep, and you're allowed shenanigans and fun.
- **When you're in a bad mood, the fastest way out of your head is to do something for someone else**
  Chelsea Handler says you can add value as a private person: smile at a stranger, help someone struggling at the airport, ask the bathroom attendant about their day. She says being generous when you don't feel like it is 'next level.' Mel's takeaway is to stop making the whole world about your bad mood.
- **If you don't know where to start, figure out where you're going**
  For the heavy, lost feeling, Mel argues that people spin in place because they only see where they're standing. Without an imagined destination, you can't plot directions. That leads into Dr. Martha Beck's ideal-day exercise.
- **Imagination and anxiety can't easily run at once**
  Beck, a Harvard-trained sociologist and life coach, frames it in left-brain versus right-brain terms. The verbal, counting, problem-solving side gets stuck in anxiety. Senses, place and imagination engage the creative side. 'Anxiety shuts down creativity, but creativity shuts down anxiety.' That framing simplifies how the hemispheres actually work, so take it as a metaphor. She says the things that bring tears to your eyes point to your real purpose, not career or money.

EXAMPLES

- **Mel's walk between tapings**
  Sluggish and burnt out, Mel took a 10-minute walk only after her executive producer, Tracy, pushed her. She got ice cream with her sister-in-law Christine under a blue sky and came back 'a fundamentally different Mel Robbins.' She says to keep your phone away so you actually notice things.
- **The hospital window study**
  Alter describes surgical patients randomly assigned to rooms that looked out on a lawn and trees, or on another part of the building. After identical surgeries, the patients with the green view needed about half as much pain medication and left the hospital about 3 days sooner.
- **Alter's five minutes on a rock**
  A runner who goes out 4–5 days a week, Alter made himself stop mid-run in a forest and sit by running water for five minutes. He calls it 'by far the most restorative' part of the day.
- **Chelsea Handler's mirror line**
  She reads from her book I'll Have What She's Having about becoming her own best friend, cheerleader, listener, mother and sister. Most mornings she tells her reflection: 'What shenanigans are we going to get up to today, you beautiful human being.'
- **Mel's ideal day in 2034**
  Guided by Beck to imagine 10 years ahead using only her senses, Mel hears waves and children laughing. She sees wide-plank, unshiny floors, a big beach painting and a closet full of flip-flops and Birkenstocks ('you have more than one house'), and

pictures walking the beach and reading on the porch with family. Beck pointed to her tears as proof it was real.

- **Beck on language and despair**

  Beck says psychologists trace humans' unique capacity for suicide to language: we can build an imagined future so painful it outweighs the fear of death. She says she lived that way for about 32 years before choosing to 'live in the awareness of that light.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Match the tool to the feeling**

  Drained: walk for 10 minutes. Foggy: end your shower cold. Fried: get 5 minutes of nature or water sounds. Self-critical: give yourself a mirror pep talk. Bad mood: help someone. Lost: do the ideal day.

- **City-proof nature**

  Alter says indoor plants, fresh flowers by your computer, a small fountain, an open window, or taking out your earbuds to hear birds or rain all stand in for the real thing. Aim for 5 minutes a day doing nothing else.

- **Run the ideal-day exercise with your senses, not logistics**

  Close your eyes, pick a year, wake on an ordinary day in an ideal life: what do you hear? Then look at floor, walls, window, mirror, closet shoes. If your mind asks 'how will this happen,' return to senses and notice what moves you.

- **Ease into cold exposure**

  Suzuki started with one shoulder, and Mel stops at around 20 seconds. Anyone with heart or other medical concerns should check with a doctor first.

You Don’t Need to Solve Your Life Tonight: How to Quiet Your Mind & Sleep Better

Date: 2026-06-15 · Duration: 0:55:46
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_NwN9qXxfW0

KEYPOINTS

• Night is when unprocessed thoughts catch up with you

In this solo episode, Mel explains that negative loops show up the moment you lie down because the world gets quiet and everything you didn't deal with during the day surfaces: regrets, pressure, the to-do list, the fear you're failing. Fall asleep in that headspace and you wake up tired. Her fix is seven sentences to say in bed, built from past guests' research, to 'change the settings' in your mind.

• The framework: acknowledge where you are, then choose a helpful mindset

Mel builds the routine on Stanford's Dr. Alia Crum, director of the Mind and Body Lab and the researcher behind the famous milkshake study. Crum's two steps are to start by acknowledging the problems and goals you have, then ask what mindset would help you address those problems or reach those goals. For stress, that might be remembering that the body's stress response wasn't designed to kill you.

• Sentence 1: 'It's okay for me to feel overwhelmed based on everything that's going on'

This covers Crum's first step and draws on clinical psychologist Dr. Lisa Damour, who says mental health doesn't mean being happy all the time. Big feelings that match big circumstances can be a sign you're mentally well. Heartbreak after a breakup, grief after a loss and overwhelm when life is overwhelming are healthy responses. Mel notes this is the opposite of a culture that treats distress and mental illness as the same thing.

• Sentence 2: 'I can manage this'

This comes from Crum's cancer research with colleagues including David Spiegel. Her view is 'mind and matter', not mind over matter, so get the best treatment. 'Just think positive' and 'I'll be fine' can be denial. Instead, patients do better with the mindsets 'this is manageable' and 'my body is capable'. In trials designed to shift mindset, these were linked to better functioning and fewer chemotherapy symptoms like nausea and fatigue. Mel adds that you've managed everything else that's ever happened to you.

• Sentence 3: 'I don't need to solve this right now'

When you're lying in bed booking flights in your head or working out whether Tuesday is the 22nd or 23rd, you can tell your brain 'not now'. Pairing it with 'I can manage this' reminds you that you'll be a different, more capable person after a night's sleep.

• Sleep is the biggest lever, and small gains count (Dr. Rangan Chatterjee)

Chatterjee, who said this while running a big medical practice, raising two young kids and caring for his dying father, argues that moving a diet from 85% to 90% good won't matter if you sleep five hours. Going from 5 to 5.5 hours, or adding 20–30 minutes, makes a physiological difference the next day. It's not 'eight hours or nothing'.

• Sentence 4: 'I did my best today'

This one comes from Jim Kwik, author of Limitless: on days you only have 40% to give and you give 40%, you gave 100% of what you had. Mel says it works because it's true, given everything you were managing that day.

• Sentence 5: 'Now is my time to rest'

This is Harvard sleep scientist Dr. Rebecca Robbins's own line. After a day of giving to students, partner and kids, she tells intrusive thoughts 'no, not now, now is my time to restore'. She writes down anything still surfacing, does 4-7-8 breathing, reads a few pages and does progressive muscle relaxation, clenching on the inhale and releasing on the exhale from the toes up.

• Sentence 6: 'Tomorrow's going to be a good day'

Mel's reasoning is that you don't know how tomorrow will go, and worrying is betting on the negative. Since you're guessing anyway, bet on the positive and decide you'll make it good.

• Sentence 7: 'I give myself permission to drift off to sleep'

Worry amounts to telling yourself you're not allowed to sleep yet because some future problem matters more. Stop trying to fall asleep and give your body permission. Mel recalls Dr. Robbins saying it takes the average person 20–30 minutes to fall asleep, so lying awake briefly is normal.

EXAMPLES

• Baylor's to-do list study

Mel cites Baylor University research comparing people who wrote lists of what they'd done with people who listed unfinished tasks before bed. Those who wrote down what they still had to do fell asleep faster, and Mel says faster than with some medication. Getting tasks onto paper lets your mind stop bringing them up. She keeps a pad by her bed for 'popcorn thoughts'.

• The night Mel thought Chris was mad at her

Chris seemed off and said he couldn't talk about it, and Mel lay awake wondering what she'd done. She told herself she didn't need to solve it right now. The next morning she hugged him in his office and asked. He said it had nothing to do with her. It was about one of their kids.

• Crum's cancer mindset trials

Mel highlights the word 'manageable' in the clip and contrasts it with 'this is a catastrophe'. She notes that many cancers incurable 10–20 years ago are now curable, so the mindset sits alongside treatment, not in place of it.

• A busy anniversary week

With family coming in for her and Chris's 30th wedding anniversary, Mel describes mentally re-booking logistics in bed, the exact moment to use 'I don't need to solve this right now'.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Customise the seven sentences**
  Say them in order once you're in bed: overwhelmed is okay, I can manage this, not now, I did my best, time to rest, tomorrow's good, permission to sleep. Change the wording so it feels true to you.
- **Keep paper by the bed**
  Write down any looping thought or unfinished task instead of rehearsing it. The research Mel cites suggests a to-do list helps you fall asleep.
- **Add a body wind-down**
  Pair the sentences with 4-7-8 breathing, a few pages of a book and progressive muscle relaxation. If sleep problems persist, a clinician is the right next step.

How to Rewire Your Mind to Handle Anything, Turn Off Stress, & Calm Your Body

Guest: Dr. Tara Narula
Date: 2026-05-28 · Duration: 1:01:15
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ddCt_T7MNOA

KEYPOINTS

- **Resilience isn't bouncing back. It's keeping your wonder and engagement while moving in a new direction.**
  Cardiologist Dr. Tara Narula built her own definition from clinical work: the ability to 'retain your wonder, joy, excitement, investment, engagement in life despite what happens to you.' You don't return to where you were. You adapt. She frames it as a skill that can be strengthened like a muscle.
- **The honest answer to 'When will I be myself again?' is 'never,' but a different version can be beautiful.**
  When she tells patients they have coronary artery disease, or that their heart function is 20% instead of 50%, she says they all have the same look of fear and paralysis. Her answer: 'You will never ever be yourself again… but you can be a beautiful different version of you.' She cites Michelangelo carving marble 'to set the angel free.'
- **Stress isn't the enemy. A stress response that never switches off is.**
  Some stress pushes us to grow, but there's a tipping point. Citing Stanford's Robert Sapolsky (Why Zebras Don't Get Ulcers), she explains that the stress response evolved to escape a lion: heart rate, blood pressure and breathing go up, while digestion, reproduction and growth shut down. Today the same response fires for a bill, a comment at school or a tough boss, over and over all day.
- **Here's how to tell normal stress from harmful stress.**
  If you feel back to normal a few minutes after a stressor, that's probably fine. The problem is when the response stays on: clenched muscles, shallow breathing, a slightly faster heart rate, a mind that keeps cycling, repeated through the day. She notes acute stress can trigger a stress-induced heart attack, which women are more prone to, but chronic low-grade stress is the bigger concern.
- **You're not a victim of your stress response. You can deliberately turn it down.**
  Build in daily moments that take you 'from 10 to zero': a walk, music, meditation, exercise, breathing exercises, meeting a friend. Her own go-tos are getting her heart rate up and being in nature at her rural Connecticut home (birds, trees, fresh air). For in-the-moment calm, she mentions taking five slow breaths in and letting them out.
- **Acceptance comes first, because nothing else works until you stop fighting what happened.**
  Denial sounds like 'This can't be happening. I just got pregnant,' or 'I worked so hard, how am I losing my job?' Acceptance isn't giving up. It's the 'opening of the door' to every other tool. Resisting the change, by staring at the life you wanted, creates more stress. Her image: 'be the river, not the rock.'
- **Flexible thinking means moving the goalposts, not dropping your goals.**
  She cites resilience researcher Lucy Hone, whose 12-year-old daughter died in a car accident. Hone still had her husband and sons to live for, so she 'picked up the goalpost and moved it somewhere else.' Narula sees the same in medicine: she can't restore dead heart cells or a stroke-damaged arm, but patients can find a new path to meaning. Acceptance and commitment therapy, CBT and mindfulness can help with the 'but I don't want this' part.
- **Social support is underrated and within reach.**
  She points to former U.S. Surgeon General Vivek Murthy (she was his intern at the Brigham) on the harms of loneliness, and to Robert Waldinger's long-running Harvard study, where the quality of social connections best predicted quality of life. You don't need a big friend group. Mel admits she turns into a hermit under stress, which is when connection matters most.
- **Talk to yourself the way you'd talk to someone you're caring for.**
  Negative self-talk compounds stress. Resilience grows when you give yourself the same love and encouragement you'd give your child or spouse. Her line for patients: 'I don't know what's going to happen, but you're not going to go through this alone, and you are capable of managing this.'
- **Hope is found in small daily moments, and it's something you can practice.**
  Hope is the foundation of a resilient response, especially when the future looks unrecognizable. Writing intentions down ('I am capable of getting through this,' 'I'll carve out 6 hours a week for me,' 'I'll sing in the choir this fall') is a free way to push back against a world that shrinks your sense of what's possible.

EXAMPLES

- **The patient left 70% blind**
  A man went in for routine surgery, something went wrong, and he came out 70% blind. Six months later he had 'a lightness' and was smiling. He credited two things: acceptance ('I couldn't change what happened') and social support from friends.
- **'How do I not lose hope?'**
  A husband newly diagnosed with Parkinson's said he still had so much to write and so much to do with his wife. Narula told him to find hope in small moments: hearing 'I love you' each morning, writing his book each day, and the possibility of a treatment he doesn't know about yet. 'Fall towards the side of hope, not despair.'
- **Three caregiving wives in one month**
  In a single month, three women married to her male patients, one whose husband has Parkinson's, told her about the strain of caring for husbands, kids and everyone else. She told them they needed support and help to keep caregiving and to protect their own health.
- **The identity pie**
  A psychologist she interviewed has patients draw a circle and divide it: mother, writer, dog owner, athlete, baker, with only a small slice for the diagnosis. It shows them visually: 'I am not my diagnosis.'

• Her 10-year-old's vision board

Her daughter, about to turn 10, took her laptop and made a vision board of where she wants her life to go. Narula said 'This is great.' Mel's take: otherwise society decides for her.

OTHER RELEVANT

• The 10-to-zero list

Write down three things that reliably bring your stress down (a walk, music, five slow breaths, calling a friend, time outside) and schedule at least one daily, not only in a crisis.

• Stress self-check

A few minutes after a stressor, check: are your muscles still clenched, is your breathing shallow, is your mind still looping? If so, the response hasn't switched off. Do something on your list.

• Draw your identity pie

Useful after a diagnosis, layoff or divorce. Seeing all your other roles keeps one event from taking over your whole identity.

• Her book

The Healing Power of Resilience covers her full blueprint, including acceptance, flexibility, social support, self-talk, hope and purpose.

Nervous System Reset: Do THIS Every Day to Rewire Your Brain From Stress and Anxiety

Guest: Dr. Nadine Burke Harris
Date: 2026-04-27 · Duration: 1:10:46
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2aI8q3gE2-c

KEYPOINTS

• Trauma is the body's response to overwhelming stress, not the event itself.
Pediatrician and former California Surgeon General Dr. Nadine Burke Harris reframes trauma as 'the biological response to overwhelming stress.' Mel admits she always thought trauma was the thing that happened. Because it's a biological response, it can be wired in during infancy: 'You may not remember the actual event, but the body remembers.'

• Adverse childhood experiences are common and add up.
The 1998 CDC–Kaiser Permanente ACE Study surveyed about 17,500 people about 10 categories: physical, emotional or sexual abuse; physical or emotional neglect; and growing up with a parent who had a mental health disorder, substance dependence or incarceration, or with parental separation or divorce, or intimate partner violence. Two-thirds had at least one ACE and 1 in 8 had four or more. She says updated CDC data now puts it at 1 in 6 nationally.

• The higher the ACE count, the higher the health risks.
She calls it a dose-response relationship. Four or more ACEs meant 4.5 times the risk of depression, 7 times alcohol dependence, 10 times opioid dependence and 2.5 times heart disease. She explains that switching on the stress response also switches on immune activity and inflammation, which helps explain links to heart and autoimmune disease. These are population risks, not destiny.

• Your stress response is a bear alarm, and it switches off your thinking brain.
The amygdala sounds the alarm, triggering adrenaline and cortisol: your heart pounds, your pupils dilate, blood goes to your big muscles (and away from the 'itty-bitty muscle that holds your bladder closed'). It also turns down the prefrontal cortex, which handles judgment, impulse control and executive function, so you don't do something rash like fight the bear. The response can be fight, flight or freeze. If it's stuck on, you can know exactly what to do, like finish the résumé, and still not be able to start. That's biology, not a lack of willpower.

• Buffering is what keeps stress from turning into lasting harm.
Buffering is anything that helps the stress response switch off: above all a safe, regulated caregiver, plus therapy and sometimes medication. Her example from raising four kids: when something scary happens, you pull the child in, stay calm and say, 'You're okay. That was scary, wasn't it?' You acknowledge the fear, signal safety, and maybe give a hug.

• Buffering effects can pass down generations, as the rat studies show.
Researchers stressed baby rats by handling them, then returned them to their mothers. Pups whose mothers did lots of licking and grooming grew up more stress-tolerant, more exploratory and better on cognitive tests, and their stress response shut off normally. They then groomed their own pups more. Pups with little buffering showed the opposite, and passed that on too.

• The 'I'm here' effect sums up all the science.
She sums up buffering, trauma-informed care and regulation as a regulated presence saying 'I'm here.' That can be adult you showing up for the child who didn't get it, and adult you showing up for yourself today. She says giving yourself what you needed then changes your biology now.

• Step one: seven evidence-based regulators.
From her Surgeon General's report: sleep, exercise, nutrition, mindfulness, mental health care, healthy relationships and time in nature. Start simple, for instance a 20-minute daily walk. Her own mornings include mindfulness, journaling, a walk or a workout.

• Step two: deliberately build safe, stable relationships, and add therapy if you need it.
For some people the daily practices are enough. Others need therapy as well. She has personally used EMDR (eye movement desensitization and reprocessing), in which a trained therapist guides you through a memory with bilateral stimulation (she uses a TheraTapper) and then a corrective experience: what should have happened.

• Healing shows up as being less reactive and more responsive.
Early signs include catching yourself ('I reacted a little heavy-handed there, that's not the mom I want to be') rather than not noticing at all. In her clinical practice, she says adding buffering to standard treatment, whether for ADHD or a child who isn't growing, improves outcomes.

EXAMPLES

• The 7-year-old who stopped growing
A school nurse referred a boy for behavior and focus problems. He was 7 but at the 50th percentile in height and weight for a 4-year-old. His behavior problems and his growth both stopped at 4, when, his mother revealed, he had experienced a serious trauma (a sexual assault). An endocrinologist confirmed that stress hormones could do this, and the treatment was talk therapy, not hormones. With developmentally appropriate therapy, his stress hormones normalized and he started growing again.

• Her EMDR corrective experience
Going back to a memory of herself as a terrified child, she pictured adult Nadine walking in, sitting on the bed and saying, 'I'm here.' That moment became her shorthand for the whole science.

• 'Is that why you drink a bottle of wine every night?'
People often say their ACEs didn't affect them because they have a great job, house and spouse. Mel jokes back about nightly wine. Burke Harris's point: acknowledging the impact honestly is part of saying 'I'm here' to yourself.

• Holding a scared child

In her own family, the first move after a scare is to pull the child close, stay regulated and name the fear. That's buffering in practice, and the same thing an adult can learn to do for themselves.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **The 3-word reset: 'I'm here'**
  When you notice yourself reacting, shutting down or dreading, say it to yourself and follow up with one regulating act: breathe, walk, go outside, call a safe friend.
- **Daily regulation checklist**
  Sleep, movement, nutrition, mindfulness, mental health support, connection and nature. Pick one to strengthen this week rather than all seven.
- **Helping someone you love**
  Be a regulated presence first. Then witness their experience ('I can see how that impacted you'), tell them you love them, and tell them healing is possible.
- **'Infrastructure is love in action'**
  Her parting advice: build supports such as a circle of safe friends before a crisis hits, 'not waiting for the wheels to fall off the cart.'

