Power Tips to Zap Stress Out of Your Life
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INTRODUCTION

For the past one hundred years there has been much debate and theory offered about what stress is and what stress is not. We each know intuitively what stress is to us because we all experience it. Defining stress, however, is not so easy.

Hans Selye is one of the founding fathers in stress research. In 1956, Mr. Selye argued that “stress is not necessarily something bad – it all depends on how you take it. The stress of exhilarating, creative successful work is beneficial, while that of failure, humiliation or infection is detrimental.”

Selye’s position was that the biochemical effects of stress would be experienced irrespective of whether the situation was positive or negative.

Since that time, much more research has been conducted, and new ideas have evolved. Stress is now widely perceived as a "negative," producing a range of harmful biochemical and long-term effects. These same effects have rarely been observed in positive situations.

Richard S Lazarus is attributed with our most commonly accepted definition of stress: Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that “demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize.”

Everyone responds differently to stressful events. That stress response is part instinct and part to do with how we think. We can train our minds how to best respond to the stressors in our lives. Stress does not need to be all bad. Some stress in our daily lives is good and challenges us to reach even higher heights.

This ebook is dedicated to helping people, everywhere, to harness the stress in their lives and channel it into something that is beneficial and positive.

STRESS RESEARCH
Fight-or-Flight Response

In 1932, Walter Cannon offered some of the earliest research on stress and established the theory of the “fight-or-flight” response. His work proved that when an organism experiences a shock or perceives a threat, it reacts instantly by releasing hormones that help it to survive.

In human beings and other animals, these hormones allow for greater speed and strength. Heart rate and blood pressure increases, delivering more oxygen and blood sugar to support major muscles.

Sweating increases to better cool the muscles and allowing them to remain efficient. Blood is regulated to reduce blood loss if there is any damaged. Hormones focus our attention on the threat, to the exclusion of everything else. All of this commands a heightened ability to survive life-threatening events.

We can also trigger this same reaction when faced with something unexpected or something that frustrates our goals. If the threat is small, our response will be likewise, we may not notice the stressor among the many other distractions of a stressful day.

This mobilization of the body to spring into survival mode also has negative consequences. We become excitable, anxious, jumpy and irritable. This state can reduce our ability to be most effective. With shakiness and a pounding heart, we can find it difficult to carry out controlled skills.

The intensity of our focus on survival takes from our ability to draw information from many sources. We can find that we are more accident-prone and less able to make good decisions.

To be most productive, our day-by-day lives require a calm, rational, controlled and socially sensitive approach.

We need to be able to control our fight-or-flight response; otherwise, we can have problems later on such as poor health and burnout.

Identifying Stress in your Life

Many people go through their days not aware of the stress in their lives. They might think, “Well, how serious can it be if I don’t even know it exists?”
Regardless of how little or how much stress you have in your life, being able to identify it will be a big help to you. Once you are able to identify the stress in your life for what it is, you can then go about the business of dealing with it more effectively.

Make no mistake about it – if there is stress in your life, chances are you are reacting negatively to at least some of it.

**Keep a Stress Diary**

When you commit to keeping a Stress Diary, you gain important insight into how you react to stress. This allows you to better channel your energy into performing as you choose to and not as the result of the unidentified stress that has a foothold in your life.

You will begin by recording, each day, information about the stresses you are experiencing. Your goal will be to analyze these stresses and then better manage them.

Here is an example of a day one entry:

- Woke up late (alarm did not go off)
- Got the kids off to school in an awful rush, very cranky
- Arrived to work without any breakfast, feeling like a zombie
- Short-tempered with co-workers all day
- Picked up kids from school and nearly bit their heads off
- Locked myself in my room.
- Stayed in room entire night, sleeping and watching TV, had a bath

Your Stress Diary will better help you to understand:

> What causes your stress in more detail?
> Level of stress that you operate at most efficiently
> How do you react to stress? Are your reactions appropriate and useful?
When you write your Stress Diary each day, you will gain valuable insight that will help you to manage stress more proactively.

So that you can best analyze your stress, include the following information:

*Date and time of each entry

*How do you feel right now? On a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being miserable and 10 being ecstatic

*Record your mood on a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being low and 10 being very happy

*Record how effective you feel you are on a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being very ineffective and 10 being highly effective

*How stressed out do you feel? On a scale of 1 – 10 with 1 being in a Zen state and 10 feeling like you are crawling out of your skin

*What stress symptom do you feel?

*How did you handle the stress?

Analyze your Stress Diary

Commit to making daily entries into your diary over a reasonable period of time. After a period of about 4 weeks, you should be able to start to see patterns.

Some of your behaviors which are provoked by stress will be repeated on a regular basis. Make a list of those behaviors that you see most often. These will be the stressors in your daily life you will want to learn to control first.

Next, look at the causes of these obvious stressors. Also, look at how well you managed them on a day-by-day basis. When you can identify areas where you can learn to manage your stress responses better, list those.

List all of the every day events of your life that cause you stress and list how these events made you feel.
By now you can see the contrast in what events cause you the most stress compared to what events cause you the least. You can now see at what stress level you can function best. Your goal now will be to lessen the stress in your life by managing how you deal with stressful situations and you can do this by responding to the stress in your life in a more proactive/positive manner.

**POWERFUL TOOLS TO HELP MANAGE EVERYDAY STRESS**

Often times stress will manifest when we carry over yesterday’s concerns into our present day concerns. An accumulation will almost always end up in a high stress level. Therefore, we must be able to “dump” all of our concerns from the previous day or days and concentrate wholly on our today.

**Stress Busting Tip #1**

Resolve right now to release every thought from yesterday and be only mindful of the now…. *this thought only...this breath...this moment.* Take in three very deep breaths and slowly release each one.

At the same time feel each and every concern, each and every problem, and each and every unresolved moment, begin to dissolve. You can deal with them at a later time. For now, you are only to be in this very moment.

Now go to your inner quiet place. Go deep inside to a place where you feel that you are at peace and then just relax and breathe in deeply and enjoy the feeling of being at one and at peace within yourself.

Use this special time and place to be calm. Free your mind and body of all worry, all regret, all disappointment, all anger and grief.

**Stress Busting Tip #2**

Next, think of one particular act, such as rocking your baby, taking a quick stroll, raking the leaves, and do that one simple thing. All the while, your mind is quiet and calm and you are in your own special place within.

Practice this act of quiet and calm each day and you will see that you will accomplish so much more. At the first sign of being stressed, go back to this
mindful, quiet place and start all over again until you have reached your inner place of calm.

Stress Busting Tip #3

The very best thing that you can do for yourself is to eat, drink and rest – to your health!

Stress is easily brought on by not eating and drinking properly. When you don’t get the number of hours of sleep that you need each night, you are only setting yourself up for additional stress.

Limit the amount of salt, sugar, caffeine and alcohol in your diet. Drink plenty of clean, pure water each day and do at least moderate exercise each day. This will breathe new life into your skin, hair and will nourish all of your vital organs.

Take time to breathe properly! Take deep belly breathes to send pure oxygen to all of your body.

Laugh and then laugh some more. It is food for the soul! Spend time doing the things that please you most. Engage in healthy and fulfilling relationships and work on problems that would erode the closeness that you have with someone special.

When we are content and living a balanced life everyday stresses seem to pale in comparison. We are better equipped to deal with the unexpected.

