Kelly McGonigal: How to make stress your friend

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[I have a confession to make,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#435) [but first, I want you](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#4613) [to make a little confession to me.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#7876) [In the past year, I want you to just raise your hand](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#11469)

[if you've experienced relatively little stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#14557) [Anyone?](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#17971)

[How about a moderate amount of stress?](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#20604)

[Who has experienced a lot of stress?](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#23133) [Yeah. Me too.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#26441)

[But that is not my confession.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#28849) [My confession is this: I am a health psychologist,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#31113) [and my mission is to help people be happier and healthier.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#34803) [But I fear that something I've been teaching](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#39392) [for the last 10 years is doing more harm than good,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#42926) [and it has to do with stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#47254)[For years I've been telling people, stress makes you sick.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#49678) [It increases the risk of everything from the common cold](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#52853) [to cardiovascular disease.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#55748) [Basically, I've turned stress into the enemy.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#57890) [But I have changed my mind about stress,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#62383) [and today, I want to change yours.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#65095)

[Let me start with the study that made me rethink](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#69010) [my whole approach to stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#71390) [This study tracked 30,000 adults in the United States](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#73825) [for eight years, and they started by asking people,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#77244) ["How much stress have you experienced in the last year?"](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#81190) [They also asked, "Do you believe](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#84728) [that stress is harmful for your health?"](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#88012) [And then they used public death records](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#92165)[to find out who died.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#94043)

[(Laughter)](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#96124)

[Okay. Some bad news first.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#97101) [People who experienced a lot of stress in the previous year](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#101350) [had a 43 percent increased risk of dying.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#104636) [But that was only true for the people](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#108405) [who also believed that stress is harmful for your health.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#112395) [(Laughter)](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#116931) [People who experienced a lot of stress](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#118537) [but did not view stress as harmful](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#121140) [were no more likely to die.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#123103) [In fact, they had the lowest risk of dying](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#124805) [of anyone in the study, including people](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#128459) [who had relatively little stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#130486)

[Now the researchers estimated that over the eight years](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#132896) [they were tracking deaths,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#135182) [182,000 Americans died prematurely,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#136776) [not from stress, but from the belief](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#140334) [that stress is bad for you. (Laughter)](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#142879) [That is over 20,000 deaths a year.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#146257) [Now, if that estimate is correct,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#149709) [that would make believing stress is bad for you](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#152759) [the 15th largest cause of death](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#154851) [in the United States last year,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#157297) [killing more people than skin cancer,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#159215) [HIV/AIDS and homicide.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#160979)

[(Laughter)](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#164428)

[You can see why this study freaked me out.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#167311) [Here I've been spending so much energy telling people](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#170136) [stress is bad for your health.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#173827)

[So this study got me wondering:](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#176797) [Can changing how you think about stress](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#178786) [make you healthier? And here the science says yes.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#181287) [When you change your mind about stress,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#184726) [you can change your body's response to stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#186808)

[Now to explain how this works,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#190327) [I want you all to pretend that you are participants](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#192441) [in a study designed to stress you out.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#195322) [It's called the social stress test.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#197929) [You come into the laboratory,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#200613)[and you're told you have to give a five-minute](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#202667) [impromptu speech on your personal weaknesses](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#205574) [to a panel of expert evaluators sitting right in front of you,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#209301) [and to make sure you feel the pressure,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#212958) [there are bright lights and a camera in your face,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#214519) [kind of like this.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#217811) [And the evaluators have been trained](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#220620) [to give you discouraging, non-verbal feedback like this.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#223380)

[(Laughter)](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#233076)

[Now that you're sufficiently demoralized,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#236534) [time for part two: a math test.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#239356) [And unbeknownst to you,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#242156) [the experimenter has been trained to harass you during it.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#244257) [Now we're going to all do this together.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#248153) [It's going to be fun.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#250826) [For me.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#252220)

[Okay. I want you all to count backwards](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#253289) [from 996 in increments of seven.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#258291) [You're going to do this out loud](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#261138) [as fast as you can, starting with 996.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#262666) [Go!](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#266627) [Audience: (Counting)](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#267769) [Go faster. Faster please.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#269110) [You're going too slow.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#271699) [Stop. Stop, stop, stop.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#273968) [That guy made a mistake.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#276114) [We are going to have to start all over again. (Laughter)](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#277703) [You're not very good at this, are you?](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#280475)[Okay, so you get the idea.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#282753) [Now, if you were actually in this study,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#284556) [you'd probably be a little stressed out.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#286299) [Your heart might be pounding,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#288244) [you might be breathing faster, maybe breaking out into a sweat.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#289825) [And normally, we interpret these physical changes](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#293229) [as anxiety](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#296209) [or signs that we aren't coping very well with the pressure.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#297825)

