

## Stress Busting - Top Twenty Tips

We have access to time- and labour-saving devices beyond the dreams of any previous generation. Yet poor time-management skills and resultant stress seem a more common problem than ever before.

Do you recognise yourself in any of these common patterns?

- \* Feel overwhelmed by the pressures of modern living
- \* Can't say no
- \* Difficulty setting (and/or achieving) your goals
- \* Can't switch off at the end of the day
- \* Have problems finding time for the things and people that really matter
- \* Repeated procrastination
- \* Beset by interruptions, emergencies and deadlines

Try these top tips to beat stress.

1) Number one tip in all ways - learn to say 'No'. There are only 24 hours in the day. Be careful what you agree to take on. The more you agree to do, the more people will expect of you. Is it really your problem? Who else could do it? Does it need doing at all?

2) If a job really does need doing, and only you can do it, can it be done NOW? Consider a quick job that doesn't need thinking about – for instance paying a bill. Putting it to one side will only increase your “mental clutter” as you need to remember to do it ‘by the due date’. The bill won't go away; it won't get smaller – in fact it may get bigger. ‘Do it now’ to get rid of it.

3) If finances are causing your stress and you can't pay your bills right away, take urgent action to correct the situation. It may seem simplistic to say ‘earn more’ and/or ‘stop spending’, but an objective review of your life with a life-coach (even a single session) will be an excellent investment, before things get completely out of hand.

4) Laughter is one of the best ways to relieve tension – it exercises muscles in your face and abdomen and the bigger the belly laugh the greater the effect. Studies have shown that laughing can boost your immune system and even lower your blood pressure. Laughter releases endorphins, the body's natural painkillers, which can increase your feel-good-factor. You may have to seek out cartoons or even think of silly incidents from your childhood to get you started, but make it a habit – and try and get workmates and family in on the act. You'll all feel better for it. However if you really don't feel like laughing don't let that stop you – even fake laughter can have a beneficial effect as the ‘laughter’ muscles can't tell the difference!

5) Try meditating. The aim is to still your mental confusion and produce a state of calm which will relax your body and increase mental clarity. Sit quietly in a chair with your head supported and both feet flat on the floor. Close your eyes, take a deep breath and as you exhale focus on a word to suit your circumstances (examples: peace, love, calm).

Breathe deeply several times. If you still find it hard to relax, imagine yourself on a beach in the sunshine – enjoy feeling the warmth of the sun on your skin, hear the lapping of the waters. The troubled thoughts of the day will try to force themselves into your mind, don't worry. Just calmly put them to one side. Do this regularly for only ten minutes every day (more if you can spare the time) and you'll soon feel the benefits.

6) If meditating is 'too much' for you, just spend some time each day alone and in silence. Research in Paris found that talking can send your blood-pressure through the roof! Silence and a good book may have a calming effect.

7) Breathe deeply, from your stomach. Take a brief breath in and a long slow breath out.

8) Using a few drops of Camomile, Marjoram, Ylang-ylang, Sandalwood, Patchouli or Neroli essential oils in your bath at bed-time can help you relax after a hectic day. Make sure the bath isn't too hot, as this could raise your blood pressure.

9) A glass of red wine in the evening may help you unwind - but don't overdo it, restrict yourself to one glass a day because alcohol is also a stimulant!

10) Lack of sleep promotes stress. Learn, and stick to, your body's natural sleep pattern. To help promote sleep, avoid eating late in the day – ideally allow three hours between your last meal and bedtime. When you do eat, make sure you're sitting at a table concentrating on the meal in front of you, don't snatch meals on the run, while working or watching television. If your posture is poor when you eat your digestive processes can be hampered, food may linger too long and sleep can be disturbed - let alone leaving yourself wide open to a range of digestive problems.

11) One of the best ways of relaxing is to take some gentle exercise – 20 minutes every day or half an hour three times a week. Suggestions: take a brisk walk to work – even getting off the bus or train one stop earlier can help. Use an exercise bike while you watch TV or read a book. It's important to choose a form of exercise that you enjoy, or you won't stick to it, so take up a new (active) hobby such as dancing or swimming. If you have any form of heart condition, remember to check with your GP before you increase your levels of exercise.

12) Every day make some time just for you to do something YOU want to do. It could be reading, a lovely relaxing bath, a massage, a facial, a brisk walk or even something challenging that you've always wanted to do such as learning a new language. Any of these could help you feel better about yourself. Initially you may find you have difficulty setting aside 'you' time, so block out half an hour in your diary every day to give yourself permission! If you have a family, don't feel guilty about this – the whole family will benefit when your stress levels are reduced.

13) Give up smoking – although it has a calming effect initially, this is short-lived. In fact tobacco has a stimulant effect – not to mention the addictive tendencies and risk to health.

14) Watch what you eat and drink – excess sugar, caffeine, fizzy drinks or alcohol have a stimulatory effect. Drink plain, bottled water whenever you can, ideally 2 litres a day. Eat more fruit and vegetables, which have an alkalizing effect. Always start the day with breakfast to get your blood sugar in balance.

15) Put the answerphone on! The phone always rings most often when you're in a rush. It is NOT imperative to take every call. 'Caller Display' lets you see who's calling if you want to be selective.

15) Express your emotions, don't bottle them up. Write your worries down, possibly as a letter, then burn them. Don't make the mistake of posting the letter – 99 times out of 100 you'll regret it.

16) Think positive thoughts. How many times have your worries passed by without the worst happening. Look for the good in any situation rather than the bad.

17) Plan your life so that you avoid those little snags that can so easily be the last straw. Make sure you always have a few coins tucked well out of sight in your car, ready for the parking meter.

18) Write down everything that's causing you stress. Which items have you got control over? What can you do to alter the situation? If you have no power to control the situation can you learn to accept it?

19) Think of someone you love or admire. Are they perfect? Yet you still love/admire them. Don't expect perfection from yourself when you tolerate imperfection in others. Learn to forgive yourself. When you make a mistake, look for a lesson to be learned and move on.

20) Many people find they can rebalance their 'Wheel of Life' more quickly with the aid of a life coach. To find out more about how coaching can help you with stress and time management, visit the website below and contact one of the coaches with any questions about coaching.

To learn more about coaching for stress and time management visit the website <http://www.life-coaching-london.co.uk> for help in various areas of your life.