Stress Busting Tip #4

Often times when we have too much stress in our lives, we want to just give up. We must always hope for something better! When we give up our fight-or-flight seems to just fizzle and we become caught up in a maze of one unfortunate event following another.

You can take control today! Isolate only one particular stressor in your life and then work on it until you regain control. At the very least, have some new hope!

Being hopeful is a quiet confidence that eventually, all will be well. Write out a plan today about how you will tackle just one major problem in your life. Write it out step-by-step. Make an action plan about how you will tackle each of those points.

Slowly, as you begin to work on your problems, you will start to see that there is hope for a brighter tomorrow. You must believe that, otherwise, you will feel defeated before you even begin.
To actualize the hope you feel, sit in a comfortable chair and close your eyes. Take your mind to a place that pleases you and begin to feel every one of your muscles begin to relax. Command each muscle to relax. Constrict and then relax each of your muscles.

Have a beautiful picture in your mind. Imagine you are a part of that beautiful picture now and imagine that as you work on your problems you will become that beautiful picture. Your life will become that beautiful picture.

Sit and relax, deep breathing, seeing only that beautiful picture. See all of your most pressing problems resolved. See how you will work to resolve each of your problems. When you sit up from your relaxed state, write out how you will tackle the problems you have just imagined.

Now, go about doing what you have written one step at a time. The ability to relax, meditate, imagine and plan to resolve a problem is a proven stress buster. You can take control of each and every problem in your life that causes you undue stress.

You can make the stress work for you!

**MANAGE YOUR STRESS THROUGH MENTAL IMAGERY**

We are not always able to escape our environment when we feel stressed. For some, taking a simple walk to clear the head is something that must be put off. What we all can do, though, is take a few moments to sit in our chair and use imagery to melt away our stress.

*Used with deep breathing, imagery can be a powerful anti-stress tool.*

Imagery makes good use of our imagination. From the imagination we can draw on any number of experiences. We can recall a time and a place where we were at peace, where our surroundings were blissful and beautiful to the eye. We can recreate from memory to bring ourselves out of a stressful situation and into an intensely relaxing situation.

When you picture a pleasant and relaxing scene in your mind, this reduces stress. Your body quickly responds by relaxing. On the other hand, if you create an image in your mind of an unpleasant and stressful situation, your stress levels will quickly increase.
To Create Imagery

Many people enjoy listening to a quiet CD of a favorite nature retreat or similar when doing this imagery.

Begin by relaxing in a comfortable chair and deep breathing. Take deep, cleansing breaths and then release them slowly. Start by imagining a scene, place or event that you recall as being safe, peaceful, restful, beautiful and happy. Bring all your senses into this imagery with recalling sounds of cool, running water, the song of birds, the smell of fresh cut grass, the heat of the sun, etc. Imagine that you are at a place free from stress and pressure.

Concentrate on developing your five senses. Savor the pictures of serenity. Smell the freshness of nature. Feel the warmth and comfort of the sun and the air. Behold of the beauty of the animals, of nature. Each image will be different to each person. Really focus on what you can see, taste, touch, smell and feel.

Now imagine that all of your stress, all of your worries and all of your concerns are being zapped from your body. Feel each stress point release as if into thin air. As you feel the stress drain from your body return back to your picture of imagery. Relax there and deep breathe.

Imagery substitutes your actual experience with something much more ideal. It allows you a renewed sense of self-confidence to take on the stress of your life. During imagery, your body is relaxed and recharged. Your stress levels lessen and adrenaline disperses. It gives your mind and body a break over the stress having control and you have complete mastery over the mind and body for that time. Imagery is a great life balancer!

PHYSICAL RELAXATION

Stress and physical relaxation do not co-exist.

Physical relaxation techniques are highly effective in reducing stress. The highest form of relaxation is achieved with both physical and mental techniques used together.

Physical relaxation techniques are useful to reduce muscle tension and manage the effects of the fight-or-flight response on the body. This is particularly important when you are under pressure.
Deep Breathing Technique

Deep breathing is a very simple, effective way to relax. It is a core part of well-known relaxation techniques, everything from the "take ten deep breaths" approach to yoga relaxation and Zen meditation.

It works well with complimentary techniques such as progressive relaxation, relaxation imagery and meditation to effectively deal with stress.

To use the technique, take a number of very deep and purposeful breaths and then relax your body further with each breath out. There is no magic to doing this. It is that simple!

Progressive Relaxation

Progressive Relaxation will relax your body, especially when your muscles are the most tense.

The idea behind PR is that you purposely tense a group of muscles so that they are as tightly contracted as possible. Hold them in this state of extreme tension for only a few seconds. Next, relax the muscles as you normally would. Next, consciously relax your muscles yet further so that you are as relaxed as you can be.

By first purposely tensing your muscles, you will then be better able to relax your muscles than if you tried to relax your muscles directly.

Experiment with PR by forming a tight fist, and then clench your hand as tight as you can for just a few seconds. Relax your hand now and then go back to the same tension.

Finally, relax your hand again so that it is as loose as possible. You should now feel very deep relaxation in your hand muscles. You can exact the same result by doing this exercise throughout your entire body.

The Relaxation Response
‘The Relaxation Response’ is a term penned by Dr Herbert Benson of Harvard University in 1968. He had good success with reducing stress and controlling the fight-or-flight response.

Direct effects of Dr. Benson’s relaxation techniques includes deep relaxation, slowed heartbeat and breathing, reduced oxygen consumption and increased skin resistance.

The Relaxation Response Technique is as follows:

1. Sit comfortably and quietly
**
2. Close your eyes
**
3. Start by relaxing the muscles of your feet and then work up your body relaxing each of your body muscles
**
4. Focus/Breathe purposefully/Deeply/Calmly
**
5. Breathe in deeply and then let your breath out. Count your breaths, and say the number of the breaths as you let each one out
**
Do this for ten to twenty minutes.

Alternatively, follow the above steps, using relaxation imagery instead of counting breaths in step 5.

Being Aware of How We Think (Rational and Positive Thinking)

Much of the stress in our everyday lives can come from our thought processes. How we perceive a situation can be off and so we can feel that we are off. We can jump to wrong conclusions about people’s motives and so be seen as unreasonable. All of this can send us spinning downward into a spiral of negative thinking and so stress is born.
Here are some effective and simple tools that help to change this negative thinking.

Any given situation in your life is not stressful in itself. Your perception of the situation is what will or will not make it stressful. Stress will arise quickly if:

** You feel threatened in any way
** You feel your resources will not be sufficient to meet with a demand
** How much damage you feel this situation can do to you
** Whether or not your resources will be enough to meet with the demand.

A person with a calm and well-balanced life will not perceive threat easily, while a person who is frazzled and feeling low certainly will.

When we are feeling low and without reserves to deal with stress, we become easily stressed: Physically, socially, emotionally and in our careers. Feeling this type of stress serves as an early warning signal to alert us to take immediate and positive action! To ignore these important signals means we will definitely suffer.

**Using Thought Awareness to Deal with Stress**

Be on guard to watch for negative thinking when stress arises. If you are thinking negatively about your future, putting yourself down, criticizing your efforts, doubting your abilities, or planning for failure, you then become paralyzed to deal with stress.

Your negativity will only serve to damage your much needed self-confidence, harm your performance and deplete your mental recourse.

