

“Stress Management Secrets”



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Table of Contents

Introduction	4
Chapter 1: What Causes Stress In Our Lives	11
Chapter 2: How You Contribute to Your Own Stress	19
Chapter 3: Stress Management Techniques	27
Chapter 4: The Physiology of Stress	36
Chapter 5: Lifestyle Changes to Better Manage Stress	43
Chapter 6: How Diet and Nutrition Influence Your Stress Levels	53
Chapter 7: How to Lower Your Stress With Exercise	60
Chapter 8: The Psychology of Stress	69
Chapter 9: Control Your Thoughts, Control Your Stress	72
Chapter 10: Learning When to Let Go	78
Chapter 11: When To Seek Help	87

Introduction

The economic uncertainty of recent years is a huge cause of stress to people today. It used to be that to have food to eat and a place to live, you would tend your own crops or have a ranch and probably build your own home. Families all stuck together and children helped to care for parents and vice versa. Neighbors also would lend a hand when something needed repair and trade was plentiful - some of your crops for the wool from our sheep, some of the eggs from our chicken for that tool we need, and so on.

But today, who grows their own food and builds their own house? Who trades or barterers? If you want food to eat and a place to live, you need to work a job where you can get money to buy those things. Jobs require work skills and an education as well as a means of transportation to the job. Unfortunately today's educational system fails many as children still graduate high school with only remedial reading skills, much less the skills they need to conquer the job market.

And of course educational requirements change all the time when it comes to working and what is needed to keep a job. That degree that a person got twenty or even ten years ago may not be applicable in today's job market and may not give them the skills they need to keep up with the ever-changing world in which we live.

You're also typically competing with many others in the job market who are all applying for the same job. With machinery and computers and other

shortcuts that employers use, there are fewer jobs available for all those job seekers out there.

This doesn't mean that those who have jobs are not feeling stress either. The pressure to keep one's job can be enormous, and it's believed that those who are afraid of losing their jobs feel just as much anxiety and stress as those that are out of work! Living in constant fear of losing one's job is like being at a heightened state of awareness and anxiety which means stress for everyone.

Additionally, as employers cut costs and lay off some workers, they may expect others to pick up that slack and to handle workloads that are even beyond their capabilities. This too causes stress and anxiety on the job, and many find that they're working more hours than ever just to keep up with their increased demands.

Other stresses on the job include the demands of keeping up with a changing economy and a global market. Those that own businesses now face competition not just from the business next door but from the one across the country and on the other side of the world. So if you're thinking that you need to own a business to be free of stress, you may want to think again.

Facing economic uncertainty is bad enough on its own, but in today's world, the financial pressures are overwhelming for many individuals and families. As said, you cannot just live on your parent's farm or ranch anymore; people need housing as well as transportation, money to buy clothes, furniture for

the home, gas for the car, insurance for the car, and so many other things that are necessary just to make it through today's world. And these expenses continue to mount when a family has children and aging parents for which they're caring.

Today too there is an incessant need to keep up a particular lifestyle. When you see neighbors with a pool or new car, you want the same for yourself. Think of all those advertisements you constantly see for clothes, home appliances, accessories for the home, sporting goods, televisions and gaming systems ... and the list could go on. Advertising and marketing works; that's why it's a billion dollar industry. We want what we see, which means additional financial pressure on individuals and families.

Of course, just getting the basic necessities can be stressful enough. Prices continue to rise for groceries, heating oil, and things such as these. Many companies are also cutting medical benefits for workers, meaning more out-of-pocket expenses for individuals and families. It seems that in every single area of one's budget, costs are rising making financial pressures very common with individuals and families. Many today are also facing rising mortgage costs, as many have purchased homes with adjustable interest rates that have raised their mortgage cost over time. Rising gas prices make it difficult to meet one's monthly budget and this also means that the cost of goods is rising as well.

Financial pressures also continue to rise as people get older. Many are living longer than ever these days, which of course is good news, but it also means that they continue to have financial pressures well into their old age.

Understanding financial issues is often difficult today because many people just are not taught financial skills in order to manage money properly.

How might relationship issues be a contributing factor to stress and anxiety today? Of course relationships themselves can be stressful; no couple or family is perfect and arguments and disagreements cause stress for everyone. But the breakdown of the family and the disposable attitude that many have toward relationships can cause even more stress and anxiety.

This is because when a person is going through something difficult and stressful, their family and their relationships can be a comfort to them. There can be a "we're all in this together" attitude that helps a person through, and the idea that no matter what else you may lose in life, your family will always be there for you.

But sadly this just isn't the case any longer. People cannot count on marriages, relationships with parents or children, or any other relationship any more than they can count on their jobs being secure! This not only causes stress, but means that there is less relief of stress in the family as there should be.

Relationships also seem to suffer between parents and children and siblings as well. This can cause stress especially as parents get older. They may wonder who will take care of them if they're estranged from their children and may worry about their children and their lives as well. All of this causes worry, stress, and anxiety.

Along with this type of stress and anxiety are what people feel because of changing expectations in the home and family. Men often no longer know where they fit in the family arrangement; they want to respect their wives as full partners but this can mean they no longer feel needed in the home. If she can earn a living and raise children and manage the home on her own, that makes him even more disposable.

Women too feel the pressure of changing expectations in the family. Often they want to work outside the home and have children as well, and try to be all things to everyone - the career woman, the perfect homemaker, the perfect mother, and so on. This can mean constant pressure and anxiety as she tries to live up to her own expectations and the expectations of those around her.

People today seem to be suffering from constant small worries that add up to anxiety levels the likes of which so many have never seen. Often a person doesn't just worry about finances but their family, their health, and other problems all at the same time. And of course we today have those major anxieties as well - the threat of war, of terrorist attacks, of sicknesses that we cannot cure, and so on.

Some have thought that stress is a good thing; it makes you rise to the occasion and step up to do your best in any situation. Some also believe that they work better under pressure, but many studies have argued that a person simply works faster under pressure, not better. Their work may actually suffer because of pressure and because of feeling this "push" to do more and to do it quickly.

In reality, stress and anxiety rob a person of their abilities to think clearly and cloud their judgment, as well as causing physical tensions and ailments. And chronic stress can be like background noise that never seems to go away and which robs you of your ability to rest and to be healthy. Without adequate rest and without good health mentally and physically, everything in a person's life can suffer including their abilities to make good decisions.