If You’re Feeling Overwhelmed, You Need to Hear This

Date: 2025-10-20 · Duration: 0:48:52
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8ZaRhjqCFQo

KEYPOINTS

- **Stress and overwhelm are different states.**
  Mel describes stress as pressure, like stepping on the gas. Taping days for the show, or racing out by 3 p.m. for a doctor's appointment or soccer game, are 'go go go' but manageable. Her image: stress is juggling a lot of balls, while overwhelm is juggling knives, so afraid to drop anything or get cut that you freeze.
- **Overwhelm comes from too little control, not too much to do.**
  In a clip, Harvard-trained psychiatrist Dr. K (known online as HealthyGamer) says overwhelmed patients feel life coming at them too fast: the boss, the kids, a sick relative, back-to-school shopping. 'You don't feel overwhelmed from dealing with too much. You get overwhelmed when many of the things you're dealing with are out of your control.' It isn't weakness; it's carrying too many challenges you didn't choose and too few you did.
- **Your brain tracks the ratio of passive to active challenges.**
  In Dr. K's framing, passive challenges happen to you: taxes, a spouse, child or parent getting sick. Active challenges are ones you choose, even hard ones like learning to bake sourdough. Whether you feel overwhelmed depends on the ratio of passive to active, not the total number, which he says is what most people get wrong.
- **Under strain, the amygdala takes over from the planning brain.**
  Dr. Aditi Nerurkar, a Harvard-trained physician who ran the largest stress-management clinic in the Harvard medical system, explains that normally the prefrontal cortex (behind your forehead) runs memory, planning, organization and strategy. Under stress, the almond-shaped amygdala, built for survival ('caveperson mode'), takes over. Short bursts are fine; when it becomes chronic, burnout can set in. Overwhelm is what she calls psychological flooding.
- **Step 1: Label it.**
  Name whether you're stressed or actually overwhelmed. Recognizing 'this is beyond stress, I'm flooded' tells you that pushing harder won't work and that you need to reset first.
- **Step 2: Breathe. It's the one system you can steer.**
  Dr. Aditi says breath is the only physiological function under both voluntary and involuntary control. Brain waves and digestion aren't, which makes breathing a gateway to resetting your stress response. When overwhelmed, your breathing and thoughts both speed up, often without you noticing.
- **Breathing toggles between two nervous systems.**
  Dr. Aditi explains there are two branches: the sympathetic system (fight-or-flight, powered by the amygdala) and the parasympathetic system (rest-and-digest). In her description they work like a light switch: when one is on, the other is off. Anxiety and overwhelm usually come with rapid, shallow breathing, and slowing your exhale is how you flip the switch manually. She adds that the goal is not zero stress, which is biologically impossible; your brain is built to handle short bursts well.
- **Mel's breathing cue: 'When life's too much, double in, then flush.'**
  Take a double inhale through the nose, then one long exhale through the mouth. It's known as cyclic sighing or the physiological sigh, which Dr. Andrew Huberman discusses, and Mel learned it from Dr. Russell Kennedy ('the anxiety MD'). One minute changes how you feel. Mel cites Stanford research suggesting five minutes a day reduced anxiety more than meditation.
- **Step 3: Do a brain dump.**
  Set a 10-minute timer and write everything you're carrying onto paper. Overwhelm doesn't need a complicated solution. Seeing it all on the page gives you clarity and evidence to point to when you need to ask for help or set a boundary.
- **Writing unfinished tasks before bed helps you fall asleep.**
  Mel says the mind keeps looping on unfinished tasks to make sure you don't forget them (she calls it the Zeigarnik effect). Once they're on paper, your brain can 'check, check, check' and let go. Her fix for lying awake thinking about emails and errands isn't lavender oil or white noise, it's the list.
- **Step 4: Add one thing you care about.**
  Dr. K's counterintuitive advice: when passive challenges pile up, don't drop everything you chose. Add one active challenge you control. Mel initially thought it made no sense, then realized it signals to yourself that you still do things that matter to you.

EXAMPLES

- **Baylor bedtime journaling study**
  One group wrote about what they had accomplished that day; the other wrote what they still had to do. The to-do group fell asleep 9–10 minutes faster, effectively sleeping next to tomorrow's list.
- **Dr. K's patients in crisis**
  People facing addiction, divorce, probation at work, legal problems or DUIs almost all start by taking control of one thing, such as 'I'm not going to drink today.' As they regain some control, their brains feel less overwhelmed and they handle the passive challenges better.
- **Mel's version of 'add one thing'**
  Searching for a job every day because you care about it, or picking up a book instead of your phone tonight. Small chosen acts tip the ratio back.
- **The Drano and the birthday text**
  Mel's own brain-dump items, tiny errands that loop in your head at night until they're written down.
- **Juggling balls versus juggling knives**
  Mel's test for which state you're in. With balls, you're busy but moving and can drop one without disaster. With knives, everything feels dangerous to touch, so you stop moving, which is why overwhelmed people often stall on even simple tasks.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Four-step overwhelm reset**
  1) Label it: stress or overwhelm? 2) Do one minute of double inhale plus long exhale. 3) Do a 10-minute brain dump, ideally at night. 4) Add one chosen thing you care about.
- **Daily breathing dose**
  Five minutes of cyclic sighing a day, per the Stanford research Mel cites. If you have persistent anxiety, use it alongside professional help, not instead of it.
- **Book**
  The Five Resets by Dr. Aditi Nerurkar covers stress and burnout in more depth.

The Secret to Stopping Anxiety & Fear (That Actually Works) | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. David Rosmarin
Date: 2025-05-26 · Duration: 1:06:06
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FJ5tXuBi4EM

KEYPOINTS

• Most anxiety is a normal emotion, not a disorder

Harvard Medical School psychologist David Rosmarin, author of Thriving with Anxiety, argues that society is over-medicalizing a normal human emotion. Treating everyday nerves as if they were clinical anxiety, he says, has made us 'allergic' to them and feeds today's anxiety epidemic. He points out that his centers have treated more than 10,000 patients and none has died from, or 'gone crazy' from, an anxiety attack, even though it can feel that way. He also notes that real harms can travel alongside anxiety, including substance misuse and self-injury.

• Fearing anxiety makes it worse

When you read clammy hands or a nervous stomach as proof something is wrong, your adrenaline spikes and the anxiety builds on itself. Rosmarin says he spent years asking himself 'David, what's wrong with you?' on stressful days. During the COVID pandemic he realized that feeling anxious in a hard time is a sign of health. Mel describes nearly 30 years of being 'afraid of my anxiety,' trying to drink it away and outwork it.

• Anxiety has three parts: thoughts, body and behavior

The cognitive side is worry and catastrophic stories, like 'if I wear the wrong thing on this date I'll never have another date.' The physical side is adrenaline: sweaty palms, cotton mouth, labored breathing and a sense of dread. The behavioral side is usually avoidance, sometimes checking. Mel adds a definition Rosmarin endorses: anxiety is uncertainty combined with doubting your ability to handle it.

• Nerves show that you care

Rosmarin asks why newborns scream. A healthy baby facing light, air and noise freaks out, and a baby who doesn't is a reason to call a neurologist. In the same way, a little apprehension before a hard workday shows you are connected to the work and the people. If you felt nothing, you might be disconnected from what matters.

• The four steps: identify, share, embrace, let go

Identify: dig down to what you truly fear instead of shutting out the symptoms. Share: talk about it with someone, telling them what you need ('just hear me out'), so it becomes connection instead of loneliness. Embrace: do the thing that makes you anxious, when you are ready and at a pace you can handle. Let go: accept what you can't control, since anxiety always revolves around control.

• Rate your anxiety from 1 to 9

Nobody is at zero, and 10 would be catastrophic. Rosmarin calls 1 to 3 low, 4 to 6 medium and 7 to 9 high. At 7 to 9 the anxiety is usually disrupting sleep or causing avoidance, and he wants people getting therapy or medication, not relying on self-help alone. Many people function reasonably well at 4 or 5, especially during a breakup, a new baby or medical school. He warns that promising to get anxiety down to a 1 and keep it there isn't even helpful.

• Rosmarin criticizes a zero-cutoff anxiety screening

Rosmarin describes a federally funded physician panel that recommended screening patients for anxiety at primary-care visits using the two-item GAD-2. He says he supports screening. His objection is that, as he describes it, the cutoff was set at zero, so any worry in the past two weeks could flag someone for clinical treatment. He believes this leads to overdiagnosing ordinary stress.

• Gender differences show up in how anxiety is handled

Rosmarin says women have about twice the rate of clinical anxiety as men. He links it to women being harder on themselves for feeling anxious ('something's wrong with me'), while men tend to suppress it, which shows up as higher rates of substance and alcohol abuse. Mel mentions research she has seen suggesting that women who lose a job turn the doubt inward and take roughly a 25% pay cut in their next role, while men's salaries hold steady.

• Underneath most fears is the fear of being alone

When Rosmarin keeps asking patients what they're afraid of, he says it usually comes down to one thing: being alone or abandoned. He knows he has reached it when they start to tear up. You don't let go of that fear. You use it to connect with other people, and you let go of the idea that you can control it.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's son and the fear of throwing up

Mel's 19-year-old son still gets anxious about vomiting. Her instinct was to reassure him ('there's a nurse at school, get on the bus'). Rosmarin would instead calmly ask what exactly is upsetting: the taste, the embarrassment, being sick without Mom there. He suspects an old memory, like a parent cleaning up a mess, may be part of it.

• A hand on a stranger's arm during turbulence

A colleague on a very bumpy flight noticed the woman next to him hyperventilating. He held her hand and said, 'I'm nervous too, but we're going to be okay. Look at the attendants, they're chatting away.' Rosmarin uses it to show how sharing a fear can instantly connect two people.

• Exposure on an eight-seat Cape Air plane and a toilet bowl

For a fear of small planes, Rosmarin would put a patient on a tiny Cape Air Cessna out of Boston Logan, 'a minivan with wings.' A patient with a germ phobia had chafed their hands raw from washing. Treatment moved step by step from touching the office desk to things in the bathroom, and eventually the inside of a toilet bowl. Anxiety often drops noticeably after one or two exposures. Long-avoided fears take more repetitions, which he likens to paying off a mortgage.

• Rosmarin's own pandemic data and his wife

Rosmarin says his data showed that patients who finished treatment before March 2020 did not have a substantial rise in anxiety during the pandemic. That made him rethink treating all anxiety as clinical. When he finally told his wife about his fear of failure, she said, 'I know,' and supported him through it, which he says brought them closer.

OTHER RELEVANT

• When a child is anxious, ask questions instead of rescuing

Skip the reassurance ('everything's fine') and skip the accommodation ('you don't have to go'). Both tell the child that their anxiety is dangerous. Say something like 'Oh, you're feeling anxious, tell me more,' and ask without judgment what they fear, whether it's embarrassment, losing friends or the physical feelings. For sleepovers, validate first and get the child bought in rather than forcing them.

• Brain-dump, then look for the 'saplings'

Spend 10 to 15 minutes writing down everything in your head, then pick out the one or two worries with deep roots. Rosmarin even suggests asking ChatGPT to find the main themes in your list. Then dig into what you're really afraid would happen.

• Focus on what you can control for big worries

For fears like climate change, wildfires or money, Rosmarin says people are not 'the architects of all world events.' He draws on his religious tradition here. Turning your attention to what is in your power uses the anxiety constructively, like giving up control on a roller coaster rather than having it taken from you.

• Mel's takeaway: rename low-level anxiety

Mel plans to call the 1-to-3 feelings 'nerves,' 'excitement' or 'feeling unsettled' rather than anxiety, and to welcome them instead of bracing for battle.

The Truth About Anxiety & ADHD: Life-Changing Tools From Renowned Psychiatrist Dr. Tracey Marks

Guest: Dr. Tracey Marks
Date: 2025-04-10 · Duration: 1:33:13
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LOkEvGV-L4U

KEYPOINTS

• Anxiety is rising, and the goal is management, not a cure

Psychiatrist Dr. Tracey Marks, who has practiced for over 25 years, cites a World Health Organization report of a 25% global rise in anxiety that began with the pandemic and is still climbing. She blames 24-hour news, social-media comparison and information overload. Social anxiety and generalized anxiety are most common. Anxiety rises and falls like a wave, and some of it helps, such as prompting you to prepare for a presentation. The aim is to stop it from impairing your functioning.

• Anxiety happens in the head and the body

Mind symptoms include worry and preoccupation with what others think. The sympathetic fight-or-flight response fires for imagined threats too, causing a racing heart, gut trouble and unnoticed muscle tension. That tension is why you can feel exhausted after 'just sitting' all day. Marks admits she felt performance anxiety during the interview itself: a dry mouth and overthinking her words.

• You can't stop the gas pedal, but you can stop accelerating

The amygdala detects threats and steps on the gas; the parasympathetic system is the brake. Marks says the initial response can't be prevented, but its escalation into rumination, freezing and worst-case thinking can. Mel calls this a breakthrough after '56 years' of trying never to feel anxious at all. For anyone supporting a loved one, the goal shifts to helping them slow down, not making the anxiety disappear.

• Interoceptive exposure breaks the link between sensations and fear

Many anxious people fear the physical sensation itself, like a stomach churn signaling a panic attack. Marks's technique, from her book Why Am I So Anxious? (pages 248-250), is to trigger the sensation on purpose in a safe setting so you learn it's survivable. Do jumping jacks if a racing heart scares you, or spin in a swivel chair for a minute if dizziness or 'nausea' does.

• With phobias, avoidance becomes the bigger problem

Avoidance makes any phobia worse, and soon the avoiding causes more damage than the feared thing. Marks says the pandemic reinforced social anxiety ('I didn't want to go anyway'), and isolation feeds anxiety in turn. Gradual exposure works through small steps: arrive at the networking event, then walk into the room, then talk to one person, building proof that you can handle it.

• Introversion and social anxiety are different

Introverts like Marks recharge through quiet time but don't necessarily fear people. Social anxiety is a disorder of being preoccupied with judgment to the point of avoiding situations, including performance situations like speaking in team meetings. When people glance at the door as you walk into a bar, a non-anxious person assumes they were expecting someone else, while a socially anxious person assumes 'they hate that I'm here.'

• Sleep, diet and exercise change anxiety biologically

Marks says high sugar and ultra-processed foods drive inflammation and alter gut bacteria, sending negative signals to the brain. They can even change gene expression (epigenetics), for example in cortisol regulation. Sleep deprivation raises baseline anxiety because the brain needs sleep to process the day. Exercise boosts BDNF, which she calls 'fertilizer for the brain,' helping good habits rewire it. She ranks sleep first, with diet close behind.

• ADHD and anxiety feed each other

Disorganized thinking makes people feel out of control, which creates secondary anxiety. ADHD involves low dopamine in the prefrontal cortex, which handles executive functions like time management, working memory and emotion regulation. A weaker prefrontal cortex manages the amygdala less well, so worst-case thinking takes over. Mel recognizes the hours she lost ruminating over an email from an annoyed business partner.

• ADHD is about stimulation, not an inability to focus

People with ADHD can hyperfocus on what interests them, which is why a teen can game for hours but leave sneakers in the hallway. Partners often read that as not caring, which strains relationships. Marks thinks rising diagnoses reflect better awareness, not overdiagnosis: 25 years ago adult ADHD was barely recognized. Her own struggle is 'set shifting,' where one midday interruption, like taking her mom to the doctor, wrecks the whole day.

EXAMPLES

• Oakley's 'nausea' and hand-shaking

Mel's college-age son asked by video about a spinning, nauseous feeling that sets off his anxiety. Marks suggested it may be depersonalization or derealization, a dissociative sense of losing touch with your surroundings, and recommended interoceptive exposure. For his unconscious hand-shaking when anxious, she said self-soothing is fine unless it causes problems. Noticing it is the cue to breathe and ease off the gas.

• Bruised hands in fourth grade

Oakley came home with bruises from wringing his hands in class. He was first diagnosed with anxiety, then found to have undiagnosed dyslexia, dysgraphia and ADHD. Mel was treated for anxiety from high school until an ADHD diagnosis at 47, which she says is common for women whose kids are being evaluated.

• Alyssa's fear of vomiting

A 23-year-old production assistant described lifelong emetophobia: she did virtual school to avoid classmates being sick, dislikes flying and rarely drinks. Marks, who once considered staying in New York after residency because it had few roaches, says crafting your life around a fear makes it worse. Phobias can be driven by disgust, not only fear.

• Marks's 'paralyzed' morning

After a stressful week of hunching over her mouse with one shoulder raised, she woke unable to lift her head and briefly feared paralysis. Now she uses progressive muscle relaxation, contracting and releasing muscle groups from head to toe, and recommends five minutes at lunch.

• Mel's ADHD tells

Lists everywhere, cabinet doors and faucets left open, endless saved social-media folders she never revisits, and 'time expansion,' believing she can do 25 things in three minutes. She can tape for nine hours straight but loses the thread after a single meeting.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Vagal tools to hit the brakes

Splash cold water on your face or chest, hum, or use paced breathing: box breathing (4-4-4-4) or 4-7-8, where the long exhale stimulates the vagus nerve. Box breathing makes Marks feel short of breath, so simply breathing slowly and deeply is fine. For grounding, pick a color and name everything in the room that's that color.

• Habit reversal for picking and biting

Body-focused repetitive behaviors range from nail and cheek biting to compulsive hair pulling. People with anxiety may do them to soothe tension, and people with ADHD for stimulation. Notice triggers like boredom, then substitute something, such as wearing gloves while watching TV for a couple of months. For severe cases, see a therapist. Tics are different: involuntary, worsened by anxiety, and sometimes by stimulant medication, which is worth raising with your doctor.

• The five-minute rule and monthly small wins

For procrastination, which is often fed by past failures, commit to five minutes with permission to stop. For lifestyle changes, take an inventory and tackle one per month: a set bedtime, fewer chips, a weekly walk. Her parting words: you're not defective, just different.

If You’re Feeling Uncertain & Anxious, You Need to Hear This | Dr. Julie on The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. Julie Smith
Date: 2025-03-13 · Duration: 1:21:54
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bjvPbfxE3CI

KEYPOINTS

• Struggling is normal, and you trade places with other people over time

Dr. Julie mixes a bowl of white rice (everyone) with wild rice (the roughly one in four people with a mental health problem in a given year). Any small pinch, meaning your circle, includes someone who's struggling. Seeing your pain as a normal human experience removes the judgment so you can get curious. Mel adds that we all swap between being the wild rice and the white rice.

• Emotions are information, not evidence that something is wrong with you

Sadness, anger and anxiety usually signal a need or something going on around you. Emotion regulation isn't about making painful feelings disappear. It's about dropping the judgment and turning toward them with curiosity.

• Your attention is a spotlight, and you can't pull actors off the stage

"Only positive vibes" makes you feel like a failure every time a critical thought appears. She teaches defusion instead: picture your thoughts as actors on a stage. You can't drag the ones you dislike off, but you choose which one gets the limelight, and that shapes how you feel.

• Be the predator, not the prey, when fear arrives

When she was diagnosed with breast cancer a week or two before her manuscript was due, she deleted her own gentle chapter on fear and rewrote it. The prey darts around avoiding threats; the predator has a goal and is on the front foot. "This cancer isn't coming after me, I'm coming after it." The fear stayed. She just used it rather than waiting for it to go away.

• Let emotional waves wash over you

Waist-deep in the ocean, if you try to hold back a wave you tumble; if you turn sideways and bend your knees, you land again. Her inner world is "like a sauna": helpful only if you don't stay too long. In acute distress, reach out to someone you trust. She admits to dark moments, mostly fear for her children.

• Resentment points to what you need to work on

Blaming the other person keeps you in prey mode. Resentment usually means you haven't held healthy boundaries, or sometimes that you're taking someone for granted, in which case gratitude helps. Left unchecked, it destroys relationships.

• Compare narrowly, and never with friends

Telling people to stop comparing is impossible. Comparing yourself to friends puts a scoreboard between you: their wins feel like your losses, and bids for support become "I had it worse." Useful comparison is concrete, like watching a club player a few steps ahead of you with a great backhand, never comparing personalities or worth.

• Confidence is a byproduct of evidence from action

Every time you get through something uncomfortable, even badly, your brain logs proof that you survived. You have to go where you have no confidence and be willing to be a beginner. The self-doubt may never fully go away; you learn what to do with it.

• Avoidance brings instant relief and slowly shrinks your life

With a wooden rainbow toy, she removes layers one at a time: crowds, a friend's 200-person wedding, buses, restaurants. Each avoided thing gives an addictive "phew," but the arch shrinks until life feels depressingly small and missing things you value. Mel recognized this in her postpartum depression and in a child with anxiety who stopped going to sleepovers.

• You don't need to be fully healed before a relationship

She calls that social media rule "utter rubbish." Under it she never would have married Matt, her partner of 20 years. Struggle doesn't mean it's the wrong person, and strong couples have often been through the most together. If a partner isn't a talker, ask why you need them to be. She and Matt mostly repair with humor.