>>>> One way to effectively counter-balance stress is to be forever aware of your stream of consciousness as you think about a stressful situation. Do not deny your negative thoughts, instead, just let them happen, acknowledge them, and then write them down as they occur<<<<

As you become more and more familiar with your thought patterns, which are negative and which are not, look back at your Stress Diary. You will easily see patterns that emerge detailing the same or similar negative thoughts.

Once you have identified which negative thoughts cause you the most problems, you can then take action to deal with them more effectively.
Step One to Managing Negative Thoughts is to acknowledge them.

Step Two to Managing Negative Thoughts is to write them down.

Step Three to Managing Negative Thoughts is to deal with them.

Thought awareness can be your first effective step in the process of managing negative thoughts. Remember, you cannot manage thoughts that you do not acknowledge first.

Use Rational Thought to Deal with Stress

The practice of rational thought allows you to separate the positive thought from the negative. Study each of the negative thoughts that you have identified using the Thought Awareness. Look at each thought and ask yourself if this thought is, in fact, reasonable. Many people find this step very difficult, because you must be somewhat objective to get it right. You must separate the emotion from the rational.

Let’s take a look now at your Stress Diary. We will identify where you have had frequent negative thoughts:

I feel inadequate (written 5 times in 6 days)
I feel taken advantage of (written 3 times in 5 days)
I feel I am not appreciated by my kids (written 6 times in 6 days)

Are the above comments only thoughts and feelings on your part or can you back your feelings up with actions?

For Example: I feel inadequate because when I was asked to bake for the bake sale, I felt poorly that day and remained in bed, unable to bake.

Ask yourself if this is an occurrence that is frequent (your staying in bed and not baking) or if this was a one time thing. If the answer is that you do, in fact, stay in bed a good deal rather than participate in some school function, you might want to look further into avoidance issues.

On the other hand, if this was just a one time thing for you, you could easily tell yourself that your feelings are unwarranted and your kids would understand that
you wanted to bake but simply could not at that time. There will be plenty of other school functions that you will be able to help out with.

The key to rational thought is to clarify and identify truth and underlying thoughts and feelings. When you can do this, you are better able to deal with any stress that results.

Left with the actual negative feelings and thoughts, you are now warned to take appropriate, and if need be, immediate action to ward off any subsequent stress.

Lastly, positively affirm those thoughts and feelings that turned out to be less than negative.

For example:

I felt inadequate, however, I no longer do. I now realize that I do participate when called upon by my kid’s school to contribute, unless I am unable to help at that time. I will continue to help out to the best of my ability and where time permits.

So long as you mean what you write (and say it out verbally) you will feel the stress leave your body and mind as you state the positive and negate the negative.

Go through your entire Stress Diary in this way and you will feel much more relaxed and be less apt to make similar entries into your Stress Diary next time around.

BUST YOUR STRESS AWAY!

Sometimes it is just the little things that make a big difference. Own just five Stress Busters each day and practice them, and you will feel the tension leave!

Lie in bed and just listen to the rain.
****
Dry off with towels warmed in the dryer.
****
Hold hands when walking with your loved one.
****
Make a surprise call to an old friend.
Engage in purposeful, stimulating conversation.

Spend the day at the beach -- any time.

Make good on your promised favor.

Tell the new guy your *Inside* jokes.

Kiss and make up.

Plant that first kiss. (Any kiss.)

Spend time with puppies, babies, and kittens.

Give up your parking space for today.

Sip on a Turtles hot chocolate.

Take that surprise road trip.

Swing on a swing.

Fall in love all over again.

Go to a really good concert.

Bake homemade cookies for the entire office.

Treat yourself to a free day.

Pay a compliment.

Learn something new and exciting.

Get lost in a great book.
****

Treat family to a really great movie.
****
Reply to your emails same day.
****
Do something/anything one time only.
****

Accept yourself just as you are.
****
Buy a present -- just because.
****
Give the first crocus of spring.
****

First day of fresh snow, go skiing.
****
Do that promised home improvement.
****
Have yourself a really good cry.
****

Next time say, “No charge.”
****

Do the work you love.
****

Finish that important project.
****

Wear only comfortable shoes.
****
Buy that sweater you really want.
****
Enjoy a brand new day; a fresh start.
****

LAUGH YOUR STRESS AWAY
Humor is a terrific stress-reducer and antidote to all manner of upsets. It has been clinically proven to be effective in combating the worst of stress.

Experts know that a good laugh relaxes tense muscles, sends more oxygen into your system, quicker and lowers your blood pressure.

So next time you feel yourself start to tense up, tune into your favorite comedy on television. Read a funny book. Call up a good friend and laugh heartily for a few good minutes. It doesn’t even hurt to just force a good laugh now and then. You'll find your stress melting away with each breath!

Americans were attracted to humor while reading the stories of Norman Cousins. This man successfully overcame cancer by watching his favorite comedy shows on television.

These days, you can attend an organized humor meeting and even in places such as India where laughing in a public place is frowned upon.

Dr. Lee Berk, along with fellow researcher Dr. Stanley Tan at Loma Linda University School of Medicine, has taken up carefully controlled studies that show the experience of laughter lowers serum cortisol levels, increases the amount of activated T lymphocytes, increases the number and activity of natural killer cells, and increases the number of T cells that have helper/ suppresser receptors.

This is powerful evidence that laughter stimulates the immune system and this off-sets the immunosuppressive effects of stress. Laughter is powerful medicine!

Research has proven that laughter can lower cortisol levels and thereby protects our immune system.

The emotions and moods that we are all subject to directly effects our immune system. It makes perfect sense, then, that when we cultivate a mood of humor this allows us to perceive and appreciate the everyday nuances of life through experiences of joy and delight.

Such positive states of mood and emotion creates neurochemical changes that act to buffer the immunosuppressive effects of stress.

Stress research pioneer, Selye, noted that a person's interpretation of stress is not dependent only on an external event; it also depends on the perception of the event and the meaning given to it.

This points to the fact that we can learn to control our reaction to stress. How we look at a situation, then, determines if we will respond to it as a threat or as a challenge.
Humor gives us an entirely different perspective on our problems. If we can perceive it in a lighter bent it is no longer a threat to us. We have already discounted its effect by lightening it. With such an attitude we serve to self-protect and so control our environment.

**Bill Cosby coined an important phrase when he said, "If you can laugh at it, you can survive it."

It's certainly very difficult to force a laugh while in a stressful situation. However, that's precisely the time when you need to laugh the most. Remember, the trick is to take control over your environment or situation. That way you are more apt to feel challenged and less threatened.

Any way you can slice it – lighten up and feel less stress. Calm over chaos is the phrase of the day. Begin by trying to find humor in the worst of situations. If you must, blow the situation way out of proportion, just to make yourself laugh. Make the serious look ridiculous. When you reach the point of absurdity, you can then begin to melt and calm. Practice makes perfect!

**SELF THERAPY FOR NAGGING DAILY STRESS**

It is all well and good when you can get away to a wonderful Spa or Retreat. There are many good ones located throughout the world. You can even find a great day Spa locally. These are a great remedy for everyday stress.

Another great remedy and a more practical one for everyday stress is to practice self-therapy.

Here are a few great suggestions that you can start with right away:

Great for your aching back and muscle tension

Begin by massaging some soothing essential oil or peppermint lotion into your feet. Work those thumbs slowly as you move up the arch. In terms of Reflexology, this area on your feet will correspond with the lumbar, thoracic and cervical spine area, respectively.

