

HOPE
and
HELP
for Your
NERVES

END ANXIETY NOW

Bestselling Author of
Peace from Nervous Suffering

DR. CLAIRE WEEKES

With an Afterword by the Author

“THEY SAY IT’S ‘JUST NERVES’ ...”

But it can stop you from working ... upset your personal relationships ... transform you from the busy and interesting person you used to be into someone else. Dr. Claire Weekes has treated victims of nervous illness with the care that only a sympathetic, understanding doctor can offer. The man who has trouble swallowing ... the woman who cannot travel outside the safety of her own home ... the young girl who is afraid she will be sick in public—Dr. Weekes has answers for them all. She knows about the tricks your nervous system can play on you, and gives down-to-earth, step-by-step guidance for achieving full recovery.

DR. CLAIRE WEEKES is the author of the bestselling *Peace from Nervous Suffering*, also available in a Signet edition. In addition, Dr. Weekes, best known for her pioneering work in the study of nervous illness and anxiety, has lectured at psychiatric hospitals in Britain and has spoken often on radio and television both in Britain and in the United States.

Hope and Help for Your Nerves

by Dr. Claire
Weekes,
M.B., D.Sc., M.R.A.C.P.

Consulting Physician to the Rachel Forster Hospital Sydney, Australia



A SIGNET BOOK

SIGNET

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To the memory of my indomitable mother

Many of those who suffer from nervousness are persons of fine susceptibilities and delicate regard for honor, endowed with a feeling of duty and obligation toward others. Their nerves have tricked them, misled them.

W. R. HOUSTON

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Hope and Help for Your Nerves

The Power Within You

If you are reading this book because your nerves are “in a bad way,” you are the very person for whom it has been written, and I shall therefore talk directly to you as if you were sitting beside me.

I shall show clearly and simply, and yet with all necessary detail, how such nervous illness begins and develops and how it can be cured. *The advice given here will definitely cure you, if you follow it.* This will take perseverance and some courage. You may notice that I have not asked for patience. A nervously ill person is rarely patient, because “sick” nerves are usually agitated nerves—that is one reason why he is bewildered by them. To wait patiently in line can be almost intolerable misery for such a person. However, there is a substitute for patience, and this I shall present to you later.

It will not be difficult for you to read this book: it is about you and your nerves, and for this reason you will read it with interest, whereas to read an ordinary book or newspaper may seem an impossibility or, should you succeed, may leave you more distressed than when you began.

I used the word “cure” and this may surprise you, because it implies an illness and you may think of yourself as more bewildered than ill, lost in a maze, trying to find your way back to being the person you used to be.

On the other hand, you may be so depressed and exhausted that you may readily agree that you are ill. Whether or not you consider yourself ill, more than anything else you want to be yourself again. You probably look at others in the street and wonder why you can’t be like them. What is this “terrible thing” that has happened to you? What is the meaning of these terrible feelings?

Such feelings may have possessed you for a long time, even for years. Indeed, you may have reached a point of such desperate suffering that you could be thinking of ending it all, or may even have attempted to do just that. And yet, however deeply involved you may be in nervous illness, however long you may have suffered, you can recover and enjoy life again. I emphasize *however deeply involved and however long.* The main difference between a person ill for many years and someone ill for a short time is that the one who suffered for long has had more time to collect disturbing memories, especially the

memory of much defeat, so that he despairs easily. But there is nothing altered within this person determining that because he has been ill for so long, he cannot possibly recover now.

However long you may have been ill, your body is waiting to recover in exactly the same way as the body of a person who has been ill for only a short time. It is important to understand this, because your illness is very much an illness of how you think. It is very much an illness of your attitude to fear, panic. You may think it is an illness of how you feel (it most certainly seems like this), but how you feel depends on how you think, on what you think. Because it is an illness of what you think, you can recover. *Thoughts that are keeping you ill can be changed.* In other words, your approach to your illness can be changed.

Now don't despair when you read this. I know how easily you despair and how impossible it may seem to you at this moment to imagine changing your approach to your illness. It is my work to show you how to do this, to help you do this. Have the courage to read on and see what you must do. Don't despair. Take heart!

When I see a person who has suffered from nervous illness for a long while, I do not think of him or her as hopelessly, chronically ill. Neither do I see a coward. I see a suffering, bewildered person, who has possibly not had adequate explanation of his illness, adequate help. So many people have been cured at last after having been ill for many years that no one should be discouraged by a history of long illness.

The guidance you need is in this small book. The perseverance you can, with help, find within yourself. *The strength to recover is within you, once you are shown the way.* I assure you of this.

Each of us has unsuspected power to accomplish what we demand of ourselves, if we care to search for it. You are no exception. You can find it if you make up your mind to, however great a coward you may think yourself at this moment. I have no illusions about you: I am not writing this book for the rare brave people, but for you, a sick, suffering, ordinary human being with no more courage than the rest of us but—and this is the important thing—with the same unplumbed, unsuspected power in reserve as the rest of us. It is possible that you may be aware of such power but may feel, because of your nervous condition, unable to release it. This book will help you find this power, and show you how to use it.

First, you must know how your nervous system works.

How Our Nervous System Works

Our nervous system consists of two main parts, known as voluntary and involuntary (autonomic).

THE VOLUNTARY NERVES

These nerves direct the movement of limbs, head, and trunk, and we control them more or less as we wish, hence their name, voluntary. They consist of brain and spinal cord, from which a number of paired nerves arise, each ending in the muscle it supplies.

THE INVOLUNTARY NERVES

Endocrine glands govern and regulate the normal functions of our body, including our body's reaction to stress. They do this with the help of involuntary nerves that act as their messengers. The involuntary nerves have their headquarters in a brain center connected with a delicate network of fibers (involuntary nerves) lying on either side of the spinal column (backbone), from which numerous threadlike branches pass to the internal organs—heart, lungs, intestines, etc. Unlike the voluntary nerves, the involuntary nerves are not under our direct control but—and this is of paramount importance in understanding “nerves”—*they respond to our moods*. For example, when we are afraid, our cheeks blanch, our pupils dilate, our heart races, and our hands may sweat. We do not consciously react this way and we have no power to stop these reactions *other than to change our mood*. This is why we call these nerves involuntary.

The involuntary nerves themselves consist of two parts, the sympathetic and the parasympathetic. Of these, the sympathetic “sympathizes” more demonstratively with our moods, hence its name. The action of the sympathetic nerves strengthens an animal's defenses against the various dangers that beset it, such as extremes of temperature, deprivation of water, attack by its enemies, *any form of stress*.

Have you ever seen a frightened animal standing stock-still from fear before taking flight? Its nostrils and its pupils dilate, its heart races, it breathes