

Sanity Secrets *for* Stressed-Out Women

SUE AUGUSTINE



HARVEST HOUSE PUBLISHERS

EUGENE, OREGON

Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are taken from The Message. Copyright © by Eugene H. Peterson 1993, 1994, 1995, 1996, 2000, 2001, 2002. Used by permission of NavPress Publishing Group.

Verses marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189 USA. All rights reserved.

Verses marked NIV are taken from the HOLY BIBLE, NEW INTERNATIONAL VERSION®. NIV®, Copyright©1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible Society. Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved.

Verses marked NASB are taken from the New American Standard Bible®, © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission. (www.Lockman.org)

Verses marked TLB are taken from *The Living Bible*, Copyright ©1971. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Wheaton, IL 60189 USA. All rights reserved.

Verses marked NKJV are taken from the New King James Version. Copyright ©1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Cover by Left Coast Design, Portland, Oregon

Cover photo © iStockphoto

Harvest House Publishers and the author have made every effort to trace the ownership of all poems and quotes. In the event of a question arising from the use of a poem or quote, we regret any error made and will be pleased to make the necessary correction in future editions of this book.

This book is not intended to take the place of sound professional medical advice. Neither the author nor the publisher assumes any liability for possible adverse consequences as a result of the information contained herein.

SANITY SECRETS FOR STRESSED-OUT WOMEN

Copyright © 2009 by Sue Augustine

Published by Harvest House Publishers

Eugene, Oregon 97402

www.harvesthousepublishers.com

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Augustine, Sue.

Sanity secrets for stressed-out women / Sue Augustine.

p. cm.

ISBN 978-0-7369-2417-7 (pbk.)

1. Christian women—Religious life. 2. Stress (Psychology)—Religious aspects—Christianity. I. Title.

BV4527.A93 2009

248.8'43—dc22

2008028532

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means—electronic, mechanical, digital, photocopy, recording, or any other—except for brief quotations in printed reviews, without the prior permission of the publisher.

Printed in the United States of America

09 10 11 12 13 14 15 / BP-NI / 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

Contents

PART 1: Is Your Life Out of Control?

1. Escape the Lunacy 7
2. Yearning for Sanity 17
3. What Is This Thing Called Stress? 25
4. Measuring Your Stress Susceptibility 35

PART 2: Recognizing Stress and Taking Action

5. Sanity Secret #1: Recognize the Warning Signals 49
6. Sanity Secret #2: Isolate Your Specific Stressors 59
7. Sanity Secret #3: Identify What You Can and
Can't Control 67
8. Sanity Secret #4: Develop Coping Mechanisms 75
9. Sanity Secret #5: Be a Creative Problem-Solver 85
10. Sanity Secret #6: Problem Solving in Action 91

PART 3: Keeping Your Sanity

11. Sanity Secret #7: Practice Healthy Self-Care 107
When You Need Pampering and Nurturing
12. Sanity Secret #8: Rethink Life Balance... 119
When Life Seems Out of Whack
13. Sanity Secret #9: Simplify Your Life..... 129
When Things Are Complicated
14. Sanity Secret #10: Get Out of the Fast Lane 137
When Life Is Speeding Past
15. Sanity Secret #11: Get Off the 24/7
Merry-Go-Round 149
When You Need More Time

16. Sanity Secret #12: Conquer Procrastination	161
<i>When You Dread Beginning</i>	
17. Sanity Secret #13: Clear Out the Clutter	167
<i>When You're Drowning in Stuff</i>	
18. Sanity Secret #14: Boost Your Drooping	
Body Image	183
<i>When More Than Your Confidence Is Sagging</i>	
19. Sanity Secret #15: Redefine Contentment	191
<i>Stop Shopping 'til You Drop</i>	
20. Sanity Secret #16: Celebrate the Joys of Aging	197
<i>When You're Having a Mid-Yikes Crisis</i>	
21. Sanity Secret #17: Get Your Finances in Shape	205
<i>When Too Much Month Is Left at the End of the Money</i>	

