

Relaxation

(Managing your stress)

Life is a gift • Enjoy yourself and your life • Pain is inevitable-suffering is optional

If the above statements sound like, 'yea right!' or 'I used to know these were true...', then applying the information in this handout will be very helpful.

Current Level of Stress: low medium high

How are you handling it: poor fair good great

Current sources of stress: *(the big 3 are money, time, relationships, and health...hmm that's 4...oh yea, we better add perfectionism and unmet expectations)*

- 1.
- 2.
- 3.

My Main Symptoms of Stress (circle all that apply when you are stressed)

- | | | |
|---|---|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Tight muscles▪ Racing mind▪ Poor self esteem▪ Tired▪ Poor sleep▪ Addictions▪ Anxiety▪ Anger-irritable▪ Tearful-Sad▪ Poor food choices▪ Depression | <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Irritability▪ poor concentration▪ weight gain or loss▪ decreased immunity from illnesses▪ fear or avoidance of important daily activities▪ increased feeling of pain (all pain is felt | <p>more acutely when the body is in a short- or long-term stress response)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Other: |
|---|---|---|

What positive things are you doing or have you done to relax and manage stress

(circle all that you have done that have been helpful)

- | | | |
|------------|------------------|------------|
| Exercise | Talk with others | Counseling |
| Meditation | Laughter-humor | Other: |
| Journaling | Yoga-Tai Chi | |
| Gratitude | Eating well | |

Four Overlapping ways to Manage Stress :

Any Steps Can Help

1. Change Situation
2. Change Reaction to Situation
3. Increase Ability to Recover Quickly/Recover Regularly
4. Strengthen Self-Lower Baseline Stress

What do I want to do different? *(remember: the definition of insanity is doing the same thing and expecting different results)*

What resources might I need?

When can I imagine doing these things?

Ideas that require No Added Time:

Other Best Times:

Four Ways to Manage Stress

Having stress that is ongoing or that you do not take time to recover from is damaging to all parts of your body. This is one of the most important life skills to develop!

1. Change Situation

Though this is not always practical, this is a very effective way to manage stress.

Look at the main sources of stress and see how many of these things are in your control. I hope the poem and prayer below bring some consolation so that you know you are not alone in this struggle!

Autobiography in 5 Short Chapters

a poem by Portia Nelson

Chapter 1

I walk down the street and there's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I fall in. I am lost; I am helpless. It isn't my fault. It takes me forever to find my way out.

Chapter 2

I walk down the same street and there's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I pretend I don't see it. I fall in again. I can't believe that I'm in the same place, but it isn't my fault. It takes a long time to get out.

Chapter 3

I walk down the same street and there's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I see that it is there. I still fall in; it's a habit. My eyes are open; I know it's my fault. I get out immediately.

Chapter 4

I walk down the same street and there's a deep hole in the sidewalk. I walk around it.

Chapter 5

I walk down a different street.

Serenity Prayer

*Grant me the Serenity to accept the things I cannot change,
The courage to change the things I can,
And the wisdom to know the difference.*

2. Change Reaction to Situation

Sometimes it is not possible to change the situation, so we have to find a way to change our reaction.

- Humorize it: find a fun way to make it silly, comical, or ridiculous. Only argue with a clown nose on, picture the person you are angry with in a bunny suit,...
- Future play: Ask the question, 'is this going to really matter in 5-10 years?'

- Witness: this takes some practice, eventually you can start to see yourself as an observer and watch your emotions. As you observe yourself you often get new insight into ways to behave in the future.
- Pattern interrupt: find a word or an action that literally interrupts your or another's pattern.
- Prayer: this is useful if you have a faith or want to, just sincerely ask for help to whom ever you believe can help.
- Fresh Perspective (Byron Katie): this is a powerful 4 step method to turn things around and learn from situations we judge. See web site for free handouts and how to do this.
- Remove yourself from the situation temporarily: eg a Bathroom Break, take 5, adult time out, etc.
- Counseling (especially CBT: cognitive behavioral therapy) can be very helpful here.

