



You can't inoculate yourself against stress – but you can find ways to calm the inner turbulence it can cause BY CHER PETERSEN

**W**HAT do you think of when you hear the word stress? An endless to-do list? A continuous stream of demands and obstacles? Feeling overwhelmed and irritable? Of course feeling stressed isn't pleasant. But what if you stopped seeing stress as a negative thing and started to view it instead as an opportunity for personal growth? How do you do this? By identifying your personal

stressors, consciously deciding how you respond to them and managing the impact they have on you, says Sean Waters, a stress specialist practitioner and founder of Stress Less Clinic in Johannesburg.

Some stress is normal, and you might not even register it because it's just the day-to-day stuff of life. Moderate stress might make you feel irritable and on edge. Severe, persistent stress is what you really need to get a handle on as it can seriously affect your health.

The negative effects of stress can be physical, emotional or behavioural, says Leoné Malan, a human physiology professor at North-West University who specialises in stress responses in the brain and heart.

**'Learn to handle stressful situations in a way that helps you grow'**

"One might experience intense headaches, chest pain, dizziness, concentration issues, forgetfulness, impulsivity, depression and anxiety."

To protect yourself from the detrimental effects of stress, you need to build up your resilience – and you can do this by handling stressful situations in a way that helps you grow.

"We all have a habitual response to stress, and we need to evaluate whether this initial response works for us or not," Waters says.

Being stress resilient isn't about resistance, avoidance or inoculation against stress. It's about recognising the signs that you're stressed, understanding what's going on and handling it in a positive way.

Here's how to go about it.

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