

*DISCLAIMER: This information is not presented by a medical practitioner and is for educational and informational purposes only. The content is not intended to be a substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Always seek the advice of your physician or other qualified health provider with any questions you may have regarding a medical condition. Never disregard professional medical advice or delay in seeking it because of something you have read.*

*Since natural and/or dietary supplements are not FDA approved, they must be accompanied by a two-part disclaimer on the product label: that the statement has not been evaluated by FDA and that the product is not intended to "diagnose, treat, cure or prevent any disease."*

---

## **HOW TO REDUCE STRESS AT WORK & AT HOME**

### **TABLE OF CONTENTS**

#### **INTRODUCTION**

#### **WHAT IS STRESS?**

#### **HOW TO CONTROL STRESS**

#### **SELF HYPNOSIS**

#### **OTHER STRESS REDUCERS**

#### **TAKE A STRESS TEST**

#### **CONFIDENCE AND SELF ESTEEM**

#### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Did you know that 90% of doctor visits are for stress related symptoms?

Stress bombards us every day from all directions. Maybe it's sitting in the midst of highway gridlock when you are already late for an important appointment. Or how about the bill you forgot to pay? It could be a phone call from the school complaining about your child's behavior.

These are just the annoying little stress triggers that we handle every day. What about the larger issues? Retirement, moving, divorce or, heaven forbid, the death of a loved one or friend can come out of the blue and here comes the stress, launching you into treading murky waters one more time.

The impression is that the feelings of stress come from outside sources when, in reality, it happens inside of us.

When we feel as though we are under pressure, our bodies react the same way that we have trained them to do with a rise in blood pressure, tightening of muscles and accelerated breathing.

These physical symptoms are generally referred to as "fight or flight" responses. This is a term left over from historical times when

the choices were to flee or stand and fight.

Unfortunately, today we don't have those options. Each situation must be dealt with and that's where the stress comes in. Some stress is unavoidable and is actually good for you as we will discuss further on. But too much stress leads to troubles that can range from upset stomach to anxiety attacks and even as serious as heart attacks.

There's a whole arsenal of stress busting tools available that we will discuss here. Hopefully, the more you understand your stress, the better prepared you will be at controlling your body's response to stress and restoring a calmer state of mind.

## **WHAT IS STRESS?**

Chemically, stress is a condition that your body enters as the result of a message received from your brain telling it to prepare to run or fight. The body reacts by preparing for that eventuality. The brain tells the adrenal glands to send a rush of two hormones (adrenaline and noradrenaline) to the muscles in preparation for them to respond to a fear or a threat.

It is the job of the brain to protect the body. It accomplishes this by telling the noradrenaline to redirect blood flow from lower priority areas of your body (like skin or your abdomen) to the muscles

to give you a “power boost.”

At the same time, the brain is also telling the adrenaline to speed up your breathing to take in more oxygen to feed the work being done on the muscles with the noradrenaline.

Unfortunately, when you can't make a decision about how to react (fight or flight), these two hormones are caught in limbo rushing around madly waiting for you to decide what you want them to do. Since you aren't doing that, the only choice they have is to cause vomiting, make you tremble, panic or maybe even pass out.

It's actually a very efficient process and has worked wonderfully for thousands of years. When we were running across the plains barefoot with a spear in our hand bearing down on supper, we needed this process to protect us. Indeed, the entire system is just the result of the brain doing what it is supposed to do ... keep the body functioning and protect it.

We no longer chase the woolly mammoth nor does our survival revolve around running away from a rival tribe (well maybe just a little). The battles today are demanding employers, uncontrollable traffic, annoying neighbors, partners, children and oh yes, taxes!

Here's where the interesting part of this analysis comes in. Even though our situation has changed, the chemicals are still there along with the vehicle to drive them.

The system is very efficient and works quite effectively. This is why you have stress. It is merely a response to a perceived threat and the brain will set it in motion on a subconscious level even at the slightest sensation of danger. In fact it will DEMAND this action.

Since we now live in an “enlightened” society, we are conditioned not to throw a spear at the boss, strangle our spouse or set the neighbor’s house afire.

What is needed is the ability to change our programmed responses. We need to discern the difference between real threats and our own internalized perceptions of danger. Sounds pretty simple, huh?

Sure it does. Until you’re sitting in that freeway gridlock, half an hour late for the most important career busting appointment of your life, knowing full well that your blankety blank boss will turn the account over to that jerk in the office and you’ll never get the raise you were counting on when your son starts college in the fall. ... whew!

Here come the chemical twins, adrenaline and noradrenaline ready to do battle with no battle to go to. They’re rushing through your body and have got to attack something. Your muscles aren’t responding by running or fighting so they’ll just pick any old organ to attack instead. A good one is the heart.

Sometimes a dose of the chemical twins is a good thing. After

all, even though we are now “civilized” there are still very real threats in the world. Just take a look at the evening news or read about the latest “mugging” in the newspaper.

So, here is the paradox. You need the chemical twins to protect you from real danger but you don’t need them to cause illness, unhappiness and stress. The challenge is knowing when to have them and when you don’t need them.