EXAMPLES

• Her desk Post-it during cancer treatment

"Get busy with life's purpose... get active in your own rescue, if you care for yourself at all, and do it while you can." It became the book's opening quote. She nearly put off getting a breast lump checked until after her deadline and urges busy parents not to wait. Early testing was her best weapon.

• A year locked in with your high-school bully

For self-critical clients, she asks how they'd feel after a year 24/7 with their worst bully, compared with their best friend. Your inner voice is one of those roommates. If your head isn't a safe place, she asks, how will you ever take risks?

• From shy kid to live TV

She was the quiet child in the corner and hated being looked at during clinical training. She only did live TV after promising to have her own back even if she "flashed my underwear to the nation," coaching herself the way coaches treat elite athletes.

• Note-taking in a care meeting

A client with severe anxiety and paranoia took notes in a meeting with their professionals, which moved their spotlight from "who's looking at me" to the plan. In a networking circle, the same trick means noticing what people say, what they're wearing, or what you could compliment.

• Mel's lonely move in her early 50s

After 26 years in one place, she wallowed for about six months, then set steps: leave the house daily, then read in a coffee shop for half an hour, then talk to people. Dr. Julie still faces her own fear of heights on family trips so her children don't inherit it.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Climb a fear ladder from the bottom**

  Rank feared situations from greeting a shop clerk up to a wedding speech. Start with something manageable but challenging and repeat it until it becomes your comfort zone, then step further. Going too far too fast often ends in retreat. After heartbreak, that might mean going out with a close friend, then joining mixed groups, then introducing yourself to a stranger.

- **Do her values-box exercise every few months**

  Split a page into life areas like parenting, marriage, health and career, and write how you want to show up in each. Rate each area's importance from 0 to 10, then how well you've lived it lately. A 10 paired with a 2 tells you where to focus. It's not for self-criticism. Choosing by values rather than comfort sometimes feels terrible, like night feeds, but choosing by comfort shrinks your life.

- **Use a compassion line for regret**

  "I did the best I knew how with what I had at the time, and I have new insight and skills now." Cringing at your past self is a sign of progress. Dwelling on the past feeds depression and the future feeds anxiety, so come back to the present.

- **Check whether a feeling is warranted and proportionate**

  Poor sleep, dehydration or too much coffee can amplify a reaction. In uncertain times, focus on the next couple of steps and live as if you have a future. What you do, who you're around, what you eat and how you move all influence how you feel.

When Nothing Seems to Be Going Your Way, Here’s Exactly What To Do

Date: 2025-01-30 · Duration: 0:35:41
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ADrkJSpG3V8

KEYPOINTS

• Start by saying it out loud: life isn't fair

Mel opens by validating a long list of unfair things, big and small: losing a house or a parent, melting ice caps, corporations dodging taxes while you can barely pay yours, being born diabetic, caring for aging parents or young kids alone, acne, a supermodel sister, a parent favoring your brother, a friend's pregnancy after your miscarriage, an unaffordable housing market. Ignoring it or feeling bad about it isn't working, so she has listeners shout it with her.

• It will always be unfair, but this is a scene, not the ending

Some painful things will happen to you and not to the person next to you, and much will stay out of your control. Mel says complaining, venting and even feeling sorry for yourself have value, but it's 'one stop on the journey,' not where you live. The more powerful fact: through your attitude and actions you can move the needle a little.

• Step 1: Give yourself a deadline for feeling bad

A deadline is permission and a boundary at once. It acknowledges you deserve time to be sad, disempowered or grieving, and it marks on a calendar that this chapter will end, so it doesn't take over your life. Until then, play the sad songs, live in pajamas, cry, scream into a pillow. The exact date matters less than the intentional act.

• Strong feelings in an unfair situation mean you're mentally healthy

Mel credits clinical psychologist Dr. Lisa Damour: feeling sad, overwhelmed or depressed after a loss or breakup shows your mind is working properly, as long as the emotions match the situation. You don't need to fear or run from them.

• Suppressing emotions after trauma prolongs symptoms

Mel cites a UC Irvine study of how Americans coped after 9/11. Six months later many still had heightened anxiety and post-traumatic stress symptoms, but people who actively managed emotions right away (seeking support, planning ways forward, processing what happened) healed faster. Those who shoved feelings down, distracted themselves or just got back to work still had PTSD and anxiety symptoms months and years later. 'It's not time that heals; it's what you do with the time.'

• Step 2: Accept reality, which is harder than admitting it's unfair

You can shout 'it's not fair' and still secretly wish it hadn't happened. That wish is resistance, and Mel says most internal suffering comes from wanting things to be different than they are, an idea running from Stoicism to Buddhism. The relationship is over, the diagnosis is here, the cancer is back; wishing only makes the present more painful.

• 'Let life live through you'

Mel quotes Rumi: 'Try not to resist the changes that come your way. Instead, let life live through you,' and calls it the 'let them' part of her theory. When life hands you a 'poop sandwich,' you don't have to choke it down; set it on the plate beside you and move on. She says her worst news has often revealed the best things about herself.

• Step 3: Ask what's in your control, then make a plan

Paralysis blinds you to the fact that there's almost always something you can do. Instead of searching 'life isn't fair,' search your specific situation ('my marriage just ended, what should I do?') and learn from people who've been there. Mel is convinced someone has faced the same thing or worse and figured it out. What stops people is despair, not capability, because without hope you skip the small actions that change things.

• Step 4: Find meaning and choose your attitude

Mel calls Viktor Frankl's Man's Search for Meaning, with more than 15 million copies in print per her edition, one of the most important books of her life. Frankl, a psychiatrist, survived four Nazi camps by holding on to thoughts of his wife and imagining someday lecturing on the psychology of Auschwitz; his wife and family did not survive. She reads his line: 'Everything can be taken from a man but one thing... to choose one's attitude in any given set of circumstances.'

EXAMPLES

• Rules of thumb for how long feelings last

From her research for The Let Them Theory, Mel shares that people typically start feeling better about 11 weeks after a breakup, that grief after losing a loved one or a long-time home can take six months to two years to settle into a new normal, and the common advice to make no big changes for a year after a death. Your timeline may be shorter or longer.

• The 5 p.m. deadline for old grievances

For things you've beaten yourself up about for years, like your height, body, face or complexion, Mel says you've already done the grieving and it's only eroded your confidence. Her suggested deadline: 5 p.m. today.

• Her list of acute unfairness

A narcissistic ex bullying you through divorce, a home lost to fire or flood while you wait for power, a denied health insurance claim, a rent hike, being a Dreamer facing possible deportation, or simply a flat tire on the way to work: Mel agrees each is unfair before moving to what to do.

• Frankl's follow-up line

'When we are no longer able to change a situation, we are challenged to change ourselves.' Mel ties it to her 'let them, let me' framework: you don't control what happens, but you control what you feel, think, say and do about it.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Mel's AI-coach prompt for a 30-day plan

Her suggestion: ask ChatGPT to 'act like the world's best life coach,' describe what happened and that you feel hopeless, and request a day-by-day plan for 30 days with five daily actions. She frames it as removing the work of planning so your energy goes into following it, alongside library books, YouTube and articles from people who've been there.

• Recap of the four steps

Say life isn't fair and set a deadline to feel it; accept reality and let life move through you; make a plan with what's in your control; and choose your attitude and look for meaning. Mel adds that hope anchors you to a future beyond the deadline, which is what makes taking action feel worthwhile.

- **Use the deadline as reassurance**

  Seeing an end date reminds you the hard scene will pass, so you can let emotions rise and fall without fearing you'll be stuck forever.

If You Struggle With Stress & Anxiety, This Will Change Your Life

Guest: Dr. Aditi Nerurkar
Date: 2025-01-20 · Duration: 1:05:40
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6TiJuzF0iD0

KEYPOINTS

• Stress is a brain state you can reset

Dr. Aditi Nerurkar, a Harvard Medical School lecturer who was medical director of Beth Israel Deaconess's integrative medicine program and ran a large stress management clinic, describes stress as the thinking prefrontal cortex going offline while the almond-shaped amygdala takes over. She cites a recent study finding about 70% of Americans struggle with stress and a UK study finding over 90% experiencing burnout. In a room of 30 people, about 21 feel this way.

• 'Horizonlessness': drawing a blank when you picture your future

Nerurkar says the term was coined by a journalist, and she encountered it during the pandemic when interviewed for an Elle feature. It's not confusion about direction but a 'meh' absence of anticipation: nothing feels worth working toward. Anger or excitement about the future at least carry a charge; horizonlessness is a lack of emotion. She notes there isn't much research defining it yet.

• Anticipating a hopeful future is good for your brain

Nerurkar cites an MRI study showing that anticipating the future activates the medial prefrontal cortex and correlates with well-being. When you're stuck in 'amygdala mode,' focused on survival, you biologically can't access that planning, forward-looking part of the brain, which is why people describe feeling stuck.

• The delayed stress response: the dam breaks once you feel safe

During acute stress you hold it together at all costs. Once you feel psychologically safe, pent-up emotions flood out. Nerurkar ties widespread horizonlessness to the post-pandemic period: people held on through promised short lockdowns, and now feel worse than in 2020 while the world says to move on. She laughed at 'Roaring 20s' headlines because 'that is so not how the human brain works.'

• Step one: normalize, validate and practice self-compassion

Your brain and body are doing what they should and aren't broken. She quotes her meditation teacher Jon Kabat-Zinn: there is more right with you than wrong with you. Self-compassion isn't soft; she says it dials down the amygdala by changing neural circuitry, which helps you get out of your own way.

• Step two: start small, because this isn't the moment for big goals

Telling someone in amygdala mode to plan six months ahead is asking the impossible; it's not mind over matter. Mel compares it to not playing pickleball on a broken leg. Nerurkar suggests something as small as looking forward to an afternoon coffee or a walk around the block tomorrow.

• Small actions work through agency, not fitness

A walk around the block isn't about exercise but proving you have power to make a difference in your life. Mel admits she nearly rolled her eyes at 'coffee, walk, journal,' then realized the emotion itself makes you do nothing, which makes you feel worse; the action proves the emotion doesn't rule you. Nerurkar likens it to turning potential energy into kinetic energy.

• Habits take about eight weeks, but you feel better after one walk

Nerurkar says it takes about eight weeks to build a habit like daily walking, and falling off and restarting is part of habit formation. You'll feel better by the end of the first walk. Doing something daily beats occasional workouts because it avoids decision fatigue; vowing to do hour-long gym sessions three times a week when you feel horrible tends to fail.

• Loneliness is a global epidemic with physical risks

Nerurkar cites data that 330 million people globally go two weeks without speaking to a friend or family member. Per figures she attributes to the Surgeon General, Vivek Murthy (her college friend): about 50% of US adults are lonely, and 78% of 18-to-25-year-olds. In one study, loneliness carried a mortality risk comparable to smoking 15 cigarettes a day, with about 30% higher risk of heart disease and stroke.

• Being alone isn't the same as being lonely

Alone is a physical state; loneliness is an emotional experience, and you can feel it in a crowd. Mel describes loneliness while traveling constantly with thousand-person audiences, and during stretches of her marriage when life with young kids and Chris's struggling business became pure logistics.

• Parents are overwhelmed, and it affects kids

In a Surgeon General snapshot Nerurkar cites, nearly 50% of parents say they're overwhelmed by stress most days, 65% are lonely, 77% of single parents are lonely, and prior data suggest 75% experience parenting burnout. She suspects underreporting because of guilt. One study found children of caregivers with poor mental health were four times more likely to have poor general health.

EXAMPLES

• Cancer patients who cried after the all-clear

Nerurkar's patients often stayed stoic through diagnosis and treatment. Then, the day after a clean bill of health, they'd come in crying: 'I should be having a party, why do I feel like this?' She uses it to illustrate the dam breaking.

• The strong-ties and weak-ties clicker study

Over six days, participants clicked one counter for interactions with close contacts and another for casual ones with baristas, grocery baggers, dry cleaners or playground parents. More casual interactions meant less loneliness and greater happiness. A Harvard Business Review study across eight countries found similar results for a mix of both.

• Mel's six months of awkward hellos in Vermont

After 26 years outside Boston, Mel moved to southern Vermont and sat home for months, sometimes not talking to anyone for two weeks, crying to Chris that she had no friends. She finally started talking to people next to her at a favorite coffee shop.

About six months of hellos built 'scaffolding of familiar faces' and led to some of her favorite people.

• A friend in job crisis told to drop everything but three things

When a friend facing a possible job exit was trying to add every wellness practice, Nerurkar told her to focus only on sleep, laughter and community for now. The friend was relieved that she didn't have to do it all at once.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Treat sleep as therapy

Nerurkar suggests going to bed at 9 p.m. for a week and seeing how you feel, aiming as close to 10 p.m. as possible, since she calls 10 to 11 p.m. the golden hour of sleep. Add five minutes of daily movement, a gratitude list of five things and why, or reaching out to a friend, but only what feels doable.

• Lean into casual conversation when you're low on bandwidth

If deep friendships feel like too much, chat in the grocery aisle or at the dry cleaner. Mel tells her college-age son to get out of his dorm and say hello, even to whoever empties the trash bins. She cites Bob Waldinger's long-running Harvard study: relationship quality is the strongest predictor of happiness.

• Parent yourself the way you parent your kids

Parents set bedtimes and screen limits for children but not themselves. Nerurkar quotes the Surgeon General: 'caregivers need care too.' Silence the inner critic, which often speaks through 'a megaphone in each hand' for parents; remember repair matters more than perfection, and model self-care for your kids.

The Real Reason You’re Exhausted: How To Gain Control of Your Time & Your Life

Guest: Dr. Scott Lyons
Date: 2024-11-18 · Duration: 1:02:01
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gStPBZVRVLc

KEYPOINTS

• Busyness can work like an addiction

Mel starts from a basic definition of addiction: a pattern of behavior you keep repeating even though it harms your life. By that measure, she says, constant busyness and stress qualify. She brings in Dr. Scott Lyons, a psychologist who developed a somatic stress-release method he says is now taught in 20 countries, and who has written about an 'addiction to stress.' She plays clips from her conversation with him and adds her own commentary.

• Signs of stress addiction

Dr. Lyons lists them as constant motion, anxiety others can see even when you can't, making mountains out of molehills, venting, gossip and overscheduling. It's 'always about the doing.' He calls it an avoidance strategy, whether you're avoiding emotions, intimacy or problems, and also a form of control.

• Busy people often aren't getting much done

Mel cites Stanford psychologist Albert Bandura's 1977 work suggesting that completing tasks satisfies a need to feel competent, which is why checking boxes feels rewarding. Dr. Lyons counters that chronically busy people often hyperfocus on one area, like filling a calendar or one part of work, while the rest of their life and home falls apart.

• 'A child who is not embraced by the village will burn it down to feel its warmth'

Dr. Lyons uses this proverb to describe the wound under drama and busyness: wanting connection and healing while also finding them dangerous. Mel connects it to self-righteous anger when your effort goes unappreciated, and to never asking for help ('it's just easier if I do it').

• Stress gives relief, so you keep needing more

Dr. Lyons quotes physician Gabor Maté: 'Don't ask why the addiction, ask why the pain.' He says the brain registers emotional and physical pain the same way. Stressful activity, from small anxieties to skydiving, releases endorphins that dull the pain. As with other addictions, you need more over time, at the cost of your physical health and well-being.

• Dopamine rewards the doing that keeps you from feeling

Each social event, work task or checked box gives a dopamine hit, and the activity keeps you away from feelings you've avoided for years. Mel's question for listeners: if your life paused for a week, what would come up, and what conversations would you need to have?

• Chaos is a 'familiar hell'

Dr. Lyons, who grew up in a household with physical abuse, alcohol and drugs, says early environments set your baseline. He cites Freud's 'repetition compulsion': we keep moving toward the familiar, hoping for a different outcome. Calm can feel like a threat to a nervous system raised on chaos. Mel admits she has told her team for three years that things will slow down in two months, and instead it keeps getting more chaotic.

• Many of us learned that doing equals worth

Dr. Lyons asks how you felt loved as a child: freely, or by earning it? Children with busy or unavailable parents often conclude they're 'too much' and must prove their value through perfectionism, more degrees, and constant achievement, which means abandoning themselves. Mel calls slowing down 'an act of defiance' against that training, and says you have to believe you're worthy even when unemployed or rejected.

• Healing starts in the pause

Dr. Lyons's first step is noticing what happens when there's no stimulation. Do you rush to fill it? He once sat in a bathtub resisting the urge to grab his phone, asked 'What am I running away from?', and realized it was too much to face alone. He recommends finding someone who can stay with you in the discomfort. Safety has to be felt, not just understood ('that was then, this is now'), and rebuilding it takes time.

• Before you fix someone else, look at yourself

Asked how to help a busy spouse, child or colleague, Dr. Lyons says: 'There's no better way to avoid yourself than to help someone else,' and that it can be a form of control. Change requires you to be grounded first. Mel borrows her friend David's line, 'leaders bring the weather,' and adapts it: your stress soaks everyone around you.

EXAMPLES

• Chris closes Mel's laptop

Home after a week away on business, Mel sat down with Chris, then opened her phone and later her laptop while he watched TV. He reached over, shut it, and said, 'I thought we were just going to hang out.'

• No Target in Southern Vermont

After moving to a town whose main store is an 1800s general store, Mel noticed how often she used to dart to the grocery store, mall or coffee shop with no real need. She concluded she was addicted to being busy doing nothing.

• Mel's third year of law school

Mel describes waking up hating her life, smoking first thing, rushing out the door late but still stopping at Dunkin' Donuts, sitting at the back of class smelling of cigarettes, barely able to study, and ending each day with a bottle of wine, all while juggling two relationships. She says the busyness meant she never had to face what was wrong. She had untreated anxiety and unrecognized trauma at the time.

• This Is Water

Mel uses David Foster Wallace's 2005 Kenyon College commencement story about young fish who ask 'What's water?' to

argue that busyness is what we're all swimming in and can't see. Each generation spots it in the next: kids on phones, Mom always working, Grandma always off at tennis or mahjong.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Try the line test**
  Next time you're in a 5-to-10-minute checkout line, don't touch your phone. Notice the agitation, fidgeting and looking around, which Mel says is the alarm Dr. Lyons describes. She admits she can manage about five minutes before it takes real restraint.
- **Red flags worth noticing**
  You can't book a friend for three months. You collapse at night and beat yourself up over what you didn't do. You need a drink to turn your brain off. You can't stop watching the news. You feel something terrible will happen if you don't get everything right.
- **Practice de-escalating, one moment at a time**
  Walk into the house without your phone, breathe, and remember you're bringing the weather. Don't send that text. Close the laptop and just sit with your partner. Mel believes she'll be more productive, not less, by staying connected to herself.

How to Let Go of What You Can’t Control & Redirect Your Energy

Date: 2024-11-04 · Duration: 1:07:36
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zF27t4hYM0Y

KEYPOINTS

• Dread is bracing for the worst before anything has happened

Mel recorded this as the clocks went back, when it's dark by 4 p.m. in Vermont, and during a tense US election, which she refuses to discuss. She describes dread as something that happens far more often than people notice: before a breakup talk, a test, feedback at work, a diagnosis, or even waiting for a text reply. The dread isn't the problem, she says. Letting it take you over is. She admits she once put off a breakup for over a year because she couldn't move through it.

• When you're bracing, your body overrides what you know

Mel calls herself pragmatic and logical, yet in severe turbulence she couldn't hold on to rational thoughts about hurricane winds. Her point is that when dread kicks in, your physiology and psychology override your knowledge and you can't reach your tools, even though the tools still work. That's why she pairs head tools (focus on what you can control) with body tools that work 'from the neck down'.

• Box breathing signals safety to your body

Breathe in for four counts, hold for four, breathe out for four, hold for four. Mel says slowing your breath tells your body you're okay. She notes that people often barely breathe when they're bracing, like on the walk up to a breakup conversation. Chris counted her through it on the plane, and she describes the effect as an elevator in her nervous system slowly coming down.

• Sort what you can and can't control

Producer Phil, whose father was diagnosed with a cancer the doctor called very treatable, described waiting three weeks for a PET scan to see whether it had spread. His approach: listen to the doctor, tune out medical websites and well-meaning friends, and focus on what you can do, like eating well, walking and meditating. He compares going back to that list every time dread returns to training a muscle.

