

FIFTEEN STRESS BUSTING TIPS

By Leonard Szymczak, MSW, LCSW

- **PRACTICE SELF-CARE WITH LOVE.** A commitment to yourself, your family, work, and other important values and belief systems promotes an inner sense of satisfaction. Good self-care implies a commitment to your physical, emotional, mental, relational and financial well-being. If you don't nurture yourself, you become more vulnerable to stress.
- **ESTABLISH PERSONAL CONTROL.** When you take control of your life, you engender power and hope, emotions that counteract being overwhelmed. Change those parts of your life you can control. It may be as simple as changing your body posture while typing or releasing tension through exercise. Similarly, you can train your mind to focus on positive mental states during challenging times.
- **EMBRACE CHANGE AS AN OPPORTUNITY.** Change is often seen as an interruption to security and safety. When you view problems as opportunities and challenges, you are in a better position to learn from them. Change, stressful situations, and even tragedies offer important lessons that can enrich you. For example, getting burned out may teach you about taking better care of yourself.
- **STAY IN THE PRESENT.** Pay attention to your physical, emotional and mental states. Awareness helps you monitor your levels of stress. To stay present, take periodic check-ups using a ten-point scale with number one as calm and relaxed and ten as burnt out. If you hover around ten during the week, it's time to incorporate anti-stress remedies.
- **MAKE TIME FOR RELATIONSHIPS.** A loved one, colleague or friend not only can relieve the pressure of stressful emotions but can also offer fresh perspectives. Asking for help is often the first step toward resolving a problem. While you're at it, develop a support group of people who are positive and care about your well being. Loving relationships provide soothing balm for any difficulties.
- **TAKE PAUSES.** Intermittent breaks or rest periods help you rejuvenate. This could be as simple as stretching after a long stint on the computer, taking a quiet pause during lunch or it may mean scheduling vacation breaks throughout the year. Take periodic deep breaths. Schedule time for exercise and rest to help your body discharge stressful emotions and recuperate. Relaxation or meditation exercises can refresh the mind after a particularly hard day.
- **INTRODUCE VARIETY.** When feeling in a rut, it may be time to think of adding variety to your life. You could vary job activities such as starting an afternoon project in the morning or interspersing your job with more enjoyable tasks. If you work on the computer, alter the position or height of your chair occasionally to prevent muscle fatigue.

- **JUGGLE PRIORITIES GRACEFULLY.** Knowing what you can and can't do within a defined period of time relieves stress. Incorporate Time Management Principles to use time more effectively and eliminate wasted parts of your day. And if you occasionally drop the ball, forgive yourself.
- **REMOVE ENERGY DRAINS.** Make a list of ten things that burn your energy. People, places and things will burn your time, money and emotions. Think of practical ways to eliminate the clutter and negative patterns in your life. As you clear your life, make room for new possibilities. A quality life often has more to do with what you remove from your life than what you add.
- **RENEW YOUR MIND.** Marcus Aurelius once said, "Our life is what our thoughts make it." Your thoughts can either encourage or discourage you. Begin and end the day with inspirational passages that stimulate and motivate your mind.
- **SMILE OFTEN – LAUGH FREQUENTLY.** It takes less energy to smile than to frown. Smiling sends a signal to your brain that about feeling happy and laughing is a wonderful way to discharge pent-up tension and aggression.
- **CREATE A LIFE AFTER WORK.** Set clear boundaries between job and home so when you leave your job psychologically as well as physically. When you bring work home, you essentially never get a break. It's important to create a life that involves pleasurable activities with enjoyable people. Fun and laughter rejuvenate and replenish.
- **SCHEDULE AN APPOINTMENT WITH YOURSELF.** Plan anywhere from a half-hour to half a day. When you make this time sacred, you create a powerful message that your life is valuable enough to invest time and energy for self-care. Practice "being" rather than "doing" and replenish yourself with pampering activities such as massage, reading, time in nature, solitude, etc.
- **UTILIZE SPIRITUAL PRACTICES.** Stress can be viewed as an opportunity for spiritual and emotional growth. A spiritual framework can add a dimension of meaning and purpose to life. Prayer and meditation offer empowering experiences for healing and connection to the realm of the holy.
- **BE GRATEFUL AND PASS IT FORWARD.** Maintain a mindset of gratitude to fuel the process of change. Graciously accept compliments when they come your way. Then pass the good feeling forward to others.

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