Stress and Perception

Stress is a word with which we are all very familiar, even young children use the word stress in their language these days... so what does this word mean?

Dictionary definition for stress

- "a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or very demanding circumstances *: he's obviously **under** a lot of **stress** |* [in combination] *stress-related illnesses.*
- something that causes such a state *: the stresses and strains of public life."*

The dictionary definition very clearly puts *stress* in the category of an *external event* that causes a person pressure or discomfort. We certainly all face times of difficulty in our lives from particular adverse or demanding circumstances, but are the circumstances themselves causing our stress?

It certainly looks like adverse circumstances are the direct cause of the pressure and dis-ease we feel inside, however there is evidence to suggest that this is not the case. Our perception of an event has a more powerful effect on us than the event itself.

This may sound a bit unusual, however, we don't actually respond to the event or circumstance, we respond to our own personal thoughts about the event.   It's our *perception* of what is happening that triggers an emotional response, which in turn causes an automatic, alchemical process to be activated in the body.

Dictionary definition for perception

- a way of regarding, understanding, or interpreting something; a mental impression (There are other definitions, but this is the best one for the purpose of this article)

When our perception is of a resistant or negative quality, we will feel it in the mind, emotions and physical body as stress.

Stress is created by our own perceptions and our reaction to those perceptions, as we become more aware, our perceptions change and so too does our ability to manage our stress.

We can feel quite *disempowered* when we're stressed. We can't control other people or external events, so we can feel as if we are at their mercy. This lack of control within our own environment can eventually lead to feelings of frustration, helplessness, stress and exhaustion.

Cleaning up our internal environment.

Ultimately, feeling stressed and disempowered for a prolonged period of time is detrimental to our health. We can't change our external environment, but we can change our internal environment.

Our personal perception affects the quality of our experiences. Becoming aware of our own thought processes and reactions is the first step to changing and managing our stress levels.   It's very important to acknowledge ourselves in a positive way when we catch ourselves in negative thinking, reaction or attachment. The fact that we have caught the

negative thinking should be celebrated, it shows that we are growing in awareness and that's perfect. So don't berate yourself, *congratulate yourself!* When you're working on change it's important to be kind and patient with *yourself*.

Once you're aware that your thoughts are resistant, judgmental or on the negative side, *you are cooking*, because then you can consciously choose to make new choices. Even small changes make a big difference.

We learn to manage our own stress levels more effectively and efficiently as we become more internally oriented. By consciously choosing not to personalize things, to take a step back from the situation and view life more objectively, we create a sense of space and inner control. A new level of empowerment is felt.

You can't changed what has already happened, but you do have control over your own responses. Acceptance is also important here, acceptance of what has taken place facilitates a deeper sense of inner peace. Acceptance doesn't mean you are necessarily agreeing with something, it just means you have decided not to hang onto it, you're making a conscious choice to let it go, or at least step back from it. Empowered choices help to reduce stress levels and supports mental, emotional and physical health.

Through monitoring our thoughts and practising de-personalization and non-attachment, there is a raising of awareness attained, bringing a shift in perception which gives us more control over our stress levels through the ability to balance our internal environment. This results in a new sense of personal power, freedom and peace in our lives.