• Most worries never happen, according to the study Mel cites

Mel cites a Cornell study finding that 85% of what people worry about never happens. Of the 15% that does, she says 78% of people found it easier to handle than expected and learned something valuable. She pairs this with the Dalai Lama's line: if a problem can be fixed there's no need to worry, and if it can't, worrying doesn't help.

• Swap 'dread' for 'uncertain'

Calling something dreadful means you've already decided it will go badly, which lines up your thoughts, feelings and actions with failure. In truth the outcome is uncertain: the funeral, diagnosis, breakup talk or presentation hasn't happened yet. Staying in that uncertainty leaves room for 'what if it all works out', and she calls handling uncertainty a skill you can build.

• Dread isn't exactly 'manifesting', but it does make things worse

Asked by Phil whether dread manifests bad outcomes, Mel explains the hardwired fight-flight-freeze response. If a fire alarm went off, no one could do a math problem. The negativity bias makes you spot the rattlesnake instead of the turning leaf. Staying in that state shuts down problem-solving and stops you from taking the steps that would improve things, so in that sense you do 'create more bad'.

• Dread can show you what matters

Dreading a presentation shows you care about your work. Dreading a breakup shows you value honesty and yourself. Dread about your country or community shows you care, and Mel says it can push you to act locally. On the plane she wasn't thinking about work at all, only her parents, husband, children and friends. She urges using that information to decide how you show up next.

EXAMPLES

• Turbulence over Iceland

Returning from Bali, their first trip alone longer than a long weekend in 28 years, Mel was on a double-decker plane three hours from JFK when it began swinging side to side. The crew rushed to their seats and the pilots said nothing. She imagined never seeing her daughter's wedding and sent an 'I love you' to the family chat. Chris, who has meditated for 15 years, sat 'like a Buddhist statue'. His first reassurance ('you'll be unconscious, it'll last 10 seconds') didn't help. Box breathing and picturing a good outcome did. She asks airlines to train pilots to warn passengers calmly.

• Phil's elevator moment

The PET scan showed the cancer hadn't spread. Phil got his mom's text in the studio elevator, and his shoulders dropped as it went down. He walked out into a sunny day that felt 'like a new reality'. Mel uses it to show that the body keeps bracing even when you think you're handling things rationally.

• Hand on her heart before a funeral

About 14 years ago, getting ready for the funeral of a close friend who died by suicide and had been like a second father to her daughter, Mel sat on the edge of the bed, put her hand on her heart and told herself she would get through it and be present. She remembers every detail of the service and is proud she was there for her daughter.

• A plane drop that made her want to leave law

Decades ago, Mel was on a plane that suddenly dropped and the oxygen masks came down. In the 30 minutes before landing she took stock of her life: her relationships, how she felt about herself, and how she spent her time. She realized she didn't want to be a lawyer anymore and started making changes.

• Her parents waited two weeks to tell her

Mel's father passed out on a golf course. A check for vertigo turned up an aneurysm that needed brain surgery at the University of Michigan. Her parents waited two weeks to tell her and her brother 'because we didn't want you to worry', which she says only added to the bracing.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Listener questions answered**

  Nicole, 24, single for two years and dreading dating: you may not be ready, so drop the 'should', and call it uncertain instead of dread. A wife dreading her negative husband: stop pushing self-help on him, since trying to change people backfires. Let him have his moods, and ask an open-ended question like 'how are you feeling about things?'

- **Plan for winter instead of dreading it**

  Mel says seasonal depression is real and she feels it too. Instead of 'winter is coming', map out a new routine: adjust bedtime and wake time, plan a trip to see a friend somewhere warmer, or sign up for an evening class like painting to get out of the house.

- **If you dread getting up every day, treat it as a wake-up call**

  Use 5-4-3-2-1 to get out of bed; Mel still does after 15 years. For sleep, spend nine hours in bed to get eight. Then list what you dread about your day. It may point to your health, job, morning routine, an avoided conversation, or needing your family to step up. 'You're not stuck.'

How To Reset Your Mind for Calm & Control

Date: 2024-10-14 · Duration: 0:46:34
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KXjX0b9B-j4

KEYPOINTS

• Comfort objects are tools, not childish leftovers

The episode starts at college drop-off. Just before Mel and Chris left, their 19-year-old son Oakley pulled out his childhood teddy and his tattered blankie and set them front and center on his freshman dorm bed, the first thing anyone sees on walking in. Mel's argument is that simple comforts are 'essential tools for your brain,' and that adults underrate them.

• Comfort means a moment of freedom from stress

Mel defines comfort as a state of physical ease and freedom from stress and whatever is weighing you down. It can be a ritual, an object, a sound, smell, taste or meal. Her daughter in Los Angeles texts her for a particular chili recipe when she comes home. Nothing that comforts you is stressful in itself, and that refueling, she argues, is what gives you strength to take risks and face hard things.

• Familiar comforts tell your brain you're safe

Mel calls Oakley's choice deliberate: he brought something predictable and familiar into a space that is new, stressful and unpredictable. Comfort rituals ground you and bring predictability to chaos. She feels the same thing unpacking in yet another hotel room alone. Oakley's childhood habit of rubbing blankie's ends when nervous is what she calls tactile grounding.

• Comfort triggers the brain's reward chemistry

Mel explains that familiar comforts, like seeing blankie or sipping your favorite drink, light up dopamine pathways. Dopamine, the neurotransmitter involved in pleasure, motivation and reward, signals 'this feels good, keep doing it.' Her claim is that this calm, familiar state leaves you better able to take on bigger challenges, so comfort is about stability and focus, not just relaxation.

• Growth works like a rubber band: stretch, then reset

Mel has long pushed listeners out of their comfort zones, and what surprised her in researching this topic is how important it is to come back to comfort on purpose. Change stretches you as you build new behaviors and neural pathways. A rubber band that never resets snaps, and constant stretching is what she calls burnout. Like a muscle, you have to rest between efforts.

• Learning locks in while you rest

Mel notes that new habits, memories and learning get consolidated while you sleep, not while you're practicing or studying. She uses this to argue that rest and comfort are part of growth, not a break from it.

• Dr. Waldinger: people refuel at a 'home base'

In a clip, Harvard psychiatrist Dr. Robert Waldinger explains that babies who bond well with caregivers grow up believing they're lovable and brave enough to explore, because they have a home base to return to. He describes a toddler on a playground running back to grab a parent's leg, which researchers call 'refueling,' and says we need that throughout life. As an adult, it might mean running a risky idea like starting a podcast past your spouse and hearing 'I've got your back.'

• Comfort isn't always warm and cozy, and it's personal

Controlled discomfort like a cold plunge or cold shower can, Mel says, activate the parasympathetic nervous system and leave you calm afterward. The comfort comes from the ritual. What soothes one person may do nothing for another, as her producer's husband shows (see examples).

• Nobody cares what comforts you, so own it

Asked whether new dormmates might judge him, Oakley said no one walks in thinking 'you're such a child,' because people understand comfort, especially at college, away from your room, friends and family. His line, which Mel highlights: if there's something comforting you feel you can't be without, 'then be with it.' He plans to keep blankie until it's a single thread, then frame it.

EXAMPLES

• Why Teddy matters so much

At five days old, Oakley was rushed by ambulance to Mass General's NICU with Hirschsprung's disease, where parts of his colon and intestines weren't working. Doctors caught it before his intestines ruptured. He spent 30 days there having surgeries, with Teddy in his crib the whole time. Blankie was a monogrammed gift from Mel's girlfriends in a town outside Boston, waiting for him when he came home from the hospital.

• Mel's travel comforts

A moth-eaten beige shawl from students in one of her online courses, about six years old and so fragile she now packs it instead of wearing it. A belt buckle from Chris with an old photo of the kids when Oakley was a baby, Sawyer about seven and Kendall six. She wears it on every keynote stage and jokes it's 'the best way to travel with your kids.'

• The gifts in her suitcase

Mel travels with things strangers have given her as thanks: sobriety medallions, memorial wristbands, and a brooch from a woman who had struggled with hoarding. The woman gave away her mother's brooch as a sign that she could finally let go of things. Seeing them in hotel rooms makes Mel feel less lonely on the road.

• Amy's three-minute river plunge

Producer Amy walks a quarter mile from her Vermont home, crosses a bridge, goes to the same rock and wades into the river in her water shoes. She shouts to her husband Tim to start a three-minute timer. Sometimes she cries or shivers, sometimes she crouches to watch the river 'from a frog's-eye view.' Tim never joins her, because it doesn't comfort him.

• The team's dinner-table answers

Mel's daughter Sawyer: sour grapes, which Mel can't stand. Business partner David: freshly mown grass. Business partner Christine: the chaise end of her couch after dinner, with their two Australian Shepherds piling on. Executive producer Tracy: old-book smell and the sense of discovery in a library. Mel: moments when the universe seems to say you're in the right place, plus her nightly bath.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Name your version of Teddy and blankie**
  List what you reach for when life feels new, overwhelming or exhausting: a candle, a lap blanket, a tea, petting your dog, a window, a stop on the drive home, a family photo or favorite mug at work. It's about getting into that calm state, not about the object itself.
- **Plan your reset after every stretch**
  When you take a risk, like a new job, a solo dinner, improv or asking for a mentor, also decide how you'll come back to comfort afterward. That might be a call to a parent, a bath, or a ritual like Amy's.
- **Bring comfort into new places on purpose**
  When you move, travel or start something new, pack and display the things that feel like home, as Oakley did, instead of hiding them.

#1 Stress Doctor: 5 Tools to Protect Your Brain From Stress & Feel Calmer Now

Guest: Dr. Aditi Nerurkar
Date: 2024-05-23 · Duration: 1:18:29
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Rl5Y9Eem3tc

KEYPOINTS

• Healthy stress moves you forward; unhealthy stress keeps you stuck

Dr. Aditi Nerurkar, a Harvard physician, stress researcher and author of The Five Resets, separates adaptive stress (a new job, falling in love, the nerves before a 5K) from the maladaptive kind we mean when we say 'I'm so stressed.' Fear and excitement live in the same part of the brain. She suggests telling yourself 'this is excitement, I can do this,' because pushing through builds self-efficacy.

• Chronic stress puts the amygdala in charge

Normally the prefrontal cortex, behind your forehead, runs planning and focus. Under stress the amygdala takes over in 'cave-person mode,' built for survival. Fight-or-flight was meant to last seconds, for a tiger in the forest. Headlines, traffic, deadlines and worried kids keep it humming in the background, and over time that leads to burnout. Nerurkar says the amygdala doesn't reset on its own, which is why a vacation or a sunny weekend feels great but doesn't last.

• Burnout can look like simply getting through the day

You can go to work and see friends and still be running on fumes rather than thriving. Nerurkar cites a study where 60% of people with burnout had one main feature: an inability to disconnect from work. Mel admits she's in the 'running on fumes' camp despite knowing all the science.

• Doomscrolling, stress eating and revenge bedtime are the amygdala at work

Nerurkar's explanation for doomscrolling: tribes once had a night watchman scanning for danger, and now we each play that role on our phones. Stress also drives comfort eating (hers is chocolate cake) and 'revenge bedtime procrastination,' staying up late to claim some 'me time.' She cites a study showing people who do this know they should go to bed earlier. It isn't a knowledge gap. Behavior changes only when you act differently.

• Stress can be measured, and five areas drive it

Every patient takes a stress quiz, then retakes it after a month to see if the score moved. She focuses on sleep, movement, diet, media use and connection with others. Every tool in her book is free and quick, because most people can't fit in monthly massages and acupuncture.

• Reset 1: get clear on what matters most

Instead of asking 'what's wrong with me?', set a MOST goal: Motivating, Objective, Small and Timely. Mel's burnout goals included sleeping through the night and not thinking about work at 3 a.m. Nerurkar says a habit takes about eight weeks, falling off and getting back on included, so give yourself three months.

• Reset 2: find quiet in a noisy world

'Popcorn brain' describes being so overstimulated by constant phone use that slow offline life feels eerie. 'Brain drain' research suggests that just having your phone nearby distracts you and adds stress. She says over 50% of people check their phone first thing on waking. Her fixes are digital boundaries, not quitting: keep the phone off your nightstand, buy a cheap alarm clock and switch to grayscale.

• Reset 3: sync your brain and body

Shallow chest breathing goes with fight-or-flight, and slow belly breathing switches on 'rest and digest.' The two systems can't run at once, so breathing works like a light switch. She also describes the gut as a 'second brain,' with far more serotonin receptors than the brain. For movement, a 5–10 minute daily walk beats an ambitious gym plan, because daily habits avoid decision fatigue. 'Opt out of a scroll and go for a walk.'

• Reset 4: come up for air

Productivity follows a bell curve, not a straight line, and most of us sit on the overstressed right side. Nerurkar calls the middle the 'Goldilocks' zone. You usually can't cut your workload, so honor your breaks instead. Checking your phone between meetings isn't a break. It wakes the amygdala back up.

• Reset 5: bring your best self forward

The inner critic gets a megaphone under stress because the amygdala wants to keep you safe and small. Her main tool is a written gratitude practice. Keep a notebook where your phone used to be and each day write the date and five things you're grateful for, and why. She cites Rick Hanson's 'Velcro vs. Teflon' idea, that stress makes negative experiences stick, and studies showing better mood, less stress and better sleep at 30, 60 and 90 days.

EXAMPLES

• The Holmes–Rahe study and the rule of two

In the 1960s, psychiatrists Holmes and Rahe studied about 5,000 people across 43 common life events, good and bad. The more events people piled up, the higher their risk of stress and later illness. That's why Nerurkar recommends changing just two things at a time. She jokes that her 2020 plans to build a farmhouse table, learn Italian and play guitar turned into wearing clean clothes and eating a few vegetables.

• A doctor whose 'diamond cracked'

As a resident working 80-hour weeks and seeing death daily, Nerurkar was taught that 'pressure makes diamonds.' Then she burned out. She recovered with gentle yoga a few days a week and daily short walks, and says Mel's openness inspired her to share her own story in the book.

• Stop, breathe, be at the doorknob

Seeing 30 to 40 patients a day, she said 'stop, breathe, be' each time she turned a patient's doorknob, grounding her feet and taking a breath. She used it before this interview too. It works, she says, because anxiety is about 'what if' and this pulls you back to 'what is.'

- **The sitting data**

  In a study of about 800 people she cites, those who sat most had 112% higher risk of diabetes, 147% higher risk of heart disease, 90% higher risk of dying from heart disease and 50% higher risk of death overall. She notes the stress mechanism isn't fully understood. Her advice is simply to stand and move after long meetings.

- **The patient who watched news day and night**

  During an election year, a patient told her he watched the news day and night. She assumed he was exaggerating until his routine confirmed it. She uses the story to say it wasn't his fault: the amygdala drives the behavior.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Tonight's sleep plan**

  Start with self-compassion: if you're not sleeping well, it's not your fault. Ask her sleep colleague's question, what are you doing in the two hours before bed? Limit screens then, keep the phone out of the bedroom, and don't scroll on waking. She says you may notice a difference within a week.

- **Rename stress as an amygdala alarm**

  Mel's takeaway is to think 'my amygdala is on fire, I need a quick reset' instead of 'I'm stressed.' That turns a vague feeling into something you can act on.

- **If you do only one thing, practice self-compassion**

  Nerurkar says self-compassion has been found to calm the amygdala and lower cortisol. 'You are the sky; everything else is just the weather.' Be kinder than necessary to others, and to yourself.

Why You Care So Much About These 5 Things (and How To Stop)

Date: 2024-04-15 · Duration: 0:36:48
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kLb5lRmAA4A

KEYPOINTS

- **Trying to control the uncontrollable drains the energy you need for what matters**
  Mel's premise is that we burn mental and emotional energy on things we know we can't control: the friend who's always late, the roommate who never takes out the trash, the partner who snores. She names five common culprits and pairs each with what you can control: the weather, waiting, the headlines, the past and the future.
- **You can't control the weather, but you can control whether it bothers you**
  A few days after Mel put the winter coats away, she woke to snow on her emerging daffodils and tulips in southern Vermont. Fretting would change nothing, and she later learned tulips like cold and bloom longer in it. She points to how much worry couples spend on wedding-day weather; once you have a plan A and plan B, you're done. She means normal seasonal weather, not dangerous storms.
- **Bad weather is a chance to practice discipline**
  Mel says doing things you don't want to do, like walking in the rain, is linked to growth in the anterior midcingulate cortex, which researchers associate with willpower and even the will to live. She describes it as the only brain region that grows from doing what you don't want to do. Her rule: a passing shower won't kill you, so don't let it kill your plans.
- **You can't control waiting, but you can control what you do with the time**
  Gripping the wheel in traffic or fuming in a slow post office line on your lunch break doesn't move anything; it only leaves you exhausted. Mel suggests treating waiting as found time rather than lost time.
- **You can't control the headlines, but you can control your headspace**
  Mel admits she used to be passive with media, absorbing whatever the news or her feeds served. She treats attention as your most precious commodity and says giving it away by default is how you waste time and create stress. She cites a recent study estimating Americans watch about 34 hours of TV a week — time that could go to a degree, a side business, healing past trauma, the gym or learning to cook.
- **Passive scrolling and active posting may affect you differently**
  Mel cites a UK study in the journal Behaviour & Information Technology finding that people who passively browse others' content were more likely to report anxiety, depression and stress, while those who created and shared their own content saw a positive effect, especially on stress. Rather than making social media the villain, she says, keep the power by choosing how you use it.
- **You can't change the past, but you can change your behavior now**
  No amount of regret changes what happened. Learn the lesson, then remember that the best apology to others and the most powerful form of self-forgiveness is changed behavior. Living in a way that makes you proud today proves you're no longer that person. Mel says there are entire decades she regrets, but she's proud of who she is now.
- **You can't control the future, but you create it today**
  Mel argues she could predict who you'll be in six months from your current habits, friend group and media diet, so today's actions matter more than any amount of worry. The next six months will arrive either way. Unless you do something different today, the outcome is already set.

EXAMPLES

- **The best wedding Mel ever attended**
  A sudden storm off the Great Lakes ripped open a tent and sent a waterfall onto the dance floor at Emily Glasser and Billy Sussman's wedding. Thirty years later, Mel still calls it the most memorable, most fun wedding she's been to, partly because of the storm.
- **The "guardian angel" truck**
  Mel shares a viral idea: when you're stuck behind a truck on a one-lane road, imagine it was sent to slow you down and keep you from something around the corner that wasn't meant for you, or at night, to light your way. Sip your coffee and practice patience and gratitude.
- **Texting her nephews from the line**
  One of Mel's goals is staying closer to family, so she treats a long line as a cue to reach out, such as congratulating her nephews on their water polo tournament wins. Calling a friend hands-free or queuing up an audiobook or podcast also works.
- **Following Gary Vaynerchuk**
  About nine years ago, getting into media, Mel found that Gary Vaynerchuk's content lit something up and nudged her to post her own instead of procrastinating on social media. It showed her you control your headspace by choosing who gets access to you.
- **Not the same person she was in college**
  Mel describes her college self as anxiety-ridden and toxic, before she knew about trauma, her ADHD or anxiety, or had been to therapy. She asks listeners to look in the mirror and give themselves the same credit for change.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Keep the plan anyway**
  When it's drizzling or humid, take the walk, hike, yard work or dog walk you planned. Mel's friend Josh reminds her there's always blue sky above the clouds.
- **Curate your feeds on purpose**
  Unfollow accounts that make you feel bad, follow ones that inspire action, and consider creating rather than only consuming.

- **Ask what change would make you proud**
  Get up earlier, quit vaping, bring a better mood home. Pick one and start today rather than replaying regrets.
- **Swap each worry for a matching action**
  Worried about your parents? Call them today. About your vacation body? Exercise today. Retirement? Make a budget. A promotion? Book a meeting with your supervisor about what it would take in six months.

4 Ways to Stay Calm When You’re Stressed: This Life Advice Will Change Your Future

Date: 2024-03-18 · Duration: 1:01:22
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=af7uTFizB44

KEYPOINTS

• When someone you love freezes on an opportunity, it's usually fear, not lack of desire.

Mel's 23-year-old daughter Kendall, a singer-songwriter, got an invitation to perform at Carnegie Hall seven days later and left it unanswered for 24 hours. Mel was baffled and getting angry. When they finally talked, Kendall said she felt unworthy and unready, and worried about what friends who had worked just as hard would think. Mel's takeaway: intellectually the hesitation makes no sense, but the person you love is living in their emotions, not their intellect.

