

## Quick tips to

# MANAGE STRESS



While we all talk about stress, many of us don't really understand what it is and how it affects us. Stress is our body's response to a demanding or threatening situation. When we experience stress, our body tries to meet the demands of the situation by releasing adrenaline; pumping more blood to the heart and muscles and shutting down all non-essential functions. What can we do to ensure we don't end up paying a toll with our health, vitality, and peace-of-mind? Here are some suggestions for increasing stress resistance and avoiding burn out down the road:

### INCREASING STRESS RESISTANCE AND AVOIDING BURN OUT

**Laughter.** Laughter can reduce stress, boost your immune system functioning, and help discharge pent up emotion. If you can't make yourself laugh, then go see someone who makes people laugh for a living, like a comic.

**Breathe.** Be aware of your breathing. Think "my body can relax," inhale slowly and purposefully noticing the breath as it enters through your nostrils and fills your lungs. Expand your abdomen as you breathe to the count of four, hold the breath for a moment, and slowly exhale to the count of four. For your second breath, visualize warmth and relaxation entering your body as you inhale; tension exiting your body as you exhale. This is a good technique to use when you get a stressful phone call, for example. Put the person on hold, take your breath, release it slowly and thoughtfully, then return to the call.

**Say 'no.'** Are you a "yay-sayer" (i.e. "sure, I'll do all the cooking for the party," "certainly, I can work overtime anytime you need me to")? Think about the things that you would like to do and separate these from the things that you have to do. Begin to say "no" to some of the expectations other people place upon you if they aren't "have to's." A cautionary note, however. Sometimes we have to do things that we don't like despite temporary feelings of discomfort. You are the best judge. Do what takes care of you, your career, your family, and your relationships. Everything else you agree to is a bonus and should only be considered if you have time and energy.

**Set reasonable goals and strive to do your best.** Learn from mistakes and failure and don't beat yourself up when things go wrong. Be a bit easier on yourself.

**Play with a pet.** Playing with a pet can distract you from your worries. So rather than ruminate and feel stressed, focus your thoughts on your pet and thereby begin to feel better. Additionally, playing with your pet may offer you a chance to get active. If you have an animal that likes to run outside, go out and throw a ball for it to retrieve. You'll feel refreshed and consequently, less stressed.

**Simplify.** A sure way to reduce stress is to do less and re-evaluate your commitments. Is it important that you belong to the bowling league, bridge club, own a luxury car, raise five children, and coach the swimming team? If so, why? Choose one or two activities that you truly enjoy and re-evaluate your commitment to the others. When you reduce the demands on your time, you will have more leisure time and may have less stress.



**Get active.** Regular aerobic exercise (repetitive movement of large muscle groups as in walking, jogging, swimming) is a healthy and effective way to manage stress. In addition to improving your physical well-being, it can have a positive effect on your mood and your body's immune system. A word about exercise: more is not necessarily better. Too vigorous a workout may suppress your body's immune functioning. This isn't an issue for most of us, however. Just getting enough exercise is the challenge.

**Eat well.** Stress drains your body of energy. Consequently, you need to ensure that you nourish your body with the nutrients it needs to combat stress, and limit your intake of foods that aggravate stress. This means eating a variety of fruits and vegetables, grains, dairy products, and lean meats, if you like. Also, reduce your intake of caffeine (from coffee and colas) and substitute with green tea.

**Talk to others.** One of the best ways to manage stress is to share your feelings with others. Supportive relationships will help you manage stress. Find a friend or someone who you feel comfortable sharing things with, and tell them about your day. Similar to the effect of laughter, talking with friends and "getting it off your chest" can help improve your body's physical health. Regardless of whether or not these conversations lead to "solutions" and ways to change your circumstances, just talking things out will help reduce stress.

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