

# TEN STRATEGIES TO MANAGE STRESS

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New York Daily News  
Wednesday, February 20, 2008

Whether your boss, your child, or the tortuously slow line at the supermarket is making your teeth clench and your heart race, you're not alone. More than half of all Americans report feelings of "high stress" in a typical day, and up to 90 percent of all visits to the doctor are stress-related, according to Harvard's Mind/Body Medical Institute.

You may experience the unsettling symptoms every time a driver cuts you off or your toddler colors all over your living room walls. But what you may not know is that stress can be a warning signal that we're losing our balance.

To restore that balance and feel calm and centered, it's important to manage stress, experts say. Here are ten tried-and-true stress reduction strategies to try:

- 1) Eat for the long run. New York City life can be a marathon. Choose nurturing and sustaining foods instead of quick pick-me-ups, which can cause rapid bursts of energy, followed by lowered mood and energy. Create a custom food strategy that fits for you. Eating on the go involves strategic planning of easy prep, easy-to-carry foods like raw almonds or organic apples. Prepared food resources can be mapped and targeted using Zagat's Restaurant Guide and Marketplace Guide.
- 2) Decrease the sleep deficit. You may be surprised to know that some of us really do need eight hours of shut-eye or else we feel jetlagged, which leads to even more stress. So turn in a little earlier each night and see if your stress levels decrease when you're better rested.
- 3) Laugh! It's a natural stress buster, alleviating tension and promoting the release of the endorphins that give us a sense of well-being. Norman Cousins wrote in the New England Journal of Medicine that laughter was a significant component of his recovery from severe disease. You don't have to be sick to enjoy a sense of humor. Rent funny movies, see a comedy show, read a book that's funny. Not sure which one to choose? The New York Public Library offers a variety of resources. Check out the branch for the Performing Arts at Lincoln Center.
- 4) Stretch out. When your body's tight, you feel uptight all over. Gentle stretching can relieve stored muscle tension and promote flexibility.
- 5) Choose your music with care. Music is more than just something our ears hear. It also influences our breathing, heart rate and blood pressure. Dr. Barrie Cassileth, Chief of the Integrative Medicine Service at Memorial Sloan-Kettering Cancer Center writes that "Music therapy...the use of music to encourage healing and promote a general sense of well-being ...is a documented effective complementary therapy." So try listening to tunes that make you feel relaxed. Remember, the right music can also promote the release of feel-good endorphins.
- 6) Help others. An Emory University study suggests that focusing on another's well-being can actually reduce stress. So shift the focus from yourself to someone less fortunate by doing some volunteer work, and you may be surprised by how good it makes you feel (to say nothing of the other person).
- 7) Be truthful to yourself. Choose your own internal programming. When you're doing what you know is right, you'll feel better and much less stressed.

8) Connect with a friend. Sharing feelings with a supportive friend lessens tension. It may even enhance wellness and increase survival rates of those with heart disease or breast cancer, research shows.

9) Breathe. We tend either to hold our breath or breathe more shallowly when stressed. Paying attention to the natural rhythm of your breath may help interrupt stressful thoughts. This method can help you achieve the Relaxation Response, the opposite of the stress response. Dr. Herbert Benson, Director Emeritus of Harvard's Benson-Henry Mind/Body Medical Institute says, "Regular elicitation of the Relaxation Response has been scientifically proven to be an effective treatment for a wide range of stress-related disorders."

10) Walk it off. Connections with nature can reduce stress and increase energy, so go to the park, visit the New York Botanical Garden, or stroll through the butterfly exhibit at the American Museum of Natural History.

Note: Stress management is not a substitute for medical therapy or psychotherapy.

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