[But what if you viewed them instead](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#300841) [as signs that your body was energized,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#302910) [was preparing you to meet this challenge?](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#305362) [Now that is exactly what participants were told](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#308804) [in a study conducted at Harvard University.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#311650) [Before they went through the social stress test,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#314311) [they were taught to rethink their stress response as helpful.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#317417) [That pounding heart is preparing you for action.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#320378) [If you're breathing faster, it's no problem.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#324167) [It's getting more oxygen to your brain.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#326761) [And participants who learned to view the stress response](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#329846) [as helpful for their performance,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#332543) [well, they were less stressed out,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#334780) [less anxious, more confident,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#336119) [but the most fascinating finding to me](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#338287) [was how their physical stress response changed.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#340380) [Now, in a typical stress response,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#343763)[your heart rate goes up,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#345655) [and your blood vessels constrict like this.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#347623) [And this is one of the reasons that chronic stress](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#351960) [is sometimes associated with cardiovascular disease.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#354950) [It's not really healthy to be in this state all the time.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#357809) [But in the study, when participants viewed](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#361415) [their stress response as helpful,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#363432) [their blood vessels stayed relaxed like this.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#365559) [Their heart was still pounding,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#369065) [but this is a much healthier cardiovascular profile.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#370372) [It actually looks a lot like what happens](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#373728) [in moments of joy and courage.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#376383) [Over a lifetime of stressful experiences,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#381092) [this one biological change](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#383935) [could be the difference](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#387125) [between a stress-induced heart attack at age 50](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#388429)[and living well into your 90s.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#391433) [And this is really what the new science of stress reveals,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#394297) [that how you think about stress matters.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#397441)

[So my goal as a health psychologist has changed.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#400980) [I no longer want to get rid of your stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#404110)[I want to make you better at stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#406272) [And we just did a little intervention.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#409230) [If you raised your hand and said](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#411935) [you'd had a lot of stress in the last year,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#413293) [we could have saved your life,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#415552)[because hopefully the next time](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#417395) [your heart is pounding from stress,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#418926) [you're going to remember this talk](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#420946) [and you're going to think to yourself,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#422793) [this is my body helping me rise to this challenge.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#424955) [And when you view stress in that way,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#430129) [your body believes you,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#432553) [and your stress response becomes healthier.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#434525)

[Now I said I have over a decade of demonizing stress](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#438204) [to redeem myself from,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#442380) [so we are going to do one more intervention.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#444354) [I want to tell you about one of the most](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#446964) [under-appreciated aspects of the stress response,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#448946) [and the idea is this:](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#451987) [Stress makes you social.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#454001)

[To understand this side of stress,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#457266) [we need to talk about a hormone, oxytocin,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#458855) [and I know oxytocin has already gotten](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#461917) [as much hype as a hormone can get.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#464918) [It even has its own cute nickname, the cuddle hormone,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#466865) [because it's released when you hug someone.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#470204) [But this is a very small part of what oxytocin is involved in.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#472890) [Oxytocin is a neuro-hormone.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html" \l "477383) [It fine-tunes your brain's social instincts.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#479870) [It primes you to do things](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#483444) [that strengthen close relationships.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#485975)[Oxytocin makes you crave physical contact](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#489486) [with your friends and family.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#492342) [It enhances your empathy.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#494334) [It even makes you more willing to help and support](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#495920) [the people you care about.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#498628)[Some people have even suggested](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#501596) [we should snort oxytocin](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#503291) [to become more compassionate and caring.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#506886) [But here's what most people don't understand](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#511340) [about oxytocin.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#513756)[It's a stress hormone.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#516164) [Your pituitary gland pumps this stuff out](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#519130) [as part of the stress response.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#522248) [It's as much a part of your stress response](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#523796) [as the adrenaline that makes your heart pound.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#526047) [And when oxytocin is released in the stress response,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#530155) [it is motivating you to seek support.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#532969) [Your biological stress response](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#536330) [is nudging you to tell someone how you feel](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#538383)[instead of bottling it up.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#541813) [Your stress response wants to make sure you notice](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#544306) [when someone else in your life is struggling](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#547410) [so that you can support each other.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#549729) [When life is difficult, your stress response wants you](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#552228) [to be surrounded by people who care about you.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#556019)