PART 4: Turning Stress into a Positive Force

22. Discover the Stress Cycle	217
23. Sanity Secret #18: Take Charge of Your Perceptions. . .	219
24. Sanity Secret #19: Take Charge of Your Thoughts . . .	225
25. Sanity Secret #20: Take Charge of Your Self-Talk . . .	231
26. Sanity Secret #21: Take Charge of Your Emotions . . .	237
27. Sanity Secret #22: Get Moving!	245
28. Sanity Secret #23: Eat Your Stress Away	255
29. Sanity Secret #24: Get a Good Night's Rest	265
30. Sanity Secret #25: Laugh and Rest	273
Peace and Joy to You!	285

A decorative border of white flowers and dots surrounds the central text box. The flowers are of various sizes and are arranged in a scattered pattern around the box.

PART 1

Is Your Life Out of Control?

Escape the Lunacy

Somewhere along this frenzied journey called modern-day life, we've lost our sanity. In fact, a friend of mine has a magnet on her refrigerator that says, "Out of my mind. Be back in one hour." But she wants to know why she has to return so soon. And she's not alone. More and more women tell me they long to escape, even temporarily, to a slower-paced, simpler time. If there is one expression that describes the condition of women's lives today, it is "stressed out." In fact, many of us are getting stressed out over being so stressed out.



Some mornings it seems hardly worth the effort to take the cat off your face. (You have to be a cat owner to know this is how they get your attention in the morning.)

This book is as much for me as it is for you. I am not immune to the types of pressures life throws at us. Although I write and speak about stress solutions, I face the same daily stressors as everyone else. But I've discovered some innovative sanity secrets through research, reading, and life experience that help me stay sane...and they will help you too.

Although most of the time I'm so excited about my life I can hardly stand it, there are times when I have to guard against bouts of frustration, discontent, and world weariness. I get irritated, annoyed, agitated, worried, and disappointed over the same things that probably upset you: there's never enough time, I need to lose weight, I can't find things when I need them, where is the romance, what was I thinking when I married him (and why won't he read *his* relationship manual), the car needs to go in for repairs again, the kids are driving me nuts, why did I think I'd be any good at this job, will I ever get totally organized, the phone never stops ringing, will there be enough money for retirement, I need a vacation!

Some mornings it seems hardly worth the effort to take the cat off your face. (You have to be a cat owner to know this is how they get your attention in the morning.) If you've ever had "one of those days," or weeks, or lifetimes, you know that sometimes the only answer seems to be to run away from home, leave town, and start over again. Some days I'm convinced that if I could just dye my hair, get new ID, and escape to a Caribbean island, maybe I could regain some of my sanity and begin anew. But the old axiom "Wherever you go, there you are!" reminds me that although it's not easy to find happiness within myself, it's impossible to find it elsewhere.

For many of us, life has become a pressure cooker of excessive demands, unrealistic expectations, and nearly impossible standards. Being a woman means there is always more than plenty to do—more than enough people to help or deal with, appointments, activities, and unfinished tasks competing for our attention. While traveling as an international motivational speaker, I began sharing with women audiences that I was writing a book on "sanity secrets for surviving daily pressures, overcoming physical burn-out, and conquering inner turmoil." Almost every woman responded by asking, "How soon can I have a copy? I need that book yesterday!" Each week I hear from women who tell me they feel overworked, overextended, overwhelmed, overloaded, undervalued, and unappreciated. From nearly every angle, women are burned out, worn out, and weary. In fact, being frustrated, frayed, frazzled, and fatigued most of the time has become the new normal.

What I want us to do in this book is take a step back and see this

insanity for what it really is, take lessons from the way life used to be, learn some wisdom of the ages, and move forward to becoming the level-headed, even-tempered, calmer, saner, more balanced women God created us to be.

