

[IMAGE]

Stress Busters

10 Ways to Reduce Stress

By Dr. Perry Nickelston

Does it seem as if your life is spiraling out of control? We all feel overwhelmed at times, but the way we deal with it determines whether we continue our productive lives or board a one-way express train to Stressville, USA. Let's face it, the bills aren't going to stop coming, there will never be enough hours in the day for all your errands, and your career or family responsibilities will always be demanding. But you have a lot more control than you might think. In fact, the simple realization that you're in control of your life is the first big step to stress management.

Managing stress is all about taking charge: taking charge of your thoughts, your emotions, your schedule, your environment, and the way you deal with problems. The ultimate goal is a balanced life with time for work, relationships, relaxation and fun - plus the fortitude to hold up under pressure and meet challenges head on.

There are several different types of stress, and learning how to control them can make all the difference. You have physical stress (lack of exercise, illness, sleep habits, etc.), mental stress (how you deal emotionally with life) and chemical stress (nutritional and environmental). Here are 10 straightforward ways to help you reduce all three stress factors.

1. Proper Breathing

Let's start with breathing because it's so fundamental. Proper breathing has a dramatic impact on muscle relaxation, tension reduction, normalizing heart rate, and increasing mental clarity. Breathing is of primary focus in meditation, yoga, and Pilates because of its intricate connection to inner core strength. What you want to strive for is learning to breathe mostly with your diaphragm instead of your lungs. The diaphragm is the most efficient muscle for breathing. It is a large, dome-shaped muscle located at the base of the lungs. Learning how to breathe with your diaphragm takes some practice, but in time it will become second nature.

stress - Copyright â Stock Photo / Register Mark Practice the following technique on a daily basis for 5-10 minutes. Lie on your back, putting a pillow or similar support under your knees to relax your lower back. Place one hand on your abdomen and the other on your chest. Slowly inhale through your nose and make sure the only hand that moves is the one on your abdomen. Try to keep the hand on your chest as still as possible. Exhale through pursed lips and repeat. You may become temporarily lightheaded after your first few breaths, but this is a normal response to the increase in oxygen uptake by the body.

2. Organization

Are you feeling overwhelmed with so much to do and so little time? Unclutter your life and get organized to take back control. Where do you start? You've got to have a plan. That plan starts with learning to master the art of creating a "Top 5 List." Create a list of the five most important tasks you need to complete for the day. Put the one you want to do the least at the top of the list to help prevent procrastination. It is human nature to delay things which make you feel uncomfortable. By accomplishing the difficult task first you set the tone for positive action and motivation the rest of the day. You can always add more numbers to the list when you get better at the system.

3. Adequate Water

Dehydration stresses your body and nervous system. Adequate water intake is essential for cellular processes, tissue regeneration and detoxification. You may even notice a decrease in mental clarity, tiredness, fatigue, lethargy and a propensity for more illness due to increased stress on the immune system. So, how much should you drink? The advice to drink eight 8-ounce glasses of water a day is antiquated. Instead, multiply your weight in pounds by 0.5 and 0.7. The numbers generated are the range, in ounces, of water you should drink each day. There is no need to start slamming down water today. Instead, gradually increase your intake over a four-week period. Keep in mind that caffeinated beverages are natural dehydrators, so for every cup of caffeine beverage you drink, replace it with 2 cups of water.

4. Healthy Snacking

Eat healthy and eat often to control blood sugar levels. When you go long periods between meals, a hormone known as insulin spikes. This hormone controls how fast sugar enters your bloodstream after eating. Big surges in insulin occur when you wait too long between meals, which may increase stress on your body chemistry. You can get cravings and mood swings. Eating only three meals a day is insufficient

for keeping this delicate balance of hormones in check. It is recommended that in addition to eating three regular meals a day, you mix in 2-3 healthy snacks. You will notice a renewed sense of energy and vitality as you provide your body and mind with the nutrition it needs.

5. Exercising

Get in shape and get out of stress; now there's a win-win proposition. Find an exercise you truly enjoy doing, not one you dread. Once you make it a part of your daily routine, it will become an integral part of your healthy lifestyle. Strive to get 20 minutes a day of some type of exercise. Walking is a great way to start. Get outside and enjoy the open air while at the same time clearing your mind. It can be an escape from all the chaos in your life. There is nothing like the calming effect of being around Mother Nature. Excess weight is also a stress on your body; regular exercise will help eliminate the pounds, improving your looks, your health and your state of mind.

6. Finding "Me Time"

Take some solo time every morning before you start the day. Use this time to reflect on yesterday and plan out today's events. This is a good time to compile your "Top 5" list of things you want to accomplish for the day. With the craziness of non-stop information overload in today's society, it's more important than ever to take quiet moments. Set your alarm 15 minutes early and wake up to silence. Do not turn on the television or open the newspaper. You may find that problems which have plagued you suddenly become more manageable and put into perspective. When was the last time you sat in a room without white noise all around? Try it and see what happens. I have a feeling you will find it to be one of the most enjoyable moments of your day.

7. Listening to Music

Music calms the soul. It can trigger so many emotions and senses, transporting you to another time and place. Are there certain songs you hear that automatically make you smile or remember a special moment in your life? Make a special collection of your favorite songs and play them when you need to escape. Close your eyes and take yourself back to a place that left a cherished impression on your heart. It will help give you a renewed perspective on your current situation.

8. Reading

Reading can truly change your life. It can be one of the most powerful and simple ways to transform your personal and professional life, and a wealth of knowledge and learning is available at your fingertips for free at the local library. This ties in nicely to the aforementioned "me time." You can read and learn about anything your mind can conceive; fiction, non-fiction, a fantasy book, or biographies of successful people who have overcome their own struggles. Try to find 20 minutes a day to read something positive and reassuring. Stay away from newspapers and magazines that are filled with doom and gloom.

stress buster - Copyright © Stock Photo / Register Mark **9. Focusing on Good News**

Turn on the TV these days and all you see is bad news. What happened to the good news? The negative aspects of everyday life are always highlighted to sell headlines and increase viewership. All that negativity adds to your stress and a feeling of hopelessness. Sure, you need to stay informed of current events, and all you have to do is check out a summary page on any Web browser to catch yourself up to speed. What you focus on becomes your reality. So stop focusing on the bad things in life and zero in on the positive.

10. Better Sleeping

Sleep is necessary for the regeneration of body and mind. Lack of sleep leads to stress on the immune system and makes you more prone to illness. Get poor sleep consistently and say hello to irritability and fatigue, too. Remember how great you felt after your last poor night's sleep? That was your body telling you something; learn to listen to it. During waking moments, your nerve cells are constantly active and become more or less fatigued. Sleep gives the body cells an opportunity to rid themselves of waste and repair themselves. How much sleep should a person get each night? The answer depends on the individual; however it is recommended to get eight hours of sleep per night for maximum benefit.

It takes 30 days to form a new habit. Try these top 10 stress busters for just one month and you can change your life. Even if you can't do all of them, start with a few and see how much less stress you have in your life. There seems to be no end to the amount of stressful situations we encounter, but taking simple steps to ease the burden can go a long way toward making every day count.

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