



STRESS MANAGEMENT

Relaxation techniques are valuable stress reducers. At a physical level they lower blood pressure, slow heart rate and breathing, and bring brain waves into Alpha mode, which is the ideal level of activity for creative problem solving, extracting things from your memory, and programming the subconscious with positive concepts (especially useful when goal setting).

Create a buffer zone between you and your trigger point. The more regularly you do any of these stress busters, the quicker the results.

Aim to create a routine, almost a ritual, to go with your main relaxation process.

Just beginning the familiar elements will trigger a drop in stress levels. You may use candles, a prayer, a familiar place, a particular posture or breathing routine.

Develop something you can use as a quick trigger wherever you are.

Begin your day with positive thoughts. (See affirmations below). If you are challenged for time, say (or better still sing) them in the shower, with as much emotion as you can.

Whenever you review what is coming up, phrase your thoughts positively, and expect the best possible outcome, even if you don't currently know what that is.

Smile: Even a 'pretend' smile triggers the release of endorphins - happy hormones. And who knows, someone may just smile back.

Basic Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR) Takes 20 - 30 minutes

Sitting comfortably, arms and legs uncrossed, with eyes closed, breathe slowly and steadily, being aware of the diaphragm moving gently with each breath.

Focus on your breathing for 10 breaths.

With your eyes still closed, strongly tense the forehead, notice how it feels, where the tensions builds.

Hold for a count of 5. Allow the muscles to relax, feel the tension drain away, say the word "Relax" to yourself as you breathe out.

Just breathe slowly for 3 breaths.

Notice how different the muscle group feels.

After the forehead, work in turn through face, neck, shoulders and chest, arms, hands, belly, bottom, thighs, calves and feet. Use the same process for each muscle group.

Practise daily.

Take note of your stress level before and after.

Ultra quick version of PMR

Breathe slowly, using diaphragm, 3 times.

Tense whole body, face, etc.

Hold for a count of 3. Release, saying "Relax".

Say "Relax" with each breath, 3 more times.

Handy for those moments when tension has built suddenly, and you know you can't get away with yelling or screaming!



Exercise:

Any form of exercise appropriate to your fitness level has a stress reduction benefit. It releases tension and unused physical energy built up over time, and frequently allows the release of any associated emotion, especially anger.

Exercise builds fitness, which in turn enhances immune response, and reduces the chance of a physical component compounding your stress. Any form of exercise can be used as time out, and as a distraction. It can raise self esteem by improving how you look and feel, both in terms of a balanced physique, how you move and stand, increasing your ability to handle the physical requirements of your day. You also have another avenue for setting and reaching achievable goals. Above all, when you pick something make sure it's fun!

Diet:

Be honest, do you generally have a healthy balanced diet? Enough fruit and vegetables, only a little fat, sugar and

- 1 - Minimum tea, coffee, chocolate and alcohol?
- 2 - Relax before you eat? Eat regular meals about equal time apart?

If not, you know what to do! A little organisation, a suitable cookbook and you're on your way.

The difference in your life can be profound.

If you feel flat, tired, and miserable, and haven't eaten for a while, eating a yummy, healthy treat already in the cupboard will increase your energy, your self esteem (you did something positive for yourself) and may even save you money.

Begin today.

Singing and dancing:

You don't have to be good to enjoy it, so close the doors and the curtains and turn up the music.

Peaceful environments:

Whether it's going to a garden or park, snuggling in your comfy bed, walking by the ocean, soaking in a bath, stroking a pet, using candles at dinner, ambient music - whatever soothes

you, indulge yourself as often as possible. Make it possible!

Slow breathing:

Over breathing/hyperventilation syndrome is often an unrecognised cause of ill health, stress, and exhaustion.

If you suffer from asthma, allergies or snoring, you can improve your life drastically by learning to correct your breathing.

Medically proven, drug free, and very effective, a short course can have a life-long benefit. The exercises can fit easily with meditation techniques, for a double bonus.

