

tops DE-STRESSING Tips

- ◆ Build a 30-minute cushion into your schedule. Unexpected events are bound to pop up. This cushion lets you deal with them without panic.
- ◆ Taking care of yourself should be one of your priorities. Have you built self-care time into today's routine?
- ◆ Don't let bad situations get out of hand. If you don't like the way things are going, speak up. The sooner you do, the easier it is to change things—and the less tension you'll have to live with.
- ◆ A stress-reduction break can be simple as sitting with eyes closed for five minutes, uninterrupted. Relax your muscles; concentrate on breathing in and out slooowwwllllly.
- ◆ If you're an empathetic, caring person, beware of letting others' stress become your stress. Just because someone near and dear to you is angry or tense does not mean you have to be, too. In fact, you'll support them better if you keep your perspective.
- ◆ Ask for help. Spouses, children, friends, and co-workers won't know you're overwhelmed unless you tell them. Specific requests, conveyed in a positive manner, work best.
- ◆ Deep breathing is a great way to relax anywhere, anytime. It brings oxygen into your body and signals the brain to reverse a stress reaction.
- ◆ Stress can be good when it accompanies a positive event or give you the oomph to "tough out" a bad situation. But you'll know you've crossed the line to "too much" stress when you start feeling out of control.
- ◆ If you find yourself tensing up more often than you'd like, hang a mirror where you'll glance into it often. The reflection of your frown or the deep furrow between your eyebrows may remind you to lighten up.
- ◆ Whether or not you're a "list maker," be aware that the *process* of composing a list is probably its most valuable feature, forcing you to gather random thoughts and to set priorities. Even a mental list will accomplish this—and reduce the tension of being bombarded with too many things to do at once.
- ◆ Get a professional massage. If you've never had one, you'll be amazed at how warm and loose your muscles feel afterward. Your mind relaxes, too. During stressful times, relief like that is anything but a luxury.

- ◆ Don't wait until stress completely zaps you to take a break. By then, your adrenaline level and blood pressure may be sky-high. Take a timeout as soon as you feel your own personal stress signals, which may include tense neck muscles, rapid and shallow breathing, a clenched jaw, or a jittery stomach.



- ◆ Are you doing something nice for yourself every day? If not, move yourself higher up on your priority list. Even on the busiest days, take five minutes to smell the roses (or a scented candle), or feel the sun on your face, or dance along to music, or...
- ◆ When stressed, people tend to reach for foods high in fat and sugar. If you find yourself doing so, don't bother looking for healthy snack substitutes when hunger isn't the problem. Instead, attack stress at its source.
- ◆ Make one small change. Even if you're overwhelmed by responsibilities and unpleasant realities, simply doing *one thing right* can get the ball rolling.
- ◆ The word "no" can be the greatest stress buster in your arsenal. Practice using a polite reply like "No, I'm sorry, I won't be able to do that." It'll save you from squandering endless hours trying to fulfill someone else's priorities at the expense of your own.
- ◆ Your time off should be just that. Don't force yourself to do chores during your lunch time or work breaks. Give yourself a real break.
- ◆ Be yourself. You have enough challenges in the world without trying to fit someone else's mold.



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