How to Use This Book

You've got enough stress in your life right now (or you wouldn't be reading this book), so learning how to implement these sanity secrets isn't meant to be an additional source of tension. I suggest reading this book in short sessions and only reading as much as you can take in and act on within the next week or two. I have divided the information into bite-size segments to make it easy-to-read and conducive to putting the principles into action. At the end of most Sanity Secret chapters are "Sanity Savers & Survival Hints" sections. These are extra tips and ideas I've tested and put into practice in my life...and they'll help you in your quest for a stress-free life.

This book has four parts, and following each one there is a section called "The First Resort"—an encouragement to turn to God through prayer in times of distress...rather than asking for divine guidance as a last-minute last resort. These inspiring thoughts, uplifting ideas, and biblical insights will help you transform your life by bringing it into balance—mentally, emotionally, and spiritually.

My desire is that this book will be a refuge from the world for you, a retreat from the pressures of life and a haven for a few minutes out of your day. I hope you'll relax just a bit while discovering the principles and tools that will help you reclaim your life and put it on solid footing once again.

Here are some ways to get maximum results from this book:

- As you read each segment, keep in mind your current situations, circumstances, and challenges at home and at work. Relate all the information to your life. Ask, "How can I use these ideas to overcome the stressors I'm facing now?" and "How will these concepts improve my life?"

- Use a highlighter to emphasize ideas and points that stand out and are especially meaningful to you. When you go back later to review, you'll be able to spot those special concepts right away.
- Keep a pen and spiral-bound notebook handy. As you read, make summary notes of the points that are particularly pertinent to your life. You'll end up with a shorter version of the book with the specific ideas you plan to incorporate into your life. This will be easier to review any time you need a quick refresher.
- As you read, note the specific goals you want to achieve.
- As tempting as it may be, resist thinking, *I know lots of people who really need these ideas!* While it's true that others would benefit from these sanity secrets, you're the one reading this book. For now, take the information personally. Once you experience results in your life share the ideas with others and include your personal insights.
- Implement the Sanity Savers & Survival Hints. Use the information as a personal goal planner.
- Put new strategies into practice as soon as you can. Knowledge is great, but it's only potential success until it's combined with action. Doing what you know brings success.
- Expect great results! There's an adage that says, "When the student is ready, the teacher will appear." We have many teachers over the course of our lifetimes. Let this book be one of them for you.
- When it comes to making changes, give yourself time. It's natural to feel uncomfortable when attempting anything new or different, so don't get discouraged if it's a bit difficult at first. It takes about three weeks to develop a new habit pattern. Be patient. You will experience a calmer, more relaxed life in about 21 days.

Are you at your wit's end? Then I hope you take a step away from the lunacy and embrace a simpler, saner pace where what matters and what doesn't will be easier to see. If you're sick and tired of being sick and tired, get ready to be renewed, refreshed, and recharged! If you're fed up with being inundated, snowed under, and weighed down by information, deadlines, never-ending to-do lists, obsessions, fads, crazes, clutter, and too many decisions, separate yourself from the noise that surrounds you and listen for the sound of wisdom coming from inside you...from the still, small voice of God, who will give direction and new meaning to your life. Putting the sanity secrets to work in your life will decrease the craziness you experience and increase your joy.



I don't suffer from insanity; I enjoy every minute of it
BUMPER STICKER

Why and How I Can Help You

A large international seminar company organized the very first stress-management workshop I ever presented. I prayed that at least 20 people would be interested in attending. More than 700 participants showed up! I was so stressed from the size of the audience that I don't remember one word I said. Since then I've had many opportunities to present my program to thousands of people. Based on positive feedback from participants about the results they experience and my own observations, I'm confident you'll find the material timely, relevant, and helpful. Over the past 20 years I've developed and updated the content many times to keep it current and applicable to today's lifestyles.

For quite a while now audience members have continued to ask for a book on managing stress. While I'm not an expert when it comes to the psychology of stress management, this book is written from personal experiences—mine and others—plus the wisdom and principles found in God's Word and extensive research I've done while preparing for and presenting stress-management workshops in professional and corporate settings, on cruise ships, in churches, and at women's retreats.