Logically you know that you don’t need them under most normal situations like: at work, at a party or when the kids are screaming in your ear.

So what can you do? Some people turn to drugs or alcohol and others take out their frustration on the people they care about the most. You can learn how to control the twins. Let’s do that now.

## **HOW TO CONTROL STRESS**

What’s causing your stress?

A slow buildup of everyday annoyances: a dead car battery, traffic jam, buttons that pop off your clothes as you are going to an important meeting. It’s the little things that get under your skin

Is it a tight schedule and seemingly insurmountable problems? Bills to pay, a boss to please, a colicky baby to pacify? Juggling many roles is a main cause of stress.

Maybe it's positive and negative life changes, from the joy of a wedding to the loss of a spouse, from the exhilaration of a job promotion to sadness at moving away from old friends.

Perhaps the cause of your stress is inner conflict. Anger with your boss actually may be old anger against a parent bubbling to the surface. If you can recognize a pattern from the past, this can be an instant stress reliever. Take some time, even just 30 seconds and write down your feelings.

What you need to do is **relax**. Huh? It can't be that simple! Yes, it can and you can do it. No, we can't control other people and situations. What you can do is control how you respond to people and events.

What you have done is to give away control to others. What you need to do is regain that control, seal it up and only let the twins out when it's really necessary.

When was the last time you actually relaxed? Can you remember what it was like? Were you calm and collected? Was your breathing normal? Were your muscles loose? And, did you feel that way without any outside stimulants like drugs? If so, the good news is that you can restore that same feeling at will. Yes, you can definitely take it back whenever or wherever you choose.

When your mind is bypassing the chemical twins and sending

truly relaxing messages to your body, wonderful things begin to happen. Just as the chemical twins jump to attention when you stress, other chemicals go to work when you relax causing you to have a feeling of contentment.

While relaxing, actions taken by people and external events are still important but not necessarily personal. You are able to discern that no one is launching a direct attack upon you or anyone or anything of yours.

Small problems remain small problems and not the woolly mammoth charging down upon you. Large events will become smaller and not cause you to get out of your car during gridlock and shout obscenities to the drivers in front of you.

Those people who are horrible and annoying, shrink to a caricature serving up no more significance in your world than an ant on a picnic table. As you continue your journey toward relaxation, you can watch these people with amusement. When you reach the point of total relaxation you are able to see your world as it is, not for how you feel about it.

Everything you do is a matter of choice. You choose to be angry, happy or indifferent. You make a conscious choice to take action or not to take action.

On the opposite end of the spectrum are the chemical twins

controlling what you know is stress and you are bumped, pushed and thrown into chaos. No choice and no idea why you don't have a choice.

Obviously, relaxing is a good thing because it gives you choice. It puts you back in the driver's seat instead of the chemical twins.

So relax already! Sure, just like that.

Do you remember tormenting your neighbor's cat as a child? You had the upper hand until kitty fought back. You'd step away from the torment and probably forget all about it until the next time you scratched. It took a few lessons, but pretty soon you understood if you tormented the cat, the cat would fight back. So you stopped. That was a conscious action taken to prevent being hurt. It was a survival strategy just like fight or flight, except that this was **behavior modification** instead of an automatic response.

As you grew older, the behavior for survival changed but the bottom line is that you probably used a dozen behaviors without even thinking about it every day of the week. The one behavior that you probably overlooked is the most important one of all, the behavior to relax.

If relaxation is just another behavior, then that means it's a learned response. And, if that is the case you are able to change the behavior. Chances are you were never taught how to do that, which is

why you are reading this in the first place.

You have to teach your brain how to do it. Actually, your brain already knows how subconsciously, but you need to teach it how to do it consciously. In order to do that, you need an understanding of how your mind works.

Everything you have ever encountered or done in your entire lifetime is permanently recorded in your subconscious mind. Most of it is not remembered consciously. If I ask you, "How much is two and two," you will immediately answer, "four." That was from your conscious memory. But if I ask you what you had for dinner ten years ago tonight, it will more than likely be impossible for you to consciously remember it at all. However, your subconscious remembers it in great detail.

When you drive your car, you are probably thinking about all kinds of things other than driving the car. Your subconscious, through habit, is controlling all your driving actions. You just automatically arrive at your destination without giving it detailed conscious thought.

You don't have to think "push the brake" or "ease up on the gas pedal." You do it all automatically, controlled by your subconscious. Your subconscious is designed to protect you. It controls all body functions. If you are cold in the night, it awakens you. If you need to go to the bathroom, it awakens you also. It controls your heartbeat

and all other involuntary functions of the body.

Your subconscious doesn't rationalize; it doesn't ask questions, doesn't know truth from falsehood. It merely acts upon whatever information is stored within.

