Sit Down, Relax, and Say Goodbye to Stress

A guide to relieving stress in your life

With so much to worry about on a daily basis: time, money, work, family, school, and others, it's no wonder stress builds up and takes a toll on our lives. In fact, in the U.S alone, at least 75% of the general population experiences at least "some stress" every two weeks, with half of those experiencing moderate or high levels of stress¹.

What is Stress?

Stress is the combination of psychological, physiological, and behavioral reactions that people have in response to events that threaten or challenge them. Stress can be good or bad. Sometimes, stress is helpful, providing people with the extra energy or alertness they need. Stress could give a runner the edge he or she needs to persevere in a marathon, for example. This good kind of stress is called eustress. Unfortunately, stress is often not helpful and can even be harmful when not managed effectively. Stress could make a salesperson buckle under the pressure while trying to make a sales pitch at an important business meeting, for example. Moreover, stress can increase the risk of developing health problems, such as cardiovascular disease and anxiety disorders. This bad kind of stress is called distress, the kind of stress that people usually are referring to when they use the word stress.

A convenient way to think about stress is in terms of stressors and stress responses. Stressors are events that threaten or challenge people. They are the sources of stress, such as having to make decisions, getting married, and natural disasters. Stress responses are psychological, physiological, and behavioral

¹ National Health Interview Survey

Copyright 2009

All rights reserved
reactions to stressors. Anxiety, depression, concentration difficulties, and muscle tension are all examples of stress responses.

The connection between stressors and stress responses, however, is not as straightforward as it may seem. Mediating processes, for instance, stand in between stressors and stress responses. Whether stressors lead to stress responses depends on mediating processes like how people appraise potential stressors and how well people are able to cope with the negative impact of stressors. Furthermore, a number of moderating factors, such as personality traits and health habits, influence the links between stressors and stress responses. These mediating processes and moderating factors help determine whether people experience stress-related problems like burnout, mental disorders, and physical illness and are the focus of many stress management techniques that emphasize cognitive-behavioral approaches, relaxation, exercise, diet and nutrition, and medication

Some of The facts:

* Millions of Americans suffer from unhealthy levels of stress at work. (A study several years ago estimated the number to be 11 million--given events since that time, this number has certainly more than tripled--studies in Sweden, Canada, and other Westernized countries show similar trends.)

* Worker's compensation claims for "mental stress" in California rose 200-700% in the 1980s (whereas all other causes remained stable or declined!)

* Stress contributes to heart disease, high blood pressure, strokes, and other illnesses in many individuals.

* Stress also affects the immune system, which protects us from many serious diseases.

* Tranquilizers, antidepressants, and anti-anxiety medications account for one fourth of all prescriptions written in the U.S. each year.
* Stress also contributes to the development of alcoholism, obesity, suicide, drug addiction, cigarette addiction, and other harmful behaviors.

* When asked to rank the elements of life that cause them the most stress, respondents placed "excessive noise in the environment" right behind "working/raising family." - National Stress Survey, Prevention Magazine

* Over half of the population (55%) feel they would rather "rest and relax" during their leisure time versus participate in "enjoyable activities" (34%). - Yankelovich Monitor

* More than half of all deaths between the ages of one and 65 result from stressful lifestyles. - U.S. Center for Disease Control

* Research shows that regular workouts lift depression, banish stress and sharpen the mind. - American Health Magazine

* Over 30% of U.S. adults experience enough daily stress to impact their performance at home or work. – National Science Foundation

* Lack of control, high demands and repetitive work lead to job stress which can lead to health problems. - Duke University

* Stress management training for heart attack patients achieved a 40% reduction in recurrence compared to patients who received only standard care. -American Heart Journal

* Job related stress creates home problems which adds to job stress affecting personal productivity. – National Study Of Changing Workforce

* Annually, over $800 million dollars are spent on "anti-anxiety pills". The U.S. accounts for 5% of the world's population and consumes 33% of the pills.-Neurogen

* 1/3 of the U.S. population makes New Year's resolutions to begin stress management programs-Prudential Healthcare Survey

* Over 20 million Americans practice or have tried Yoga-Various yoga related trade groups and publications
* In more than 22 years of research at the International Society for Music Medicine, studies of over 80,000 surgical patients have unequivocally demonstrated music’s capacity to reduce anxiety and pain.