Reducing stress is a step-by-step process. It requires a thorough assessment and examination of your daily life in order to develop your own customized stress-reduction program.

The process is not as time-consuming as you might think. It's actually quite simple. First, you have to figure out which issues are causing you the most stress, including those hidden sources you might not necessarily think of. Next, you have to come up with a plan. Finally, you have to work toward implementing that plan.

The first step in this process is to figure out what is causing you the most stress. Until you know which elements of your life are the most stressful, you won't be able to do very much to eliminate your stress.

Start by making a list of everything you feel is causing you significant stress. It doesn't matter at this point how big or small these stressors are, just write down everything that comes to mind. Chances are, if they are stressful enough for you to think of them, they are causing problems for you.

Next, you need to prioritize each of these stressors. Make a numbered list that starts out with what you believe are your most serious stressors, and moving on down the list to those that you feel aren't necessarily as serious. This will let you know where to focus most of your efforts.

Once you have this list, you can start putting together your customized plan for reducing stress.

Chapter 1: Main Causes of Stress

Money Issues

The most common source of stress in most people's lives is money, or lack thereof. The old saying says "money is the root of all evil", but perhaps it would be more apropos to say "the lack of money is the root of all evil". It's understandable that money troubles are such a huge cause of stress. When money is tight, you may face all kinds of issues. You may be at risk of losing your car, your utilities, even your home.

Not only do you have to worry about losing the actual items, but you have to worry about the repercussions of this. For example, your family might be pretty upset with you if they suddenly had no cable television. This might cause arguments within the family. Also, if you lost your car, you might have no way to get to work. If you lost your home, you might have nowhere to live.

These are all extremely stressful situations. And the arguments and conflicts that tend to crop up as a direct result of money problems can make the situation a lot worse.

When dealing with money issues, there are two main elements at play. First, you must make more money. Next, you must find ways to control expenditures so you spend less.

Making more money may involve taking on another job, but this could end up being more stressful, especially if you are already under a lot of pressure at your main job.

You may also take on some part-time freelancing or consulting jobs, perform odd jobs here and there, start a small business on the side, sell some of your unused stuff, or something similar.

It may not be realistic for you to make more money if you're already extremely short on time, so you may have to instead work on spending less. There are many ways to cut expenditures. Even if you think you aren't spending much unnecessary money, almost everyone can find ways to cut expenses without experiencing too much discomfort.

The point is to make your life less stressful. If cutting out a certain expense would make your life less happy and fulfilled, don't worry about that one. Just do your best to cut spending down as much as possible without affecting your quality of life too much.

Relationship Issues

Perhaps the second most common source of stress is difficulties in relationships. While there will usually be problems in all interpersonal relationships, those that happen between romantic partners are usually the most stressful.

Your romantic partner should be your rock, your biggest supporter, the person who helps ease your stress. Unfortunately, this is an unrealistic ideal in most relationships. While this should be what happens, it rarely is. Most relationships are filled with a lot of hostility, jealousy, and other negative emotions that cause excessive stress for both partners.

One thing you need to realize is that if you are experiencing stress due to your relationship, your partner probably is, too. This leaves open the possibility of talking with your partner and working things out.

Sit down with your partner and let them know that you feel the problems the two of you have are contributing to your excessive stress levels. Let your partner know you don't blame them for the issues, and that you know that they are probably also experiencing stress.

Tell your partner how much you care about him or her, and how you want things to be better. Stress is not healthy for either of you, and it's certainly not healthy for your children, if you have any.

By sitting down together and working on the issues, the two of you might be able to come to some sort of peaceful resolution. If nothing else, perhaps the two of you could see a therapist who might be able to help you through your issues in order to ease the stress that both of you are experiencing.

Workplace Issues

Issues at work are a huge factor in the stress levels of most people. Whether you're the boss or an employee, whether you work for someone else or you're self-employed, you will undoubtedly experience some stress as a result of your job.

One of the most common sources of workplace stress is the inability to realistically meet deadlines. If you feel the deadlines you receive aren't realistic or are problematic, you will either need to discuss the issue with your boss or clients and try to get your deadlines relaxed a little, or you will have to learn better time management skills.

If other employees are given similar deadlines and are successfully meeting those deadlines, you may have to take a look at the situation and try to find out if there are specific reasons that you are not able to meet your deadlines when other people are.

It could be a problem with your time management skills, it could be that you have special circumstances, or it could be that you have an issue like depression or ADD that might need to be treated.

Another common workplace issue is simply not getting along well with your coworkers. If you are having an issue with a coworker that you feel is interfering with your work or causing you undue stress, try talking it over with them first. If you go behind that coworker's back and talk to your superior first, you may alienate that coworker even further, perhaps making the situation even worse.

If you try to work out your differences and aren't successful, you may have to go to your boss for help. Just explain that you have already tried unsuccessfully to work out your differences with your coworker, and that you really need help. Your boss might be able to at least work with your coworker to find a reasonable solution for both of you.

If you are having trouble at work, don't ever be afraid to talk to your boss. Even if your main issue is caused directly by your boss, talking to him or her may be beneficial.

If you can't work out your problems no matter what you try, you may have to consider finding another job. Since your job is your livelihood, you can't let this kind of stress stay in your life.

Time Management Issues

As I mentioned in the previous section, time management issues are common in the workplace. They can also cause problems at home, at school, and anywhere else.

If you don't have very good time management skills, you may find it very difficult to get everything you need to get done finished in a day. This can lead to you getting behind on your work, which is very stressful.

I suggest taking a time management class or getting a good book or course on it. Even if you think you already have good skills in this area, it can't

hurt to improve them. Time management can help you in every area of your life, from work, to school, to home, and more.

Family Issues

Sometimes you may have issues with family members that cause you a lot of stress. Usually these issues can be resolved by simply talking things out, but sometimes things are more complicated than that.

If you're having very serious issues with a family member that you can't seem to resolve, you basically have two issues. You can either seek the help of a mediator such as another family member who is neutral, or a professional such as a therapist, or you can simply cut that person out of your life.

If that person is your child, it may not be that simple. You can't simply cut your child out of your life without causing yourself significant guilt and distress. In fact, it may be more stressful to cut your child out of your life than it is to have them in it. In this case, it's vital to try as many times as necessary to talk out your differences, and to seek qualified help if you are unable to work anything out on your own.