Defining the Sanity Secret Philosophy

“Sanity secrets” are the self-nurturing steps you can take to fortify yourself for the upcoming struggles and ongoing challenges you face that rob you of peace of mind and throw you off balance. The sanity secrets philosophy is simple: “Pinpoint your stress triggers and make changes in your thoughts, beliefs, actions, and lifestyle to nurture your life back into balance and wellness so you’ll cope well during times of distress.” For those times when things go wrong, be prepared by treating yourself right.



Quit taking this life on earth so seriously.
Nobody gets out of it alive anyway.

Stress is taking its toll on us, and part of it is because we’ve bought into the message that we’re capable of doing everything for ourselves. These days, due to the feminist movement, we can pay for our own meals, open our own doors, carry our own luggage, and give up our own seats on the last lifeboat. We’ve also been fed warped messages about what we *can do* and what we *should do*. The problem started when we distorted the truth that “women can be anything” into the mandate that “women should do everything.” And when we fall short of that ideal, we feel disappointed in ourselves. There is a big difference between “can be” and “should do”!

In our high-tech and fast-paced culture, it’s easy to get stressed out, off balance, and caught in the trap of believing the messages all around us that encourage us to do more and be more. For starters, not only are we rushing about at breakneck speed attempting to get everything crossed off our never-ending to-do lists, we’re also doing it wearing three-inch heels. Talk about getting off balance! Our minds are always busy and filled with concerns about the future, our children and grandchildren, our relationships, health issues, time pressures, finances, and social responsibilities. And then there’s all that is going on in other parts of the world that we hear about on the news.

Some of us work in careers or professional positions where we must constantly adapt to new procedures, handle personality conflicts, and cope with looming deadlines. Others must deal with busy toddlers,

teenagers exhibiting “hormonal crazies,” or aging parents with serious health and financial concerns. In some cases it’s all of these. Perhaps you have a husband who constantly works overtime, or is often away from home on business trips, or is preoccupied with a hobby or sport that takes precedence over all other matters. Maybe you have no spouse at all to alleviate some of the social and financial pressures. Are you a single mother bearing the full responsibility of being the mom, dad, breadwinner, and homemaker all wrapped into one?

Add to these the increasing external pressure of having to accomplish more in less time, and it seems any opportunities to slow down, take your time, enjoy some pampering and nurturing retreats, make time for family and friends, and complete activities at your own pace are rare. For some they never occur at all.

Learning and implementing sanity secrets when you’re feeling tense and stressed means finding ways to live stress free within the chaos rather than wishing it would all go away. It involves finding time for the important things in your life and discovering coping mechanisms to help you deal with those circumstances and situations that are clearly (or not so clearly) beyond your control. Sanity secrets equip you to:

- nurture your inner self
- acquire a positive mental perspective toward your life and future
- discover the inner peace and freedom you long for

What It Is and Isn’t About

Sanity Secrets for Stressed-Out Women will help you develop a system of proven approaches, time-honored wisdom, and practical principles you can implement when stress threatens to overwhelm you. By putting them into practice regularly, the sanity secrets can soften future stressful circumstances too. Sanity secrets go well beyond the conventional stress-management strategies that encourage deep breathing, progressive relaxation, exercising, drinking pure water, and eating a healthy diet, although all of these traditional methods are important and will be touched on in various chapters.

You'll be discovering ways to *control* your stress responses and *minimize* the negative effects of stressful situations and circumstances before stress takes over. What you won't find are suggestions for eliminating all the causes of your stress. I know, it would be wonderful and convenient to wave a magic wand and see all the situations, circumstances, and people that make us crazy disappear. But here's the thing: The stress in our lives—and on this planet, for that matter—is not going away. So we need tools and inner strength to deal with it rather than wasting valuable energy and time wishing it would magically vanish.

Sanity secrets: principles and ideas that minimize the negative effects of living in our chaotic world and help us balance priorities, renew our enthusiasm, and enjoy life.

You also won't find ideas for coping with loss, dealing with grief, managing anger, or overcoming a harmful past. There are many great books available to help in those specialized areas, although most of the principles presented here will be helpful if you find yourself in such circumstances.

