



# Human Optimization

## Pod Club Discussion Questions



### E30 How to Manage Your Stress: Name It, Control It, and Use It for Good

Guest: Peter Rhee, DO, MSc, Orthopedic Hand Surgeon, Assistant Dean for Trainee Well-Being, Mayo Clinic School of Graduate Medical Education | Mayo Clinic – Rochester, MN

*The three big questions explored in the podcast:*

#### Question 1

What exactly is stress and how does it show up in our lives?

#### Question 2

Why do so many of us feel overwhelmed and what are the consequences?

#### Question 3

What are the practical steps we can take to reduce and control our stress levels?

### Discussion Questions:

1. Dr. Rhee defines stress as your "physiologic response to a stressor" and emphasizes that it's natural and normal. Take a moment to reflect: What physical responses have you noticed when responding to a stressor? Separate these into "normal physiologic responses" and "excessive or exaggerated responses." What are some key differences between the two?
2. The podcast distinguishes between "good stress" (acute, stimulating, focusing) and "bad stress" (chronic, detrimental to well-being). Can you identify a recent experience of "good stress" that helped you perform well? Now think of one example of "bad stress" that felt overwhelming. Discuss these different experiences as a group.
3. Dr. Rhee highlights that time scarcity and constant connectivity (news, social media) are major contributors to feeling overwhelmed. Identify one or two steps you want to take to mitigate their influence.
4. The discussion emphasizes that chronic stress negatively impacts nearly every aspect of life: physical health, sleep, mood, relationships, and performance. Which of these consequences do you find most concerning? How might this motivate you to prioritize stress management?
5. Dr. Rhee introduces a physiological technique for managing acute stress: exhalation-focused breathing. Have you tried a similar technique? Select the type of high-stress scenario you often experience when you want to practice this specific breathing exercise and help regain control?
6. The podcast suggests that long-term stress resilience can be built through practices like mindfulness, kindness, and gratitude. We refer to them as "stress threshold training." Which of these practices do you already incorporate? Select one could you intentionally add to your routine to increase your resilience this week.

7. Dr. Rhee shares his personal experience of an 8-year-old son recognizing his stress before he did. Who might provide you with helpful observations about your stress levels? This week, ask them for their observations, thank them for their candor, and take a few moments to consider opportunities to manage your responses to such stressors.
8. The challenge presented in this episode encourages listeners to practice an exhalation-focused breathing technique in a stressful situation or before a challenging event. Identify one upcoming situation where you could intentionally apply this technique. Then, practice the technique and share back with your group what you gained from it!
9. Based on this episode, what is one small change you are going to make to help improve in this area. How are you going to keep yourself accountable to that and measure your success? (Be sure to keep it simple, start small, and make it very clear).