There are actually four states of consciousness, but for our purposes we will be dealing with just two:

Beta – this is our waking state

Alpha – first step to the subconscious

The Alpha state is where we will begin our work. This is the state where you are relaxed, the normal machinations of your conscious mind are just a little distant and you feel warm and comfortable. The chemical twins are sealed up where they belong

Have you ever sat in a car waiting for a friend or family member to run in and make a quick purchase or run an errand? It may be a warm, sunny, spring day. The window is open and you can feel a gentle breeze caress your cheek and fluff your hair. The sun feels warm and cozy on your face. Before you know it, your eyelids begin to droop as you sit and enjoy a moment of oneness with your surroundings. Not awake and not asleep, you are totally relaxed and content to drift along quietly enjoying the sensation of the warm sun and the gentle breeze.

If you have ever had this or a similar experience, you were in

that Alpha state. Close your eyes and see if you can recapture the same sensations you had while you were in that state. Take a few moments to do that, then imagine a car door slamming and pulling you instantaneously back into the Beta state. Wow! What a rude awakening.

Alpha level is where you can do the best work for yourself on a subconscious level. This is also a state of meditation, and the level you work with using self-hypnosis.

The truth is that you are actually in this state every single day at least two times. Those times are the fleeting moments just before you drift off to sleep and just as you awaken.

Your conscious mind has the ability to reason out a course of action that would be helpful to you. However, the conscious mind needs the cooperation of the subconscious and will send its energy out to implement the decision.

Your energy source is the subconscious mind. No matter what you consciously do to instruct the subconscious mind to do something there is no way to permanently override what the subconscious mind has been programmed to do.

Let's take a look at some examples. If a very young child is told by a parent, teacher, elder sibling or anyone else in a position of authority:

"You never do anything right."

"What's the matter with you?"

"Why can't you be more like Billy?"

"Don't you have a brain in your head?"

"Why are you so stupid?"

"You will never amount to anything!"

This child will often be a failure in life. The reason is that this child's conscious mind is not developed enough to block this type of information. Therefore, it becomes a fact in his subconscious mind.

As he/she grow to adulthood, his subconscious will be a very good student and apply everything it has learned. Remember, the subconscious is not right or wrong, good or bad, it is merely a computer just like the one you are reading from now.

The subconscious will force the conscious to act in exactly the same manner that was programmed as a child.

The subconscious mind will only accept what the conscious mind believes at the time the suggestion is offered. However, if the conscious mind changes an opinion on a given matter after it has become embedded in the subconscious the subconscious will not change with it.

These factors are important to understand before you begin your work. There are certain "tapes" in your subconscious mind that will

not be changed. What you can do is create “new” responses.

## **SELF HYPNOSIS**

Now that you have a very basic understanding of how the conscious and subconscious mind work, your first step is to learn how to put your mind in an Alpha state yourself in order to facilitate the changes that need to be made. Since self-hypnosis is simple to learn we will begin with that modality and give you several examples that you can use for self-hypnosis.

The first thing you need to do is learn how to hypnotize yourself. There are three tools that you will be using: suggestion, concentration and imagination. If you have a good imagination you will have no trouble mastering these techniques very quickly.

It is important not to try too hard. The whole concept is to just relax and let yourself go. If you try too hard you will become tense and this is exactly what you don't want.

Also ignore any analytical attitude. If you don't, you will keep the conscious mind awake and the whole object of hypnotizing yourself is to relax.

We assume you want to hypnotize yourself or wouldn't be doing this. You can't go into self-hypnosis against your will. Therefore you can't do it unless you follow the rules.

Before we begin, it is important to realize that there is no set “script” to the verbiage of a hypnotic trance. There are different techniques used by pioneers in hypnotherapy. The first technique was developed by one of those pioneers. His name was Charles Tebbetts who was already a teenager by World War I. Charles is known for his comment that, “all hypnosis is self-hypnosis, and the power is in the mind of the person being hypnotized.”

Our first technique is called “Fractional Relaxation,” and is one of the best induction methods for beginners. It takes a little longer than some other formulas, but it’s a great conditioning technique for faster methods which can be more easily learned later. It relaxes the body completely, often to the point of partial or total loss of bodily awareness. Tension is released and the conscious mind drifts in and out of awareness of the surroundings, often viewing mental images of forgotten events from the subconscious. Here’s how you do it:

### **BEGIN INDUCTION**

Lie down on your back, arms parallel to your body, fingers loosely outstretched and palms downward. Separate the feet by eight or ten inches so that no part of your thighs are touching. Use a pillow if you wish, and make yourself as comfortable as possible. Remove or loosen clothing that binds you in any way and remove your shoes if

they are tight. The idea is to get comfortable and relaxed.

If you are recording this procedure, use the second person throughout, but if you intend to use it without a recording, memorize it in the first person. It is given here in the second person so it may be read directly from the book into the microphone. Start reading in a soft voice, rather slowly, and gradually slow down more and more, drawing out your words and pausing often between sentences. Your voice and the pace of your speech must suggest drowsiness and relaxation. Speak in a very slow monotone.

