



When You've Reached Your Breaking Point By Deepak Chopra, MD

What does it mean when you find yourself saying — or thinking — “I’ve had it up to here. I can’t take this anymore.” We’ve all been there, yet these words don’t mean the same thing to everyone. People reach their breaking point in different ways, according to their style of personality. A person who balks under pressure may just stop responding at all. Another person simmers and then suddenly explodes. Everything depends on how you relate to stress, because reaching the breaking point happens when your ability to cope with stress breaks down, or threatens to.

The word stress is used a lot, but most people haven't looked at their own stress response very deeply. There are really three stages.

Stage 1: You are aware of being under stress, but it isn't getting to you. You still feel centered and in control.

Stage 2: Stress has got you frazzled. You have to make a conscious effort not to respond with anger, anxiety, impatience, or blame.

Stage 3: You can't cope any longer, and the stress response creates an outburst, which releases your tension momentarily but leaves you in regret and frustration.

Here we are talking about chronic stress, the kind that builds up over time. Acute stress happens all at once, like being in an auto accident or hearing bad news. It jump starts the stress response, kicking in the hormones associated with the fight or flight response. Chronic stress is more like hearing a dripping faucet. First you notice it, then you get irritated, and finally you can't stand it anymore. By the time you get to Stage 3, it's easy to get up and fix the drip or call a plumber. The same applies to some chronic stresses. Rather than simply coping, you should see if you can reduce the stressor first. An amazing number of people will try to put up with stress when they should take positive steps.

It's like someone walking around for days with a rock in their shoe thinking, "I can stand this. I just have to work through the pain," when what is called for is to take the rock out. If something in your life — the work environment, a relationship, a financial strain — is causing you to reach the breaking point more than

once or twice, you need to look seriously at making a significant change. Putting up with chronic stress is bad for both mind and body, since the brain's stress response isn't set up to be triggered constantly, and the presence of stress hormones like adrenaline and cortisol over an extended period throws the whole physiology out of balance.

What we're really trying to maintain in the face of stress is balance. When you are in Stage 1, feeling centered and in control, you are beating stress by remaining in balance. The important thing is to learn how to stay there. If you can do that, two things will happen. First, you won't reach your breaking point. Second, in the event that you do reach your breaking point (Stage 3), you will become centered and back in control much faster. These are both desirable outcomes. So how do you achieve them?

It all happens in consciousness. You need to learn what it feels like to be centered. You need to value this state. You need to train your brain to stay there.

Feeling centered has a set of feelings associated with it. Physically, you are calm but not dull or fatigued.

Inside your calmness you feel alert and alive, with more than enough energy to do what you need to do.

You've had a good night's sleep. Your mood is up. If you place your attention in the center of your chest, in the region of the heart, there's a sense of openness.

Nothing hurts anywhere in your body.

Now, we've all experienced such a state. It's not happiness so much as contentment with just being here. You'd think that everyone would value such a basic sense of comfort, but many of us don't. We want to be stimulated instead. Running after excitement,

distractions, and even the next stress, we only feel alive when we've escaped ourselves. Modern culture is set up to reinforce this kind of restless existence. It glorifies action for its own sake, so that resting is like giving up. One hears of people who claim to thrive on stress, who exist on thrills, need barely four hours of sleep, and so on. The reality is far different from the image, however. Being able to stay centered, relaxed, and present is the optimal state of balance for mind and body. Being too stimulated, even by positive feelings, is stressful and unhealthy.

Your brain is used to the lifestyle you follow and has grown to adapt to it. So if you push yourself out of balance, the brain's mechanism for returning to balance gets worn down over time. This mechanism is powerful — every cell in the body wants to be in balance — but we challenge it by various bad habits. Here are two lists that describe the habits that lead to balance and imbalance. See which list best describes your lifestyle.

Pushing Out of Balance

- You work until you feel exhausted.
- You cheat on getting a full eight hours sleep.
- You put up with a lot of stress at home or at work.
- You seek distraction with hours of television, games, or surfing the Internet.
- When you work on something, you focus intensely, rarely getting up to move around.
- You take your life very seriously, without a sense of humor.
- You over-schedule your time.
- You're addicted to being busy.
- You fret and worry.

- You are constantly texting, e-mailing, and checking up on things.
- You deal with all the demands in your life by multi-tasking.
- Your diet is loaded with sugar, fat, and processed food.
- You eat in a hurry, sometimes on the run.

All of these behaviors train the brain in the wrong direction, pushing it to the breaking point if the pressure is kept up long enough. Unfortunately, there are millions of people whose lives consist of doing all or most of these things, sometimes believing that they are actually doing some good for themselves. They mistake stress for stimulation, and deep down, the last thing they want to do is to meet themselves in a state of simply being. Consider the stark contrast when you train your brain to keep you in balance.

Staying in Balance

- You get a full eight hours of sleep every night, without sleep aids.
- You don't add stress to your life or other people's.
- You deal with feelings of anger, anxiety, and depression before they erupt.
- You make sure to move every hour, getting up from your desk for at least half a minute.
- You make time during the day to play.
- You practice meditation, yoga, or breathing exercises that center you.
- You go out into Nature to feel its peace and beauty.
- You work on your relationship stressful points, being open with your partner.
- You don't multi-task, focusing instead on one thing at a time.

- You don't constantly monitor everything by texting, e-mailing every minute.
- You follow a sensible diet, emphasizing fresh, organic foods.
- You set time aside to eat in a relaxed state, appreciating your food.
- You find ways to enjoy simply being with yourself.

As you can see, prevention is the best medicine. Reaching your breaking point means that you've crossed into the red zone, from which it's hard to return. You won't get to your red zone if you apply the habits of self-care I've just listed. The choice is really yours. Medical research has abundantly validated that being in balance is the healthiest way to live. Spend the next two weeks getting back into balance. You'll be amazed and pleased with the results.

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