

## Stress Busters – Practical Ways to Reduce Stress

- **Exercise Regularly.** Exercise aerobically for at least 15 – 20 minutes per day. This is probably one of the most effective ways to reduce tension.
- **Eat Well!** Avoid excessive caffeine or other stimulants as they may cause anxiety. Fresh fruits and vegetables are often recommended to reduce stress. Stressful foods can include: processed foods, artificial sweeteners, carbonated drinks, chocolate, eggs, fried foods, junk foods, pork, red meat, sugar, white flour products, chips and similar snacks, foods containing preservatives or heavy spices.
- **Get Adequate Sleep.** Most people need 7-9 hours per night. Sleep not only rests your body, it also gives your brain the time to organize the material you've been studying.
- **Laugh.** Don't take things so seriously. When we laugh/smile, blood flow to the brain is increased and endorphins are released. In turn, the level of stress hormones drops. Studies show that laughter not only relieves tension, but actually improves immune function.
- **Be Decisive.** Indecision prevents you from taking appropriate actions, thus, intensifying stress.
- **Be Assertive.** Openly communicate your thoughts, feelings, etc. with others even when there are differences. Don't be aggressive, though.
- **Encourage Yourself.** If you are inclined to blame yourself for problems (even when they're not your fault), you may be guilty of negative self-talk, which is a great stress maker. Accept mishaps as routine and normal occurrences in life and you'll have a higher self-esteem and a much lower stress level. Use positive self-talk.
- **Slow Down and Relax.** Slow down. Don't rush. Take a walk. Getting "away" will relax you and allow you to think more logically when you return.
- **Reward Yourself.** When you accomplish a task, even a small one, reward yourself. Surf the internet, browse a bookstore, go to a movie. Those who do this experience a boost in the disease-fighting quality of their immune systems for several days.
- **Nurture Your Spirituality.** Religious or spiritual beliefs give us a context larger than ourselves, which can put things into perspective when we are stressed.
- **Don't Be Afraid to Ask For Help.** Seek counseling/health care if: you suddenly feel panicked, you are unable to work because of anxiety, self-treatment has failed, or cause of anxiety is unknown.
- **Establish a Routine.** By establishing a daily routine, you can save time and prevent stress. With predictability, you can be assured that even with everyday mishaps, some things remain constant.
- **Create Lists.** Have a daily written list of what you expect to accomplish that day. Prioritize. It will help you think more realistically about your schedule and time. Once you cross off an item from your "TO-DO" list, it relieves stress by removing one concern from your mind.
- **Don't Procrastinate.** It lessens productivity and quality, compounds stress, and may cause the stressful by-products of guilt, anger and low self-esteem. Remember: the worse your stress gets, the greater the tendency to procrastinate!

*Adapted from: Stress: 63 Ways to Relieve Tension and Stay Healthy, People's Medical Society, 1996. 11 Ways You can Beat Stress, by Christina Frank, <http://www.shape.com>.*