Now let's assume you are in the described position, and are listening to your voice coming from your recorder. He is what you should hear:

"Fix your eyes on a spot on the ceiling and take three long, deep breaths. Inhale, hold the air in your lungs for three seconds, and as you exhale slowly, you will relax all over. Now let's take the first breath. Inhale. (pause) Exhale – Sleep now (pause) Now another deep breath, even deeper than before. Inhale. (pause) Exhale – Sleep now. (pause) Now another deep breath, even deeper than before. Inhale. (pause) Exhale – Sleep now. (pause) Now as your whole body begins to relax, and as every muscle and nerve begins to grow loose and limp – your eyelids also become heavy and tired. They grow heavier and heavier, and will close now. The lids have become so tired

and so heavy, it would be difficult to open them, but you have no desire to try because you want them to remain closed until I tell you to open them. (pause)

Now, I want you to concentrate all of your attention on your right foot. Relax the toes of your right foot. Imagine they are like loose rubber bands dangling from your foot. (pause) Let this loose feeling spread back through the ball of the foot, and then **all** the way back to the heel. (pause) (Drag out the word all and speak very slowly from this point on, pausing between ALL sentences.)

Now, let this relaxed feeling go up into the calf of the leg. Let the calf muscles go loose-and-limp and LA-A-A-ZY. (long pause) And now, while your muscles and nerves are relaxing, let your mind relax also. Let it drift away to pleasant scenes in your imagination. Let your mind wander where it will, as you go deeper – deeper into drowsy relaxation. You are breathing easily; all of your cares and tensions are fading away, as you go deeper – d-e-e-p-e-r into drowsy slumber. Every breath that you take – every noise that you hear makes you go deeper, deeper, into pleasant, comfortable relaxation.

Now let the wonderful wave of relaxation move from your right calf up into the large thigh muscles. Let them go loose and limp. The right leg is now completely relaxed and comfortable. (pause) Now the left foot. The toes relax, the whole foot relaxes just as the right one

did – limp and lazy. Let the feeling of pleasant relaxation go up into the left calf. Let the calf muscles go. Your legs are feeling heavy like pieces of wood. As you relax the left thigh muscles, they feel heavier and heavier and you become more and more drowsy. Now as the wave of relaxation moves upward through your hips and abdomen, you let go more and more. Think of your abdomen as an inflated ball. You are letting the air out of the ball and it spreads out and relaxes completely. Stomach and solar plexus relax. Let them go – as you go further into deep – deep slumber. (pause)

(slowly) The fingers in your right hand are now relaxing and so is your wrist. Now your forearm relaxes. On up to your right shoulder – your whole right arm is relaxed and numb. You probably feel your fingers or your toes tingling. This is a good sign, so continue to go deeper. And now, just go on over, into a deep, deep hypnotic sleep. (pause)

The fingers on your left hand are completely relaxed. Your hand and forearm are letting go. Up, through your elbow, to your upper arm, relax. Now the left shoulder, let go – loose, limp and lazy. Now relax all the large back muscles, from your shoulders all the way down to your waist – let them all go limp and loose. (Remember, plenty of pauses. Continue to speak softly and very slowly.)

Relax the muscles in your neck. Let your jaws separate and let

the chin and cheek muscles go loose and rubbery. (pause) Now let your eyes go. Let them go completely – relax and feel comfortable and good. Relax the eyebrows too and the forehead. Let the muscles rest. Back across the scalp – let the entire scalp relax – from the forehead all the way back to the back of the neck – all relaxed – all resting – all loose. You are now completely relaxed. Your body feels boneless. You are going deeper and deeper into restful hypnosis. Your mind is experiencing a wonderful feeling of tranquility. Your subconscious is now receptive to the helpful suggestions I am now going to give it. (At this point the suggestion is given to the subconscious mind.)”

### **END INDUCTION**

What we are using in this next example is a variation of the Fractional Relaxation Technique called the “Rapid Induction Technique.”

### **BEGIN INDUCTION**

1. Make yourself as comfortable as you can on a mat, a couch or a chair.
2. Inhale deeply and exhale, releasing all muscular tensions everywhere in the body. Continue to breathe naturally, easily and

gently.

3. Close your eyes. Focus your attention gently on your subconscious mind and give it the following commands silently and in sequence:

a. Address yourself by name. (The name or nickname to which you usually respond automatically when called by another person. Say silently to your subconscious mind, "I WANT YOU TO RELAX, VERY DEEPLY, NOW!"

b. Let go and let down. Feel your mind, your emotions and your physical body sink quickly and deeply into relaxation, drifting ever deeper and deeper until you reach a plateau of relaxation.

c. At this point, again address your subconscious mind by name and once more say silently to yourself, "I WANT YOU TO RELAX MORE DEEPLY, NOW!"

d. Feel yourself plunging deeper into relaxation, going down further and deeper until you reach another plateau of relaxation.

e. Once again, address your subconscious mind quietly, silently, by name and repeat the command, "I WANT YOU TO RELAX MORE DEEPLY NOW!"

f. And finally, once more, address yourself in a silent whisper, calling yourself by name and giving yourself a final command, "I WANT YOU TO RELAX MORE DEEPLY NOW!"

g. At this time you should reach a very effective level of deep relaxation when you can give yourself very effective suggestions toward achieving your desired goals.

h. You may give yourself suggestions in the form of visualizations, positive verbal suggestions, altered feelings or emotions such as:

- 1) Visualizing your ideal configuration and weight.
  - 2) Replacing any fears, anxieties, depressions or other negative feelings by a sense of self confidence, optimism, pride or other positive emotion through verbal suggestions and suggested feelings.
  - 3) Permitting a feeling of deep pervasive peace to envelop you.
  - 4) Suggesting to your subconscious mind – time contractions – for example, that the next hour will seem like only ten minutes have passed.
  - 5) Any other suggestions consistent with your selected goals.
4. With daily practice for about two weeks, using this Rapid Self Induction Technique, you should be able to put yourself into an effective level of deep relaxation, within 30 seconds whether lying down, sitting or standing up.