Yoga:

If this appeals, there are multiple benefits, from physical fitness, leaner physique, and spiritual calm.

Meditation by repeating a mantra:

Choose a sound, word or short phrase which you find comfortable to say/think over and over again.

Remember, anything you repeat, especially while relaxed, will rapidly go into your subconscious mind, so choose something positive that you want to your mind to hear. eg; "God is love", "I am peaceful and centred", "Joy", "Harmony" or any of your favourite affirmations.

Close your eyes, say your mantra slowly, in time to your breathing.

Gradually slow your breathing down, then forget it, concentrating solely on the mantra. It is quite probable that at first your mind will wander.

Gently return to saying the mantra (maintaining positive or at least neutral self-talk in the process.) This exercise can take 5 minutes or an hour, as it suits you.

Prayer:

A quiet word with your deity can be very calming.

Try finding things to be grateful about, and say thanks with all the loving energy you can. Remember, faith is being grateful for things BEFORE they happen.

Keeping a Journal/Diary:

The act of writing down your thoughts, no matter how apparently random and initially chaotic, can do wonders for releasing tension before it builds up too much, as well as improving your ability to see patterns over time.

Studies indicating an improvement in both mental and physical health of diary keepers make it at least worth a try.

This is a place to be creative and without judgement - spelling, grammar and neatness don't count here!

Time and Energy management:

Take a few minutes each day to make a 'to do' list. Keep it a manageable length.

Divide it into 'must do' and 'may choose to do'.

If you feel it helps, work out a timetable, and stick to it as best you can.

If the list still seems overwhelming, ask for some practical help.

Friends, neighbours and relatives are often willing to lend a hand, especially if you can offer equal time or energy in return at a future date.

Spend time occasionally writing down longer term plans, break into manageable parts and start as soon as practical.

Somewhere on your 'must do' list include something for yourself, even if it's just one of the quick lifts listed in the pampering section below:

1 - You deserve to do something for yourself.

2 - Crossing things off your to do list as you achieve them can be very satisfying and rewarding.

3 - Are you aware of the time/s of day you function best?

4 - Are you a lark or an owl?

5 - Make the most of your best time to do anything requiring more concentration and effort.

6 - Notice whether you need regular brain breaks, or if taking a break distracts you.

7 - Background noise a help or a hindrance?

8 - Lavender oil, a comfy chair - do they wake you up or put you to sleep?

9 - Make it your business to consciously make the most of your energy and time.

10 - Life will get much less frantic.

Affirmations:

Positive goals stated as if they are already happening are affirmations.

If you are a long way from target, then use affirmations that you are moving in the right direction. They are useful to help maintain focus, and will gradually overcome negative thinking and beliefs if used frequently - it only takes 10 seconds or so each time, so 10 or 20 times a day is easy to achieve.

The following are good examples:

I am becoming slim and healthy', 'Life is wonderful', 'Today I am going to achieve everything more easily than usual', 'I notice every positive thing that happens to me', 'I am a worthwhile person', 'I deserve the best and accept it now'.

Slow down:

When things get frantic, physically slow down your voice, breathing, and movements. Aim for smoothness and calm.

People around you will also begin to calm down, taking subconscious directions from anyone deliberately choosing how they move and speak.

Pampering:

Acknowledge that you are a special and worthwhile person.

Take time, at least occasionally, to do things that make you feel good. Do something as simple as take an hour with the phone off the hook and a good book.

A float and massage, a bubble bath, a chat with a friend, go to a funny movie, test drive a luxury car, sit on a hillside and watch the sunset.

Regular self-nurturing does wonders for your self-esteem, gives you an emotional boost and helps you feel positive about the rest of the world.

You don't have to wait for someone else to give you these things. Remember, you deserve it!

Hug, Kiss, Cuddle, Love, Stroke, Nurture:

Yourself and your loved ones. Best therapy in the world.

We acknowledge and thank [Stress Busters](#) for this material.