If the family member is not your child, it is still preferable to try to work out your differences first. Family is important. Having a strong, tight-knit family structure is actually a great stress reducer. Even if you have to see a therapist or other qualified mediator together, it can be very beneficial to repair the relationship rather than just abandoning it.

Of course, if you try everything you can to repair the relationship and are unsuccessful, you may have no alternative but to cut off contact with that person. Your mental and physical health should be your top priority, and if your family member cannot respect that, perhaps they have no place in your life at the present time.

Friendship Issues

As with family, friends can often be a major source of stress. Just like with family, you should first try to resolve your problems amicably. It is a much better idea to try to repair an existing friendship, and it's sometimes easier to do that than to try to make new friends.

Sadly, there will always be times when a relationship simply can't be mended. If you must, don't hesitate to cut people out of your life. Remember, your mental health and physical health is at stake, and they are far more important than any friendship could ever be.

Illness

If you are physically ill with a major disease or injury, especially if it causes you significant disability, it can be extremely stressful. Mental illnesses can also be extremely stressful.

If that illness is life-threatening, the stress it could cause you could be immeasurable. Life-threatening illnesses, either your own or that of

someone you care about, are one of the most terrifying and stressful events you could ever imagine.

If you are experiencing a serious illness or injury, it's very important to seek help from a therapist, especially if that illness could be life-threatening. You should never have to go through something like that alone, and even your friends and family may be unable to support you in such a frightening time.

If the illness is not yours, but that of someone you love, you should be sure to spend as much quality time with that person as possible. Not only will it be comforting to you to know that you spent as much time as possible with them before they passed away, but you would also be providing them with love and support in their greatest time of need.

We all experience stress in every single one of these areas. However, when any one or more area is causing consistent and continual stress, that is when it becomes a problem. Constant stress is what causes health issues to arise and so learning to identify the problem areas is the first step towards being able to prevent, reduce or eliminate these stress factors.

Chapter 2: How You Contribute to the Stress

There are many ways that we sabotage ourselves when it comes to managing stress. We don't know how to say no, we set unrealistic goals for ourselves, we don't eat properly, we don't get enough sleep, we try to live connected 24/7 and the list goes on.

In this chapter, we'll take a look at some of the ways we add to our own stress levels, sometimes thinking we are helping when we are actually making things worse.

There are three obsessive behaviors that you are likely to be engaging in that stop you from enjoying a stress-free life. Recognizing these barriers can be a great first step toward getting rid of the problems that go with being too stressed.

The first is obsessive negativity. When you are obsessively negative, it means that you have a tendency toward being "negative" about people, places, situations, and things in your life.

Perhaps you find yourself saying things like "I can't do this!" or "No one understands!" or "Nothing ever works!", for example. You may be doing this unconsciously, but essentially you have what's known as a "sour grapes" attitude, and it holds you back from knowing what it's like to view life from a positive lens and enjoy the beauty in yourself and people around you! There's a whole world out there for you...with happiness and positive thinking.

Then you have obsessive perfectionism. When you engage in obsessive perfectionism, you are centered on trying to do everything "just so" to the point of driving yourself into an anxious state of being. You may find yourself making statements such as, "I have to do this right, or I'll be a failure!" or "If I am not precise, people will be mad at me!" Again, this behavior may be totally under the threshold of your awareness, but it interferes greatly with your ability to enjoy things without feeling "uptight" and "stressed."

Finally there is obsessive analysis. When you are obsessed about analyzing things, you find yourself wanting to re-hash a task or an issue over and over again. For instance, you might find yourself making statements such as, "I need to look this over, study it, and know it inside and out...or else I can't relax!" or "If I relax and let things go without looking them over repeatedly, things go wrong!"

While analytical thinking is an excellent trait, if it's done in excess you never get to stop and smell the roses because you're too busy trying to analyze everything and everyone around you. Gaining insight into this type of behavior is one of the most important keys to letting go of stress.

If you find yourself engaging in any of the above "Blocking Behaviors", there are two things you can do to help yourself. First, ask the people you know, love, and trust, "Am I negative about things?", "Do I complain a lot?", and "Am I difficult to be around?"

This may be hard for you to listen to, as the truth sometimes hurts a great deal. But the insight you will get from others' assessment of you is

invaluable, and you'll know precisely how others see you. Accept their comments as helpful info, and know that you will gain amazing insights from what you hear.

Second, keep a journal to write down and establish patterns of when you are using "blocking behaviors." Even if you are not thrilled with the idea of writing, you can make little entries into a note book or journal each day. The great part is that you'll begin to see patterns in your behavior that reveal exactly what you're doing to prevent yourself from getting rid of the stress in your life.

When you feel stress and pressure closing in on you, what do you do?

If your answer is that you do nothing, or that you catch yourself eating, smoking, drinking, screaming at the children, or something along those lines, then a good part of the reason you continue to feel stress is probably that you haven't learned to take control.

It's imperative to learn how your stress can be allowed to escalate so that you're no longer in charge of your own thinking and your own feeling. This leads to a pattern of feeling stress, getting overwhelmed, and feeling even more stress because of being overwhelmed.

If you don't take charge of your stress, how will it end? What will break that never-ending circle of stress and feelings and more stress? In other words, if you don't learn to control your stress and the thinking that leads to it, then

your stress will always control you. Don't count on it just taking care of itself.

Let's go over some tips to consider for taking charge of your stress and your thinking that leads to even more tension and anxiety.

Catch Yourself

You can't change the thinking that's causing you more stress if you don't realize that you're doing it in the first place. Very often the thoughts running through the mind get pushed back so that they become something like background noise, and we tune them out from our consciousness.

This doesn't mean that they're any less harmful. Our mind is still picking up on the messages from those thoughts and the body will respond accordingly. So it's important to learn to be aware of these thoughts so that they can be corrected.

When you feel yourself getting tense, anxious, nervous, or panicky, tune into what you're thinking. Really hear that voice in the back of your head. Start considering how those thoughts are tied in with what you're feeling and how the tension is building. Get into the habit of doing this every time you start to feel tense or nervous.

Bringing these stressful thoughts to the foreground may not be pleasant but it's necessary in order to address them. You may assume that ignoring them is the way to deal with them, and this can help if you can truly tune

them out. But rarely can anyone do this. Even though you don't hear them as much as thoughts that are in the forefront of your mind, they are still causing damage. So really hear them and catch yourself when you start thinking something stressful.