FYI: The tips of your cute toes correspond with your sinus region.
Treat yourself to wide, sweeping movements, working your way up and down your entire foot area. As you land on your toe area, spend some time kneading and massaging with purposeful motions.

TIP: Apply good amounts of pressure for best results.

Cover each and every tiny spot on your feet and toes until your whole body responds with a tingling sensation. Now switch with your buddy and work your way to your back!

Great soothing workout for your mid-section

Wearing loose, baggy clothing, retreat to a quite place and then softly close your eyes. Exhale any of the old, stale air from your lungs and then place your hand below your navel and rest.

Take in deep breaths, slowly, through your nose and feel as your belly begins to expand. As you breathe out, imagine that you are exhaling through your ribcage all the way around. Now repeat this in the same way as you imagine inhaling and exhaling through the kidneys or your mid-lower back.

FYI: When you breathe deeply and purposefully, this is called "belly-breathing." This oxygenates your tired blood and helps you to focus better.

You experience a "calm" signal inside and this diminishes all stress so that you can breathe easier.

For the Multi-Tasker in all of us

You can only be so efficient in your lifetime when your little, inner child starts to call you out to play. Just how serious can life be, after all?

Make a point to get down on all fours and play with your kids today! Grab the silly putty and make some cute little critters. Get the slinky out and remember what awe you felt when you first saw that sucker jiggle its way down your stairs!

Make today the first day for your new outlook. Give yourself permission to feel a new sense of adventure. Get those travel mags out and decide with hubby where you will go next and then start planning and saving!
Do something daring and especially do something that will make you want to just laugh your fool head off!

Do this and you will instantly release tension. Remember that all of this positive play will boost endorphins and increase your "feel-good" factor.

FYI: LOTS of creative play is what is needed to support optimal wellness of your body-mind and spirit.

A very effective 5 minute relaxation exercise for those on the go

It’s time to tense up! Purposefully clench every muscle in your body, including your fists, abs, teeth, cheeks, shoulders, ears and even your toes!

Hold on to the tension for a full 10 seconds.

Slowly begin to release each muscle one at a time.

As you inhale think of joy, peace, love and friendship.

As you exhale think of those things that cause you stress, one at a time and just let them all go.

FYI: When you visualize the things that you love as well as what causes you stress and then associate that with relaxation breathing, you are cleansing your body of the negative and filling with the positive.

Looking for a good night’s sleep

If you toss and turn at night, unable to empty from your mind, the contents of a busy day, this is a great relaxation exercise for you!

- Bring a note book to your bedside.
- Turn on slow, soft mood music.
- Lie quietly and as thoughts come in to disturb your solace, write them all down.
When you are ready to fall asleep you will have “dumped” all of the noisy thoughts and clatter from your busy day that would serve to steal your sleep from you. Writing it all out helps you to empty your mind of it.

Reread all of your notes making a mental note to release all your cares down a sea of care. Envision each of your worries out on a raft about to hit the waterfall. Watch as the raft is eaten up by the falls and so goes your worries.

Return to your peaceful sleep listening to your peaceful music. You will fall asleep peacefully now.

NATURAL STRESS-BUSTERS GAINED FROM SIMPLE PLEASURES

There’s just no two ways about it, being active, in mind, spirit and body is what keeps the stress away best. The more engaged we are in healthy activity the less place stress will have in our lives.

Make a vow to yourself, today, to do at least 3 simple stress-busting pleasures each day and you will instantly feel much, much better.

Enjoy moderate, pleasurable exercise like bike or swim
~~~~

Remove your watch and go for a timeless walk
~~~~

Give a hug, a kiss or an orgasm (these all release endorphins)
~~~~

Cultivate interest in music you love
~~~~

Make some music you love
~~~~

Select from 3 cards and send to 3 people just because
~~~~

Phone in for a "well" day and then have a ball!
Offer a heartfelt apology

Spend the day downtown and pretend you are a tourist

Play with your children today, all day!

Tell somebody how much you appreciate them

Smile at everyone you see today

Shoot some hoops with a neighbor’s kid

Shoot some pool with your own kid

Shoot the breeze with a neighbor you thought you did not like

Take a walk or bike ride on a new route

Always meditate and practice mindful breathing all days

Go to an arts event of some kind even if you don’t think you will enjoy it

Dance like a pro!

Cook your spouse a favorite meal

Take mom out for a favorite meal

Go someplace special like to see a beach sunset
Start a new hobby such as gardening

Begin a new journal

Write a poem

Settle in for a really good movie (don't forget the popcorn)

Reduce all sugar, caffeine, alcohol just for 1 week

Get back in touch with someone you miss

Pay someone to come and clean out the garage

Organize your closet

Donate the clothes you never wear to charity

Do a kind deed but don’t tell

Curl up on the couch with a really good book

Spend the whole day at the Spa

Spend the day giving someone you love a good massage

Play board games all day long and into the night.....

Go for some acupuncture
Wear wild colors today, all day

Buy 2 bunches of flowers. One to keep and one to give

Meditate by the ocean listening to the soothing relaxation

Go for aromatherapy or reflexology

Take a yoga class

Hang out at your favorite bookstore

Invite a friend out to a movie, a concert or a play

Frame that picture for your best friend

Put some coins in someone’s expired parking meter

Pre-pay the toll for the car following you

Volunteer your time at a food bank or soup kitchen

Don’t just volunteer your time, volunteer you!

Commit yourself to a spiritual belief or ceremony

Treat yourself to a hot bubble bath by candlelight

Go on tour with Mother Nature (see the woods, mountains, desert)
Go fly a kite!

Treat yourself to something pampering (a manicure or new hairstyle)

Wait in line for a free makeover in a department store

Retreat to your favorite store and buy 1 gift just for you

Join a book club

Brew a special cup of tea and offer it to someone else

Try a new recipe at a new exotic restaurant

Paint the kid’s room a fresh, new color

Bring home a new fur ball (pet)

Surprise your family with a fun Sunday drive into the country

Blow bubbles with your kids

Make a snow angel with your husband

Go back to school to teach

Update your photo album

Gather round and plan the next family vacation
ANOTHER GOOD REMEDY FOR EVERYDAY STRESS

Do you feel that you just don’t have the time to properly de-stress each day? The good news is you can incorporate simple stress busting routines into all that you do!

Stretch those muscles!

Lean your right ear down to your right shoulder and stretch the left side of your neck as you do. Now, switch sides and do the other side. Now, look down and drop your chin towards your chest. Now slowly, let your head roll to the right and then to the left. Repeat slowly until you feel yourself loosen up.

You can do this same exercise for your shoulders, too. Try a few shoulder circles, as well. This is simple to do and when you take the time to do these several times a day, your range of motion will increase and you’ll feel considerably more relaxed.

Enjoy a relaxing massage

Treat yourself to a professional therapist massage and be sure to ask for a calming essential oil such as lavender or chamomile. Buy yourself some of the same oil to take home, and when you’re having a stressful moment, put a few drops of oil onto your tissue or pillowcase and then just breathe into it deeply. You can also use some of the oil to be infused into the air with a diffuser. Just smelling the oil will relax you even if you don’t get to have a massage!

Wear a Smile

Always begin your day with a broad smile on your face. Purpose in your heart to be lighthearted on this day and every time you see someone pass them a big, sincere smile. You will be surprised how easily this action will affect your mood.
Share in a good joke or two and try to make someone else laugh. Feeling lighthearted is a good thing! Just ask Martha Stewart!

