

## Say Goodbye to Stress

### **Seven ways to *minimize stressors* (things that trigger stress):**

#### **1. Cross things off your schedule and to-do list.**

A busy schedule can make you feel overwhelmed. Examine your schedule and make it more bare-bones. Create empty spaces. Your to-do list may be unreasonable. Break it up into what you want to accomplish in a year, a month, a week, and **today**. Make these lists realistic. What can you delete from your schedule every single day, in order to create more open space and free time?

#### **2. Start saying no more often.**

Learn to say no if you don't know how. Women are socially raised to always say yes, and put the needs of others before ourselves. While taking care of others is a beautiful thing, if it comes at the expense of taking care of ourselves, eventually we won't have anything to give! Practice saying no with grace, and without apology or guilt. With practice it will come easier.

#### **3. Batch the things you do in your schedule, so that you can be present.**

Instead of being swayed by whatever comes at you – phone calls, emails, or requests from others – take charge of your time. Make decisions about what's essential, and then batch it. This means deciding **when** you are catching up on news, spending quality time with your kids, checking your email, answering phone calls, cooking, exercising, relaxing, or working. Shut down the things you are not doing. Know that all you need to do is the activity you are doing, so you can do it fully and be present while you do it.

#### **4. Resist distraction and turn off notifications**

Distractions can be a huge time suck, and cause you to feel off-track and overwhelmed. This includes online distractions, such as email and social media pings. Turn off your notifications and be in charge of when you deal with online tasks. You may find you spend less time online overall, or at least that your time online is dictated by your choice. You may also find that it's incredibly freeing to unchain yourself from your phone for periods of time. What are your distractions that aren't online and how can you turn them off?

### **5. Avoid and minimize stressful events.**

Don't push yourself into situations that stress you out or drain your energy. Identify these situations and avoid them. Instead, spend your time in situations that recharge you. Introverts may prefer slower time with fewer people. Extroverts may get lonely by too much time alone or at home, and need to get out and be around lots of people. Seek the events and situations that feed you, and avoid the ones that drain you.

### **6. Avoid and minimize contact with stressful people.**

Minimize contact with people who stress you out. You know who those people are. Avoidance can be a great strategy in order to protect yourself and reduce your stress.

### **7. Drop pointless arguing and drama.**

If you recognize an argument is pointless, let it go. It's not worth the stress. Do you notice that you tend to be in argumentative or dramatic situations regularly? If so, begin to practice letting go of these situations. There may be something about them that draws you. Real-life drama is inevitably stressful. If you enjoy a bit of drama, go see a high drama movie to get that desire out of your system.

### **In a nutshell:**

- **Delete to-dos**
- **Say no**
- **Batch activities**
- **Resist distraction**
- **Avoid stressful people**
- **Minimize stressful events**
- **Lose the drama**

Of course we can't control all of our stressors. There will always be external stressors. However, we can learn to **change our perception** of these stressors so that we don't respond the same way. Many of us react without thinking.

### **5 ways to *change your perception of stress***

### **1. Take a breath, take a break.**

When faced with a stressor, take a deep breath or a short break. Deep breathing (while expanding your belly with your inhalation) has an immediate physiological calming response. A break could be simply counting to 10, walking around the block, or excusing yourself to go to the bathroom. Make a decision to let it go for the time being and think about it at a better time. These techniques can save you from automatic reactions that raise your stress levels through the roof.

### **2. Cultivate empathy.**

When other people stress you out, think about their point of view. It's human nature to want positive interactions, and we all have similar needs. The people who are stressing you out are just like you, and they may be under stress themselves.

### **3. Practice letting go.**

Another way of saying this is to practice acceptance. You can accept that a stressor is present, and that it's out of your control. Choose to simply accept it and let go of reacting. Life is short and it's not worth it. The expression "don't sweat the small stuff" can be expanded to the big stuff as well. Think of an expression that works for you. It may be something like "I'm going to let this roll off me, and remain steady and calm, no matter what." Another phrase from the 12 step programs is "Accept the things I cannot change."

### **4. Look for the positive.**

Instead of immediately going to what's negative in a stressful situation, think about what is positive. Take a step back from the situation, and make it smaller in your mind. Have a sense of the greater concept of the whole world and time, and how this moment is nothing beyond a moment. A greater positive can be that you are glad to be alive on this earth, experiencing life at this moment. Or it could be something specific. For example, if you are stressed that your dentist is running late, you could appreciate that you have teeth and you are able to see a dentist to take care of them.

### **5. Find the humor.**

This is similar to #4, in that taking a step back to laugh at the situation or yourself can really lighten things up. Use expressions like "this is a first world problem," or "this is the problem of an impatient driver," or "this is the problem of a person who's not in control

right now." Often those expressions can make us laugh at ourselves, and humor tends to lighten things up.