5. After you have mastered the Rapid Self Induction Technique, with an additional 1 to 3 weeks of daily practice to achieve a state of deep, effective relaxation within 1 to 5 seconds merely by closing your eyes and silently saying to yourself, "RELAX." This almost instant self induction should be practiced consistently in all positions (lying, sitting and standing) to maintain proficiency.

### **END INDUCTION**

Now that you have learned how to induce an advanced state of relaxation, you must learn how to structure the suggestion you would like to teach to your subconscious mind.

The subconscious mind must obey suggestions as though they were orders. While in hypnosis, with the conscious mind somewhat inhibited, it is possible to reach the subconscious mind directly with the suggestions that you want it to program.

It is very important to understand that the subconscious operates without the benefit of your conscious reasoning. Therefore you must be extremely careful with wording your suggestions. Structure them correctly and the subconscious will carry them out for you faithfully without conscious effort of any sort. Your motivation must be strong.

Start your suggestion with your motivating desire:

*"Because I have a strong desire to live stress free, highway gridlock no longer upsets me"*

*"Because I have a strong desire to have an attractive, slim figure and because I enjoy wearing a size nine dress my body no longer requires more calories than it needs to live healthy"*

There are examples of two complete auto suggestions. A couple of factors are important. You must always phrase the suggestion in the present tense as if the action has already occurred. You must never mention the negative behavior you wish to eliminate.

Suggest action not the ability to act. In other words, don't say, I have the ability to live stress free. . . .and so on. You must be specific.

Use repetition when writing your suggestion. Repeat it, enlarge upon it and repeat it again in different words. Embellish it with convincing adjectives. Repeat your suggestion daily until it becomes entrenched in your subconscious.

### **OTHER STRESS REDUCERS**

Research has shown that the stress hormone cortisol reduces a person's ability to retrieve information and memory. Even worse, this

same stress hormone is linked to progressive shrinking of the hippocampus – an important memory center in the temporal region. High levels of stress also promote depression, which severely impairs memory and increases the risk for dementia.

To reduce stress, try relaxation exercises. Sit quietly and breathe deeply and slowly. Relax each part of your body, starting with the top of your head and finishing with your toes.

Look for humor in tense situations and talk about your feelings with family members, friends or a therapist, if necessary.

Try reducing stress and anxiety with fresh, natural scents. In general they induce a calming state. In one recent study, volunteers became extremely anxious when they were confined in coffin-like tubes, but then calmed down when the tubes were infused with the smells of green apple and cucumber. These odors seem to have an impact on the limbic systems, the emotional center of the brain.

If you anticipate a situation where you will feel anxious, try a shampoo with green-apple flavored shampoo. Here are a few tips that will lower stress in five minutes or less:

- Move around.
- Walk rapidly around your workplace.
- Take a quick walk around the block.
- Climb rapidly up and down a flight of stairs to really get the

heart pumping.

- Do 15 jumping jacks in place.
- Stretch while seated at your desk. Link your fingers under a knee and draw it to your chest. Repeat with your other knee. This stretches the legs and the lower back.
- Stretch your arms above your head, palms up and fingers linked. Dangle hands at your sides, then raise right shoulder to right ear, keeping the head vertical. Repeat this with the left shoulder. Finally, flex and bend back the fingers of each hand. Hand stretches are especially important if you use a computer for long periods.
- Take 10 long deep breaths. Your belly should expand as you inhale and contract as you exhale.
- Massage your eyes by placing your palms over them and apply gentle pressure while spiraling your palms. Try the same technique for your ears. Periodically, try to block out all sight and sound for just a second or two. Researchers report that this can be a refreshing experience from a psychological standpoint.
- Experiment with aromatherapy. A drop of citrus essential oil like lemon-lime or orange is refreshing for your office or home and is not overbearing.

- Early morning sleep is really the most restful sleep you can get. Men sent to bed at 2:15 a.m. and awakened at 6:15 a.m. slept more soundly than ones sent to bed at 10:30 and awakened at 2:30 a.m. So, if you are stressed and can get only four hours of sleep, stay up as late as possible to get the most benefit from your limited sleep. This does not replace a full night's sleep. Resume normal sleep pattern as quickly as possible.