That Small Inner Voice -- Talk to yourself

Gently close your eyes and repeat positive affirmations. Tell yourself over and over what you want to believe to be true, such as: 'I am calm' or 'I am confident and sure…' Keep in mind that what you believe to be true will be felt by your body!

In Support of Good Posture

Take in a few, good deep breaths as you sit up very tall. Put your feet flat on the floor. At the same time angle your thighs slightly toward the floor, arch in your lower back slightly, gently push your sternum (chest bone) back and then relax your shoulders.

Take in another good deep breath and hold your position for a minute or two. Don't allow your posture to slouch at all during this time – hold your position upright and support your good posture.

As your good posture continues to align, you will relieve all muscle tension. Do this exercise twice daily and you will find yourself naturally supporting your good posture each day.

Have Some Fresh Air and Take a Brisk Walk

If you must be indoors most of your day, taking a break to breathe in pure air and to exercise your limbs will be an instant refresher. Doing this will give you back good concentration and you will feel more limber.

Spend only 20 to 30 minutes each day taking in fresh air and walking and you will improve both physically and mentally. If you have a dog, take them along with you. They need to be refreshed just as you do.

Take up a Relaxing Hobby
Spend an afternoon at your local craft store and select a new hobby. A good hobby that really interests you will breathe new life into your day. You will be more relaxed and enjoy having a new interest. Whether you choose painting, playing an instrument, knitting, or even kite flying, choose something that will encourage calm and serenity.

Try a Relaxing Form of Eastern Meditation such as Tai Chi

Take time to focus from within and you will cultivate a spirit of self control over the anxiety-ridden external world.

Take a good book to bed with you each night and spend 30 minutes relaxing before you turn out the light. This will be calming and as you close yours eyes each night remind yourself of your many blessings.

Give Lots of Hugs and Kisses Daily

Even on your busiest days, stop and hug and kiss someone who is special to you. Your children, especially, need to know how much they mean to you. A show of affection will go a long way.

Spend time each day with a beloved pet. Studies have shown that when we care for a pet we release anxiety and tension, naturally.

Spend quality time with your loved one. Remember those special times with your spouse before the children came along. Nurture moments with just the two of you and you will relax, naturally.

Replace that Uncomfortable Office Chair with an Ab Ball

Next time you leave for your office, stop, first into a fitness store and buy an Ab Ball. This ball will allow your core muscles to have a great wake up call. Just sit on your Ab Ball and then bounce on the spot! You will feel instantly refreshed and your co-workers will want to do the same!
Just as it is time to take your lunch, first bounce on your Ab Ball to get your gastro-juices going! You will firm up your body in no time and best of all you will have fun!

Breathe in the Gift of Life

We can all go for weeks without a crumb of food, days at a time without water, but, we can only go for minutes without good, pure oxygen.

The average person breathes very shallowly and this makes it almost impossible to be relaxed.

Sit yourself down, purposefully, and take in a slow deep breath in through your nose until you have properly filled up your lungs.

Hold in the air in for a moment and then very slowly exhale through your lips. Breathe deeply in this way for 4 - 5 times, a few times a day.

You will feel instantly refreshed!

Listen to the Gift of Music

As much as possible, always set your mood with background mood music. Some like traditional blues, some like jazz. Try the newer nature sounds, so you can be working to background sounds of tin pans, flutes and ocean waves crashing on the beach. Whatever you choose, make sure it relaxes and does not energize you. There is a time to be energized and a time to relax. For relaxation, select the mood music over the rock and roll or the hip hop.

A CLOSE KINSHIP -- RELAXATION AND SCENT

Our sense of smell is one of the most powerful tools we have to combat the negativity of stress.

An ocean breeze, the fresh smell of the forest after a rainfall, the pristine scent of a crisp winter morning – all of this uplifts our spirit.
Essential oils allow us to bring the exhilarating scent of the outdoors into our indoor lives. As we must secure our windows to the cold of winter, just a few strategically placed sprays of an essential oil, and we have the best of both worlds!

Magical Essential Oil Combinations

To begin: Fill a mist spray bottle with purified water and then add the essential oils.

Tighten the cap well and shake the bottle. The longer the mixture remains in the bottle; the scent strengthens and improves in potency.

Essential Sunshine

50 drops of Lime essential oil
50 drops of Grapefruit essential oil
10 drops of Orange essential oil
10 drops of Patchouli essential oil
Mix with 4 ounces of pure water

Essential Flower Garden

75 drops of Ylang-Ylang essential oil
25 drops of Orange essential oil
20 drops of Clove essential oil
Mix with 4 ounces of pure water

Essential Rain Forest

40 drops of Pine essential oil
40 drops of Cajuput essential oil
20 drops of Cypress essential oil
20 drops of Sandalwood essential oil
Mix with 4 ounces of pure water
Essential Spice for your Life

25 drops of Marjoram essential oil
25 drops of Sage essential oil
25 drops of Spearmint or Peppermint essential oil
25 drops of Clove essential oil
20 drops of Patchouli essential oil
Mix with 4 ounces of pure water

Essential Room Disinfectant

65 drops of Tea Tree essential oil
50 drops of Thyme essential oil
35 drops of Eucalyptus essential oil
Mix with 4 ounces of pure water

When you feel particularly stressed and need a little extra boost:

Place the following blended oils into an aroma lamp with a small bit of pure water.

Inhale the vapors deeply for best results

Essential Breathe Easy

5 drops of Lemon essential oil
5 drops of Pine essential oil
5 drops of Lavender essential oil
5 drops of Peppermint essential oil

Essential Room Freshener

5 drops of Lemon essential oil
5 drops of Tea Tree essential oil
5 drops of Sage essential oil
5 drops of Cajuput essential oil
Essential Carpet Refresh

Mix this blend in a wide mouthed glass jar and tighten cap. Let mixture sit for at least 24 hours. Sprinkle mixture over carpeting and let rest for 10 minutes. Vacuum.

Formula #1)

50 drops of Lime essential oil
30 drops of Orange essential oil
20 drops of Patchouli oil
Mix with ½ cup baking soda

Formula 2)

30 drops of Eucalyptus essential oil
30 drops of Cinnamon essential oil
30 drops of Lemongrass essential oil
10 drops of Clove essential oil
Mix with ½ cup of baking soda

Essential Furniture Polish

For a beautiful shine! Combine ingredients and polish gently.

10 drops of Ylang-Ylang essential oil
1 ounce of Jojoba carrier oil

Use these essential oil combinations in your daily life and you will never have a blah smell throughout your home ever again. Just see the difference in how your mood changes!
Everybody needs their own special place to relax. For many, they choose a place that is outdoors. Where do we go when we want to relax inside of our home?

Consider decorating one aspect of your home, meant only to encourage and promote relaxation. One of the best ways to do this is to bring the outdoors in. What better way than to bring in natural, raw elements, inspired by nature?

Design a Relaxing Room

Design one room in your home that complements the outside of your house. The design will flow more gracefully along with the outside and the overall appearance of your home will be far more harmonious and appealing.

Homes that are enjoyed, primarily, in the summer months, often feature "solariums." These are truly beautiful rooms, filled with plants and flowers, and natural wood furniture that look light and airy. Wicker furniture has been enjoyed for centuries and is still very popular, today, along with cushion fabrics that have wide, bold displays of floral patterns.

To earmark this one room as your relaxation room, think about using all of the natural colors and hues from the great outdoors.