Argue With Yourself

When a thought pops into your head, what do you do? If you're like most, you allow it to sit there or worse yet, fester and grow. One bad thought leads to another and another, and soon enough your stress has grown into anxiety and outright panic. You worry about paying your bills and these thoughts grow to knowing that you'll be homeless and on the streets and all sorts of other bad things will happen to you. Or you stress about your marriage and soon enough you've convinced yourself that your spouse is cheating and hates you and you'll be alone and everyone will be laughing at you.

Many allow their thoughts to follow this pattern because they don't know what else to do about them. When you get a thought in your head, that's just it, right? Your thoughts are out of your control since you're not really consciously originating them ... right?

In reality you can argue with your own thoughts the way you would argue with anyone else. This doesn't mean you need to walk around talking to yourself and you don't even need a full-blown conversation running through your head. Just mentally repeating firm phrases like "Stop it!" or "Knock it off; you know that's not true," can help to stop this vicious cycle.

This might seem like a lot of work and indeed it can be, at least at first. But when you begin to get into the habit of arguing with your own thoughts, you realize the benefits of not allowing those negative thoughts to interfere or to spiral out of control.

Arguing with yourself will mean not letting those thoughts run unchecked which in turn means less stress and anxiety. When thoughts that are unsettling are allowed to just fester and grow, so does stress. But when you argue with yourself, it's like getting rid of those thoughts altogether so they cause less stress. Think of it as a game of mental whack-a-mole; a thought pops up that's going to cause you stress, and you knock it back down with a thought that doesn't allow it to stay there.

Replace Those Thoughts

As you argue with the thoughts that are in your head, it's good to consider how you can replace those thoughts as well. If you put new thoughts in your head you'll see that you not only have fewer negative thoughts but can also dwell on the positive as well. Arguing with yourself is a way of neutralizing negative thoughts, but this leaves you at square one. You need to then think of something positive so those negative thoughts don't return.

Replacing negative thoughts can mean learning new ways of thinking and calling on those things when you feel your thoughts spiraling out of control. It can also mean addressing your negative thoughts and your negative feelings directly.

Positive Events

If it's difficult to think of positive thoughts, consider positive events and circumstances. Think of your children, your parents, that great vacation you took last year or are going to take this year, or something else that is encouraging. Think of a project you completed on your job or a compliment you got from a friend. If nothing else, think of what you'll be eating for dinner when you get home at night! Anything you can use to replace those negative, stressful thoughts will help you to be less tense and anxious just because of what you're thinking.

When you're not sure of positive events or really don't have many to call to mind, make some up! Imagine yourself in a faraway city or on a great cruise. Think of being in a beautiful garden or in some setting that you would enjoy. In this way your mind can get away from those negative thoughts and negative experiences you currently have and your stress can be relieved.

Change the Channel

When you find it difficult to replace stressful thoughts with more positive ones, think of it as changing the channel. Use that phrase with yourself; when those thoughts creep into your head, think to yourself "Change the channel!"

Then use those positive thoughts we've outlined, or something else that helps. Imagine those positive events in the past or something you're

looking forward to, and this will help you to replace those negative thoughts. The key here is to be forceful with what you're thinking and to not just allow those negative thoughts to run amok in your own mind.

Taking Control

One reason that this helps is that you can feel more in control of yourself and your circumstances. When you take charge of your own thoughts, you can then feel as if you can take charge of your own circumstances.

This can in turn lead to positive action. If you're stressed and worried about certain circumstances in your life, it's easy to just freeze up due to that stress and tension. And when you're frozen with worry, you can't do anything positive to address your stress. But when you begin to think positively, you can then learn to act positively.

By identifying thought patterns and behavior patterns in yourself that contribute to the stress in your life, you will better be able to change those patterns. As you practice controlling these patterns, you will find that it gets easier as time goes on. Replacing negative and self-sabotaging habits and thoughts with positive and empowering thoughts will establish new patterns for you.

In the next chapter, we will look at some of the various stress management techniques that have been developed that can help you learn new ways to cope with stress.

Chapter 3: Stress Management Techniques

In this chapter, we are going to take a look at some of the methods used for stress management. Not all methods will work the same for everyone. Some people find relief by using a combination of these methods.

Ultimately, it will be a matter of trial and error to discover the method or combination of methods that work for you.

Stress is common to all. There is hardly anything that one can do to avoid it. However, there are several ways of dealing with stress. They increase the ability to handle stressful situations and help reduce stress.

A structured program combining elements of physical and mental relaxation can go a long way in providing relaxation and reducing stress. Such a program can include a wide variety of activities ranging from the martial arts to meditation, deep breathing to muscular relaxation. These programs can also use psychotherapy and other medical therapies.

Deep Breathing

Deep breathing is a simple but effective stress management technique. It is actually the core component of many stress management techniques, which are comparatively complex in nature. Techniques such as relaxation imagery, meditation and Progressive Muscular Relaxation involve deep breathing.

Breathing relaxation is a process of focusing of the attention on the exhalation phase. It can give a feeling of heaviness, a feeling of slowing down or sinking. When you experience these sensations during the exhalation phase of the breathing cycle, you automatically get relaxation.

There are three basic criteria that you need to remember while using the breathing rhythms for relaxation:

1. The first one is to breathe normally. You should not try to manipulate your breathing cycle. Allow the body to breathe itself. Just observe it passively.
2. Disregarding the inhalations is the second point to remember. Let your body inhale by itself. You need not to give any conscious thought to it.
3. Third, you should focus your attention on the exhalation phase. Think about the exhalations and concentrate on it.

If you follow the above steps properly, you feel and experience some soothing sensations when you exhale. You experience a feeling of heaviness, a feeling of slowing down or sinking. This will ultimately leave you with a sense of freshness and relaxation. Breathing relaxation does not aim at providing relaxation only during the exhalation phase of the breathing cycle. If you synchronize the exhalation phase with the sensations, relaxation will be more lasting.

How to relax your breath:

1. Position yourself in a comfortable posture with adequate support. You should not cross your arms or legs. Have a passive mind and allow your body to relax.
2. Close your eyes and quietly observe the air as it enters and leaves your nose during the first few breaths.
3. Focus only on the exhalation phase for the next several breaths. Focus on the warmth of the air as it leaves your nose and relax.
4. With each exhalation, feel the sense of your body sinking into the supportive environment. You will feel as if your body is slowing down.
5. Remain in the relaxed state for some time. Before you finish and open your eyes, take a deep breath, flex and stretch.