• We get frustrated because we can see someone's potential.

Mel compares it to a partner who says he needs a new job and is still in his boxers eating a waffle at 9:45 on a Wednesday, while you angrily wash the dishes. You get mad because you believe in them. She points out that the people who love you probably see things you say you want but aren't working on either.

• Pressure backfires; confusion opens things up.

Telling someone what to do is the fastest way to get them to do the opposite. Mel suggests starting with 'I'm confused', which puts the focus on you and gently points out the gap between what they said they wanted and what they're doing. For example: 'I heard you say you wanted to lose 40 pounds, and I'm confused because I haven't seen you exercising. Do you need support?'

• Expect defensiveness first, then the truth.

After you say 'I'm confused', Mel warns that the fear will come out first: excuses, 'I'm busy', 'how dare you'. Kendall even accused Mel of wanting it more than she did. Keep saying 'anything else?' until the real answer comes out. Usually they know what they want but are scared, or they don't know how to start.

• Lesson 1: 'It's not that deep.'

When someone is in the emotional deep end, these four words, which Mel learned from Kendall, lower the stakes. The phrase also reminded Mel that it was Kendall's decision: if she didn't want to go, there would be other opportunities. Mel applies it to job hunting ('it's just a resume, it's just an interview') and to dating, so you stay clear-headed instead of freezing or blowing the opportunity.

• Lesson 2: don't underestimate a good scream.

Mel encourages letting pent-up tension out instead of holding it together: in the car, a bathroom stall, into a pillow or in the front yard. She cites Dr. Brian Bruno, medical director of Mid City TMS in New York. He writes that the relief after a big scream or cry may come from endorphins and peptides that reduce pain and stress, and that screaming releases muscle tension from bottled-up emotion. Mel notes that researchers are still speculating about why it works.

• Lesson 3: give someone your pants.

Mel's third lesson comes from a stranger's generosity backstage. Her point is that it wasn't really about the pants. She asks what life would look like if your possessions were things to lend and give to lift others up, rather than just to own.

• Lesson 4: if you want a core memory, don't try to film it.

You can't be present to your phone and to your life at the same time. Mel's advice is to stop trying to capture everything, or you'll miss actually experiencing it.

EXAMPLES

• How the invitation came about

A year earlier, Kendall had met musicians at the Newport Folk Festival and kept in touch. One invited her to the annual Piano Recital at Carnegie Hall, where artists including Mandy Moore, whom Kendall calls her 'musical mom', perform two original songs with only a piano. Her mentor Phil Cook had already arranged her single 'Pastime' for piano and offered to accompany her. Once Mel said 'it's not that deep', pointing out that it's an auditorium at 57th and Sixth, she'd been performing for 15 years and her mentor would be beside her, Kendall laughed and said yes.

• The sprint around Carnegie Hall

On the day, Kendall's surprise visitors (her 86-year-old grandmother, who had flown in from Florida, and the grandmother's 85-year-old boyfriend) were in tow. Her pre-show anxiety kicked in: she couldn't find her water, lipstick or the right pants. Insisting 'I have the information', she speed-walked the wrong way, and she and Mel circled the whole block, arriving back at the stage door next to their hotel at 4:13 for a 4:15 call.

• The scream in the elevator

Inside, Kendall pressed 2, but the elevator went down to the basement. She dropped her head into her hands, then put her fists at her sides and let out a bloodcurdling scream. Mel expected her to cry, but Kendall immediately regained her composure. A breathless staff member who had come running at the basement said it 'happens all the time in here'. When the doors opened on the second floor, Kendall walked out calm.

• Leanne Ford's 'traveling pants'

At the sound check, Mel complimented a woman's black high-waisted pants that flared out like a ball gown. She had owned them for 20 years, the tag long gone, and friends around the world had borrowed them. Kendall mentioned she wished she had something that fabulous to wear. Hours later the woman, interior designer Leanne Ford, changed at her hotel, came back and gave Kendall the pants with a note, saying to mail them back 'when you're ready'. In a message afterwards, Ford said what she would remember most was watching Mel's joy as a mother, and that she hoped to give her own daughter the same light.

• Filming the railing

Warned that Carnegie Hall ejects people who film, Mel practised hiding her phone in a trench coat with her elbows tucked in. When Kendall started singing, Mel leaned forward into the moment and only afterwards found she had recorded the railing in front of her. She says she's glad, because she was fully present for the performance.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Use the 'I'm confused' script**
  Say: 'I heard you say you want X. I'm confused, because I don't see you doing Y. Do you need help?' Then let them vent and keep asking 'anything else?' until the real fear or block comes out.
- **Say 'it's not that deep' to yourself**
  When a resume, interview, date or performance starts to feel enormous, name the plain facts of the situation. Lowering the stakes keeps you moving and thinking clearly.
- **Give yourself a release valve**
  Whether it's a scream, a cry, a sigh or a hug, let the pressure out instead of bottling it. Mel sees it as taking control, not losing it.
- **Lend what you have**
  Look for small ways your belongings, time or connections could lift someone up in a big moment. Mel's view is that generosity like this matters more than the object itself.

6 Signs You Are Addicted to Stress, According to a Psychologist | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. Scott Lyons
Date: 2023-10-26 · Duration: 1:10:32
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=punx8WL5_-s

KEYPOINTS

• Drama addiction means unnecessary turmoil, and it can be internal

Dr. Scott Lyons, author of Addicted to Drama, defines it as unnecessary turmoil: exaggeration, intensification and dysregulated energy and emotion used as a dysfunctional way to adapt. Mel's realization is that it isn't only the loud person who sucks the air out of a room. Someone sitting quietly in the corner, braced and ruminating, can be just as hooked. Lyons reclaimed the word 'drama' from 'drama queen' to make the topic more approachable.

• Outward signs to check yourself against

Lyons's list includes extreme language ('literally,' 'always,' 'never'), feeling anxious or bored when things are calm, gossiping and stirring things up, and craving extreme situations and sensations. Others: pulling people into your crisis, generalizing one bad event ('what's up with men'), the catchphrase 'it's always something,' feeling most alive under deadline pressure, constantly fixing things, and replaying scenarios. If you retell a story more than twice, he asks what you haven't processed. His warning on gossip: people who gossip with you also gossip about you.

• Inside, it feels like urgency and being out of sync

From the outside, someone hooked on drama can seem controlling and bulldozing. Inside, they feel out of control, in pain and on edge, as if everything is an emergency, with timing and emotion that feel mismatched with everyone else's. Peace and stillness can feel unsafe, even terrifying.

• The 'revving reflex' interrupts calm

Lyons describes the moment in a meditation class, a bath or a garden when you start to relax and an inner alarm goes off. Suddenly you're thinking about work, checking your phone or looking up an ex. He also cites sad music when you're sad and rushing with nowhere to go. The revving keeps you from contacting vulnerable, unprocessed feelings. His line: 'We chase the drama to avoid our traumas.'

• Drama gives three payoffs: distraction, energy and pain relief

Overscheduling, gossiping and fighting all trigger the same stress response. The first stage releases energy; the second releases a cascade of pain-relieving hormones. For people numbed by early trauma, 'drama is not about making sense, it's about making sensation.' The intensity rises above the threshold of numbness so you feel alive, even if what you feel is bad.

• It meets the criteria for an addiction

Lyons points to tolerance (needing more stress to feel the same; he once took on multiple grad programs at once), withdrawal (anxiety and boredom that create an 'itch' for friction, doomscrolling or news), disregard for social consequences, and the way it consumes energy and attention. On violent crime and horror shows at night, he says they offer the same three payoffs, not just familiarity.

• Trauma trains your senses to scan for danger

Staying in an Airbnb, Lyons couldn't find a carbon monoxide detector beeping every 55 seconds and noticed his whole body bracing for the next beep. Trauma isn't only stored, he explains; it tunes all your senses like a TV channel toward the next possible threat, which is why 'it's always something.'

• How to be around someone who's revving

Stress responses are contagious, so first notice what's happening in your own body and settle yourself. Don't try to stop someone mid-roll down the 'hill of drama'; questions just add logs to the fire. Let the cycle run, then reconnect and ask what story, feeling or unmet need sits beneath their story. If you get an eruption followed by the silent treatment, validate your reality with a friend or therapist rather than waiting for theirs to match.

• Passive people are in the drama too

Lyons, who refereed his parents' fights and later did couples work, recognized he got his own physiological rev from being the martyr. If you enable someone's drama by avoiding confrontation, you're participating. Reclaiming the choice to say no or walk away is what makes the relationship workable. He stresses this isn't victim-blaming.

EXAMPLES

• Lyons faked his own suicide at 16

Bullied by students and by teachers who called him stupid because of severe learning disabilities, he staged a note and pills. He didn't want to die; he wanted people to feel his pain and save him, which he now calls 'weaponized empathy.' He went inpatient, loved the safety, then was sent back to the same school. Later, depressed after a divorce in his late 20s and living with his parents, he noticed he felt alive only when fighting with his ex or sister, watching Bravo, or calling friends about the news.

• The motorcycle boots fight

While shopping in LA, Mel told her daughter that the boots she tried on looked like a pair Mel bought her five years ago. Her daughter stomped back into the dressing room, and the tension lasted the day. The next morning Mel asked what she needed. Side by side in the car, her daughter burst into tears: she felt lost and lonely and afraid she wouldn't make it as a singer-songwriter. Mel apologized for assuming she had it all figured out.

• 'Try to get a ride home'

While Mel traveled, Chris, shaped by a childhood where no one picked him up, told their middle-school daughters to find their own rides. Lyons calls the family's panic around getting out the door now a disproportionate response, 'blowing out a candle with a fire hose.'

• Mel's lonely story and her friend's passive-aggressive texts

Five or six years ago, Mel convinced herself her old friends were partying without her, which kept her isolated. In reality,

everyone was busy and lonely. A friend who texts 'thanks for not telling me you were in town' likely feels unseen. Lyons suggests responding: 'I hear the story you're creating is that I'm not here for you. I'd love to connect.'

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Create a family safe word like 'rev up'**

  Mel asked her family to call out her demeaning tone and venting. Losing that outlet forced her to face being overwhelmed at work without a strong team. Start by noticing the urge for even one second, then build to five and ten.

- **Take a media fast**

  Lyons says media captures attention with awe, angst and anger. He cites findings that people who repeatedly watched Boston Marathon bombing coverage showed more significant PTSD signs than people who were actually there, which he attributes to the repetition and dramatic framing.

- **Choose your words, set boundaries, forgive yourself**

  Swap 'you're an abuser' for 'when you said that, I felt pained.' For a parent whose 30-year-old calls them an abuser when refused, Lyons suggests the boundary 'that word isn't allowed in our family.' Forgive yourself for a survival mechanism while taking responsibility for change.

Five Ways I’m Finding Hope and Strength Right Now | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2023-10-16 · Duration: 0:34:55
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z_8OVjNJF0U

KEYPOINTS

• Feeling lost in dark times is common, but you aren't actually lost or alone.

Mel recorded this in October 2023, while travelling for work and feeling overwhelmed, sad and horrified by the news of war and violence. Her own first reaction to that kind of darkness, she says, is paralysis: she gets stuck, angry and drained. Her message is that even when you feel deeply afraid, you're not alone, because you're with yourself and many people care about you. She adds that you're not truly paralyzed either: there are small things you can do to get through the storm.

• The support you need sometimes comes from a stranger.

Mel's starting point is a driver named Ernest who lifted her spirits when she arrived exhausted and heartbroken. She suggests staying open to strangers who may give you exactly the connection you need without either of you planning it, and remembering that you can be that stranger for someone else. As she points out, everyone you love was once a stranger.

• A lighthouse shines for everyone within reach.

The image at the centre of the episode is the lighthouse. Its single job is to keep shining so ships can find their way home, and it doesn't choose which ships get the light. Mel describes each person's 'light' as their humanity: compassion, the ability to laugh, love, hug, listen and care. She says that's why your heart breaks when you see innocent people suffer, and reminds herself that civilians caught in war are victims and not their governments.

• Helping someone else is often the fastest way to lift yourself.

When she feels low, Mel's first move is to help someone. Even if you can barely get out of bed, she argues that is exactly when to try. She says research repeatedly finds that helping others feels good and does you good. It breaks the echo chamber of fear in your head, shifts your perspective on your own situation and reminds you that you have more power than you think. Small acts count, like running an errand, staffing a hotline or checking on family.

• Be gentle with yourself, because collective stress gets into your body.

Mel quotes Dr. Thema Bryant, a recent guest: whatever is happening out there is happening in here too. You absorb the stress of people around you even when you turn the news off. Signs it's affecting you include trouble concentrating or sleeping, more procrastination, feeling on edge, or sliding into a sense that nothing matters. Her view is that you need to look after yourself first in order to lift anyone else up.

• Watching more news doesn't mean you care more.

Drawing on Dr. Bryant's advice, Mel separates staying informed from flooding yourself. She doesn't watch or listen to the news; she reads it, so she can stay informed while protecting her mental health. She urges people to avoid staring at traumatic images and to show they care through what they do rather than what they consume.

• Meet darkness with its opposite.

Mel's final practice is a mindset: when she sees despair she responds with hope, sorrow with love and agitation with kindness. Thinking of herself as a lighthouse shining in every direction helps her rise above her own heaviness and take action. If you don't know what else to do, she says, just smile at people, say hello and reach out to friends.

• Turn toward people instead of away from them.

Mel argues that when people around the world are suffering, we aren't really strangers. Pulling back from one another feeds the darkness. Leading with humanity, even in a passing moment at a stoplight or in a grocery store, is something anyone can do right away.

EXAMPLES

• Ernest, the driver who called himself a minister

On a work trip from Nashville to Chicago, the man who picked Mel up had a huge smile and a voice 'like liquid butterscotch', and spoke almost in poetry. When she asked whether he was a minister, he laughed and said yes. He explained that a pastor is responsible for a church, while a minister is anyone who spreads light and lifts people up. Mel invited him to her speech the next morning, where he sat up front among thousands of attendees.

• 'Mel, you're a lighthouse'

After the speech, Ernest told Mel that everyone is a minister because everyone can spread light. He said the audience had been quiet as church mice, and that she had made 'a way out of no way' by reminding people of their power. Then he called her a lighthouse, a word that carried her straight back to childhood.

• The Muskegon South Pierhead Lighthouse

Mel grew up on a small lake in western Michigan that fed into Lake Michigan. Her dad would take the boat out early on weekends to fish for steelhead, cigar in his mouth. As a worried child she pictured storms, a dead engine and being lost at sea. When the engine sputtered, her father would point to the Muskegon South Pierhead Lighthouse and tell her it was always there so they wouldn't get lost, however foggy or dark it got.

• A walk through a friend's dahlia field

One morning, driving past the fields of her friend who runs a flower farm, Mel pulled over, left the car running and walked silently through the rows. She stopped to look at individual blooms and a bumblebee 'drunk on pollen' in the centre of one. She says connecting with something bigger than the moment keeps her grounded and calm.

• Her kids deleting TikTok

Mel and her husband asked all three of their children to delete TikTok during this period, because they felt the imagery on the platform was too much for anyone's nervous system and heart to process.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Keep a spiritual practice going, daily or more

Mel has been praying for people who have died or lost loved ones, for those in harm's way, for anyone struggling with anxiety and grief, and for peace. Your version might be meditation, journaling, gathering with people of your faith, or a walk in the woods without your phone. If you can't get outside, picture your favourite place or the people you love.

• Use the 10-5 rule

At about ten feet from someone, look them in the eye and smile, holding it for three seconds or more. At five feet, smile again and say hello. Mel says that mirror neurons make most people smile back. She notes that some listeners say this isn't safe where they live, so only do it if you're comfortable.

• Check in, and say they don't need to reply

Reach out to friends who are hurting. Mel has been checking on her Jewish and Muslim friends in particular, as well as anyone facing a loss or a frightening diagnosis. End the message with: 'You do not need to respond. I just wanted you to know I'm here.' That gives two gifts: the unexpected warmth of the message, and relief from the guilt of not having the energy to reply.

• Read the news rather than watching it

Choose a format that keeps you informed without flooding your senses. Put the energy you would have spent scrolling into a concrete action for someone else.

Remember THIS When The World Feels Overwhelming | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. Thema Bryant
Date: 2023-10-10 · Duration: 0:29:19
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2CluLkJMmsE

KEYPOINTS

• Your body tells you how the news is landing before you name it

Dr. Thema Bryant says to start with bodily awareness. How is your heart? How are you sleeping? Have you lost your appetite or started emotional eating? Are you snapping at people, or have you shut down with no words? Noticing how you're showing up lets you connect what you're feeling with what's causing it, instead of saying 'I'm blessed, how are you?' when you aren't.

• 'Homecoming' begins with telling yourself the truth

Homecoming is the title of her New York Times bestseller and the core of her advice. She defines it as telling yourself the truth and then living based on that truth. Being honest about how you're really doing is where liberation and healing begin. Journaling, art and therapy help connect the larger story in the world with your individual one, because what is happening out there is also, to some degree, happening within you.

• Everyone is feeling it, just in different ways

Bryant's first message is to release self-judgment. People assume they're the only one who is overwhelmed, the only one who can't stop crying, or the only one who can't access their tears. She says everyone is affected, and that dropping the rules about how you 'should' feel is how you become a soft place to land for yourself.

• Be informed, not overexposed

Knowing nothing about the world means you've checked out of the human family, Bryant says. But a 24-hour visual news cycle means absorbing nonstop images and sounds of violence and death. Her line: 'The number of hours or minutes I consume it is not the measure of my care.' Give yourself permission to stop watching all day. She also praises the humility of people online who admit they're confused about a long, complex history.

• Post-trauma healing is different from homecoming during continuous traumatic stress

Bryant notes that the term PTSD was developed with veterans and assumes the danger is over, like an adult who survived child abuse or escaped an abusive relationship. People living with perpetual conflict or community violence don't get the luxury of 'post.' Waiting until it's over to reconnect with yourself could take a lifetime or generations, so the task becomes staying near to yourself while the world spins.

• Two ways to nourish yourself while it's still happening

First, spiritual practices such as meditation, prayer, gathering with people of your faith or reading a sacred text. Connecting with nature counts too, even by visualizing the beach or your favorite tree if you can't get there. Second, narrative therapy, which means telling your story to people who won't judge or reject you, because 'we heal in relationship with each other.'

• Judging your own numbness doubles the problem

Drawing on mindfulness, Bryant says that if you feel numb and then criticize yourself for it, you now have two problems. Instead, notice it with compassion: after so much loss in recent years, it makes sense that you're not really feeling. Whatever you feel, given your life's journey, it makes sense.

• Hopelessness is a failure of imagination you can push back on

Bryant says hopelessness is being unable to imagine anything better than now. Her counter is to deliberately reawaken imagination and picture what it would look like for people to be safe, free and treated with dignity, even if you've never seen that in your community or nation. She adds: 'This moment does not have the final say,' and trauma affects us but doesn't define us.

EXAMPLES

• A same-day call for help

Overwhelmed by the news and aware the show reaches 194 countries, some in active conflict, Mel DMed Dr. Bryant 'in a panic' asking for 10 minutes. Bryant replied, 'I'll be there.' Mel introduces her as a psychologist, minister and tenured Pepperdine professor who in 2023 became the first Black woman to serve as president of the American Psychological Association.

• How it shows up for Bryant: sleep

Her own sign of distress is trouble sleeping. As a parent she stays 'on' during the day, and only after the kids are in bed does she process what she has seen. She also seeks community, and mentions Dr. Shelly Harrell's concept of 'soulfulness': being present so that instead of 'nothing matters,' you think 'I want to make this moment count.'

• The garage-door repairman

The day of the recording, the man who came to fix Bryant's garage door was from the affected region of the Middle East and had been glued to his TV. She apologized for 'dumping' on him, but says moments where people truly see each other remind us of 'the sacredness of now.'

• Mel's 'soul exhale'

Mel says she felt her shoulders drop after the conversation. Her takeaways are being a non-judgmental soft landing for herself and watching her input of news, then turning toward an output of compassion, service and connection.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Replace extra consumption with one act of service

Bryant draws on liberation psychology: ask how you can be part of a solution within your capacity. That might be time, money, prayers, a post of support or, for psychologists, support groups for people worried about relatives. Many people are simply asking 'Does anyone care?', so visible care helps.

