



STRESS REDUCTION TIPS

Stress Reduction Tips

Techniques to manage stress are essential for everyone at one time or another. Stress of itself is not the problem, it is how we handle it that becomes the issue. Overcoming challenging stresses in our lives gives us a sense of fulfilment and satisfaction. It is when stress is overwhelming and we feel out of our depth that the knowledge of stress reduction skills become essential for our peace of mind. So whether you feel seriously "stressed-out" or find yourself occasionally feeling too pressured for your liking, you can only benefit by trying some of these proven techniques for reducing stress levels and managing the remaining stress in a more effective way.

1. Use "self-talk" to abort the stress response.

Self-talk simply involves telling yourself to slow down, to get to a point of high concentration and great relaxation. "My arms and legs are heavy and warm. My heartbeat is calm and regular. My body breathes freely and comfortably. I feel relaxed and at ease."

2. Identify and "defuse" your stressors.

Locate your stressors (those things that stress you) and deal with them. Ask yourself what they are. When you get stressed, acknowledge that you *are* upset with an "I am angry" statement, and then take time out. You can't change a reaction when you're in the middle of one. Once you're calm again, write down your reaction and think of ways you can more constructively redirect the response. For instance, ask yourself, "How would I like to respond?" What are your options? Choose alternate, acceptable responses and remind yourself of them day after day. Eventually, you will condition yourself to react differently.

3. Laugh it off by consciously incorporating more humour in your life.

Learn to not take yourself quite so seriously. Your body secretes endorphins when you laugh. These natural hormones give you a natural high. Where possible, escalate a smile into a chuckle, a chuckle into a laugh and a laugh into a belly-shaking one. Humour can smooth over many a difficult moment or make a tedious task more enjoyable. Humour helps create "common ground" in relationships.

4. Try "physical impact activity."

Or, in simple terms, hit something! The key to this is to do so as a means of preventative medicine. Exploding can be an excellent release of tension. Tennis, squash and handball are great stress relievers two or three times a week. So are jogging and body surfing. Golf - because it requires you to be too precise and controlled - may be not so stress relieving.

5. Embark on self-discovery.



Become aware of your attitudes, beliefs and responses. Change your view of yourself. Take responsibility for your own perceptions of yourself. Do you love, respect and appreciate yourself? What has to change for that to happen? Be open to change and learn to take a risk in making yourself more emotionally vulnerable with people you trust.

6. Turn off the radio and TV for one week.

Or at least avoid what has come to be called "news". Spend time looking for the good in the people around you, and comment when you see people doing something "right". At the end of the week, evaluate how this experiment affected you.

7. Recognise that you have control of your responses.

We can't always control what happens to us but we can control how we react to the things that happen to us. We may not be able to avoid becoming emotionally upset, but we can control the intensity and duration of that upset. For example, instead of reacting depressed or hostile, we can learn to react as if only sad or irritated.

8. Live in the present.

Wherever you are, be there! The past cannot be undone. Many of the things that we think will happen never do. The present is full of possibility and potential. When we are stressed, our view of the world shrinks and solutions seem to evade us. Planning and evaluating are very important. Much of our stress comes from the worry of what might happen in the future or the regrets of the past. A good day's worry is far more exhausting than a good day with an axe. When we've had a good day with an axe we fall into bed and sleep like a baby. When we've spent a day worrying, we twitch all night and sleep is illusive. If you need to forgive yourself or others in order to release yourself from the past then learn from the experience, forgive and move on with greater knowledge and understanding.

Dealing with the past

A reaction to disappointing previous performance is best handled in three stages. First, on the emotional level, it may be necessary to experience the anger or frustration. If the emotion is a negative one, the second stage is reaching an acceptance of the performance and "letting go." Finally, you should evaluate what you've learned from the experience.

Dreading the future

Catastrophic expectations of what you will do, or what will happen in the future can be harnessed as well. One way is to imagine the same situation happening to a friend. Since you can be more objective when you are not involved, this may help you recognise that your fears are exaggerated and that positive results are also possible.

Focusing on the present: It's possible to bring yourself into the present by focusing on the information currently coming to you through your five senses. Your body is always in the present whereas the mind jumps ahead into the future or focuses on things from the past. By bringing the attention of your mind to the experiences of your body, you automatically bring your awareness into the present moment. What do you see? Hear? Smell? Taste? Touch? This is a helpful reminder that NOW is



the all-important time. Solutions are more likely to be found when the mind is focused in the present than when it is absorbed in the future of past.

9. Exercise.

Exercising for 40 minutes can reduce stress levels for up to three hours. Find regular and enjoyable exercise, which can be realistically incorporated into your week. Four or five times a week is a good goal to aim for.

10. Breathe deeply.

Before a potentially stressful encounter or complex meeting, stop, bring yourself into the present moment and breathe! A few long slow deep breaths, breathing in through your nose and out through your mouth will help you release any anticipatory tension. Breathe in relaxation, breathe out stress. To stop tension from building up throughout your working day, stop regularly, bring your focus back to the present by connecting with the senses of your body and take half a dozen long slow deep breaths. Leave aside the tensions of the past and focus once more upon the job at hand.

11. Learn to relax.

Familiarity with progressive relaxation techniques helps us to recognise when we are becoming stressed. Having the ability to physically unwind is the first step to letting go mental tension. Regular use of a good relaxation tape will take the stress out of learning the technique!

12. Learn to meditate.

Learning to meditate can be the next simple step in relaxing the mind so that it becomes quieter. With a quiet and focused mind our intuition, inspiration and imagination become more readily accessible. Meditation need have no religious association though many people feel they become more spiritually alive when they meditate regularly. Meditation is one of the greatest tools for improving clarity, concentration and memory and for achieving mastery over our lives.

13. Have a purpose.

Get passionate about something! Learn to recognise and fulfil your purpose. If we are engaged in activities and relationships that are nurturing and fulfilling to us, we are less likely to find them stressful. When we feel passionate and enthusiastic about something we can speak from a real sense of authentic genuineness. Nothing beats authenticity.

14. Take care of your body.

A healthy mind in a healthy body gives us the best chance of accomplishing our purpose. Increase your fibre intake by including plenty of fruit, vegetables, legumes and cereals. Reduce your intake of red meat to once or twice a week and replace it with seafood or chicken. Maintain your ideal body weight. Cutting back on fatty food will lower your total cholesterol and help you lose weight. Have at least two alcohol-free days a week. Stop smoking. Get adequate good quality rest and sleep.