Meditation is a favorite stress buster for some people. Getting away from the everyday hassles of the world and turning your thoughts inward is a great stress buster. Meditation helps you see the objectivity in your own life and thoughts in a detached manner. Meditation is proven to reduce anxiety, work related stress. . .and blood pressure, too.

There are many meditation techniques, but here is a common one that is simple:

- Sit quietly and comfortably in a place where you will not be disturbed.
- Focus your attention on your breathing.
- Feel the breath as it comes into your nose. . . . and when it goes out.
- Other thoughts will enter your mind. Just observe them

and let them go. Return your attention to your breath.

Start practicing meditation for five to 10 minutes a day, gradually increasing it to 20 to 30 minutes. Keep a clock nearby so you can keep track of the time but don't use an alarm that might be jerk you back to full alertness too quickly.

Regular moderate exercise reverses much of the damage caused by stress and can also improve immune system function, lower blood pressure and improve your mood. The reason is because any physical activity negates the fight-or-flight response and can leave you feeling less tense, anxiety free and invigorated.

Aerobic exercise is an effective stress buster but you may be more suited to relaxed walking.

Any exercise that suits you is fine. Just be sure to do it for at least 20 minutes each day. Don't overdo it, however, because more is not necessarily good for you.

Human beings have an inborn affinity for nature. The scientific name for it is "biophilia." What that means is we enjoy things having to do with nature. Having "natural" things around us is psychologically beneficial. For example:

- Having an office with a view is not just prestigious.

Studies have shows that workers who have a view of grass and trees exhibit less stress than who look at parking lots.

- Dentists who have an aquarium in their waiting room report that their patients are less anxious.
- Eating lunch on a park bench will relax your body.
- To reduce stress try spending time in the garden and your troubles will seem unimportant.
- Living in the city has its own stress factors. When it comes to a vacation, try planning it in a totally different environment like the mountains or seaside.
- Research studies show that people who have pets are generally healthier and have better methods of coping with stress. Consider obtaining a cat, dog or even a bird.

Humor is a great stress buster. Keeping a sense of humor and learning not to take yourself so seriously definitely helps. It's hard to remain stressed when you are laughing at yourself. Try looking for the lighter side of every situation. Indulge your taste for entertaining books and movies.

If you have a favorite cartoon or saying, cut it out and put it on your bathroom mirror or refrigerator.

Try silly antics. Things that you would normally not even consider like walking in the rain or feeding birds in the park.

Cultivate friendships. Having close ties with others can make you feel warm inside. Having someone to talk to about your problems

makes the problems much easier to deal with.

Just having a friend helps reduce your blood pressure and research has shown that those who have lots of friends tend to have a lower level of cholesterol and strong immune systems.

Following a high carb, low protein diet can help with reducing stress for a short period of time, but should not be undertaken on a long term basis as the carbs represent just a short term energy boost.

Other foods that fight stress are foods that are rich in vitamins C and A like raw carrots peppers and broccoli. There's a bonus as well, chewing crunchy foods helps to dissipate the tension.

How about some natural therapies for stress? Here are a few:

- **Lavendar** - Use the flowers. This is a beautiful herb and is widely used. Many do not realize that it is an effective treatment for headaches related to stress. Also good for depression.
- **St. Johns Wort** - Taken internally, has a sedative and pain reducing effect. Use in treatment of neuralgia, anxiety, tension and similar problems.
- **Vervain** - Also known as Wild Hyssop. Will strengthen the nervous system while easing depression and melancholia. Good for fever and best for colds, and for menopausal irritations.

Here are more tips to consider for reducing stress:

- This one is a “no-brainer” and we won’t go into detail here, but if you are a smoker – STOP!
- Try to avoid tight deadlines, keep your schedule looser.
- Ask for help instead of insisting on doing it all yourself.

### **TAKE A STRESS TEST**

The standard tests that doctors use to tell whether you are an easily stressed “hot reactor” (and at greater risk for disease) are pretty simple, so take your pick, says Frank Barry, M.D., a family practice physician in Colorado Springs and author of *Make the Change for a Healthy Heart*. For the first two tests, you’ll want to take a blood-pressure reading twice – once before the test and once during the test – for comparison.

Test 1: Chill out. In Test 1, put your hand into a bucket of cold water for one minute and have someone measure your blood pressure right after you have done it. If it goes up into the high range in response to physical stress, you are a “hot reactor.”

Test 2: Do some math. Test 2 is a little more cerebral. Start with the number 100 and mentally subtract 7, then continue to subtract 7 until you get to 2. In the midst of your figuring, have your blood pressure taken. “There’s no exercise, no threat to your life, but

a lot of people still feel mental stress and their blood pressures shoot up," says Dr. Barry.

Test 3: Talk to yourself. You can also test yourself without the shock of cold water or the mental anguish of math. Ask yourself: "Are you working toward your own true goals or someone else's?" If you are busy trying to keep up with the Joneses, you're still in the rat race, even if you have retired. You're much more likely to feel the effects of stress regardless of whether you're a "hot reactor," says Dr. Barry.

