



Manage stress right now

Stress can escalate until your neck is sore, your heart is racing, and you feel overwhelmed. On an average day, more than half of the workforce leaves work with neck pain, tired eyes, or sore hands. Many take the stress home, vent with family or friends, and then have trouble sleeping. Stop the stress cycle with these ten quick, easy tips.

DEEP BREATHS

Slow racing thoughts and relax knotted muscles by breathing deeply and slowly, at least ten times. Put one hand on your stomach. Make sure it rises with each breath. Avoid fast, shallow chest breaths that increase tension. Breathe in through your nose and exhale through your mouth.

VISUALIZATION

Picture your favorite place to relax. Beach? Woods? Hiking trail? Keep a picture in your office or on your refrigerator. Pause to feel, hear, and smell your special place. Be there, and the next time you visit your place of contentment, anchor more vivid images to access when your stress cycle begins to escalate.

PRIORITIZE

Write down your top three priorities for the day. Put the rest aside. If possible, stop answering your phone or e-mail for thirty minutes. Collect yourself. Focus. When priorities change, pitch that note and write another with only three points. Don't think too far ahead. Stay in the moment. Work on what's in front of you.

RELAXING MUSIC

If your workplace allows music, opt for slow classical pieces such as Debussy's "Clair de Lune" or contemporary CDs such as George Winston's "Summer" or "Winter." Slow your mind and even try to walk in that cadence. Move and swing your arms slightly, doing subtle shoulder rolls to loosen up before you take up the next project.

POSITIVE SELF-TALK

Don't buy into "calamity conversations" and absorb the stress of others. Run positive messages through your mind. Use your voice. Say, "Of course I can handle this, all in good time." Walk outside if work continues as the main topic at lunch. Think of something besides work as you walk: dinner with your spouse or your daughter's soccer game. "I'm really looking forward to this evening."

SET BOUNDARIES AND DETACH

Make taking care of yourself your first emotional priority. You can't make people you don't like vanish, but you can make them a smaller part of your emotional life by responding differently to their emotionality, behavior, and crises. This means knowing what your hot buttons are and practicing different responses, getting better each time you try.

LAUGH AT YOURSELF

It's impossible to smile and stay stressed. If you smile when you're talking with a coworker or smile when you answer the

phone, your stress will unwind. CDs are available with contagious laugh tracks. Keep a list of funny situations you've been involved in or scenes from a movie with your favorite comedian. Recall and laugh.

SELECT STRESS-FREE SNACKS

Sugar can make you feel great during stressful times, but when your blood sugar crashes, you end up more strung out than before. Choose high-protein snacks such as yogurt or nuts or fibrous vegetables and fruits such as carrots or apples. Decaffeinated teas can be soothing, but avoid coffee, tea, or pop with caffeine, all of which heighten anxiety.

CHANGE THE CHANNEL

Bringing the tension home? Break away from your stress by tuning into a comedy or romance on TV or DVD at the theater enjoy a storyline where everything ends on a happy note. Leave your own drama by enjoying someone else's story. No news, no high-adrenaline adventure flicks.

WHAT THE EAP CAN DO

If these tips don't work for you, or if you think you need something more, phone the EAP. You may need additional help to resolve personal problems or issues that are the source of stress in your life. The EAP will help you find a way to feel good again.

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