Imagery

Imagery is a method of relaxation through use of pleasant or relaxing images. Such images help to calm the body and mind. One can get a sense of relaxation by simply controlling the breathing and viewing some soothing image. Practitioners use this technique in treating several physical and mental complexities including cancer.

Meditation Techniques

Meditation has long been one of the most popular stress management techniques. It is the process of focusing upon the core of one's being. It soothes the mind, body and the emotions. One can do meditation by daily practice of a routine or simply while being alone outdoors. There are a wide variety of meditation styles and techniques to choose from.

One of the most popular forms of meditation is transcendental meditation. The goal of this form of meditation is to achieve transcendental consciousness. Relaxation response is another popular form of meditation. One needs to sit quietly and pronounce a word or a phrase repeatedly for 10-20 minutes every day. This meditation technique is effective in reducing blood pressure and lowering the body's response to stress.

Remember that meditation is not a one shot deal. It is almost impossible to attain a calm state of mind in just a matter of minutes, especially if it's your first time at it. It is essential that you keep on practicing meditation until you have conditioned your mind to instantaneously achieve the state just by thinking it.

Here are some steps for a beginner to start with meditation as their Stress Management strategy:

Step 1: Find A Quiet Corner To Start Your Meditation

Distraction is a hindrance to those who are still starting out with meditation. When you close your eyes, your sense of hearing will be twice as good so it

is quite possible to hear almost anything in your surroundings that will make it hard for you to concentrate.

For beginners, it is important to start out in a quiet place in your home where noise is non-existent. Close your windows and lock your door. If possible, you can tell everyone in your home to minimize their noise so that you won't get distracted.

Step 2: Ready Your Position

It is advisable for beginners to avoid lying down when practicing meditation. The aim here is not to sleep, and it is a guarantee that you will immediately fall off to sleep if your mind reaches a relaxed state. To stop this from happening, you can start your meditation in a lotus position or you can find a chair you can sit on. Make sure that your back is straight and your hands are relaxed on the armrest or on your lap.

Step 3: Begin Your Meditation With Proper Breathing

A good way to start meditation is to do the proper breathing exercise. You inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. This way, you can come up with a rhythm that you can easily focus on. Also, the amount of oxygen in your body will be enough to keep you relaxed. Keep practicing your breathing until you can do it easily without having to think about it.

Step 4: Focus On Your Mind

While you are busy with your breathing, you will achieve a state wherein your mind will start throwing images at you. These are mostly in random -- events of the day, future plans, problems and worries, fears and so on. It will be hard to ignore these thoughts and you are not supposed to ignore them. The gist here is to focus on these thoughts without really paying any attention to it.

This might sound hard but here is a simple example to understand the concept. You know that you have furniture at home -- you can see them clearly with your eyes but you are not really concentrating on it. Focusing on the furniture will usually make you think of its color, its material, how it looks in that part of your home, and more. You need to be able to look at these random thoughts in a detached state -- seeing them clearly in your head but not focusing your attention on it.

There will come a time that these random thoughts will stop and you will notice that you are already in a blank space in your mind. This is the state you want to achieve during meditation. This is the place where you can think about your problems and focus on it till you can find a solution for it. With this, you have successfully mastered the basics of meditation for your stress management program.

Progressive Muscle Relaxation

One can use Progressive Muscle Relaxation to achieve mental relaxation through physical relaxation. It involves tightening and relaxing the muscle groups in succession. In this technique, you first need to tense up a group of

muscles to contract them as much as possible. Then relax the muscles normally

after a few seconds. You should relax the muscles as much as possible. It is simple to learn and perform this exercise. One needs to have adequate practice and patience to derive maximum benefits from this technique.

Autogenic Training

This stress management technique uses passive concentration and awareness of the body sensations for relaxation. Physicians use Autogenic training as a part of therapy for many ailments. In this technique, one focuses upon different sensations in different organs of the body through repetition of the autogenic

"formulas". Those sensations include warmth, heaviness etc. It does not require any particular physical exercise or skills. It only requires some amount of time and patience. This stress management technique is widely popular in Europe. It is gaining ground in the USA also.

Biofeedback

Biofeedback is an advanced technique for achieving relaxation, controlling stress responses and for modifying the body's reactions. It uses certain monitoring equipment to extract information from the body. Such equipment can measure heart rate, blood pressure, brain activity, muscle tension, stomach acidity and other biological functions inside the body. Analysts can use the information to analyze the breathing techniques, postural changes or

thinking patterns. This technique is helpful in treating several physical and psychological conditions.

Martial Arts

Practicing martial arts can be a great stress management technique. It keeps one physically fit and mentally alert. There are several martial arts that one can take up.

Tai chi is a Chinese martial art that is popularly known as "meditation in motion". It stresses precision and force. The body movements are soft and flowing. It is necessary to learn this art from an expert. Since it requires a great amount of physical labor, it is also necessary to check with a doctor before beginning to learn it.

Qigong

This ancient Chinese health care system combines Eastern philosophy and relaxation techniques with physical training. The physical training includes aerobic conditioning, isometrics, isotonics etc. This stress management technique has several forms. They are effective in treatment of various medical conditions. It needs much time, commitment, determination and patience to learn Qigong. It is necessary to have a health check by a doctor before starting the training, as it involves physical exertion.

Yoga

Yoga literally means "joining" or "union" in Sanskrit. This union is between the individual and the divine. This ancient Indian form of exercise is highly effective as a stress management technique. Besides, it also keeps the body strong and the mind alert. Yoga has many forms but all forms work on the principle that the mind has a connection with the body and breathing. Yoga restores the balance and harmony in the body and emotions through different breathing exercises and postures. It increases the body's flexibility and capability for relaxation. Yoga exercises are easy to learn and nearly anyone can learn them but guidance by an expert and a medical check before starting are essential.

All of the above techniques can help you to cope with the stress in your life. In order to learn any of them effectively, you should educate yourself and/or see a professional who can help guide you.

While some things, like meditation and yoga, have their roots in Eastern philosophies, they are widely practiced in Western cultures now. Almost any town or city of any size will have practitioners of these that can guide you.

Chapter 4: The Physiology of Stress

So far, we've learned to identify and focus on the problem areas that skyrocket our stress. We've also learned some of the common stress management techniques.