## **CONFIDENCE AND SELF ESTEEM**

The greatest challenges to your confidence come when you're facing a situation that *looks* impossible. When this happens, you must tap in to the unseen force of self-assurance so that you can press beyond supposed limits. It's not a matter of what things look like on the outside — the key is to recognize what you have working on the *inside*.

Confidence is often the missing link to seeing yourself accomplish the impossible. You just have to believe that you have what it takes to be successful, and don't back down from your capable stance.

You are in control of your thoughts. If you choose to believe you have confidence - that you're energized - then you will be. The next time you face a big challenge, take a deep breath and fill your heart with the belief that you have unlimited energy running through your veins. Build your confidence by reflecting on those things you've already accomplished. If you did it once, you can certainly do it again.

Today, receive the confidence you deserve—and you'll find that you always had it within you.

Don't confuse self-esteem with arrogance: Arrogance is an over evaluation of your worth, while self-esteem is a healthy opinion of yourself—it's valuing yourself to the point that you don't allow other people or negative situations and circumstance to influence the way you feel about yourself. Until you value yourself, you won't value anything, and other people won't value you either. After all, your relationship with yourself is the most important one you'll ever have.

When you're filled with self-doubt, give yourself a little pep talk.  
Repeat

"[Your name], you are great! You are a unique individual, a new kind of person the world has never known. You were born to do well. You were born to succeed. You were born to bless the lives of others. You were born to be great, and you have what it takes to be great.

You are enthusiastic, optimistic, and a change-embracer. You are a giver, rather than a taker. You are organized. You are a hard worker. You are happy. You are a master over yourself, you are a leader. You are a big thinker. As blessed as you are with all these talents, there isn't one thing in the world you can't do. You will never fail. [Your name], go out and make today an 'attitude is everything' day!"

By making this profession every day, you'll experience an awesome self-esteem boost! Remember, you are priceless—your past is history, and your future is now!

### **FINAL THOUGHTS**

Let's review some of what you have learned about stress. Steel will snap from it and a pressure cooker will blow its lid. Stress, pressure, tension is a fact of everyday life for most of us.

Remember that it puts you at risk for heart attack, stroke, insomnia, backache, headache, irritable bowel syndrome, sports injuries and infertility.

Stress can trigger serious illness like Graves' and fibromyalgia. Stress even makes us more susceptible to the common cold.

With your health at stake, it is essential to use some of the methods we have discussed. Also, it's important that you remember

that stress is a physiological response. It isn't all in your head! You owe it to yourself to take the time to use the stress-reducing techniques on a daily basis.

We've already given you a great selection, but we want to make certain that you have a wide range of coping skills to use at home, work and other places. So here are an additional 12 keys to stress reduction to help you open the door to a more relaxing life. They contain dozens of additional helpful hints. Choose those best suited for you.

**Breathe deeply.** Relax your muscles, expanding your stomach and chest. Exhale slowly. Repeat several times.

Follow your breath as it flows in and out. Do not try to control it. This is a good way to relax in the midst of any activity. This technique allows you to find a breathing pattern that is natural and relaxing to you.

Use this yoga technique: Inhale slowly, counting to eight. Exhale through your mouth, even more slowly, counting to sixteen. Make a sighing sound as you exhale, and feel tension dissolve. Repeat 10 times.

**Exercise regularly.** Aerobic exercise, such as walking and swimming, produces brain chemicals that uplift your mood and mental well-being. Exercise also improves sleep and gives you time to think

and focus on other things. Beware of compulsive exercise, however.

Yoga is an age-old system for stretching and strengthening the muscles. Take a class or learn at home with a good book or video.

Neck and shoulder exercises are useful for the desk-bound and arthritis sufferers.

Neck roll: Look to the right, then roll your head forward, as if you are trying to touch your chin to your chest. Keep rolling until you are looking over your left shoulder. Repeat in the other direction.

Shoulder lift: Relieve tension in the neck by lifting the shoulders toward the ears, then dropping them as low as they will go. Repeat 10 times.

**Eat healthy foods.** You should never skip meals. Take time out for lunch no matter how busy you are.

Carry nutritious snacks to the office, or even the shopping mall. A nutritionally balanced diet is important. For example, researchers have found that even small deficiencies of thiamin, a B-complex vitamin, can cause anxiety symptoms. Pantothenic acid, another B-complex vitamin, is critical during times of stress.

Avoid caffeine, alcohol, and large amounts of sweets, which can aggravate symptoms of stress.

**Don't let others get you down.** Choose positive friends who are not worriers. Friends who constantly put you down or talk

gloomily about life will increase your anxiety.

Ask a good friend to help you talk out a problem and get it off your chest. A long-distance call to an old pal can be great therapy.

Forgive others instead of holding grudges. Relax your standards – for yourself and others. Perfectionism is not the way to happiness. Become more flexible.

Communicate clearly with your co-workers and boss. Ask questions. Repeat instructions that you are given. Clarifying directions at the start of a project can save hours later straightening out misunderstandings.

Be truthful with others. Lies and deception lead to stress that always takes its toll.

**Be optimistic.** Count your blessings, especially when everything seems to go wrong. Believe that most people are doing the best that they can.

