A Mindful Way to enjoy socialising and stop isolating yourself.

If your stress has become a disorder - whether low, moderate, or high, whether anxiety or depression - it is likely that you over-think and over-feel and over-react, and that your habits interfere with your enjoyment of life.

A classic response to stress is 'avoidant behaviour' - where we develop habits of avoiding activities that make us uncomfortable, even though pretty much everything makes us uncomfortable - even activities that would obviously add to your enjoyment of life. In theory. But hey, a quick workthrough of even the starter sections of this self help blog will convince you of the evidence based science that *the human brain is not a rational thinking device that defaults to rational conclusions,* so this is typical human species behaviour, with the brain inappropriately deciding something is 'bad', (when of course it isn't bad at all), and deciding to avoid it. Or to go and have a bad time feeling bad because we've decided to feel bad and it becomes a self fulfilling prophecy.

Stress distortions cause a kind of self obsession where we're constantly personalising everything back to ourselves, not knowing how to be stimulated by the amazing life that's going on all around us. But you can undo your bad habits, and develop new beautiful healthy ones.

The following thinking exercise is something I use very successfully with my clients.

When you are invited to something - say **'yes, I'd love to',** (fake it til you make it).

Thought stop and interrupt yourself when you start negatively *fortune telling* that you won't enjoy it. Tell yourself:

"I am alive, and it's not rational or healthy for me to either avoid life and socialising and joy and stimulation and happiness because of stress, (or to obsess and worry before during and after events). What if today I'm going to think instead of what might be stimulating and interesting for me as a human being? What if I choose to think outside of myself, what if I choose to decide to 'be present mindfully'? I could take a break from worrying and being uncomfortable and thinking about *me* - my feelings, if I'm behaving properly, if others are behaving properly, how I look... all of that. I don't have to expect or need anything - I can just be there, and it can just 'be'. As long as I'm aiming to be nice and kind, I don't have to 'perform' or say anything at all if I don't feel like it. I can be the smiley quiet person. I can choose to deliberately notice what's actually happening - what will the food, the drink, the company, the environment be like? I can focus deliberately on the taste, the sounds, my senses. And who will say what... who will be entertaining or interesting? After all, even the quietest person has a story, everybody deserves respect. I can choose to deliberately focus on any conversations being had, joining in if I feel like it when it sparks ideas or thoughts that I have about the subject - or I can just listen, and marvel at being alive... I can give myself a break from the exhausting drama of *me me me*, and simply breathe and *be be be*..."

Reframe. Change your mind. Change your mood, change your life. Be happy.