* More people visit doctors for anxiety than for colds, and anxiety is now more common than depression (Barlow, 1988).

* Anxiety is a predisposing factor to major depression (Bagby, Joffe, Parker, Kalemba, & Harkeness, 1995; Surtees & Wainwright, 1996) and to suicide attempts (Coryell, Noyes, & Clancy, 1982; Coryell, Noyes, & House, 1986).

The list goes on and on. The bottom line is “Stress left untreated, leads severe problems down the road.” Being that stress affects people differently, it’s important to try a variety of different options within this guide in order to find the right balance that fits your life. This guide will cover only the most practical stress relieving techniques and is geared towards people with a busy lifestyle.

For convenience sake, we will break down the stress diminishing techniques into two categories: 1) Physical 2) Non-Physical.

**Physical Stress-Busters:**

Physical activity should be a part of everyone’s lives; young or old. The benefits of physical activity are obvious. It releases endorphins to regulate mood and feelings of wellbeing and is linked to weight loss, and healthy living. Here are a few particularly useful physical exercises that focus on decreasing stress levels and increasing harmony within the body:

**Walking or Jogging** – At least 15 minutes of walking or light jogging will get your heart pumping and get those endorphins flowing. This should be done at least 3 to 4 times a week. To really drop those stress levels, try walking or jogging in nature in a park, canyon, or by the ocean. Nature provides natural stress relief so make good use of it!
Resistance training – People associate resistance training with big bulging muscles and disproportionate body sizes. This couldn’t be farther from the truth. Resistance training increases flexibility and speeds up the metabolism since your body requires more energy to nourish the muscles being toned. More importantly, resistance training is a stress buster! Here are some fail proof exercises for all different physical fitness levels:

**Assisted Push Up** – Get on all fours. Stretch your arms out supporting the top half of your body. Lower yourself until your chest touches the floor (or gets close), lift your body back up to the original position. You should feel the triceps and pectoral muscles contracting as you lower and raise your body. Try and shoot for 10. Complete 3 sets.

**One Arm Dumbbell Curls** – Buy two small dumbbells (5lbs-10lbs) from a sporting goods store. Sitting on a chair holding one dumbbell in each hand, raise the dumbbell forming a curling motion. This can be done with both weights simultaneously or alternating one up and one down. Curl 10 repetitions on each arm. Complete 3 sets.

**Lunges** – Stand upright and take a step forward. Bend down so that your knee almost touches the floor. Stand upright again. Switch legs and repeat. Complete 10 repetitions for each leg.

**Crunches** – Lie down on a mat or towel, lift your legs up so that they that your toes are pointed up in the air. Reach up towards your toes feeling the crunch in your mid section. Alternate the stretch to each leg until you complete 20 repetitions total. Complete 3 sets.
Non-Physical Stress Busters:

**Meditation** – Find 10 minutes out of your day to concentrate on your breathing and relaxation. You really need to forget about everything when meditating. Take deep breaths in and slowly exhale. Upon inhaling, think of happy calm entering your body and upon the exhalation part think of the stress leaving your body. Repeat this slow methodical breathing until you no longer feel anxiety.

**Music** – Regulates mood and stress. Personally, when I want to unwind, nothing beats classical, however, everybody is different. Pick a relaxing type of music, one that really gets you in a good mood. If you have the time, listen to a few minutes each day or when you get stressed out.

**Eat Eggs** – Eggs are loaded with B vitamins. Whenever you’re feeling anxious, jittery, or stressed out, B vitamins are the first thing your body runs out of. Keep you levels high, and you body will laugh away the stress.

**Conclusion:**

The important thing to realize when it comes to stress is recognizing the symptoms before it affects you. Stress is all around us and there are certain stressors that impact us more than others. When you proactively address the issue of stress firsthand, you empower yourself to control it before it starts. Using the exercises and suggestions in this manual will set you on your way to becoming stress free FOR LIFE!!