Don't blow problems out of proportion. Live by a philosophy of life that whittles problems down to size. The maxim, "Live one day at a time," has helped millions.

**Plan your time wisely.** And realistically. For example, don't schedule back-to-back meetings with tight travel time. Remember to leave room for unanticipated events – both negative and positive. Be flexible about rearranging your agenda.

Get up 15 minutes early in the morning. Allow an extra 15 minutes to get to all appointments.

Avoid procrastination. Whatever needs doing, do it now. Schedule unpleasant tasks early, so that you won't have to worry about them for the rest of the day.

Keep an appointment book. Don't rely on your memory.

Do one thing at a time. Focus your attention on the person talking to you or the job at hand, instead of worrying about other things. This also reduces mistakes --- which lead to more anxiety.

Be prepared to wait. Carry a book to read in case of delays.

Say "no" to requests that stretch you to the limits.

Delegate. You don't have to do it all yourself. Break a job into separate tasks and assign them to people with the appropriate skills. Then leave them alone to do their work.

**Prevent problems before they occur.** This takes some planning.

If you are flying to another city for an important meeting, carry your presentation materials and dress suit on board the plane. Baggage does get lost.

Buy gas for the car before the tank is empty. Get regular oil changes and checkups.

Keep food staples on hand so you can fix a fast meal without

going to the store.

Keep food, toilet paper and toiletries on hand so you never run out. The same goes for postage stamps, paper and envelopes.

Keep duplicate keys for home, car and office in secure locations.

**Retreat to recharge your spirit.** Schedule private time every day. You deserve it. Unplug the telephone and enjoy a quiet evening alone or with your family, or even 15 uninterrupted minutes in the shower or bathtub.

You may want to spend a few minutes writing your feelings out in a journal. It can help you find a new perspective and relieve hidden conflicts.

Here are more spirit rechargers:

Wear earplugs for instant peace anytime, anyplace.

Learn a meditation technique. Two methods: Observe your thoughts as they pass through your mind. Or, repeat a word or phrase with an uplifting meaning.

Practice progressive relaxation for 20 minutes twice a day to relieve high blood pressure and other physiological responses to stress. Tighten and release each muscle group in turn, starting with the soles of the feet and slowly working up to the scalp.

Plan a weekend activity that is a change of pace. If your week is heavily scheduled, relax and enjoy noncompetitive activities. If you

are never able to finish anything during the week, choose a project that you can complete in a few hours on Saturday or Sunday.

Take time out for a diversion in the middle of your workday. When the pressures of completing a project are too great, your productivity can drop. Take a walk or stop for lunch.

**Savor life's little delights.** Give yourself some physical pleasure to help your stress slip away.

Treat yourself to a professional massage, or trade massages with a loved one.

Give yourself permission to enjoy a movie, watch a sports event, listen to music or read a book.

Savor a soothing cup of chamomile herb tea with a dollop of honey. Chamomile has long been used to relieve nervous tension.

Plan a day of beauty with a friend. Do each other's hair, or paint your nails and chat.

Create a simple steam facial at home by boiling water. Remove the pan from the stove. Cover your head with a large towel so that it creates a tent over the pot. Steam your face for five or 10 minutes. Add aromatic herbs to the water for a sensual touch.

Focus completely on any of the senses – hearing, seeing, eating or body movements – for a few minutes. Even washing your hands can become a sensual experience.

**Use visualization and affirmation techniques.** You can inoculate yourself against a situation you fear by going over the event in your mind. Imagine the scene in vivid detail and picture the best possible outcome.

You can also shrink an imagined fear down to size by picturing the worst possible results. Imagine describing this worst case to your best friend the next day and the sympathy you receive. Imagine telling a group of friends the next month, who share their similar experiences. Finally, imagine joking about your unpleasant experience with a complete stranger a year later. If you carry this exercise through to the end, your stress will become something to laugh about.

Replace negative self-talk with affirmations. The chatterbox in your mind is filled with gloom: You're too fat. . . you're too old. . .you'll never amount to anything. Like the little engine that could, nourish your mind with a constant stream of "I know I can."

**Get enough sleep.** Determine how much sleep you require for optimum performance. Sleep deprivation aggravates the body's responses to stress. Consider setting an alarm clock to remind yourself that it is time to go to bed.

**Strive for your dreams.** Plan ahead to meet your most cherished goals in life.

Time management experts emphasize the importance of writing

down your important goals.

Break big projects down into a series of small steps that you can work on every day. Want to change jobs? Make one phone call contact today. Is writing a book your dream? Commit to writing one page a day.

Knowing that you are striving toward your dreams relieves frustrations that mount when you feel stuck in a rut of endless responsibilities that seem to lead nowhere.

Even if you only use these last 12 keys to stress relief, you can become a happier, healthier person, a more efficient worker and a better friend to others. Keep a notebook as new ideas come to you through your reading and your own creativity. The most important key is your decision to take time for yourself and to simplify your life whenever possible.

Resources: The Stress Test <http://alphadynamics.com>  
How To Stop Worrying And Start Living By Dale Carnegie

\*