

STRESS BUSTERS

Get a good night's sleep. If you're having trouble sleeping at night because things keep running through your head, a simple technique can help. Keep a notepad by your bedside and jot down anything that's running through your head. This lets your unconscious mind know that you're aware of it, will attend to it, and you will tend to quiet down and go to sleep.

Breathe! As silly as this may sound, it's a common response to restrict breathing under stress. Shallow breathing doesn't allow your blood to receive as much oxygen as it needs. Deep breathing stimulates your central nervous system to relax. Breathe by filling the abdomen first and then the chest. It may take practice, but as you learn to breathe deeply regularly, you'll be able to do it regularly under pressure to help meet challenges.

Water yourself. Your brain is 75% water. Without enough water, you retard your ability to respond to stressors you encounter. Get through the workday by drinking 6-8 glasses of water a day. Caffeine and alcohol are diuretics so if you drink either, you need to increase your glasses of water. This simple action can make a big difference in your day.

Stressing eating. Your responses to stress are chemical, and, since the foods you eat change your internal chemistry, they can also impact your ability to deal effectively with stress. Choose a healthy diet with lots of fruits, vegetables (especially beans), and whole grains. The best animal sources are fish, chicken and extremely low-fat dairy products.

Next! Much of the stress that you feel arises not from the events that happen around you but from fears and worries about what may happen, or from kicking yourself for what you did or did not do. A simple technique can manage those thoughts running through your head. Imagine your thoughts are like cars speeding by on a freeway, (some of them just got stuck in a traffic jam in the middle.) If you have a car/though that's negative, just say "next" and imagine it's speeding by. Send each negative thought on its way, by saying "next" to yourself. You have the ability to clear the traffic jams instantly and let the thought go to focus on the next one. Stop and focus on the positive thoughts.

Fact or fiction. Many times you stress yourself by reactivating the assumptions you have made rather than what is actually going on. Separate facts from assumptions, or from "mind-reading," and eliminate unnecessary pressure on yourself. Divide a sheet of paper into 2 columns, FACTS at top of first column and MIND-READ at the top of second column. Examine all the things that are bothering you and put them in the correct column. Take action on the FACTS column and discard the MIND-READ facts.

Treat yourself. We feel bombarded by stressors at times because we don't allow ourselves a break from them. So, that a break; each and every day, take a bath, enjoy time with someone. Respect yourself! It's a treat that rewards you for being you. Send a powerful message to your subconscious mind – you deserve it!

Get over overwhelmed. If you are overwhelmed with too many demands, this simple exercise may help.

Get out a simple coil-bound notebook. On the first sheet, write your most pressing demand at the top of the page. Immediately flip the sheet over and write the next demand on the top of the next sheet. Continue until all concerns are written down, one to a sheet. Go back to the first sheet and write down all the ideas that might solve it. The minute you get stuck, go to the next sheet and write down all the ideas that might solve it. The minute you get stuck, go to the next sheet and do the same, and so on till all the concerns are addressed. You'll notice that some will be easy to address but because of the multitude they all seemed overwhelming. You now have an action plan written down and ideas to help; you're on your way to being "underwhelmed".

Let go of past stresses. Write down everything that you want to release from your past – situations, people, events, feeling, --everything you can think of. The only catch is that they must be from the past, not anything current. Once written down, rip up the paper; burn it; or put into a word processor and when asked if you want to save, say no. These symbolic rituals of letting go have a powerful effect to help you let go of the actual psychological burden.

Making 'to do' lists work for you. One of the big benefits of 'to do' lists is the checking off of completed items. Make two lists, one that you have total control of, and one that depends on others' cooperation. Also, separate the two lists into things that can be done now, and those that can wait till a later date. Complete the things that you can control and check them off as you do, now or later. Do whatever you can to complete the second list that depends on others. Write, phone, email the other person and celebrate that you have done as you can do to finish that item.

Thank goodness! Research shows that optimists are healthier, happier, and likely live longer. Shift your focus from what you can't control to what is working well for you. Start a gratitude journal. Take a few minutes each evening before you sleep to write down what you are grateful for each day and remember how wonderful those experiences felt during the day. Aim for at least 3 things each day, some days may be harder than others. You might want to make this a family discussion around the dinner table. In this way you build a support system to help you build the habit.

Laugh! Laughter reduces at least four of neuroendocrine hormones associated with the stress response. These are epinephrine, cortisol, dopamine, and growth hormone. Find some good jokes; look for the fun in events, read a funny book. Belly laughs are also good exercise! One trick for finding humor in the worst of situations is to blow things absolutely, ridiculously out of proportion. When your scenario reaches the point of absurdity, you begin to smile. The situation is put in perspective. Now you can calm down. Bill Cosby is fond of saying, "If you can laugh at it, you can survive it."