• Share honestly to soften the room

Being vulnerable in conversations at home or work 'puts breath in the room.' It reminds people that colleagues and neighbors are humans, not just labor, and creates space for real care.

- **Set a deliberate limit on news, especially video**

  Decide how you'll stay informed without a constant stream of violent imagery, and remind yourself that limiting it doesn't mean you care less.

Your Toolkit for Preventing Burnout and Improving Resilience In Tough Times | Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Jennifer Breheny Wallace
Date: 2023-10-09 · Duration: 0:55:35
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vsA0XqYc0A

KEYPOINTS

• Grind culture says your worth depends on your performance

Journalist Jennifer Breheny Wallace, author of Never Enough, defines grind culture as messages that you're only as good as your productivity, grades, income or college. Toxic achievement is chasing the next goal because you don't feel worthy until you hit it. Healthy achievement means knowing your strengths, accepting you need other people to reach high goals, and not treating a miss as an indictment of your worth.

• Parents have become 'social conduits' of competitive pressure

Researchers use that term for parents who pass on fears about an uncertain, competitive future by becoming more controlling and perfectionistic. Wallace avoids blaming parents, who she says are all feeling this; Mel blames herself and extends it to bosses who push their own stress onto employees.

• The real root is an unmet need to matter

Mattering, a concept dating to the 1980s and sociologist Morris Rosenberg (who also gave us self-esteem), means feeling valued for who you are at your core and being relied on to add value back to family, friends, colleagues and community. Wallace says it works like a buoy or protective shield against anxiety and depression, so a setback doesn't become a verdict on your worth.

• Kids suffer most when mattering is conditional, or when no one relies on them

Among the 'healthy strivers' she studied, Wallace found about 15 common threads. The kids struggling most felt valued only for performance, or felt valued at home but never depended on, leaving them without 'social proof' that they matter. Researchers describe an 'instinct to matter' driving behavior: when it's met, people give back; when it isn't, they turn inward to depression or substance use, or act out.

• A child's resilience rests on the caregiver's resilience

Wallace says research shows the top intervention for a child in distress is protecting the primary caregiver's well-being, and that caregiver's resilience depends on the depth of their own relationships. Chasing perfection made her burnt out; Mel highlights her line that 'the difference between a 91 and a 99 is having a good life.'

• Aim for 'good enough,' not perfect

When her oldest was born, Wallace considered getting a psychology PhD to parent perfectly. The 'good enough' parent responds to needs, validates them and does their best without meeting every one, which also helps kids learn to handle disappointment.

• Minimize criticism, prioritize affection

That's resilience researcher Suniya Luthar's advice for buffering achievement pressure at home. Wallace says criticism lands up to five times harder than a compliment, so she aims for five positive interactions per criticism, and separates 'the deed from the doer.' Mel's example: tell your daughter that paying about $100 to ship shoes is a poor choice, not that she's dumb.

• Being known beats being praised

Wallace stopped saying 'you're so good at math,' which can feel like pressure, and earned 'a PhD in my kids' by studying what makes each tick. Her family took the free VIA Character Strengths survey to focus on core strengths instead of weaknesses. As Brown sociologist Gregory Elliott puts it, 'what gets in early gets in deep.'

• Balance extrinsic values with intrinsic ones at home

Values act like a zero-sum game: competitive schools and social media flood kids with extrinsic ones (GPA, looks, likes, the A team), which research links to more anxiety, depression and substance abuse. Home should emphasize intrinsic ones, like 'you're such a good brother.' Wallace now ignores grades on report cards and highlights teachers' narrative comments.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's 48-hour freakout

Mel had stayed calm about Oakley's applications in southern Vermont until an acquaintance's son, 'in range' for the same early-decision school, was rejected. Mel raced home, demanded his first-draft essay, told him it didn't sound like him, and got 'Mom, could you back off.' A friend, Paige, recommended Never Enough, which led to this interview.

• Wallace's survey of 6,500 parents

With a Harvard researcher, she hoped for 1,000 responses and got 6,500 in days. 83% agreed others see their children's academic success as a reflection of their parenting, and 87% wished childhood were less stressful for their kids. An Alaska mother said her kids never knew a real Thanksgiving because they were always at soccer tournaments.

• 'Lead with lunch'

Instead of asking about the Spanish quiz, Wallace asks what her kids had for lunch, borrowed from her late grandmother, signaling she cares about them and not their performance. Her kids already hear that achievement matters everywhere else, so home should be a haven. For partners or roommates, try 'what was the best part of your day?'

• The Washington Post 'bloodbath'

When her seventh-grader Caroline was crushed by red marks on a paper, Wallace showed her a heavily marked-up early draft from an editor at the Post, where she has now written for 10 years, and explained she came to see the edits as someone investing in her.

• Luthar's one-hour support groups

Busy professional mothers met one hour a week for three months in groups of four or five. None dropped out, cortisol fell, and

well-being and relationships with their kids and parents improved.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Make others feel they matter, starting small

When a 30-year-old asked for a mattering mantra, Wallace told him to thank the cafeteria worker who brightens his day. Thank the drugstore clerk, text a friend, make eye contact. She cites a Gallup finding that about 80% of workers hadn't heard appreciation from their boss in a year, and gratitude research showing people underestimate how well thanks will be received. Being on your phone mid-conversation signals the opposite.

• Family motto: 'Never worry alone'

Teach interdependence alongside self-reliance: how to rely on others and be relied on. Wallace models limits out loud ('that's enough for the day') and shares failure stories.

• Frame chores and decisions around being needed

Swap 'I'm sick of setting the table' for 'Dad's cooking, I'm on a deadline, who can pitch in?' and 'Could you throw a couple of my things in with your laundry?' Ask kids' opinions, such as finding the best hotel rate or rental car price. Wallace's family also has a weekly volunteering requirement for everyone.

• Reframe a bad grade and ask teachers who your child is

From psychologist Lisa Damour: a bad test grade only shows what you knew that day, not your future or how your teacher sees you. Mel and Chris ask teachers to describe what kind of person their child is with peers, not the grades.

6 Magic Words That Stop Anxiety & Overwhelm | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2023-09-28 · Duration: 0:38:30
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63P5Cv9MSFE

KEYPOINTS

• Mel recorded this from a Salt Lake City hotel room after catching herself in a worry spiral

With about an hour before a convention center speech, Mel described what had just happened. Her daughter Sawyer, 24, is on a planned four-month solo backpacking trip and was in Australia doing solo hikes. Two days after posting a sunrise photo from a summit (a roughly five-mile hike started at 4 a.m.), she hadn't messaged on WhatsApp or Instagram, and her location showed only a spinning wheel.

• The mind jumps to horror-movie scenarios in a nanosecond

Instead of assuming Sawyer met friends, her phone died or she was simply busy living, Mel's mind went straight to: she fell off the mountain, she was kidnapped, she was assaulted on the trail. Standing in her underwear brushing her teeth at 6:15 a.m., she noticed she had inflicted self-torture before even having water or coffee. She says listeners' messages show the same pattern with money, jobs and kids.

• The six words: 'What if it all works out?'

First, the phrase hits the brakes on the 'locomotive of worry.' Second, because it's a question, you pause and consider it, and realize you don't actually know what will happen. It is logically true that things could work out, so you aren't lying to yourself. Mel stresses this isn't 'lipstick on a pig' but using logic to interrupt a habit.

• Most worries never happen

Mel cites a Penn State study on chronic worriers: the average person has three to four major worries a day, and 91% of them turned out to be false. Of the 9% that did happen, the outcome was much better than expected about a third of the time. Her math leaves roughly a 6% chance of the bad outcome, and her stance is 'if something bad happens, I will deal with it then.' She also says research suggests about one in three people struggle with constant worry.

• The Buddhist teaching of the two arrows

When misfortune strikes, two arrows fly. Life fires the first one into your heart: the missing text, a breakup, the number on the scale, a $1,000 car repair, a scary cough. The second arrow is the one you fire into your own forehead with your reaction and catastrophizing. You can't stop the first, but you can grab the second out of the air.

• Psychology calls this primary versus secondary emotion

Your primary emotional response is the immediate hit, like shock and despair when someone dies. The secondary response is what lingers, such as long-term grief. Mel says research shows you have little control over the first but many ways to shorten the second, and worry is a secondary response you can work on.

• Worrying makes you experience the pain twice

If the bad thing doesn't happen, you suffered for nothing; if it does, you suffered in anticipation too. Mel has been fired twice and says she could feel one coming and tortured herself for a month, which changed nothing. Once she got over the humiliation, getting fired felt liberating, since you usually get fired from a job you can't stand or aren't performing in.

• Catastrophizing damages your ability to solve real problems

Drawing on Dr. Judy Willis, whom she interviewed for The High 5 Habit, Mel explains that worry triggers the sympathetic fight-flight-freeze system, which impairs executive function in the prefrontal cortex: focus, decision-making and problem-solving. Even if the worst happens, say Sawyer were hurt and needed help, an arrow in your forehead makes you worse at handling it. Mel's own plan: if she didn't hear from Sawyer in 72 hours, she would switch to problem-solving.

• Painful thoughts light up the same pathways as physical pain

Mel cites work associated with Dr. Arthur Barsky of Harvard Medical School on stress causing physical pain: headaches, nausea, a stomach 'in knots.' She describes studies showing painful thoughts activate the same neural pathways as physical pain, and math anxiety research from a University of Chicago psychology professor who likened anticipating a math problem to burning your hand on a hot stove.

• Hypervigilance from a chaotic childhood can be kept without the pain

Mel says people who grew up waiting for the other shoe to drop often scan for danger constantly; she did too. Seeing around corners can be an intuitive superpower. The goal isn't to lose that radar but to stop escalating before anything has happened.

EXAMPLES

• Listener arrows from Instagram

Sylvia fears flying and adds 'what if I can't say goodbye?' Maggie's annual review becomes 'what if I'm laid off and can't pay for groceries?' Gabby's divorce becomes 'what if I never have the life I want?' Natalie sees happy couples and thinks 'what if I never find my person?' Mel reframes each, for example: what if the divorce is the hardest and also the best thing that ever happened to me?

• Mel's own airplane spiral

On takeoff she sometimes spirals into missing her daughters' weddings and never meeting grandkids. Her counter: what if the plane lands, she sees everyone, and she outlives them all?

• The missing charger before the flight

The day before, racing around with 15 minutes to go, she couldn't find her computer charger, passport or travel bag. She caught herself: what if it all works out? Worst case, she's an adult who can buy a charger at the airport. Stopping the spiral let her focus and search.

• Reframing Sawyer's silence

Mel's positive version: Sawyer posted the sunrise and was photographing other hikers, so she's probably busy with new friends. What could be better than a 24-year-old on a solo trip too caught up in the moment to check in with her mom?

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Catch the second arrow in real time**

  Notice when stress rises after a trigger, name the first arrow (what actually happened), then ask 'What if it all works out?' before stacking worst-case thoughts. It doesn't guarantee a good outcome; it keeps you calm, focused and present until you know otherwise.

- **Practice positive ideation as a default**

  Mel's sample lines: 'This could be the best thing that ever happens to me.' 'This isn't easy, but I trust I'll grow through it.' 'I don't know what I'm doing, but I can figure it out.' She says research shows visualizing positive outcomes is effective at beating down worry.

- **Keep a real-world trigger for action**

  Worry isn't preparation. Decide in advance what would make you act, like Mel's 72-hour rule, and save your clear thinking for that moment rather than spending it on imagined disasters.

Harvard Professor Says THIS Is the Secret to Success (It’s Not What You Think) | Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. Luana Marques
Date: 2023-06-15 · Duration: 1:15:15
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5_iGYo44_C8

KEYPOINTS

• The problem isn't anxiety, it's avoiding

Dr. Luana Marques, a Harvard associate professor of psychiatry who has worked at Mass General for over a decade and wrote Bold Moves, compares anxiety to a fever and avoidance to the infection that keeps it going. Patients ask her to get rid of their anxiety, but she says what keeps them stuck is what they do when they feel it. 'We can't get rid of anxiety. What we can get rid of is avoidance.'

• Avoidance means lowering discomfort fast at the cost of staying stuck

She defines it as anything you do or don't do in response to a perceived threat that brings your discomfort down quickly but keeps you stuck long term. The brain is wired to predict and protect, and it can't tell real threats from imagined ones, so an email or a work meeting can register like a lion. She says she has never met anyone whose struggle didn't involve avoidance, including her own hardest moments.

• The three Rs: retreat, react, remain

Retreat is moving away: not opening the email (her husband moves unwanted emails to another screen), skipping hard conversations, ruminating. React is lunging at the discomfort to make it stop: firing off an angry email, yelling at a barking dog (Dan Harris's example), grabbing a drink or a vape. Remain is freezing in place, staying in a job or relationship you know doesn't work. She says they mirror fight, flight or freeze, triggered by perceived rather than real threats.

• Staying home to avoid a panic attack trains the brain to fear work

Mel describes a family member who took a week off after anxiety spiked. Marques explains that panic attacks come out of the blue, but avoiding work links work to panic in the brain. Your baseline anxiety rises, which makes an attack at work more likely when you return. Rather than 'just do it,' she suggests a partial approach, like driving toward work.

• Pause and write out the thoughts–emotions–behaviors cycle

Marques's own example from that morning: the thought 'What if Mel Robbins doesn't like me?' brought anxiety and a pounding heart, then the urge to stay in bed. Those three ping-pong and snowball fast. Her research-based tip is to write down your thoughts, feelings and urges. She says writing engages the prefrontal cortex, which competes for energy with the amygdala, and that she has seen hundreds of patients stop the spiral this way.

• Cross-examine the thought; you don't have to believe the new one yet

She walks Mel through a feared sales meeting. Messed up 2 times out of 100? That's a 2% chance. Worst case, you'll be embarrassed, which you've survived before; firing on the spot has never happened. The new line, 'I've been nervous before and done a good job,' won't feel true at first. She says positive thinking alone doesn't work: you reframe, repeat it, and then show up.

• Aim for 'comfortably uncomfortable' in small, repeated doses

Total comfort holds nothing meaningful, and total discomfort triggers fight-or-flight, so she aims for the middle. For a listener who always wants to leave the room, she suggests staying one extra minute (or 30 seconds), and if you walk out, coming back within a minute, then building to 3 and 5 minutes on a timer. She has never had a patient who couldn't tolerate a minute.

• Not all avoidance is bad: safety and strategy are different

In situations like domestic violence, stepping back to get safe is necessary. A patient staying six more months in a job she disliked to collect a bonus that would pay bills was using strategy, not avoiding. Marques says avoidance is a reflex with a 'price tag' that keeps you stuck, while strategy is something you can explain calmly and rationally.

EXAMPLES

• Grandma's Chinese-food exposure therapy

At 15, after moving in with her grandmother in a bigger Brazilian city, Marques became terrified of people and hid behind studying. Her grandmother, actually her stepfather's mother, with no college training, took her to the mall for Chinese food, a treat after times without enough to eat. She then insisted they go talk to an elderly stranger, and kept doing it until people stopped being scary. Marques later realized it was exposure therapy. At 16 her grandmother gave her The Alchemist.

• Mel's cancelled summer in Albuquerque

As a second-year law student, Mel's anxiety built until she called the firm two days before her flight, claimed a family emergency and gave up a summer job she had worked hard for. Marques calls it a textbook retreat.

• From fear of heights to loving skydiving

Marques froze on the cable section of a Yosemite hike. She built a ladder of exposures: chairs, stairs, her roof, then three skydives in one day. She now loves it, and invites herself to Oakley's 18th-birthday skydive, which Mel is dreading.

• Mary, the CEO and Joanna

Mary gained 100 pounds in a job she hated but stayed for the income. A powerful Fortune 500 CEO avoided dating and was 45 with no meaningful relationships. Joanna, a single mother of three, hadn't asked for a raise in 10 years while being passed over for promotions.

• Interoceptive exposure: sitting with the sensation

For physical-symptom fears, Marques has panic patients hyperventilate or spin in a chair and then do nothing while their bodies settle. One vomit-phobic patient walked Boston's Faneuil Hall on a Monday morning seeing pub vomit. Mel admits she did the opposite with Oakley ('you're not going to get sick'), and he threw up 15 steps into Logan Airport. Marques later recognized her own childhood 'asthma' as panic attacks after violent fights at home.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Find your avoidance in five minutes**
  List what you want for your life, then ask why you're not doing it. Or ask: 'If I went toward this, would I feel more uncomfortable?' If yes, you've been avoiding.
- **Limit reassurance to one check**
  For health anxiety, checking with your doctor once is fine; second and third opinions after a clear result feed the loop.
- **Let your kids feel some discomfort**
  Marques says rushing in to remove a child's anxiety makes it worse. Her five-year-old Diego wants a podcast telling people to stay with their emotions instead of running.

What Every Stressed Out Person Needs to Hear | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Chris Robbins
Date: 2023-05-01 · Duration: 0:53:00
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XWyXecMJNBs

KEYPOINTS

• Under stress, people tend to overfunction or underfunction

Mel draws on psychologist Harriet Lerner, who coined the terms. Overfunctioners jump into first-responder mode: helping, directing and taking over. Underfunctioners slow down, go quiet and gather information, or at worst freeze and wait to be told what to do. Mel overfunctions and her husband Chris underfunctions. Neither is good or bad, and the goal is to notice which one is your default.

• Overfunctioning is a superpower with a cost

Mel says it lets her think 20 to 25 steps ahead. But her internal 'five-alarm fire drill' makes her lose rational thinking, trample other people's ability to handle things, burn herself out and stress everyone around her.

• The same event can set off very different alarms

On a zero-to-ten scale, their son's breakdown was an eight for Mel and a three or four for Chris. That gap is the start of the friction: each feels the other's response doesn't fit the situation.

• Resentment builds on both sides

Lerner's research, as Mel describes it, finds that overfunctioners resent slower partners because they feel they're carrying the alarm alone and read slowness as not caring. Chris adds that being bulldozed leaves him feeling bullied and mistrusted, as if he isn't problem-solving when he is, just quietly. Over time he started assuming Mel would handle everything anyway.

• Underfunctioning isn't doing nothing

Chris says he's always thinking about solutions. He just gathers information before deciding, and under real stress his focus narrows and he goes a bit numb. Mel ends by apologising that his hard thinking and worry never get credit.

• Underfunctioners need to learn to step up

Mel says that if your default is to freeze, feel helpless and second-guess yourself, the work is learning to advocate for yourself and problem-solve while the alarm is going off. Sawyer, she says, learned from her ER day about underfunctioning, pushing people away, and the value of asking for help.

• Functioning under stress comes down to three abilities

Per the research Mel cites, how well you function under stress depends on your ability to make decisions, act on them and handle emotion. An overfunctioner's anxiety pushes them to act before deciding well. An underfunctioner may decide well but act or speak too slowly for the people around them.

• Lerner's advice: 'hang in'

Hanging in means stopping yourself from doing what you normally do. Overfunctioners should hold their tongue and say about 50% less, or as Mel puts it, 75% less. Underfunctioners shouldn't disappear into silence: say out loud that you're processing, because silence can feel like abandonment to an overfunctioning partner.

• Ask the overfunctioner, 'What are you scared of right now?'

Mel says that question would reach the emotion behind the barking orders and help her see when a fear doesn't fit the facts. In this case it was a kid whose car broke down four blocks from school, with adults already helping. Chris says it might also help him meet the fear and not just the logistics.

• Give the underfunctioner a short script

Mel asks Chris to say something like 'I need a sec, I'm processing, I'll handle it,' preferably without swearing at her. Chris suggests Mel can keep talking, just in a more organised, less tornado-like way, so they work as a team.

EXAMPLES

• A colonoscopy morning goes off the rails

Chris had been up all night with colonoscopy prep. Mel forgot to set her alarm, skipped her own evening-prep advice and had 25 minutes to get out of the house. Mid-drive, their son Oakley called: his Jeep had died in the road outside his high school. She recorded a voice memo in the pickup outside Dartmouth Hitchcock hospital to show the breakdown as it happened.

• Coaching a grown man through a call with AAA

While Chris called AAA (a US roadside-assistance service), Mel kept interrupting with 'tell them you're going to a colonoscopy.' Then a school administrator, Mary, offered to meet the tow truck, and Mel talked over Chris directing that too. Her daughter was meanwhile sleeping through a virtual appointment. Chris says the barked orders, in one ear while he listened with the other, derailed the conversation.