3. Increase Ability to Recover Quickly/Recover Regularly

These will keep you from climbing up the stairs to a very stressful end of the day!

- External trigger: use something in the environment to remind you to relax. Every time you...hear your phone or pager/ take a shower/wash hands/touch a door knob/sit in your car/etc. take a deep relaxing breath, say something positive to yourself, etc.
- Body Shake: like a wet dog shake it out. Start slowly with your feet and work up your body and let it go.
- Freeze Frame: this is a great method when you get good at it to immediately shift your physiology (see below Freeze-Frame™ Technique.)
- Deep Breath Break: do this many times a day. If you know a smoker, somehow they find a way to do something like this 20 times a day. Just remove the cigarette and use your breath or a straw...
- Here are some **Deep Breathing practices** to play with and learn

1. Deep Breathing:

Deep breathing is a simple but very effective method of relaxation. It works well in conjunction with other relaxation techniques such as Progressive Muscular Relaxation, relaxation imagery and meditation to reduce stress. *To use the technique, take a number of deep breaths and relax your body further with each breath. That's all there is to it!*

2. Abdominal breathing or 3 part breathing:

Place hands on belly. Hands should go out with your belly on inhale, in on the exhale. Repeat until feeling relaxed.
Alternative: start with abdomen and expand to chest and shoulders, then reverse on exhale.

3. Breath Counting

It may be helpful to **count** on inhale and exhale:

5 seconds of inhale then 5 seconds of exhale

OR

4/7/8 Inhale for 4 seconds, **Hold** for 7 seconds, **Exhale** for 8 seconds

4. Strengthen Self-Lower Baseline Stress

Many of the above techniques will work to do this too. Here are a few others that have been proven to be very effective.

- Regular movement/exercise: one of the most powerful ways to utilize stress is to get out and sweat. This will burn up the cortisol and helps the body re-set.
- Adequate restful sleep: most people do best on 8 hours, it does not have to be continuous if you get it in 90 minute chunks that can also work well.
- Good nutrition: avoiding certain foods that act like sugar in the body and getting plenty of whole foods are best. See information on Anti-inflammatory diet for more information.
- Regular Meals (especially breakfast): if you eat within 40 minutes of getting up you can blunt the rise in cortisol.
- Avoid Caffeine, Alcohol, Tobacco, and other drugs.
- Having some kind of Daily Practice: gratitude, meditation, yoga, deep progressive relaxation, visualization, journaling, prayer, contemplation, or what ever you have found that works for you.
- Caring Supportive relationships: surprise, these help!
- Spiritual purpose meaning: finding meaning and purpose in our painful experiences can transform them from burdens to blessings and change our physiology (as can forgiveness and gratitude).
- 12 step program: excellent, especially if you are dealing with an addiction.
- Counseling: Yep, it works!
- Supplements: there are specific supplements that help with stress. The main ones that have been found to be helpful are:
 - Vitamin C: During times of stress, your body loses vitamin C, so supplementing extra vitamin C or eating more fruits and vegetables high in vitamin C can help offset those losses. 1000-2000mg a day.
 - Pantothenic Acid (vitamin B5) is very important during periods of high stress. This nutrient is found in whole grains, legumes, cauliflower, broccoli, salmon, sweet potatoes, and tomatoes. For chronic stress situations a supplement of 100 – 500 mg of pantothenic acid daily can help.
 - Vitamin B6 is found in chicken, fish, whole grains, nuts and legumes.
 - Zinc is found in good quantities in the protein rich foods, such as meat and seafood, eggs, and milk.
 - Magnesium is found in many foods, but the best sources are legumes, nuts, and whole grains. Green vegetables are also good sources. Supplementing with 250mg twice a day can be helpful.
 - L-Theanine: dose is 100-150mg twice a day. It is the relaxing part of green tea.
 - Other:
- Short term medication. Some times using a medication for stress or sleep can be very appropriate, in general they are best for short term episodic use.