Begin in the Garden

Start by deciding on a garden color to be dominant in your room design. A good suggestion would be to start with the natural hues of pink, salmon and similar pale colors. You can also swing for the deeper and bolder colors of bright yellows, reds and oranges.

For best effect, add tones of green. This will be a major part of your interior palette; you just need to decide where and how much of the green will be used.

Your walls and floors will be used as the background for everything else you will design in your relaxation room. As you decide on the feeling or mood of the room, think about these two large areas to begin with. Your objective is to bring indoors the feeling of an outdoor garden, so think about materials to be found in nature.
Wood should immediately come to mind and, if you already have hardwood floors under your carpeting, let that be part of the design of your room. The money you might spend on wall-to-wall carpeting can be best used in another area of your home.

Next take a look at the walls. Natural green will be the background color for your indoor “garden,” so follow this same design and use a soft pale green as your wall color. Choose a neutral color of green and this way, a tone of almost every other color will work with it nicely. Keep your ceiling a soft white or ivory and then add white crown molding and baseboard molding to frame your walls.

You will now have a soft glow from your beautifully finished wood floor and the neutral, soft green walls. You are now ready to choose your furniture and fabrics. This is the fun part!

Bring in the Warmth of Summer with Wicker

White wicker furniture will nicely compliment your relaxation room. Nothing says calm and serenity like warm white.

Most people appreciate the charm of white wicker furniture. Pre-summer is the best time to buy wicker. Gardening shops anticipate the summer run on buying outdoor furniture and have a good supply.

An alternative to buying wicker furniture is to consider buying bamboo, rattan and sea grass furniture. All of these are very popular for bringing the outdoors in. Costs are quite reasonable.

For fabrics, think floral. These are your best bet when creating a garden inspired room. These work very well with any of the furniture styles that we've mentioned. The important note here is to be consistent.

Some great ideas to consider are the following:

Traditional "cabbage chintz" patterns
Caribbean patterns
Indonesian patterns
Hawaiian-style tropical prints
Softer, more subtle Laura Ashley style patterns
You will need a good sense of coordination to pull off layering of florals, patterns and stripes, so ask for help.

You can ask fabric companies to show you selected combinations of floral designs and complementary stripes, plaids and solid colors as whole groupings. This will simplify your task. Find these presentations in home decorating sections of large hardware stores or in fabric stores that specialize in home decor.

Select simple, understated window treatments to frame your view to the outdoor garden and to help bring the outdoors in. Choose from neutral hues, muted and not bold.
To help define the seating area in your room look for area rugs of sisal, coir, jute or synthetic materials that replicate natural fibers. Ask the carpet stores to make you rugs that have borders to complement the colors you'll use in your upholstery and drapes.
Finally, no relaxation room will be complete without a generous display of live plants and flowers. They're the final touch that brings the realistic impression of having your outdoors flowing to the inside.

Fill your relaxation room with everything that you love and enjoy best. Stock up on good books, board games, a great music system - anything that will promote rest and calm. Make this your special room and you will have a lovely retreat to go to whenever you need to most.

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CREATE A PERSONAL HOME SPA EXPERIENCE AND DE-STRESS IN PURE COMFORT

Here are some really simple and creative personal home spa tips that will have you feeling like a million bucks in no time at all!

When you find the time to pamper yourself, even just a little bit at a time, stress will just melt from your body.

Turn even the most stress-filled days into true warmth with the luxury of a home spa and you will feel the difference, instantly!

Let's Prepare:

No need to leave your home.

-Go for your robe and slippers
-Find a soothing CD that you love
- Find a scented candle
- Find a washcloth, loofah sponge, bath brush or any skin exfoliation tool
- Find a fluffy cotton towel
- Find bath salts and/or essential aromatic oils
- Find skin cleansers, toners and moisturizers
- Find coarse sea salt
- From the kitchen, go for chilled spring water (with a splash of lime or lemon) in the fanciest glass you can find
- Fix a cup of green tea

Next:

- Release everything about your busy day...any obligations...all responsibilities...let go of the stress...and strain.

- Quiet your mind!

- Relax.

- Welcome Yourself to Your At Home Spa Vacation!

- Slow down all thoughts. Slow down breath and all movements. Relax.

- Put on your favorite mood music.

- Begin your bath now, slipping in your favorite salt or oil.

- Light your candles. Watch as they begin to burn....slowly....purposefully. Smell the beauty of the scent. Breathe in deeply.

- Run your hands through your bath. Feel the oils, the salts.

- Enter into your bath and feel the luxury of it as the water envelopes your entire body!

- Wet your washcloth and then cover both your face and neck and then stop to compress for five minutes. Repeat this three more times.

- Gently, slowly towel dry and finish your face with an anti-oxidant, anti-inflammatory facial splash.

- It is time now to rejuvenate the skin, eliminate waste, alleviate stress, enhance your mood, restore vitality and facilitate the regeneration of new, healthy cells.

- Now, as your face is just tingling and refreshed, it is time for a basic body scrub and cleansing.
- Try the freshness of lavender
- Scrub your entire body free of all stress and concerns
- Scrub using gentle circular movements
- Eliminates all toxins in the skin
  
  - Refresh your circulation

- Next, mix an ounce of ground sea salt with 10 drops of your favorite essential oil.

- Add the water to make a paste that spreads easily.

- Apply it to your entire body and slowly slough off the dead skin with big circular strokes. This will greatly cleanse the pores and help your body get rid of any toxins.

A Delicious Home Spa Bath

- Place 5 to 10 drops of an essential oil into your favorite bath salts and add to bath water.
- Get yourself an extra pillow.

- Place a kitchen trash bag over it to keep it dry.
  
  - Place another pillow case over that.

- Now, enjoy some extra time luxuriating in your spa bathtub!

- Why not spend some time reading a good book?

- Follow with a reviving shower and warm, fluffy bath towel!

Spa Treatment for your Fabulous Hair!

Your hair needs to be nourished just as the rest of your body.

Try this luxurious natural shampoo:

* Add ¼ ounce of lavender to sixteen ounces of shampoo. 
For oily hair, add ¼ ounce of lemongrass or rosemary to 16 ounces of shampoo.
*Use Rosemary essential oils and massage your scalp vigorously

*Don’t rush – just close your eyes, lay your head back and drift for a moment.

*Add lost moisture to your skin and hair by taking two tablespoons of organic flaxseed oil twice a day. You’ll say good-bye to the itches and combat wrinkles and sagging skin.

*You will experience pure joy and relaxation in your own home day spa. Take the moments you can steal away from each day and make your spa moments a part of your daily routine. Your body, mind and spirit will love you for it!

MORE GOOD RELAXATION TIPS YOU CAN PRACTICE EACH DAY

Our lives are busy and it can be hard to be forever concentrating on finding our “center of peace.”

By following just a few pointed tips each day, you can move towards a more balanced lifestyle. This can only mean more inner strength and relaxation -- and who doesn’t want that?

> Set a time aside each day to relax!
    - give yourself permission
    - don’t waste your time being exhausted.

> Carry a notebook everywhere you go!
    - Jot down everything you need to do
    - cross off as you do it
    - You’ll feel more in control.