In this chapter, we're going to elaborate on the physiological effects that happen in the body due to stress. Once you know what these signs and triggers are, you may better able to identify sources of stress that were hidden from you before now.

When you are under stress, certain physiological changes occur within your body. These changes are the result of your body's defense system trying to protect you from negative effects of stress. However, you feel and act differently in such stress situations and your body has to cope with this unusual happening.

Normally, as soon as your stress levels start going up, the hypothalamus gland of your brain directs the pituitary gland to release ACTH hormone. With it, the adrenal gland releases both adrenaline and non-adrenaline. Many more hormones are now in your bloodstream. All of them need stimulation, which is available from the sugar released from your liver.

Your bloodstream now has many red blood cells full of energy joining hands with energized hormones. All these together increase the heart beat and your body temperature. Non-adrenaline tightens the walls of your arteries, thereby increasing your blood pressure.

Your whole attention is totally on the stress point and you combat it with full concentration. You are aware of only one single thing - STRESS. Activation of your mental alertness makes you feel excited or frightened. The power of your inert senses rises and you are now highly sensitive.

Involuntarily, certain physical changes occur in your body. You sweat more. Your face becomes whitish and your muscles twitch and tighten. Your eyes are open wider and your concentration levels soar. You do not have saliva in your mouth and other body functions of digestion, urination, or defecation completely stop. In extreme cases, it may lead to uncontrollable diarrhea or urination. Your feet and hands become cold as the total blood in your body is pooling together to fight against the stress levels.

The stress period is a very vulnerable period as the total immune system of your body suffers a breakdown. Your body is defenseless against any foreign bodies. Hence, you are easy prey for illnesses and infections. You fall sick very easily and are not able to fight away the sickness.

The only way out of such stress symptoms is absolute relaxation of your nerves and the body as a whole. You have to erase the stress completely. By this means, you will be able to regain your inner and physical strength and come back to normalcy.

Early Warning Signs of Stress

There are certain symptoms that are common in people suffering from stress. Mostly these symptoms show up as soon as stress starts to build up. So many people are living with chronic stress these days that they aren't even aware that stress is causing their health issues. If you have any of these warning signs on a regular basis, you may be suffering from chronic stress.

Headaches – Most of the people who regularly complain of a headache actually get it because of stress.

Body ache – Body ache is a common result of stress. There may be pain in different organs of the body such as muscle ache, chest pain, lower back pain, etc.

Impatience – People lose patience because of stress. It increases the negative emotions of anger and anxiety.

Speech difficulties – Stammering is one of the early signs of stress. People in the grip of anxiety fail to speak clearly.

Blood sugar – Stress damages the balance of blood sugar in the body. It can result in diabetes.

Blood pressure – People suffering from stress often fall prey to high blood pressure and other related diseases.

Excessive fatigue – Excessive fatigue may cause significant damage to the personal and professional life of a person.

Sexual problems – Stress decreases the tendency to want sex. It can even lead to infertility. Women can experience irregular menstruation because of it.

Withdrawal from social life – People suffering from stress fail to cope with group situations. Therefore, they withdraw from social life.

Physical Signs of Stress

Stress is actually a reaction of the body to change in the physical, mental or emotional environment. It shows up in several physical signs and symptoms. Stress often leads to different types of physical disorders.

Heart beat – Increase in the heart beat is one of the most common conditions in stress. The heart pounds and beats faster in a stress situation.

Elevated blood pressure – Stress raises the blood pressure dramatically. It can be fatal for people that already have high blood pressure.

Tightness of the chest, neck, jaw, and back muscles – There can be stiffness in the muscles with pain. It may cause chronic pain in the body in its advanced stage.

Hives - Stress can cause hives, which is a type of skin reaction that is commonly caused by allergies, but may also be caused by stress. Hives look a bit like blisters that cover the skin. They are generally flesh-colored or slightly pink, and may be quite numerous.

Other skin conditions - Eczema and psoriasis can be caused by, or at least aggravated by, excessive stress. If you have either of these conditions, reducing your stress may reduce (or even eliminate) the condition.

Diarrhea – Stress hormones make the colon work faster. It may result in diarrhea.

Vomiting – Stress often leads to a condition of repulsion. It results in vomiting.

Susceptibility to minor illness – Stress weakens the immune system of the body. As a result, the body fails to protect itself from minor illnesses such as cold and infections.

According to the American Institute of Stress, the following can be signs of increased or chronic stress, as well:

- Clenching the jaw or grinding teeth, even at night
- Tremors and trembling
- Faintness or dizziness
- Sweating or sweaty hands/feet
- Dry mouth and difficulty swallowing

- Frequent infections, colds or flu
- Heartburn
- Gas
- Shortness of breath or frequent sighing
- Lowered sexual desire or ability
- Change in appetite
- Change in sleep patterns
- Racing thoughts or inability to concentrate
- Tinnitus
- Being accident prone
- Impulsive spending or gambling
- Weight gain or loss
- Being tired all the time

Future Negative Effects from Chronic Stress

Short term stress during a one-time event or in certain circumstances isn't harmful. In fact, it can be a good thing as the adrenaline boost can help get things done, like the proverbial woman who lifts a car off her child.

However, it's when stress becomes a chronic condition that it can cause so many health issues.

All the physical symptoms noted above aren't harmful on occasion but if they are present on a consistent basis, they can lead to major harm to your body. If your blood pressure goes up but comes back down and stays normal most of the time, it's not an issue. With chronic stress, the blood

pressure can go up and stay high, leading to severe issues like heart attack or stroke.

Not only physical illnesses come about from the effects of chronic stress, but also emotional problems can be a result. Depression is very common as is the development of obsessive compulsive disorders.

This can lead to a vicious circle that spirals out of control. As the stress causes some physical discomfort or illness, that in turn triggers more stress, which triggers increasing symptoms, and so forth.

Stress and stress-related illnesses are the leading killers today. If you look at the leading causes of death, most of them can be caused or, at least exacerbated, by chronic stress. As life continues at the ever-accelerating pace that it has over the past two decades, are we killing ourselves with stress? Stress is the biggest health issue of our time and we must learn to manage stress if we are going to be healthy.

