

Our 'Ten Quick Steps' guide to stress management

1) Avoid nicotine, alcohol and caffeine.

They are all stimulants, so therefore they cannot calm you down. If you're stressed, steer clear of them and keep yourself well hydrated by drinking water instead.

2) Work off stress with physical activity.

Pressure or anger releases adrenaline in the body. Exercise helps to reduce it, and produces 'good mood' substances in the brain. So go for a brisk walk around the block when you feel tense, and try some regular exercise after work.

3) Relax with a stress reduction technique every day.

Try self-hypnosis – it's very easy and can even be done at your desk. We can recommend courses in self-hypnosis and will soon be bringing out a CD that will teach you the secrets of this technique. Or think up a self-affirming mantra to repeat to yourself (e.g. 'I deserve calm in my life', or 'I have a choice in every situation'). Repeat it to yourself whenever you feel tense.

4) Get enough sleep.

Sleep is essential for the body to function properly. Sleeping pills are not necessary if you change your life-style. If you've habitually skimped on sleep, you probably won't even remember how it feels to wake up fully rested. Give it a go for a week, and see if there's a difference in how you perform during the day.

5) If you're ill, rest.

Don't just carry on regardless. Working will tire the body and prolong the illness. So recognise that you have limits and don't carry on as if you were firing on all cylinders.

6) Agree with people once in a while!

Life shouldn't be a constant battleground. So even if you disagree with someone, avoid conflict by just agreeing or keeping quiet. After all, they have a right to their opinion, just as you do.

7) Learn to accept what you cannot change.

A well-known prayer asks for the serenity "to accept the things I cannot change, the courage to change the things I can, and the wisdom to know the difference". This philosophy will help you avoid unhappiness, cynicism and bitterness.

8) Listen to your body.

When you are tired, hungry or thirsty, do something about it. Also recognise stress and anger in your day and counter it immediately with a brisk walk, ten minutes' in deep relaxation or whatever works for you. Order a batch of our to

put around the house or office so you can test your stress levels whenever you like.

9) Learn how to say 'no'.

Simple, but effective. Where a 'no' is the appropriate response, say it without guilt.

10) Manage your time.

Take one thing at a time. Don't overdo things. Create time buffers to deal with unexpected emergencies. And, recognise that your day-to-day problems and responsibilities are the things that cause stress in your life. Tackle them with a system that works for you.

A simple method is to:

- List the things that you need to do.
- Prioritise - Put them in order of importance
- Decide what you need to do yourself, and what can be delegated.
- Decide which is urgent, needs doing today, next week or next month
- Decide what doesn't need doing after all, and drop it from the list.

Your mountain of tasks is now in some sort of order. This should help.

Previously, the list controlled you - Now you control it.

And you've lost the stress that it caused you

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