### **In a nutshell:**

- **Breathe**
- **Take a break**
- **Count to ten**
- **Empathize**
- **Let go**
- **Look for the positive**
- **Laugh**

### **8 ways to *manage your stress* every day:**

We all need ways to manage our stress. I break this project into two lists. The first contains ways to manage your stress. The second describes techniques that actually calm you and activate your parasympathetic autonomic nervous system. Both are important.

#### **1. Get enough sleep.**

This is the first thing to pay attention to. Not getting enough sleep is a cause of stress in itself, so it can be a perpetual cycle. It is not possible to manage stress if you are in a state of chronic sleep deprivation. Getting enough quality sleep will improve your resilience to stress during the day. See our [Sleep Hygiene Handout!](#)

#### **2. Move your body.**

Many people feel noticeably stagnant or pent-up if they don't move, while others are more sedentary and need to work at it. Find an activity that you enjoy doing and you're far more likely to do it. This may be outdoors or indoors, with other people or alone. Examples include sports, classes, dancing, running, walking, or swimming. Some people love going to the gym. Others use videos and exercise programs to work out at

home, with their own equipment. A step counter motivates you to walk more throughout the day. *The only situation where exercise will not help manage stress is if you have HPA-D, and you are over exercising and not able to recover.*

### **3. Have fun and play.**

Playful adults are fun to be around. We can all be playful, at any age. Play really lightens things up! Play with kids, play sports or games with friends. Or, simply adopt a playful attitude and notice how those around you respond. This brings me to the next item...

### **4. Social community.**

There is plenty of evidence that social connection reduces stress. A social network gives you a sense of belonging, a sense of self-worth, and a feeling of security. Volunteer work, as well as helping others, are part of this.

### **5. Spend time in nature.**

Being outdoors reduces stress. It can be a hike in a national park, a stroll through a city park, or a nap on the beach. Connecting with nature tends to help us not sweat our stressors. We feel our connection to the earth, and how the small stuff doesn't really matter.

### **6. Reduce stimulants.**

If you do feel stressed out, caffeinating yourself, especially all day long, will exacerbate it. Caffeine activates the sympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system, which floods our bodies with "fight or flight" hormones. To reduce stress we want the opposite to happen.

### **7. Watch comedy or go see comedy.**

Laughter is one of the best medicines for stress. We could all use more humor in our lives. Let funny people entertain you. Comedians have a gift to share. Hang out with the comedians in your life.

## 8. Listen to music.

Studies have demonstrated that listening to music reduces stress hormones.

### **In a nutshell:**

**Sleep, Move, Play, Socialize, Nature, Decaffeinate, Comedy, Music**

### **4 ways to *get parasympathetic*:**

This is different than just managing stress. Getting parasympathetic means activating the parasympathetic branch of the autonomic nervous system, which is called *feed and breed* or *rest and digest*. When the parasympathetic branch is activated, we are relaxed, and blood flow goes towards our digestive and reproductive organs. This is why I encourage women trying to conceive to get parasympathetic as often as possible. Instead of stress hormones flooding your bloodstream, relaxing hormones and neurotransmitters flow through your bloodstream. Picking up a practice of getting parasympathetic is probably the most important part of stress management, and essential with HPA-D recovery. Many people tell me that they exercise for stress reduction but that is *not the same* as getting parasympathetic.

#### **1. Meditation.**

Our favorite type of meditation is mindful focus on breathing, with guidance. You don't need to wait to take a class. You can start with inexpensive or even free apps. Our favorites are [Smiling Mind](#) (great for kids!), [Calm](#), [Headspace](#), and [Buddify](#). Studies often show that meditating 20 minutes twice per day gets the best results. However, we see enormous changes when people meditate only five-ten minutes per day!

In your resources, you have a five minute guided meditation recording that combines mindfulness with breathing awareness. When you use your diaphragm to breathe in your belly, it creates a deep physiological relaxation response.

## **2. Acupuncture.**

Acupuncture is proven to release parasympathetic neurotransmitters and hormones, including opiates and endorphins. Many people get in a deeply relaxed state during acupuncture, a special restorative rest that is unlike no other rest.

## **3. Biofeedback.**

Biofeedback is great for meditators who want direct feedback. Our favorite method of biofeedback is [Heartmath](#). You purchase a sensor that you can plug into your phone. You get direct feedback by watching the lights and movement on the device, which measures your heart rate variability. [BioZen](#) and [Quantum Life](#) are two other types. It's recommended to practice biofeedback for five minutes, three times per day for best results. However, we see people benefit from just five minutes per day.

## **4. Restorative [Feldenkrais](#), yin yoga, or Qigong.**

These practices can be specific for restoration and pain reduction, and they tend to activate the parasympathetic system. These are great for people who have a hard time being still. Doing Feldenkrais, yin yoga, or QiGong is meditation in movement. Feldenkrais is appropriately called "Awareness Through Movement."