Stress Management Techniques

A stress management program can increase your well being. Emotionally you’ll notice the difference too. You’ll have more energy, be more alert, and you will be better able to get what you want out of life. Try some of these stress management techniques.

1. One of the main causes of stress is change, especially sudden or disagreeable change. If there has been a major change in one area of your life, try to keep other areas as routine as possible.

2. There are five steps to solving almost any problem that causes us stress. They are:
   1. Identify the problem, 2. Look for options, 3. Choose a solution, 4. Take action, and 5. Evaluate the results.

3. Have lofty but limited goals. Rather than having eighteen goals, two or three will do. Make sure your goals are realistic. Don’t work for something that is totally out of reach.

4. Divide what you need to do into A, B and C priorities with the A’s being the most important. This helps eliminate items that are unnecessary. Also, plan your school schedule on a weekly and monthly basis to allow time to complete assignments and prepare for tests. Give yourself deadlines that come before instructor deadlines. Come to class five minutes early on test days to reduce your stress level.

5. Practice active exercise. Exercise is a great way to release physical and mental tension, so physically fit people handle stress more easily than those who are not fit. A regular exercise program should include some form of aerobic activity such as running, walking, swimming, or bicycling. Most doctors recommend 30 minutes of exercise three to four times a week.

6. Have proper nutrition and eating habits. Cut down on sugar, sodium and fatty foods. Eat more fruits and vegetables and whole grains. Don’t forget to eat breakfast. Eat slowly. Remember, a meal is not a race!

7. Try not to worry about potentially unpleasant situations. Things rarely turn out as bad as we imagine them to be.

8. Don’t accept substitutes for stress management. This means that you should moderate or eliminate your intake of alcohol, drugs or tobacco. Alcohol: can mask feelings of stress, but it can’t erase emotional and physical tensions. Caffeine: relying on coffee or tea to get you through the day may leave you a bundle of nervous energy and NOT in a relaxed state of mind. Nicotine: cigarette smoking speeds up the heart, increases blood pressure, robs oxygen from the body and interferes with a person’s ability to reduce stress.

9. Lead a balanced life—not a life preoccupied with work, school, money or social activities.

10. Have “escape routes” which allow for relaxation—read a book, take a long bath, visit a friend, etc. Do something you enjoy. Do it regularly—at least a half of an hour each day.

11. Balance negative events with positive events to look forward to.
12. Have a sense of humor. We need to be able to laugh at ourselves and not see life as just a serious, difficult situation.

13. Learn to say NO! Trim such unessential activities as volunteer work, serving on committees and even maintenance jobs around the house.

14. Don’t try to conform to imprisoning and punishing social roles, (perfect mother, strong male, etc.).

15. When you reach the “I can’t cope” level, you need a little distance from your problem to figure out how to deal with the situation.

16. Work out anger. Don’t let anger get the best of you. Get involved in some useful physical activities instead.

17. Talk out worries. Talking with a trusted friend or family member goes a long way toward putting your problems in perspective.

18. Dealing with criticism. People who are stress resistant view criticism as information. They can accept it, reject it, use it, or ignore it. For them, it is information, not devastation.

19. Use “positive head talk.” We all have conversations in our heads all the time and for many of us, this talk is negative. The “up” people we like to be around tend to have a basic orientation toward optimism and cheerfulness. They look forward to anything new. This is a learned behavior.

20. Pamper yourself. Frequent small rewards are more effective than one big reward.

21. Energy and time spent worrying about uncontrollable events is time totally wasted.

22. Live on your net income, not your gross, and watch spending habits.

23. Work toward better communication with others.

24. Rehearsal is a way to prepare for potentially stressful situations before they occur. Think over the situation, go over the details, plan to take action, and visualize yourself proceeding successfully.

25. How we interpret things around us can cause stress. Interpreting a sour look from your boss or instructor to mean that you are doing a bad job is likely to produce anxiety. Interpreting the same look as tiredness or preoccupation with personal problems will not be as frightening.

26. Think positive. It’s like giving yourself the go ahead to succeed!
Stress Management Exercises

Listed below are four stress management exercises that can be done in just a few minutes each day. Nearly every stress reducing activity has immediate benefits, but you will have much greater benefits if you start an activity and stick with it.

Relaxation—Clearing Your Mind:

This forms a basis for other relaxation procedures such as meditation. To accomplish this technique:

- Reduce distractions, noise and interruptions as much as possible before you begin.
- Sit comfortably, loosen any tight clothing, kick off your shoes, relax, and begin to breathe deeply.
- Mentally focus on one peaceful word, thought or image. If other thoughts enter your mind, don’t be discouraged—relax, breathe deeply, and try again.
- Stretch and exhale as you complete the exercise. With practice, “Clearing Your Mind” can help you feel refreshed, have more energy and be ready to meet your next challenge. Practice for 5-10 minutes each day.

Autogenics:

If you have heard of the expression “mind over matter,” then you have a basic idea of what autogenics training is all about.

- Begin by sitting comfortably. Loosen any tight clothing, close your eyes, and try to empty your mind of all thoughts. You may want to breathe deeply for a few minutes and repeat a peaceful suggestion such as “I feel quiet,” “My mind is at rest” or something similar.
- Then, concentrate on another suggestion such as “My left arm feels heavy and warm.” As you think of this suggestion, try to actually feel your arm getting heavier and warmer. Continue to repeat the same command, but focus instead on your right arm, left leg, right leg, etc.
- Breathe deeply and stretch as you finish the exercise. Open your eyes, exhale slowly and notice how you feel. As you become better at this technique, you will be able to help your body relax anywhere and at any time. Try to practice this exercise for about 10 minutes each day or whenever you feel stressed.
Progressive Muscular Relaxation:

- First tighten your hand muscle and make a fist; then notice how it feels. Your muscles are taut and strained and your hand may even be trembling slightly. You may feel tension in your hand, wrist and lower arm. Hold this tension for a few seconds before relaxing.

- Release your hand, relax your fist, and let the tension slip away. You may notice that your hand feels lighter than it did while your muscle was tensed and that your wrist and forearm are also relieved of pressure.

- It is most helpful to try this exercise on each of the major muscle groups of the body. This basic technique remains the same for each group: tighten the muscle, release the tension, then notice the difference. You can start with your hands then progress to other muscles or you can begin the exercise moving from “head to toe” tightening and relaxing the muscles in your face, shoulders, arms, hands, chest, back stomach, legs and feet.

Visualization

Unlike the exercise on Clearing Your Mind, where you try to focus on one single image, visualization allows your imagination to run free.

- Try to visualize yourself warm, clam and relaxed.

- Picture a setting that has particular appeal to you. Try to imagine all of the details. Are you lying on a warm beach? How does the sun feel on your back? Do you hear waves lapping on the sand? Just use your imagination. You can give yourself a mental vacation whenever and wherever you feel the need to relax.