• 23 vials of blood

When their daughter Sawyer was sent to the Mass General ER in Boston after two weeks of odd symptoms, she insisted she was fine. They were three and a half hours away. Mel deferred all day, then drove down at 3 p.m. once she heard they'd drawn 23 vials of blood. Sawyer had been there alone for 11 hours. Mel's lesson: if you feel called to show up, don't ask, just go.

• Friends who were standing at the NICU door

The fear underneath was a memory. When Oakley was six days old he was rushed to Mass General for life-saving surgery, and two close friends who'd had kids in the NICU (a newborn intensive care unit) were waiting when the doors opened. They knew Mel and Chris wouldn't know how to ask for help.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Start with 'Are you safe?'

Looking back, Chris noted that neither of them asked Oakley if he was safe, which would have been the right first question before AAA, tow trucks or schedules.

- **Name the partner who's good in a crisis**

  Their couples therapist, Dr. Cooper, asked Mel to describe a time Chris was in charge and she felt completely safe. Her answer was camping, hiking and fly fishing. Calling him 'the trip leader' gives her a phrase to hand over control, and reminds him to lead them toward figuring out what's driving the angst.

- **Try venting out loud**

  Mel processes by talking. Saying it all into a voice memo, putting a hand on her heart and telling herself 'it's okay, Mel' helped her settle back into her body before she reflected.

- **Your stress default shows up with your kids too**

  Chris notes their kids call Mel first in an emergency because she's fast and decisive. That's valuable, he says, unless it shuts out everyone else's contribution.

Surprising Signs of Anxiety and How to Heal It | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. Russell Kennedy
Date: 2023-04-13 · Duration: 1:07:37
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yuy9VVY2Snc

KEYPOINTS

• Anxiety is framed as an 'alarm' set in childhood

Recapping part one of this two-part toolkit, Dr. Kennedy, a medical doctor and neuroscientist, argues that anxiety starts with a moment in childhood when you felt separate, unsafe, or both. The alarm was useful then, pushing a small child back toward an adult, but many people keep running it into adulthood. Any hint of separation (being judged, dumped, fired) sets it off, and the mind then piles worries on top.

• Sleep hygiene helps you cope; finding the root is what heals

For listener Jason, who gets anxious at bedtime and wakes up worrying, Kennedy backs Mel's 3-2-1 routine and no blue light, because a reticular activating system kept busy by 'zombie scrolling' stays on alert. He calls those coping tools, though. The deeper question is what bedtime felt like when you were a child. His own mother, a nurse, worked 3-to-11 shifts and left him with a father whose moods were unpredictable.

• Talk therapy alone often misses the body

Kennedy has nothing against cognitive therapy, but says most North American therapy ignores trauma stored in the body. Mel says it took her decades to heal because she got 'so good at talking about' her anxiety. Things changed only when she 'got below the neck', learned to sit with uncomfortable sensations, and realized she had been tackling the problem in the wrong order.

• The goal is getting used to the alarm, not getting rid of it

Kennedy cites Bessel van der Kolk (The Body Keeps the Score): the work is not removing the alarm but learning to tolerate it, so discomfort no longer sends you compulsively into your head looking for an answer that isn't there. He links this to cold plunges. The nerve pathway that carries temperature also carries pain, and emotional and physical pain use similar brain structures, so breathing through cold is practice for staying with a hurting younger self.

• 'Am I safe in this moment?' brings you into the present

Anxiety is always about the future, he says, so sensation brings you back to now: a hand on your chest, a breath, an essential oil, humming. His daughter Leandra, who went through a hard stretch at 21, told him it was the single most useful tip 'Dr. Dad' ever gave her. He says healing happens only in the present moment, not while you're stuck in old trauma or future worries.

• Your body's state shapes your thoughts

Kennedy's quick tool is the physiological sigh: two sniffs in, then a long, slow exhale. He says it moves you toward a parasympathetic (rest-and-digest) state and breaks the feeling-thought-feeling chain. 'You will think exactly the way your body feels', which is why repeating 'I'm happy' while you feel anxious is like pushing a rock uphill.

• The mind is a 'meaning-making machine' that turns body alarm into stories

Sensations travel through deep brain areas that have no words, and the left hemisphere then explains them, usually with painful stories that fit the alarm. Feel bad, and your brain hunts for a reason: the dentist appointment next week, then taxes, then the relationship. He calls this 'stacking'. Find where the alarm sits in your body and you get closer to the root.

• Anxiety isn't genetic, he says, but sensitivity may be

Kennedy says no 'anxiety gene' has been found, unlike the stronger genetic links in schizophrenia and bipolar disorder. What may be inherited is sensitivity. Every anxious patient he has seen is a sensitive person who needs more love, even from parents who were basically fine. Children of anxious parents can also be conditioned to pick up anxiety because they feel it in the adults.

• To break the family cycle, heal the parent first

Asked by Lena how to avoid passing her father's short temper on to her kids, Kennedy says that when parents ask him to see an anxious 15-year-old, he works on the parent instead. He compares it to Cesar Millan, who trains the owner, not the dog. Once a parent leaves alarm mode, kids notice ('Mom, you seem more connected'). He says it's about the adults '99% of the time'.

• Survival mode shuts down connection

In alarm, the social engagement system (eye contact, facial expression, tone of voice, body language) goes offline. That helps explain social anxiety and feeling cut off from a spouse or kids. People often feel guilty and wonder if they're in the wrong relationship, when they may just be dissociated.

EXAMPLES

• Panic attacks after a massage

Kennedy sometimes left his massage therapist so relaxed that he had a panic attack. As a child, relaxing was exactly when his father would slide into depression, mania or psychosis. He uses this to explain 'when it's not safe to feel safe' (chapter 62 of his book) and why patients distrust feeling better.

• Children of alcoholics stay on guard

With patients raised by alcoholics, he sees a cycle of blow-up, apology and quiet, then another blow-up. The child decides it's safer never to relax and stays hypervigilant, which later shows up as poor sleep and middle-of-the-night waking.

• Surprising signs a parent had anxiety

For a generation that never discussed feelings, his list is alcoholism, chronic irritability, being warm one moment and cold the next (which he calls almost worse than being consistently cold), hypervigilance, over-organizing, leaning on prescription drugs, being warmer with pets than with a spouse, and polished people-pleasing, like the mom who bakes cookies for everyone.

• Years of therapy that didn't reach the root

He describes patients who have spent '$40,000 on 10 years of therapy', at around $150 an hour, and feel no better. He blames therapy that never reaches the root in the body.

• A photo of your partner as a kid

Mel describes Chris as a latchkey kid locked out on game day, climbing a bee-covered trellis and punching through a glass door. When she's irritated, she pictures that fourth-grader in his blue-and-white uniform. Kennedy suggests couples keep a photo of each other at age 7 to 9, because 'that's who you're dealing with'.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Night-waking routine**

  Put your hand where the tension is, breathe into it, ask or say 'I am safe in this moment', and let yourself feel it. Add physiological sighs. Kennedy stresses linking the feeling to the thought, since he says that's how new pathways form.

- **Break a rumination spiral by moving**

  Notice the alarm first, since he says you can sit in anxiety for hours without realizing it. Then breathe, use 5-4-3-2-1, and get moving: put your shoes on and go somewhere. Rumination has inertia, like the shutdown after Mel's friend Warren died, when Chris got her out on the water.

- **Coping aids, kept in perspective**

  Kennedy lists grounding (feeling your feet on the floor), touch, hot or cold temperature, scents like lavender or chamomile (he says smell skips the thalamus and goes straight to the emotional brain), and side-to-side eye movements, which he says lower amygdala activity. He calls all of these coping, not healing. Mel warns that much viral TikTok advice is unreliable.

- **Kennedy's ABC process and play**

  A is awareness of where the alarm sits in your body. B is body and breath. C is compassionate connection with your younger self. Look at the sensation with curiosity ('heavy, sharp, purple'). Bring back the kind of play you loved as a teen, ideally with no winner or loser, and for kids try games around the dinner table guessing feelings from faces.

Anxiety Toolkit: Understanding Its Effects On Your Mind and Body | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. Russell Kennedy
Date: 2023-04-10 · Duration: 0:55:04
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G0P2L1BbkP0

KEYPOINTS

• Anxiety is alarm in the body that the mind tries to explain

Physician and neuroscientist Dr. Russell Kennedy, author of Anxiety Rx, separates anxious thoughts from what he calls 'alarm': a painful sense of danger stored in the body. The mind, a 'compulsive meaning-making machine,' explains that alarm with worries, what-ifs and worst-case scenarios. Those thoughts make the alarm worse, which makes the thoughts worse, a loop he calls the alarm-anxiety cycle.

• Everyday worry is normal; relentless daily anxiety usually isn't

Kennedy says worrying about taxes or your kids is normal. Anxiety that shows up every day, like waking with dread, usually traces back to unresolved childhood wounding held in the nervous system. Because people treat it as a thinking problem and try to fix it through the mind, he says, some stay in therapy for 30 years without getting much better.

• Children blame themselves, and that split leaves alarm behind

Kennedy quotes the saying that when a child is abused, neglected or abandoned, the child doesn't stop loving the parent, they stop loving themselves. The child, powerless, escapes into overthinking, and the habit stays. Later events like divorce or a car accident bring the alarm back. His summary: 'Anxiety occurs because you've blocked love for yourself.'

• Trauma is whatever gets your nervous system stuck

Kennedy separates everyday 'drama,' which every childhood has, from trauma, which leaves the nervous system stuck 'on.' He compares it to an old railway switch moving you from growth mode to protection mode. A securely attached child with attuned caregivers can go through hard events without that switch flipping. The older you get, the more the switch 'rusts' in place, though he avoids calling it permanent.

• The amygdala has no sense of time

Traumatic memories stored by the amygdala feel like they're happening now, not in the past. Kennedy says this is also the way in: because the amygdala doesn't track time, you can go back to your younger self and give them, now, the comfort they needed then.

• Coping tools help, but healing works at the root

Kennedy has taught yoga and meditation, and he says breathwork, guided meditation and similar tools do help you cope. Healing, in his view, means finding the suffering child in you and showing them they're seen, heard, loved and protected. He's frustrated that recent neuroscience advances have rarely changed outcomes in the exam room. The exception he finds exciting is guided psychedelic therapy with ketamine, MDMA or psilocybin, which he thinks helps people reconnect with themselves.

• Seeking validation can be a hidden sign of anxiety

Constantly looking for love and attention outside yourself, and feeling crushed and lonely without it, is a sign people often miss. Kennedy sees addiction as closely tied to anxiety: both grow from childhood wounding, and substances temporarily remove the blocks so people feel connected to themselves. He adds that unresolved childhood wounding can show up as anxiety in one person and as depression, eating disorders or personality disorders in others.

• Go into the body instead of the head

When alarm hits, Kennedy says not to 'add thoughts to it.' Feel the support of the bed, breathe, and find where the alarm sits: his is in his solar plexus, others feel it in the throat or shoulders. Put a hand there and notice its shape, color and temperature. He points to the insula, which links the thinking brain and the feeling body, as a promising area for changing these patterns.

• Go slowly, and get help for major trauma

Your younger self may not trust you after decades of ignored alarm, and the adult resists going back because that's where the pain is. Start gently. If there was significant emotional, physical or sexual abuse, Kennedy says to work with a therapist, possibly a somatic therapist, because doing it alone can re-traumatize you.

EXAMPLES

• The hand-holding shock study

Kennedy describes a study, though he says he doesn't remember the exact details, in which women received a mild, voluntary electric shock. About 12 brain areas lit up when they were alone, eight when a stranger held their hand, and four when their partner did. He uses it to show how much less work the brain does when we feel connected.

• Carrie, 53, after 30 years of panic

A creative leader with a 'so-called great career,' crippling overthinking and travel panic attacks says guided meditations haven't helped and she's close to barricading herself at home. Mel relates, saying her own high-functioning anxiety fueled business risk-taking but was 'torturous.' Kennedy hears unresolved trauma in Carrie's voice and recommends working with her younger self rather than adding more coping tools.

• Crunching snow and Mel's mornings

Mel's amygdala linked the sound of crunching snow to a car rollover on a ski trip, so walking to the mailbox in winter can bring it back. She also shares that she was molested by an older child at a fourth-grade sleepover and woke feeling something was very wrong. At 50, mornings still trigger that feeling. Kennedy says a parent's comfort the next morning, 'it's not your fault,' might have prevented the switch from flipping.

• 'I love you, Rusty'

Kennedy's father had schizophrenia, his brother had orthopedic problems that took much of his mother's attention, and he was bullied at school. 'Rusty' is his 12-year-old self. Going under anesthesia for surgery three weeks earlier, he kept repeating 'I love you, Rusty.' His phone's home screen is a photo of himself at three.

• Switching between dusk tag and the hard memory

Kennedy guided Mel to her best memory: summer dusk in her Michigan front yard, playing tag and statue with her brother and neighborhood kids, which she felt from her cheeks to her heart. He then had her briefly touch the fourth-grade memory, which she felt in her gut and ankles, and return to the warm one. He says the pull toward the bad feeling is normal because we're wired to notice fear, and moving back and forth weakens it.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Start younger-self work gently

If a photo feels too triggering, picture yourself as a child at a happy time, notice what you're wearing, relax your jaw and shoulders, and notice where the good feeling sits in your body. Kennedy suggests calling up that memory during Mel's High 5 habit at the mirror.

• Use play to calm the nervous system

Kennedy says trauma activates the fight-or-flight and shutdown systems at the same time, like pressing the gas and brake together, and people swing between anxiety and exhaustion all day. Play also activates both systems, but in a safe way, so it helps the body learn that arousal doesn't have to lead back into the trauma.

• Kennedy's morning ritual

He does a self-made meditation, then listens to Peter Gabriel's 'In Your Eyes' while looking at his childhood photo. Mel plans to print her fourth-grade photo for her phone and office, seeing her alarm as younger Mel reaching up to be reassured.

Feeling Overwhelmed? How to Tap Into Your Power and Feel Calmer | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2023-03-20 · Duration: 0:43:36
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PFUbb56Xfg

KEYPOINTS

• There are two kinds of overwhelm, and naming yours tells you what to do

Mel splits overwhelm into 'legitimate overwhelm,' where your circumstances genuinely demand more than you have, and 'lifestyle overwhelm,' a chronic, self-made state of overcommitting, never saying no and putting yourself last. The first calls for compassion and stamina; the second calls for changing how you prioritize. She asks listeners to diagnose each caller's situation alongside her.

• Legitimate overwhelm is temporary, so protect your stamina rather than doing more

Kids too young for a full school day, caring for a dying parent, grief, a dissertation or a divorce are seasons, not permanent states. Mel's prescription is to accept the season, tell yourself it will pass, lower the pressure and prioritize rest, asking a partner, parents or other parents to swap time so you get an hour alone.

• Lie #1: 'If I just hurry, I can fit more in'

For a caller juggling a two-year-old, a full-time job, marathon training and anxiety, Mel says this season isn't about fitting more in but accepting where she is. She hears resistance in the long list of personal-growth goals and reframes it: taking care of a small child while working is already the most important thing she could be doing.

• Lie #2: 'Everything is important'

If everything is important, nothing is. Samantha's habit of giving equal weight to every task and then pushing them to tomorrow is classic lifestyle overwhelm. Mel's point is that you get to decide what matters, and genuine emergencies, such as a sick child or an empty gas tank, bubble up and get your attention anyway.

• Lie #3: 'I should be doing more'

Cindy, an overachiever, feels like a failure when she can't finish an impossible daily list. Mel tells her you only need to do what needs to get done, and the rest 'doesn't matter.' Overachievers who can't sit still are most at risk, because lifestyle overwhelm robs them of reading, gardening or meeting a friend for coffee.

• Lie #4: 'I can handle it all in my head'

Thinking about a task is not working on it; it becomes rumination. Mel ties this to her earlier procrastination episode, where procrastination is framed as the 'freeze' response to stress and the stress you carry is a 'stress backpack.' Things that truly matter have to land on a calendar.

• Procrastination feeds lifestyle overwhelm in a vicious cycle

You freeze, push things off, beat yourself up, then feel more overwhelmed by everything you've delayed. Mel says avoidance drains far more energy than doing the task, which is why finishing a dreaded task can suddenly free up 'energetic time.'

• Do hard things when your energy is highest

Mel cites psychologist Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi's work on motivation and flow and the idea of 'activation energy,' the resistance to starting. For her, exercise only happens in the morning; dragging herself to the Peloton treadmill at night takes '100 times more energy.' She admires David Goggins' discipline but doesn't want a life where she has to summon willpower for what brings her joy.

EXAMPLES

• Mel recorded this while in legitimate overwhelm herself

She showed up in ripped jeans, a jog bra and a T-shirt reading 'mentally elsewhere,' about to drive to Boston for a friend's funeral where she was giving the eulogy. She uses her own day to model the framework in real time.

• The blank hallway walls

Carrying laundry upstairs in her southern Vermont house the night before, she saw the freshly painted, empty hallway walls and spiraled about a family photo wall: black-and-white frames or canvas prints, and the Shutterfly account she let lapse. She found herself having a panic attack over a project six months old, then told herself it didn't matter; clean underwear for the eulogy did.

• Her friend Joni

Joni was her mother's primary caregiver for the last two to three years of her mother's dementia. Mel never saw her, because all Joni could do was care for her mother, take care of herself and sleep, which Mel holds up as the clearest case of legitimate overwhelm.

• The talk-show mentor's advice

Before Mel hosted a daytime talk show, 175 shows in six months, often three tapings a day four days a week at the CBS Broadcast Center, a famous former host told her it was a marathon: protect your stamina, be patient with yourself, skip dinners out, don't get sick, and tell loved ones you're going into a bunker.

• Michelle paid a six-month-late credit card bill

After the procrastination episode, Michelle recognized her 'freeze mode' around money anxiety, burst into tears, paid the bill that morning and was surprised by how much time and energy she suddenly had after six months of torturing herself.

OTHER RELEVANT

• The 20–30 minute 'million dollar morning routine' still fits a hectic life

Get up when the alarm rings, make the bed, high-five the mirror, put on exercise clothes, get some bright light (even sticking your head out a window), and move for 10–20 minutes, whether that's a walk with your toddler or a streamed workout.

• Brain dump, then highlight three

Pour everything in your head onto any blank paper, even the back of a bill; optionally split it into 'important' and 'can do later.' It can run to three pages. Then highlight only the three things you must do today; Mel's were picking up her ADHD prescription, packing for Boston and writing the eulogy.

- **Use the rule of three and tell yourself 'it doesn't matter'**

When you catch yourself adding tasks or feeling guilty for being done, remind yourself that anything outside today's three doesn't matter right now. It lowers the pressure and creates time to simply enjoy your life.

- **Ask 'How can I make this easy?'**

For Leela, an artist who can't get back to her easel, Mel suggests choosing the time of day that suits her, paying for a class to outsource motivation, or recruiting an accountability friend who texts 'did you paint yet?' Mel herself does ice baths only because her stoic husband Chris climbs in first and shames her into it.

If You Struggle With Anxiety, You Need To Hear This | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Oakley Robbins
Date: 2023-02-16 · Duration: 0:58:13
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=br1gy1sShHE

KEYPOINTS

• Therapy is for when you're fine, too

Mel's 17-year-old son Oakley walked into the kitchen after a Zoom session and announced "I love my therapist," Keith. He hated therapy as a younger kid after a therapist pushed him to ride an elevator he was afraid of, but a new therapist changed his life. He compares therapy to a journal you don't have to write in that answers back, and says it's worth having even when you're perfectly happy. Friends your age with the same mindset, he warns, can't solve the same problems you have.

• Hiding anxiety lets it come back harder

For about three weeks in March of ninth grade, Oakley had overwhelming anxiety and told no one. He didn't want it to become "a process" with therapists and medication, both of which he'd had bad experiences with before, and he'd lived with weekly small panics his whole life, so he figured he could handle it. Looking back, he doubts the sophomore-year collapse would have happened if he'd spoken up in ninth grade.

• Big, scary, intrusive thoughts are common and not who you are

Mel stresses that, according to therapists, almost everyone experiences a sudden frightening thought like the one Oakley describes. They can come out of nowhere and feel uncontrollable. Oakley says suicidal thoughts are talked about as if only people at "the worst of the worst" have them, which made his scarier. Knowing they were normal and temporary, he says, would have helped.

