



From  
**STRESS**  
To Yogastickmen

If anyone had told me ten years ago that I would be in the best physical, mental and emotional health of my life, running an online business, holding workshops in yoga and well-being, and writing about and teaching yoga full-time, I would have thought they had taken leave of their senses. Yes, I had already caught the yoga bug at this stage and was attending some classes, but I had no inclination of making yoga and well-being my way of life.

**M**y mind, energy and focus were still very much on my career, and I was working ridiculously long hours to prove both to myself and my bosses that I was worthy of promotion and acceptance into the “club” of high achievers, that I would go that extra mile and do what it took to get the job done, and that my job was my life.

From the outside looking in I appeared to be the picture of success – I had a great job and was being promoted regularly, I owned my own home, drove a great car; went on fabulous holidays, had good friends and seemed to thrive in the high-stress environment I operated in.

However, as well as the apparent success, this period in my life was also one of great emotional stress and turmoil. In reality I was miserable. Yes, I worked hard because I was ambitious and wanted success, but I was also using the job and its demands to hide from myself and everyone around me what was really going on. I was lost, I was alone, I was disconnected and I was incredibly unhappy. I was operating as two very distinct people – the ambitious, dynamic professional in public, and the gibbering wreck in private. The job and its demands were the only tangible things that I could keep hold of, as when I was not working I was in a dark place, a hole so deep I felt I would never be able to climb out of it. I found yoga (or should that be, yoga found me) because I was looking for something to hold on to. In those dark moments I knew I needed help, I needed something, but I did not know what it was or how to ask for it. Yoga helped, even in those early days, to start building that bridge back to myself. I did not know this at the time, all I knew was that after a class, I felt calmer, more relaxed, peaceful and better able to cope. It became a part of my life, with periods of intense practice, and periods when my practice became more intermittent, but it was always there.

I suppose it was inevitable that things would come to a head as maintaining these two separate strands of my life could not go on indefinitely, and as the demands of the job increased exponentially (as did the material rewards), the cracks began to widen. My weight began to rocket, the



hours got even crazier and at the height of my dysfunction I had taken on another flat closer to the office in a last ditch attempt to reclaim some of my time, my thinking being that if I reduced my commuting time (I was living in London and working in Reading), and lived close to the office during the week, I could come home to London at weekends and relax. In reality, it was just easier to get to the office so I worked even longer hours.

I was trying to make changes, even managing to squeeze in a Sivananda teacher-training course on an extended period of leave, but still could not make the break. I was miserable, but remained incredibly attached to the lifestyle I had. The signals that all was not well were getting louder and louder; but still I remained attached and in the end it took serious injury, work stress to the point of meltdown and chronic fatigue syndrome to stop me in my tracks. The universe intervened and I thank it every day for doing so as I am not sure where I would be today if it hadn't.

The first two years of the illness were hell, mainly because I thought I could drive my way to recovery too – I believed that if I worked hard enough, read enough, pushed myself enough then I would recover quickly. The realisation that it would come in its own time, no matter how hard I pushed, cried, screamed or demanded it, took a while to sink in. The harder I pushed, the harder the illness pushed back and the

worse I felt, and for the first time in my life I really had to embrace patience. I was reduced to weeping and watching Bollywood movies on my sofa (Bollywood therapy is great, by the way!), hoping that tomorrow would be the day my energy would return and I would feel well. Patience and acceptance became my mantra and my mat was where I met them every day. On the days when I felt so awful I could hardly get out of bed, and was so full of frustration that recovery was nowhere in sight I just had to accept this was where I was and needed to be and let go – not easy! I had to surrender completely and accept I had no control. I just had to be and accept where I was from day to day and work with the energy I had from moment to moment. I had to remain present, continually checking in with my body, remaining in complete awareness of where I was physically and emotionally. The reconnection with myself, physically, emotionally and spiritually was slowly taking place every day as I practiced yoga. On the days when the energy was there I did more, on the days it wasn't I just lay in Savasana, and eventually I began to feel better.

Five years into my recovery and I am becoming the person I always wanted to be, my authentic self. The space and time the illness gave me, allowed me to change direction, allowed creativity to flow in, and enabled me to reconnect. The unexpected and delightful bonus is the peace, silence and calmness unleashed by my yoga and meditation practice, and a continually bubbling flow of ideas and creativity as well as energy and improved health.

I completed a British Wheel of Yoga teacher-training course, and developed the Yogastickmen.com online image database as a result of one of these bubbling ideas. The Yogastickmen product range is now extending into yoga wear as a result of another. I have begun to explore other aspects of yoga, working with mums-to-be through my training with the Birthlight Trust. I am exploring the links between stress and ill-health through my studies for my MSc. in the psychobiology of stress – hoping I can help others avoid some of the pitfalls and pain I had to go through. I have lost nearly six stone with the help of daily practice and have never felt healthier or happier. This thing called yoga seems to be the gift that never stops giving, and the beauty of it is that I was able to participate when I was most unwell and at my heaviest, as well as in full health. It has become my passion so it's no surprise that it has now become my way of life. The journey continues and I embrace all that unfolds with curiosity and excitement, engaging and working with whatever I meet.

Patricia Ezechie is a yoga and wellbeing expert and has been practising yoga for 13 years. She is the owner of [www.yogastickmen.com](http://www.yogastickmen.com) and runs classes, courses and workshops on yoga, health and well being. Full details of all her classes, workshops and one to one tuition can be found at [www.yogasiromani.com](http://www.yogasiromani.com).