> Get the amount of sleep you need each night!
    - do something you love just before bed
    - dab an essential oil on your pillowcase and temples
    - use an eye pillow to help you drift off
    - keep your heat turned low

> As soon as you arrive home from work take a break just for you!
    - retreat; let someone else manage the dinner, the kids, etc.
    - do something relaxing, purposeful, like yoga

> Do an open-eyed meditation exercise!
    - gaze softly at a candle flame
- darken your room
- calm your mind
- Always bring your mind back to the candle
- You will feel warm and relaxed.

> Create a home spa!
- give yourself permission for soothing pleasure
- No interruptions for one full hour
- put on some music
- Light lots of candles
- put bubbles in your bath
- Just soak and let your mind drift

Now that you are wonderfully relaxed, do all you can to maintain that! When you step out from the bath don't immediately start to yell or argue.

If you have to, go to a place where you can just “be” for a while! Once you feel well energized and totally relaxed, dig in and begin your productive evening. Be on your toes and guard from becoming engaged in any activity that will cause you stress.

Have you ever wondered how your next-door neighbor was taking care of his stress, or perhaps you have wondered about how your child’s third grade teacher was taking care of her stress?

Here are Three Random Examples of How Everyday People Deal with Stress:

Stand ready to reassess a misunderstanding with a colleague.
Don't let the behavior of unreasonable people get to me.
Take at least one good holiday a year.
Always keep an external focus by thinking about how my work can best help the greater population.
Always thinking ahead to plan for inevitable upsets as well as prepare for those high pressure events.
Try to see the funny side of life, at all times. (Even those awful times.)
I never drink, eat or shop to relieve stress.
I always cultivate a cohesive team at work. This means a successful team that takes pride in the results it achieves, has a high morale, and with less stressed individuals.
I always listen to a tape or mini-disc of favorite tracks and listen to it at times of high pressure. I will close my eyes and replay my memory of a particular event that was most meaningful to me. I will replay this same event over and over.

Random Response #2

1. I always get up very early in the morning to have a relaxed start to the day. I soak in bubble bath and gather my thoughts and plan for the coming day.
I build good relationships with my staff. We share problems. Talk with my colleagues on a regular basis. I am a good listener. Delegate responsibilities with consideration.
I laugh, laugh, and laugh, with everybody.
I wine and dine with my friends on a regular basis.
I have somebody come over to clean my entire house and do my ironing.
I indulge in water color painting and listen to Rachmaninov concerts played at full volume.
I garden – which I love.
I ride and mess about with my horses, daily.

Random Response #3

• I am in love!

• I expose myself to my favorite form of comedy and I have a good belly laugh for as long as possible.

• I do a physical workout that makes me sweat hard for at least an hour, preferably two. The ensuing endorphin release makes me feel much less stressed.

• I don’t eat or drink to relieve stress, but a little herbal assistance is relaxing ... try some herbal essences in the bath.

• I listen to music that makes me wonder at the beauty of it; the Ramones or Motorhead do it for me every time.

• I go for some close contact stress relief ... I use some essential oils.

• I strive to help someone who is having a hard time with something. Cliché as it is, doing good stuff for other people relieves stress.
• I mentally relive my happiest time, indulging in the actual feeling of the happiness experienced, not the reality of it being gone.

• I go for a full body massage: darkness, mood sounds, aromatherapy etc, with joint clicking (Thai massage is good) lasting at least a full hour.

• I indulge in the unconditional love of an animal companion.

**BE AWARE OF EACH AND EVERY BREATH THAT YOU TAKE**

To be best aware of maintaining your state of calm, pay special attention to your breathing.

Being aware of your breath will improve your physical and emotional health in very dramatic ways.

Every member of the family can be taught to breathe slowly and consciously with breath awareness. The health benefits for the body and emotions will increase over the years as you patiently practice.

**Breath Awareness Tips**

• Gently inhale and exhale through the nose.

• Breathe smoothly, slowly, quietly & continuously.

• Keep your head neck and trunk completely straight.

• Make note of the sensation of coolness as you inhale at the tip of the nose and the sensation of warmth as you exhale.

• Practice slow purposeful breathing with a goal of inhaling for 8 seconds and exhaling for 8 seconds.

• Stay within your comfort zone. Do not strain.

• Practice breath awareness for 12 minutes/twice a day or longer. Your nervous system will gain great benefits from this practice.
TARGETED RELAXATION TECHNIQUES

Try these relaxation techniques that target specific parts of the body:

The Five Finger Exercise

- In a relaxing chair, sit back and take a few deep breaths.

- Next, establish an easy, regular breathing pattern.

- Take in a deep breath and as you exhale, touch your index finger to your thumb. Imagine a time when your body felt a healthy tired, like how you felt after a good tennis match, or just stepping out of a hot tub or sauna....

- Now, take another good deep breath, and as you exhale, touch middle finger to your thumb. Imagine a time when you had an especially loving experience, when you felt warm and safe. Take a moment to really feel that same feeling as vividly as you had experienced it....

- Next, take another deep breath, and as you exhale, touch your ring finger to your thumb and imagine a time when you performed especially well, when you aced something that was important to you. Take that feeling of accomplishment in now and feel it as fully now as you did then...

- Lastly, take one more very deep breath in and as you exhale, touch your little finger to your thumb and as you do, imagine seeing the most beautiful place you have ever experienced...or imagine how you would feel being there now...Take a moment to fully absorb the fullness of what you feel being there.... and when you're entirely ready, and bringing with you all of these same feelings for the rest of your day, come back...
Practice Progressive Relaxation

In the early 1920’s, Edmund Jacobson developed Progressive Relaxation. Jacobson was one of the first to measure the electrical activity of the muscles. He believed that anxiety showed itself through tension in the muscles, and he believed that if we could reduce the muscular response, then we would also reduce the amount of stress in our bodies, as well.

This is a relatively straightforward relaxation technique and is widely used today. It requires very little imagination or even willpower. Practicing this technique will quiet a racing mind or heart and will help you to focus better and concentrate better.

This technique teaches the difference between tension and relaxation as many have come to associate the tension of every day life to be entirely normal. Many have forgotten what it is to truly relax.

This relaxation approach involves tightening and then relaxing various muscle groups throughout the body, a little bit at a time. One group of muscles is worked on and then, slowly, the next.

It does work best when you can coordinate inhalation of breath with the tightening of the muscle phase and then controlled exhalation with the relaxation phase.

For example:

- Tighten your left fist, slowly, inhaling as you do.
- Hold the tension now, about 5 seconds, continuing to inhale and focus on the feelings of tension.
- Really focus on what the tension feels like.
- Feel the burn, the lightness, the tightness and the restriction.
- Label how the tension feels in your mind.
- Now just let go, slowly, and relax, exhaling all of the stale tension and air.
- Notice any of the relaxation sensations, label those.
- Slowly exhale as you name those sensations of relaxation, utter relaxation. Whatever terms you can think of to label the feeling, and then relax, slowly, exhaling as you do.
Repeat the same technique for the right fist.

As you feel the change and are totally relaxed, move on to the next muscle group.

Go with about 15-30 seconds per contraction/relaxation cycle.
If relaxation imagery appeals to you during this technique, go ahead and imagine what you can to the feelings of both tension and to extreme relaxation.
It is important to compare and contrast the differences you feel from tension to relaxation.
Try doing one entire side of your body and then the other.

Calming the Racing Mind

Some people feel that they can relax their muscles very well, but that their minds continue to just race on.
Here are some good techniques to use if your mind races:

Relax your body completely.
Take in 4 deep breaths, repeating “4” to yourself as you exhale.
Then take 3 deep breaths, repeating “3 when you exhale.
Now take 2 deep breaths, repeating “2” when you exhale.
Finally, take 1 deep breath, repeating “1” as you exhale.