Techniques for Main Symptoms

Muscle Tension

Progressive Muscular Relaxation (PMR):

Progressive Muscular Relaxation is useful for relaxing your body when your muscles are tense.

The idea behind PMR is that you tense up a group of muscles so that they are as tightly contracted as possible. Hold them in a state of extreme tension for a few seconds. Then, relax the muscles to their previous state. Finally, consciously relax the muscles even further so that you are as relaxed as possible.

By tensing your muscles first, you will probably find that you are able to relax your muscles more than would be the case if you tried to relax your muscles directly.

Experiment with PMR by forming a fist, and clenching your hand as tight as you can for a few seconds. Then relax your hand to its previous tension, and then consciously relax it again so that it is as loose as possible. You should feel deep relaxation in your hand muscles. You can then do this from your feet up to your head.

For maximum relaxation you can use PMR in conjunction with breathing techniques and imagery.

Racing Mind-Poor Sleep

*** The most common reason I hear for sleep issues is, “my mind won’t turn off. My thoughts are racing.”**

There are three very simple technique to work with this the relaxation response and breathing.

Relaxation Response:

Try the following 6-step relaxation response from the book called “*The Relaxation Response*,” by Dr. Herbert Benson the next time you feel anxiety, stress, or have trouble sleeping:

1. Sit quietly in a comfortable position.
2. Close your eyes.
3. Deeply relax all of your muscles, beginning at your feet and progressing up to your face. Keep your muscles relaxed.
4. Breathe through your nose. Become aware of your breathing.
5. As you breathe out (exhale), say the word, “ONE”, silently to yourself. For example: breathe IN...OUT, “ONE”, -IN...OUT, “ONE”, etc. Breathe easily and naturally. Do not worry about if you are successful in achieving a deep state of relaxation. When distracted, simply return to repeating “ONE.”
Continue for 10 to 20 minutes (depending on your schedule). You may open your eyes to check the time, but do not use an alarm.
6. When you finish, sit quietly for several minutes, at first with your eyes closed, then with your eyes opened. Do not stand up for a few minutes.

Besides relying on this technique a few times each day, I recommend using it to get to sleep at night, especially after a long, hard day or before a tough next day. It's simple, it can fit in to your day when needed, it is fast, reliable and most importantly, it works!

Other Emotions

Be creative; find a way that you enjoy to keep the feelings flowing. Journaling, art, exercise, chopping wood, throw modeling clay at the wall, be creative here and find a way to move your emotions that does not hurt you or others.

1. Deep Breathing:

Deep breathing is a simple but very effective method of relaxation. To use the technique, take a number of deep breaths and relax your body further with each breath. That's all there is to it! Many find a sigh (using noise) really helps!

2. Belly Breathing:

Start standing or lying with one hand on chest and other on belly, exhale until your stomach goes in and then inhale first into your stomach (it should go out when you inhale).

3. Breath Counting 4/7/8 Breath

Inhale for 4 seconds, *Hold* for 7 seconds, *Exhale* for 8 seconds

This technique can also be very helpful

Freeze-Frame™ Technique from the book *Transforming Stress* by Doc Childre *this takes some practice and works great for people that are able to visualize well (great for worriers!)*

Step 1 SEE and PAUSE: Recognize the stressful feeling, see it-visualize it, then pause it, like pushing the **Pause** button on your DVD or taking a time-out!

Step 2 HEART BREATH: Take a deep breath. Make a sincere effort to **Shift** your focus away from the racing mind or disturbed emotions to the area around your heart. Pretend you've breathing through your heart to help focus your energy in this area. Keep your focus there for ten second or more.

Step 3 RECALL and FEEL: Recall a positive, fun feeling or time you've had in your life and attempt to re-experience it. Focus on the feeling rather than the thoughts or visual image. **Activate** the positive emotion.

OPTIONAL **Step 4** Using your intuition, common sense and sincerity **Ask** your heart, what would be a more efficient response to the situation you are Freeze-Framing, one that will minimize future stress?

OPTIONAL **Step 5 Listen** to what your heart says in answer to your question.