[Okay, so how is knowing this side of stress](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#561158) [going to make you healthier?](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#563687) [Well, oxytocin doesn't only act on your brain.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#565503) [It also acts on your body,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#568271) [and one of its main roles in your body](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#570772) [is to protect your cardiovascular system](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#572861) [from the effects of stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#575581) [It's a natural anti-inflammatory.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#577956) [It also helps your blood vessels stay relaxed during stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#580524) [But my favorite effect on the body is actually on the heart.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#583969) [Your heart has receptors for this hormone,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#587366) [and oxytocin helps heart cells regenerate](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#591032) [and heal from any stress-induced damage.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#594806) [This stress hormone strengthens your heart,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#598579) [and the cool thing is that all of these physical benefits](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#603160) [of oxytocin are enhanced by social contact](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#606857) [and social support,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#610374) [so when you reach out to others under stress,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#611907) [either to seek support or to help someone else,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#614826) [you release more of this hormone,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#618099) [your stress response becomes healthier,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#620107) [and you actually recover faster from stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#622369) [I find this amazing,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#625467) [that your stress response has a built-in mechanism](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#627801) [for stress resilience,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#631729) [and that mechanism is human connection.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#634446)

[I want to finish by telling you about one more study.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#638808) [And listen up, because this study could also save a life.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#642490) [This study tracked about 1,000 adults in the United States,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#646474) [and they ranged in age from 34 to 93,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#649930) [and they started the study by asking,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#654093) ["How much stress have you experienced in the last year?"](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#656362) [They also asked, "How much time have you spent](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#660586) [helping out friends, neighbors,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#664162) [people in your community?"](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#667379) [And then they used public records for the next five years](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#670133) [to find out who died.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#672908)

[Okay, so the bad news first:](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#675531) [For every major stressful life experience,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#678212) [like financial difficulties or family crisis,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#681171) [that increased the risk of dying by 30 percent.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#684220) [But -- and I hope you are expecting a but by now --](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#688158) [but that wasn't true for everyone.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#692445) [People who spent time caring for others](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#694876) [showed absolutely no stress-related increase in dying. Zero.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#698538) [Caring created resilience.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#704646) [And so we see once again](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#708190) [that the harmful effects of stress on your health](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#709716) [are not inevitable.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#712354) [How you think and how you act](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#714316) [can transform your experience of stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#717038) [When you choose to view your stress response](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#720835) [as helpful,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#723359) [you create the biology of courage.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#725656) [And when you choose to connect with others under stress,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#730667) [you can create resilience.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#733988) [Now I wouldn't necessarily ask](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#737381) [for more stressful experiences in my life,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#740056) [but this science has given me](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#743160) [a whole new appreciation for stress.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#745465) [Stress gives us access to our hearts.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#749237) [The compassionate heart that finds joy and meaning](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#753671) [in connecting with others,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#757580) [and yes, your pounding physical heart,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#759118) [working so hard to give you strength and energy,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#762680) [and when you choose to view stress in this way,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#767945) [you're not just getting better at stress,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#771288) [you're actually making a pretty profound statement.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#773800) [You're saying that you can trust yourself](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#777627) [to handle life's challenges,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#780680) [and you're remembering that](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#783715) [you don't have to face them alone.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#786640)

[Thank you.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#789351)

[(Applause)](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#790733)

[Chris Anderson: This is kind of amazing, what you're telling us.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#800014) [It seems amazing to me that a belief about stress](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#802912) [can make so much difference to someone's life expectancy.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#807017) [How would that extend to advice,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#811500) [like, if someone is making a lifestyle choice](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#813726) [between, say, a stressful job and a non-stressful job,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#815811) [does it matter which way they go?](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#819772) [It's equally wise to go for the stressful job](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#822453) [so long as you believe that you can handle it, in some sense?](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#825526)

[Kelly McGonigal: Yeah, and one thing we know for certain](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#828027) [is that chasing meaning is better for your health](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#829881) [than trying to avoid discomfort.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#832611) [And so I would say that's really the best way to make decisions,](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#834215) [is go after what it is that creates meaning in your life](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#837200) [and then trust yourself to handle the stress that follows.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#839947)

[CA: Thank you so much, Kelly. It's pretty cool. KM: Thank you.](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#843225)

[(Applause)](http://www.ted.com/talks/kelly_mcgonigal_how_to_make_stress_your_friend.html#845767)