

Breaking Free of Stress

Stress is a beautifully orchestrated physiological response that has allowed humans to adapt and survive for millennia in the face of life-threatening danger. An automatic, biochemical event, the stress response heartily persists in contemporary times though we rarely encounter the same level of peril as our pre-historic ancestors. Modern stressors—pressure, deadlines, change, illness and other life disruptions—hastily trigger an emergency alarm in our mid-brain, and, in a split second, our body is in a state of hyper-arousal. Prolonged stress drains away our joie de vivre, changes the chemistry of our body, and leads to serious, even fatal, disease.

Fortunately, we can easily learn to master stress. The solution is to gather a collection of quick, easy-to-use stress reduction techniques. To ensure efficacy, select methods that are well suited to your own style and temperament—ones that you find practical and enjoyable. Then repeat them periodically as you go about your day. Here is a sampling of techniques that can be done in a matter of minutes.

- Inhale slowly to a count of four and exhale gradually to another count of four. Draw air deeply into the lungs, allowing the chest and abdomen to fill entirely. The abdomen should slowly rise and fall. Repeat for several cycles.
- Use your imagination to create a personal scenario that produces a calming effect for you. For example, close your eyes and visualize yourself in a peaceful setting. Or recall a soothing experience from the past. Use all your senses to vivify the image or memory: smell the flowers, feel the refreshing breeze, hear the rushing water.
- Negative thoughts tend to snowball causing our stress response to escalate. As soon as you become aware of a troublesome thought, silently shout “STOP”. Then replace it with a positive statement like, “I can easily handle this problem.”

The secret is to prepare in advance and find your own formula for success. It might be a prayer, a song, a yoga stretch or a mix of different methods.

Stress has far reaching consequences. If you are troubled by stress or are coping with a stress-related physical disorder, our staff would be happy to speak with you confidentially. We can recommend techniques, or services in your area tailored to your specific needs.

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