Chapter 5: Simple Lifestyle Changes to Manage Stress

With stress being so prevalent, many people think only to get pills and potions from the doctor to help them. They load up on pain killers for the headaches, acid reducers for the heartburn and slather on cream for the eczema outbreaks. Some even end up taking medications to "calm" them so that they won't feel the anxiety. Is this really the way we want to live?

In this chapter, we will go over how to change our reactions to circumstances, stop saying yes all the time, set more realistic expectations for ourselves and others, and to finally start taking care of ourselves. These simple lifestyle changes can go far in reducing the amount of stress we have to deal with and then it becomes much easier to manage.

Small, easy changes in our lifestyles can go a long way to reducing and eliminating stress in our lives. Let's take a look at some of those ways and see what you can change to improve your stress levels.

Change How You Look at Things

Most of us overreact, either positively or negatively. This overreaction can come in the form of excessive joy or excessive sorrow or even excessive paranoia about something. Someone might get really worked up about the fact that the meal they prepared for their guests has gone bad. Someone might invite stress upon themselves because one of their colleagues has just been fired. Some bring on stress because of an approaching examination. All

these are situations that can be very easily handled. They don't deserve the stress we accord them with.

Almost all situations that we deem as stressful have nothing to them. If we were to apply our minds with a levelheaded approach, we would find that we could cope with the situation and even become winners there.

If the meal you have prepared for your guests has gone bad, just order something and in fact make a joke about your adventure in the kitchen when the guests arrive. If your coworker has been fired, it doesn't mean you have been fired too. In any case, you must keep your résumé ready and be hopeful of a better job if the situation comes to that because you have a better profile now. Exam stress is one of the most avoidable kind of stress because no academic examination requires you to be so worked up about it, especially with the hundreds of options we have with us now in the 21st century.

So, you see, it is all about how you look at things. If you think that something is a problematic situation, then a problem is all that it will turn out to be. However, people who have learnt to cope with stress know how to deal with so-called problematic situations and actually turn the tide in their favor so that the impediment turns into an opportunity.

It all lies in the way you think. Everything – every single thing – that occurs in life has a pro and a con. If a circumstance has changed, even though it seems intimidating and scary at the moment, there will be some benefit that you can derive from it.

Learn how to look at things positively and optimistically. You will be living a more stress-free and fruitful life when you learn to do so.

Learn to Say No

One huge problem people who are overly stressed out have is the ability to say "No" when they need to. Maybe your mother wants you to take Grandma to the store, but you're in the middle of a big work project. Perhaps your best friend asks if you wouldn't mind babysitting her kids when you've already made plans with yourself to get a haircut.

There's no reason why you have to say "Yes" to everyone. In fact, there are often many times when you should turn them down. If you find yourself agreeing to do things when you really don't want to, you're a people pleaser. In general, this isn't a bad trait to have, but it can be a huge stressor.

People pleasers think of other people's needs before their own. They worry about what other people want, think, or need, and spend a lot of time doing things for others. They rarely do things for themselves, and feel guilty when they do. It's hard being a people pleaser.

People pleasers hold back from saying what they really think or from asking for what they want if they think someone will be upset with them for it. Yet they often spend time with people who don't consider their needs at all. In fact, people pleasers often feel driven to make insensitive or unhappy people feel better - even at the detriment to themselves.

Constantly trying to please other people is draining and many people pleasers feel anxious, worried, unhappy, and tired a lot of the time. They may not understand why no one does anything for them, when they do so much for others - but they often won't ask for what they need.

A people pleaser may believe that if they ask someone for help and that person agrees, that person would be giving out of obligation, not because they really wanted to. The thinking goes - if they really wanted to help, they would have offered without my asking.

This line of thinking happens because people pleasers themselves feel obliged to help and do not always do things because they want to. Sadly, people pleasers have been taught that their worth depends on doing things for other people.

It's painful being a people pleaser. People pleasers are not only very sensitive to other people's feelings, and often take things personally, but they also rarely focus on themselves.

When they do take a moment for themselves, they feel selfish, indulgent, and guilty which is why they are often on the go, rushing to get things done. Because people pleasers accomplish so much and are easy to get along with, they are often the first to be asked to do things - they are vulnerable to be being taken advantage of.

People pleasers' focus is mostly on others and away from themselves. They often feel empty, or don't know how they feel, what they think, or what they

want for themselves. But it's possible to change this pattern and to feel better about yourself.

First, practice saying NO. This is a very important word! Say it as often as you can, just to hear the word come out of your mouth. Say it out loud when you are alone. Practice phrases with NO in them, such as, "No, I can't do that" or "No, I don't want to go there". Try it for simple things first, and then build your way up to harder situations.

Stop saying YES all the time. Try to pause or take a breath before responding to someone's request. You may want to answer requests with "I need to think about it first, I'll get back to you" or "Let me check my schedule and call you back". Use any phrase that you feel comfortable with that gives you time before you automatically respond with YES.

Take small breaks, even if you feel guilty. You won't always feel guilty, but most likely in the beginning you will. Remember that your physical and mental health is well worth the aggravation you may have to take from others. What's important is you. When you are healthy, those around you will be healthy!

Figure out what gives you pleasure. For example, you may like reading magazines, watching videos, going to a park, or listening to music. Give yourself permission to do those things and then enjoy them.

Ask someone to help you with something. I know this is a hard one but you can do it! After all, everyone else is asking YOU for favors, why shouldn't

YOU ask THEM? Just be tolerant if they turn you down. Just because you have always told them "Yes" doesn't mean they always have to tell you "Yes".

Check in with how you feel and what you are thinking. It's important to be aware of these things; they're part of who you are. And then try saying what you feel and think more often.

Many people pleasers believe that nobody will like them if they stop doing things for other people. If someone stops liking you because you don't do what they ask, then you're being used by them and probably don't want them as a friend anyway.

People will like you for who you are and not simply for what you do. You deserve to take time to yourself, to say NO, and to take care of yourself without feeling guilty. It's within your reach to change - one small step at a time!

Set Realistic Expectations

Sometimes expectations have a lot to do with stress. We expect the best from ourselves and can become very demanding with others as well. This can lead to stress because of course no one and no situation is perfect, so expectations are not always met. When this happens, there is tension and stress.

Some fool themselves into thinking that unrealistic expectations are how you encourage others to do better and how you push yourself to perform at your

peak. While having some expectations is good and trying better is always recommended, there is need for balance here. When your unrealistic expectations are causing stress for yourself and others then it's time to consider an assessment of your own thinking in this regard.