• Wanting to end the pain is different from wanting to end your life

Mel repeats a distinction she's made often: you can lessen anguish, anxiety or sadness without ending your life, and talking about it is how you start. Oakley compares bottled-up thoughts to a shaken Coke can. Mel believes most people, if offered their life without the pain, would say "hell yeah" to staying. The episode is clear that persistent dark thoughts call for reaching out to a therapist or someone you trust.

• Saying it out loud shreds the paper bag

Mel's friend Amy heard a therapist describe scary thoughts as being trapped in a paper bag: you can't think of anything else. The moment you find the courage to say them out loud, the bag tears open and you see you're not alone and that help exists. Oakley's advice to anyone from middle school to their mid-20s: if what's in your head is overwhelming or stopping you from doing normal things, tell someone early instead of waiting to collapse.

• An existential spiral can grip someone whose life looks great

In sophomore year, Oakley had great friends, a girlfriend, classes he loved and a close family, yet couldn't see why any of it mattered. Mel notes that research suggests empathetic or introverted people may be more prone to deep meaning-of-life questioning, which can be triggered by things like climate change, injustice, poverty or loss. You can't assume you know what someone's inner life is like.

• Purpose can be something you discover over time, not a pressure

Oakley's early sessions with Keith focused on purpose. He concluded that life may not inherently matter, but individuals can make it matter, and that one day he'll find a person, place or calling that gives him a reason to be here. At 17 he doesn't know his purpose and isn't daunted. It could take 10 or 25 years, and it has to come from him, not from his mom.

• Acknowledge recurring thoughts instead of fighting them

Oakley says the "nothing matters" thoughts still show up daily, but in the back of his head, where he can think "that may be true, but who cares." Mel describes her plane ritual: when "what if this is it" pops up, she thinks of her family and gratitude, notes "oh, there's that thought," and doesn't resist it.

EXAMPLES

• The Blue Ceiling: a foggy March morning in ninth grade

Watching TV in bed, Oakley was suddenly lightheaded, confused and terrified. He walked past his dad by the fire without saying anything, despite wanting a hug. Later, looking at the knife block, he had a vivid unwanted image of hurting himself, then hyperventilated outside telling himself he'd be okay. That night he cried under his blue star-projector ceiling. He wrote it up as a memoir called "The Blue Ceiling" in sophomore year.

• How the sophomore-year breakdown built

Writing the memoir pulled him back into those feelings. A week later, a climate film in English class set off a chain of thought from his town to the universe until "we become a grain of sand" and nothing mattered. Panic attacks followed. At dinner he went to the bathroom and told the mirror "you're okay," then broke down crying with Mel, saying he wasn't in danger but "I can't live like this."

• What the family did

Mel went into first-responder mode. Oakley wasn't allowed to sleep alone, he took a week off school, they went back to Massachusetts to see doctors, she made sure he ate, his dad meditated with him, and they got him into therapy fast. He also started an antidepressant, which he's still on and calls great. Mel's metaphor is that sometimes you need a ladder, and sometimes a surfboard.

• Mel's own derealization episodes

As a young person with acute anxiety, Mel would feel a switch flip and everything would seem fake, like The Truman Show, as if the walls might fall like a TV set and leave her alone in a desert. She shares it to show Oakley's terror wasn't unique.

• John Mayer's "Stop This Train" and the About Time quotes

The song about wanting time to stop moved Oakley to tears, including in a call from the school parking lot about how much he loved his life, about three weeks before the collapse. The family's favorite film, About Time, gives him two lines, including

living each day "as if it was the full final day of my extraordinary, ordinary life."

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Ask: do I want this in my universe?**
  Keith's "life-changing" idea was that a personal universe begins at conception, and whatever you do stays in it. Before acting, say going behind a friend's back, ask whether you want to live in a universe where you did that. Even if existence doesn't ultimately matter, you're still living and feeling this life, so make it one you enjoy.
- **For parents: don't assume silence means fine**
  Oakley hid both episodes because he didn't want a fuss. Mel hears daily from parents whose sons don't talk to them, and families forward these conversations to open dialogue. Stay curious even when someone's outer life looks good, and respond to disclosure with presence rather than panic.
- **If you're struggling now, tell anyone**
  Fleeting dark thoughts don't mean you're broken, but persistent ones are a reason to reach out to a therapist, family, friends, a spiritual leader or anyone you trust. The episode is educational and not a substitute for professional care.

This Is The ONE Thing You Should Do This Week | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Date: 2022-12-19 · Duration: 0:43:40
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Pyug7UHnmkU

KEYPOINTS

• The one assignment for the week: do nothing

Recorded during the week between Christmas and New Year's, this episode asks you to do nothing on purpose, whether for a minute, a day or a week. Mel admits she is "addicted to being busy" and finds it hard herself. She says constant doing keeps your mind spinning, drains your energy and stops you being present, and that moments of nothing are how you refuel.

• Doing nothing isn't just for the privileged

Mel's first reaction to "just do nothing" is irritation: she has a company to run, bills to pay and kids at home. She speaks directly to people caring for young kids or ageing parents, working several jobs or night shifts. For them, doing nothing might mean finding five minutes or pushing the to-do list to next week.

• Most "achievement" online is staged

Answering Jenny, a single parent of two who feels hopeless surrounded by achievers, Mel uses The Home Edit as an example: stylists and production assistants create those colour-coded pantries, and nobody's pantry looks like that 24 hours later. Rule one is to stop measuring yourself against impossible standards online.

• Only advice you adapt to your life will work

Mel points out that many self-help voices are single, child-free, or men with a full-time partner at home. Advice from a 30-something with hours a day to exercise won't fit her life with three kids, two dogs, ageing parents and ADHD. She doesn't have three hours for a morning routine and is lucky to get 30 minutes. So she adapts: 15 minutes instead of two hours, three walks a week instead of marathon training.

• Stop calling rest "guilt"; it's an unfamiliar pattern

Mel says what we feel when we sit down isn't guilt. It's weirdness: not knowing what to do with your hands or thoughts, because you have a long-standing pattern of staying busy. A world of phones, endless TV and emails also makes feeling needed a way to feel important and connected.

• Quieting your mind is harder than sitting still

Mel separates physical doing nothing from mental doing nothing. Zoning out on the couch with a show counts if your phone and to-do list are out of reach. But sit still for five minutes and your thoughts race: the wall needs paint, the sheets need washing. She compares it to the mice in the walls of her old Sherborn farmhouse, who started a parade the moment the lights went out.

• Beginners need help to quiet their thoughts

Mel doesn't tell novices to sit and meditate alone. She notes that her husband Chris is the meditation instructor, while she prefers moving mindfulness. Use free guided meditations through apps like Calm or Headspace, YouTube, Spotify or ASMR, or build a playlist that quiets your mind.

• Laziness, procrastination and excuses aren't doing nothing

Truly lazy people don't beat themselves up, and Mel says that's fine if it works for them. Procrastination is a stress-triggered habit of avoiding tasks that need brainpower. She says research shows that starting is the cure, using her 5 Second Rule (5-4-3-2-1), because about 80% of the time you'll keep going once you begin. Excuses are actively talking yourself out of something. All three are busy states, while intentional nothing is a deliberate reset.

EXAMPLES

• The grocery store detour

Picked up by Chris at Albany airport after nearly a week away, including a visit with their daughter in LA, Mel immediately suggested stopping at the grocery store, even though he had already gone twice that week. She caught herself: why not just sit in the truck, go home, and enjoy their son and the dogs?

• 35 minutes of scrolling after cribbage

After a quiet evening by the fire playing cribbage, which Chris won, he went to bed. Mel sat scrolling Instagram for 35 minutes, comparing herself to other people's businesses and purchases, when she could have been asleep.

• Emails in the bath, phone at the nail salon

Mel admits she answers emails in the bath and scrolls with wet nails while the manicurist tries to keep her hands still. For her, doing nothing means a hot bath without even a book.

• A family line of nonstop workers

Her grandmother grew up in an Ohio coal-mining town and was sent to New Jersey to work as a maid. She met Mel's Austrian-born grandfather, a Navy veteran, and they ran a bakery around the clock. The other side of her family were cattle farmers with a produce stand. Mel jokes that sitting down isn't "in my DNA."

• "He doesn't have children"

Envying a friend's three-month book tour, Mel complained to her sister-in-law and COO, Christine. Christine pointed out that he doesn't have kids, and that Mel will never match what a single man or a 23-year-old can do while she has ageing parents, three kids and a business.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Set a daily 2:13 pm alarm

Label it "take a breath, do nothing for one minute." Mel compares it to restarting a glitchy phone that has been on for three weeks: an intentional unplug that restores energy and interrupts the chaos.

• Pair the minute with music

Mel plays a trippy, yoga-style track she likes, which she calls "Genesis," and focuses on the sound so her racing thoughts fade. Choose whatever music quiets your mind.

• **Picture your own version of nothing**

Ask yourself what an hour of nothing would look like, such as a bath, a fire or lying on your bed, and then try a small piece of it this week without your phone. One minute is a good enough place to start.

This Simple Mind Hack Will Help You Overcome Any Fear

Date: 2022-11-21 · Duration: 1:01:39
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QI_1qWJnvsk

KEYPOINTS

• Nerves don't just stop you; they hurt how you perform

Mel frames the episode around performance: nerves can stop you signing up for an improv class, taking a bigger role at work, or passing the MCAT or bar exam. She shares stories from people who say they used this tool: Makoto with OCD, Lynn, a nurse, with public speaking, Emma with panic attacks about school, Dan with heights, and Maren, who earned two promotions.

• Fear of dying when you have no control isn't irrational

Coaching her producer Cameron, Mel says it's normal to think about mortality when you're strapped into a metal tube 30,000 feet up with strangers. She notes that about 95% of first-class passengers accept a free drink at 8 or 9 a.m., which she thinks is nerves, not drinking problems. The first rule is not to make yourself wrong for being afraid.

• Telling yourself to calm down makes fear louder

Cameron's coping strategy was dismissing her fear ("It's not even real, Cam, calm down"), which usually ended in tears or a panic attack. Mel says rejecting a real fear means you aren't comforting yourself, so it gets bigger. You can be terrified and still find the courage to face it.

• Anticipation steals the weeks before the event

Cameron's flight to Portugal was about five weeks away, and her dread was already setting in. Mel points out that unmanaged fear doesn't just affect the flight. It ruins the run-up and can taint the trip itself with worry about flying home.

• Loss of control often lies underneath

Cameron's father had recently died suddenly, and she says her fear of flying worsened afterwards, because having control "ripped away" made every uncontrollable situation feel threatening. Mel calls learning to move through those moments the bigger breakthrough: you can't control the plane, but you can control what's going on in your head and body.

• Superstitious bargaining eventually fails

Mel's old flying rituals failed on a short, sunny flight with her family. The plane hit an air pocket and the oxygen masks dropped while the drinks cart was out. Every "safe" sign had been present. That's when she decided she needed a real tool instead of bargaining.

• Fear and excitement feel the same in the body

Mel explains that your nervous system's automatic stress response, with adrenaline, a racing heart, blood rushing and butterflies from changes in your gut, is the same whether you're boarding a plane or about to meet your favourite band. The only difference is what your brain says about it. A six-year-old loves turbulence because their brain labels it fun.

• Reframe high alertness instead of trying to calm down

Mel cites a Harvard Business School study titled "reframing performance anxiety." As she describes it, people facing stressful tasks like singing karaoke or debating who told themselves "I'm excited" felt less nervous and outperformed those who didn't. Her explanation: you can't drop from high alert to calm instantly, but you can switch the label from fear to excitement. If you let fear take over, she says, cortisol floods your brain and you lose what you prepared, which is why people go blank on stage.

• Build the anchor before the nerves hit

Mel stresses that you must create your exciting image ahead of time. Once your thoughts are racing about failing the test or the plane, you've lost control. Linking the anchor to the event, such as arriving or nailing the interview, makes it believable, because reaching that moment means it went fine.

EXAMPLES

• Nervous-flyer Mel in the 1990s and 2000s

Flying home to western Michigan, Mel shipped Christmas presents ahead in case she died, and put off booking until the cheap seats were gone. She was overly nice to airport staff for good karma. At the gate she looked for someone in uniform, someone in a wheelchair, a baby or clergy, and she checked whether a pilot had a military-style crew cut. She sent goodbye texts, grabbed strangers' hands during the level-off after takeoff, and only relaxed once the seatbelt sign went off or the drinks cart came out.

• Cameron's anchor: Sienna in a black sweater

Asked what excited her about Portugal, Cameron chose seeing her sister Sienna, who was coming from London. With her eyes closed, she described arriving in Lisbon, Sienna in her usual black sweater, probably annoyed they were late, hugging their mom first, and Cameron feeling "comfort and wholeness." Mel tells her to say it out loud: "I'm so excited to see Sienna."

• The Lumineers test

Mel had Cameron imagine front-row seats and a meet-and-greet with The Lumineers at Fenway. Cameron described jitters, clammy hands, a racing heart and feeling flustered: almost exactly how she describes flying, except she labelled it positive.

• The yoga studio and an oat milk latte

Cameron has wanted to join a yoga studio on her street for months but is too anxious to sign up. Her anchor: walking out after class in her light-blue tights into Thinking Cup for an iced oat milk latte, feeling proud of herself.

OTHER RELEVANT

• Build a confidence anchor in three steps

1) Name the situation that makes you nervous. 2) Find something about it you're genuinely excited about. 3) Close your eyes and bring that moment to life in detail: clothes, setting, who hugs whom, how you feel.

• Use it the moment nerves rise

Count 5-4-3-2-1 (Mel's 5 Second Rule) as a signal to interrupt the worry, then bring up the anchor image and say "I'm excited." Repeat it on the way to the airport, while boarding, and at every bump of turbulence.

- **Apply it to your whole list**
  Write down everything that makes you nervous, such as interviews, tests, dates or a side project, and create an anchor for each. Mel believes repeated practice can retrain a default state of feeling on edge.

The TRUTH About ANXIETY And How To HEAL IT! | The Mel Robbins Podcast

Guest: Dr. Russell Kennedy
Date: 2022-10-13 · Duration: 1:31:49
URL: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RdM596wLz00

KEYPOINTS

• Neck-up tools help you cope; neck-down work helps you heal

Mel calls her own tools, like the 5 Second Rule, a 'neck up' approach because they work on thoughts, worry and self-criticism. Dr. Russell Kennedy is an MD with a neuroscience degree, author of Anxiety Rx, and someone who had anxiety for about 30 years. He argues that coping is mostly top-down thinking strategies, while healing means addressing what's going on in the body. He doesn't dismiss talk therapy. He says it's only part of the toolkit.

• Call it 'alarm', not 'anxiety'

Patients almost always describe anxiety as a story: my husband, the bus, the grocery store. Kennedy says that story is what the analytical left hemisphere makes up. He asks instead what they feel physically, and renames that sensation 'alarm' so people pay attention to the body. Alarm doesn't always look like worry. Mel's daughter shows it as frustration and anger, and some people go into freeze: withdrawing, losing eye contact, moving stiffly.

• The feeling comes before the thought

Kennedy's model is that the amygdala detects a threat outside you or a worry inside you and sends signals down to the brainstem. Heart rate, blood pressure and breathing go up. Then the left brain asks why you're alarmed and starts 'stacking' worries to explain it, which creates more alarm in what he calls the alarm-anxiety cycle. Thoughts can cause anxiety, he says, but treating them as the origin is the mistake. They're mostly a symptom.

• Background alarm is old emotion stored in the body

Kennedy describes unresolved childhood emotional pain as 'background alarm' lodged in the body, a framing he shares with Gabor Maté. He's clear it's a construct, since mind and body can't truly be separated, but says it helps people. We live in our heads partly to avoid feeling, he says, because the body is 'where the pain is.'

• 'All anxiety is separation anxiety'

In Kennedy's view, alarm starts with feeling separate from parents who are supposed to see, hear and love you. It doesn't have to be abuse. A 'parental mismatch,' feeling you just don't connect with a loving parent, can be enough. Children can't blame their parents, so they blame themselves with what he calls JABS (judgment, abandonment, blame and shame), and that's the start of the inner critic.

• Your alarm may be your younger self asking for attention

Kennedy asks: if a crying child in a grocery store reached up to you, would you push them away? We comfort others without thinking but tell our own alarm to go away. He believes turning toward the sensation, rather than fleeing into thought, drops the intensity, perhaps from a 9 to a 4 rather than to a 2. Over time the alarm fires less often and less intensely.

• Regulate the body to settle the mind, not the other way round

Kennedy says the body is far more likely to relax the mind than the mind is to relax the body, because 'your mind lies to you all the time; your body never can.' Engaging the brain's sensation and movement areas pulls you out of rumination, which is part of why yoga helps. He calls anxiety at its root a mind-body disconnect, and says many people become addicted to worry, so more thinking doesn't fix overthinking.

• Chronic anxiety and addiction are tightly linked

Kennedy says he rarely sees chronic anxiety without some addiction. Alcohol, drugs, porn, constant achievement or 'negative stress' can all drown out the alarm. Mel recognized herself: busyness and stress let her outrun her anxiety for decades, which is why a quiet Vermont town with 'no Target to run to' felt so frightening. Kennedy calls this sublimation, channeling the alarm into something useful so you never have to feel it.

• Anxiety as blocked love

Kennedy believes anxiety means separation from yourself, and that many anxious people struggle to let love in. That's why saying 'I love you' in the mirror can feel unbearable. Turning toward the alarm and soothing it, he says, is giving yourself love. He shares that when his father's schizophrenia worsened when Kennedy was a young teen, he blocked his love for him because it hurt too much. He says you can't block love from a parent without blocking it everywhere, and jokes that's why he's been married three times.

EXAMPLES

• Mel's lifelong anxiety

In sixth grade Mel was sent home from a five-day school camp after calling her parents every day, and she told her friends her grandmother had had a heart attack. As a varsity athlete she chugged Mylanta behind a bush before matches, and her parents bought it by the case. She was diagnosed with anxiety in law school in the early '90s and took Zoloft for 20 years, which she describes as a ladder out of the hole. When she tapered off it before Sawyer was born, she had severe postpartum depression for eight weeks.

• Mel's lava wave

After moving to a small town in Vermont, Mel woke with alarm starting in her ankles and rising like hot lava to her chest. Her instinct was to curse it and try to sleep. Kennedy reframed it as 'little Mel' needing attention. Mel says she still often feels separate, like an outsider looking in.

• Oakley's school-morning panic

Oakley was bullied and had undiagnosed dyslexia and ADHD. His body sounded the alarm before school, he read the stomach butterflies as 'I'm going to puke,' and he'd bang his head on the kitchen island and sometimes throw up. Therapists told him to 'change the channel' of his thoughts. Mel now thinks he needed a hug and physical reassurance. During quarantine, surrounded by family, he realized he didn't have to hate himself because others picked on him, and Mel says his chronic anxiety lifted.

- **The school pickup line**

  Kennedy's walkthrough for spotting someone you dislike: feel your seat, relax your shoulders and jaw, take a slow breath, and locate the sensation, for example an apple-sized pressure in your upper chest that radiates to your neck. Put your hand on it. Often the trigger isn't this person but someone from your past they remind you of.

OTHER RELEVANT

- **Find a safe place in your body and move back and forth**

  Use a 5-4-3-2-1 countdown to drop out of your head and into your body. Locate the alarm, then find a neutral or safe spot. For many people that's the breath; for Kennedy it's around his nose and cheeks. Shift attention between the two.

- **The 'love sandwich' for a child (or anyone)**

  Kennedy's wife Cynthia, a somatic trauma therapist, works with preverbal trauma. With a distressed child, put one hand on their heart and the other on their back at the same level, and just stay until their nervous system settles.

- **Ask 'Am I safe in this moment?'**

  Kennedy prefers this question to the statement 'I am safe,' which anxious people tend to reject. You can have a Friday presentation, a tax bill and a sick mom and still be safe right now.

- **Kennedy's physiological sigh**

  Take three quick breaths in through the nose and hold for 3–5 seconds. Then exhale slowly through closed teeth with a hiss, picturing a deflating tire, with shoulders and jaw loose. The long exhale is what calms you. He says that under stress, 'the stress starts breathing you.'