What can this book about stress survival do to help you? In these sanity secrets you'll discover practical, straightforward approaches to minimize the negative effects of living in our chaotic world. You'll find an abundance of concepts to help you balance your priorities, renew your enthusiasm, and find time to enjoy the truly important relationships and activities you value most.

In addition, sanity secrets provide ways to stay calm in a crisis, recognize and release earlier experiences that are still causing stress today, and move freely into a future filled with peaceful possibilities. By caring for your physical body, resting your mind, and drawing on the spiritual strength you gain from trusting in God, you can feel rejuvenated and see your struggles, disappointments, and challenges with a fresh perspective. Along the way, you'll discover specific suggestions and tools that deal with issues such as physical relaxation, nutrition, fitness, and definite thought processes for maximizing energy, minimizing stress, and promoting vibrant health, energy, and vitality.

You will never be problem-free as long as you are alive on this planet.

That's an unfortunate truth. In fact, each and every one of us is currently in one of three places: right in the middle of dealing with a serious problem, just finishing up handling a major problem, or heading toward the next big problem. So if you aren't facing a crucial issue or concern right now, don't assume this book isn't for you. Trouble is on its way, I promise. And when your current problems finally go away, new ones will soon arrive. Sometimes it seems we're allowed a brief reprieve in-between, a chance to coast for a bit before the next one appears. Often the new problems that come along are much worse than the ones we could hardly wait to get rid of. Many of us tend to put our lives on hold until the problems go away. But we'll never be completely stress free until the day our friends file past us whispering, "My, doesn't she look natural?" So instead of waiting for that momentous day, let's find out how to have peace in the midst of the storms of life.

Defining Peace

Many women tell me what they are truly seeking in a stress-free existence is genuine inner peace. If that sounds like you, how would you describe the peace you crave? What does it look like? A pastor friend of mine gave an illustration in one of his sermons that created such a visual image I'll never forget it. According to the story, many years ago two renowned artists were each asked to paint a picture depicting their personal interpretation of true peace. The first artist's painting portrayed an idyllic woodland scene complete with tranquil streams; a small babbling brook; clear, sunny skies; and birds nesting serenely in the treetops. The second artist's picture of peace took a completely different slant. In his work he painted a violent storm scene with intense, raging winds; dismal, ominous clouds; and fierce ocean waves lashing their fury against a rocky cliff. Tucked in the midst of it all, in a small cleft in the rock, was a tiny bird—safe, unruffled, and protected from the turbulence surrounding it. This seems to be a much truer rendition of inner peace in our chaotic world. Even in the fiercest storm there can be a calm, silent center in a cleft in the rock.

We can take inspiration from this by appreciating the serenity and tranquility we experience when we're trusting in our heavenly Father, who cares for our every need. As our responsibilities, problems, and concerns

whirl around us out of control, threatening to knock us off balance, we are warmed and comforted by the inner serenity and profound sense of peace we have knowing we're tucked away with God. He's in control, and our true tranquility comes from his promise to never leave or forsake us (Deuteronomy 31:6). He gives us peace that passes all understanding. All we need to do is trust him implicitly. With this newfound tranquility, we can face our fears with confidence; build strong, healthy ties with family and friends; and valiantly confront the difficult times brought about by hardship and adversity. Aside from all this, we can share our peace with others caught in the storm and help quiet the tempest they find themselves in...even if it's only for a season.

Although we yearn for those times when we can physically escape to a more restful, peaceful environment, stress-free living is far more than simply spending the weekend at a spa or resort or taking two weeks out of the year to lie on a beach and bury ourselves in a good book. As valuable as taking a break from routine can be for short-term stress relief, true inner peace comes only after we've learned to deal with life's natural ebb and flow and restored the balance between body, mind, and spirit. We can accomplish this by applying a few basic-yet-essential sanity secrets to our everyday living. This way we can separate ourselves from the hectic, worrisome pace of modern living and make these stress-free principles an integral part of our lives.