At the same time, focus your mind on a pleasant image. Imagine that you are a passive observer of something very relaxing where there is repetitive motion.

Example: relaxing on the beach, watching the waves go back and forth or just lying in the grass and watching as the clouds move by overhead.

Finally, now you want to cause your mind to go completely blank. As you are focusing on this repetitive movement, begin to envision a blank form. Just like you are standing on the edge of an abyss where there is no form and all is void.

Focus on the void and remain there as you continue to relax deeper and deeper. Hold this as long as you can.

Instant De-Stressing Skill

When you practice repeat relaxation skills over time, you develop a very practical skill for both mind and body for de-stressing yourself on command.

Practice this quick relaxation procedure whenever you feel yourself becoming tense.

This procedure involves taking 5 long and slow breaths as you notice the tension and relax your body.

To begin, stretch out your arms and legs, fingers and toes, very slowly.

Take a slow and deliberate yawn.

First Breath. Take in a long and slow breath and count to six. Breathe deeply into your stomach, while holding your breath for a few seconds. Now let the air flow out slowly and as you do, relax.

Second Breath. As you inhale another long, slow breath, concentrate on the muscles in your scalp, forehead, eyes, mouth and face. Notice the tension being held there...now relax these areas as you exhale slowly, giving in to quite and relaxation.

Third Breath. Now take in a long, slow breath and concentrate on the muscles in your neck and shoulders. Release this tension in your muscles as you exhale slowly. Experience deep relaxation.
Fourth Breath. Take in a long, slow breath and concentrate on the tension in the muscles of your chest and abdomen. Relax these muscles as you exhale and experience the relaxation.

Fifth Breath. Take in your final long, slow breath and pay attention to the muscular tension left anywhere in your body. Hold that breath for a few seconds, and then as you exhale slowly feel that deep sense of total relaxation.

**Fight off Tension with Deep Relaxation**

The next time you want to turn on the TV to relax, try some Deep Relaxation!

By now you realize that relaxation is far more than just going on vacation or watching a good TV flick. While these activities can bring relaxation, true relaxation is much more: it slows down both the body and the mind.

Think of true relaxation as a type of "Condensed Rest."

True relaxation has been proven to promote natural healing and it increases the rate of recuperations. Research also points to deep relaxation as a help with memory and learning.

Any time of the day or night, you can take “5” and try this simple "Mini-Relaxation Technique." You will minimize the amount of pressure or stress during any given day.

Take in three deep breaths. With each deep breath, imagine that you are inhaling feelings of calm and peace. With each exhale, breathe out feelings of pressure and stress. Take time during your day to stop and focus on a pleasant thought or image (like a baby playing in the sand.) Do this many times a day.

Allow your shoulders and jaw to completely relax. Do not focus on any stress. Close your eyes and feel any tension throughout your body. Picture this tension as water being held in a pitcher. Feel as the water begins to flow from the pitcher. You will begin to feel light and weightless. Stay in this for as long as you can.
Deep relaxation is the ability to instantly de-stress and to stay focused on the calm and serenity. This is a skill that can be developed and strengthened. It works best when practiced for about 20 minutes each day, although even a few minutes each day can help.

A Quieting Exercise for Mind and Body

Once you have learned to hold your relaxed state for a full fifteen to twenty minutes, you are ready to progress to an even higher level of relaxation.

Look for the following physiological/psychological signs of relaxation to know you are ready to reach a higher level:

> A feeling of heaviness in the muscles/you are unable to move.
> A sensation of warmth coming from your hands or feet flowing towards the central core of your body.
> A tingling vibration throughout your extremities.
> A sense of detachment or void in thoughts as they flow through your stream of consciousness.

Higher Level of Relaxation Exercise

Take two, four-count, easy breaths, slowly.

As you inhale your first breath say to yourself, “Leave my body out of this!”

As you exhale your first breath, smile inwardly to yourself.

As you inhale your second breath choose two muscles groups (jaw and shoulders) and relax them as you exhale your second breath.

Repeat this as much as twenty to thirty times daily, each time you even begin to feel the least stress.
TAKE THE STRESS SELF-ASSESSMENT

Created by two American psychologists, take a look at this scale of 43 life events and you will learn how much obvious stress you have in your life.

Each event has a corresponding score associated with it, according to the degree of stress that comes as the result of that activity.

Below are the top 10 most stressful life events according to the scale:

- death of a partner
- divorce
- separation from partner
- imprisonment
- death of a close family member
- personal illness or injury
- marriage
- dismissal from work
- change of job
- retirement

(Holmes and Rahe (1967) 'The social readjustment rating scale' *Psychosomatic Medicine*, 11: 213-18.)

WHAT IS YOUR LEVEL OF STRESS?

When you suffer from stress, you experience a variety of symptoms. These symptoms each fall into four categories:

- behavioral (the things you do)
- physical (your body’s response)
- emotional (what you feel)
- psychological (your personal way of thinking.)

Take a look below at the various lists of stresses and symptoms and then compare those with how you are feeling at this moment. Next, look for your score at the end of this self-test and you will discover your personal stress rating.
physical symptoms
- tightness in chest
- chest pain and/or palpitations
- indigestion
- breathlessness
- nausea
- muscle twitches
- aches and pains
- headaches
- skin conditions
- recurrence of previous illnesses/allergies
- constipation/diarrhea
- weight loss or weight gain
- change in menstrual cycle for women
- sleep problems/tiredness

emotional symptoms
- mood swings
- feeling anxious
- feeling tense
- feelings of anger
- feeling guilty
- feelings of shame
- having no enthusiasm
- becoming more cynical
- feeling out of control
- feeling helpless
- decrease in confidence/self-esteem
- poor concentration

behavorial symptoms
- drop in work performance
- more inclined to become accident-prone
- drinking and smoking more
- overeating/loss of appetite
- change in sleeping patterns
- poor time management
- too busy to relax
- withdrawing from family and friends
- loss of interest in sex
- poor judgment
- inability to express feelings
- over-reacting

psychological symptoms and negative thoughts
- 'I am a failure'
- 'I should be able to cope'
- 'why is everyone getting at me?'
- 'no one understands'
- 'I don't know what to do'
- 'I can't cope'
- 'what's the point?'
- 'I don't seem to be able to get on top of things'
- 'I keep forgetting where I put things'
- loss of judgment

Stress Self Test

*Add up your score to check how stressed you are.*

0 – 4 symptoms: You are unlikely to be stressed.

5 – 8 symptoms: You are experiencing a mild form of stress and are not coping as well as you can. You need to make some changes.

9 – 12 symptoms: You are experiencing a moderate degree of stress. You need to make major changes to your life.
13 or more symptoms: You need to take urgent action to reduce your stress levels. The higher your score the more urgent is the need for action.

Stress is impossible to eliminate totally from life. However, if we recognize what stresses us, together with how our symptoms show themselves, we can take action to minimize or reduce any negative effects.

Conclusion

Relaxation is every bit as much of an attitude as it is anything else. When you know you are in control of your mind and body, you just instinctively know what to do about stress.

Taking the time to be mindful and cultivating a loving, gentle, stress free spirit means taking the time to relax. Relaxation exercises can become a part of our daily routine just as sitting down to a good dinner is. Your body and mind will love you for it!