And this may be where humility comes into play. Do you really have the right to demand these things of those around you? If you're thinking that you don't demand from others anything more than what you demand of yourself, trying realizing that this is not an excuse. Being a perfectionist with yourself is probably cause you undue stress, and making demands of others is causing them this stress as well.

You may also want to think about what actually happens when you're overly demanding and critical of others and of yourself. Do things really get done and do people step up and give more? Chances are they just become miserable and stressed and their work is no better than if you were more reasonable with them.

Many people have imaginary expectations that they impose upon themselves in one way or another. Or they create impossibly high and often useless standards for themselves as well, and when they fail to live up to these things, stress ensues. They may also feel tense and anxious and they constantly worry about how they're handling such expectations when in reality the only one's imposing these expectations are they themselves.

Consider seriously if your expectations are realistic and even real. Ask yourself if you're not making up things in your own head and putting

imagined expectations upon yourself. If so, you're simply creating stress and tension - for you and probably for those around you. Wouldn't it be better and healthier for everyone if you were more reasonable in your expectations and more realistic overall? Wouldn't it alleviate stress if you were to do this?

Take Care of Yourself

Our bodies were made to run their best when we eat properly and rest a certain amount of time every day. We are all in such a rush to get things done and cram 36 hours into a 24 hour day that we neglect doing the basics to maintain our health.

An improper diet can actually lead to all sorts of problems in your life. If you're eating very poorly, you could experience:

- Brain fog
- Memory problems
- Depression
- Inability to focus
- Difficulty concentrating

These are just a few of the many problems that can be caused by a poor diet, and each of these can contribute to excessive stress. If you have memory problems, brain fog, and the ability to focus, for instance, you may have a lot of trouble getting your work done on time and meeting deadlines at work.

The lack of sleep can cause all kinds of physical and mental problems. These problems can snowball and lead to many other issues, all of which could end up causing you stress.

Most people need between 7 and 9 hours of sleep per night, so be sure you are getting enough. If you're having trouble sleeping, talk to your doctor about possible treatment options for insomnia. Sleep is critical, because it is your body's time to rest and repair itself.

Even after doing all these things, you may still feel stress if you are taking on too much or juggling too much. While there are some things that will simply need to be handled, there are probably other things for which you can and should ask for help. And there are probably many things that should be removed altogether.

Asking for help can be difficult for many people but it can be a necessary step to alleviate stress. This might mean help with the actual situation that is causing stress such as a project at work, or just help with household chores and things in general.

Keep in mind, if you're having problems asking for help, that refusing to do so can mean that things don't get done properly. If you try to care for aging parents or a disabled child by yourself, or try to handle your career and parenthood and home on your own, something may be missed. And if nothing else, you could wind up damaging your own health which means that things will not be handled at all! This may cause more stress for others as you may then be the one that needs help.

Asking for help might also mean personal problems you're experiencing, such as being in debt and needing a consolidation loan, or seeing a marriage counselor. Getting professional help for problems that are overwhelming can mean alleviating stress and tension because of those problems.

If possible, remove some stressors from your life. This means unnecessary projects you've taken on, hobbies that serve no real purpose and which may make you feel stressed, and things such as these. If you're the type to volunteer for projects for your child's school or at church, stop doing these things. There may be things you choose to do in order to help others and to be nice, and this is good, but only if you can really and truly handle these things! Other stressors should be removed from your life if and when possible.

Chapter 6: How Diet and Nutrition Play a Role

Eating right is something that's necessary for optimal health so it certainly shouldn't surprise anyone that it is one of the first steps in stress management. When we short ourselves on the nutrients and calories that our body needs to function well, it should come as no surprise that we experience more stress.

Life has a way of getting the best of us some days. Whether it's working too many hours, shuffling your kids all over town for their activities, taking care of your household, or dealing with personal or family matters, stress can take its toll on you physically, mentally, emotionally, and spiritually. But there are simple steps you can take to combat stress, starting with the foods you eat.

Avoiding caffeine and alcohol is a good start when life's particularly stressful. Stimulants and depressants like these can both zap your energy and rob you of the fuel you need to successfully cope with tension. Sugary foods should also be avoided as well, as they cause your blood sugar levels to spike then dip rapidly, which can in turn make your energy levels spike and dip at the same rate.

However, there are several superfoods out there that provide you with the energy and nutrition your body needs to keep stress in check.

Asparagus, which is high in folic acid, can help level out your moods. Folic acid and vitamin B are key players in producing serotonin, a chemical that gets you into a good mood.

And though we may hear negative things regarding red meat, it's actually a wise dinner option for a stressed-out family. Beef's high levels of iron, zinc and B vitamins not only help get you into a good mood, but help you stay there as well. Your local butcher can help you select lean cuts for the healthiest options

Milk really does a body good. Chock full of calcium, protein, antioxidants, and vitamins B2 and B12, it helps strengthen bones and promotes healthy cell regeneration. Paired with a healthy whole-grain cereal choice in the morning, low-fat milk is a great way to start your day and arm yourself to do battle with the stressors that await you. Cottage cheese is also another great dairy choice, and when coupled with a fruit that's high in vitamin C, it helps the body battle free radicals that run rampant during your most stressed periods.

Almonds are also an awesome choice when it comes to arming yourself against stress. They're high in magnesium, zinc, as well as vitamins B2, C, and E and unsaturated fats, all which are great warriors against free radicals, which have been shown to cause cancers and heart disease.

Nutrition Affects Our Minds

Nutrition affects not only the condition of our bodies, but also, and perhaps more importantly, our minds. The food we eat keeps our bodies in good shape and working efficiently. It provides energy, strengthens our immune system and improves our minds. Although many people shun fat and meat, it has been established that they are of great importance to the brain; and this fact must be carefully considered.

There are still many misconceptions about nutrition, e.g., vitamins help to lose weight; enzymes burn fat; weight gain is due to fatty foods, so diet foods are the solution; obesity is connected only to food, and so on. Instead of relying on oversimplified generalizations, it is important to devise a moderate diet from all food groups, including proteins and animal products, because they remove toxins from the intestines and supply the body with natural vitamins and minerals. It is good to eat in small amounts, but often - perhaps four to five times a day - since this way of eating reduces the chance of plaque production in the blood and prevents it from storing it in the internal organs and arteries. It is established that most physical ailments, especially the leading cause of death - the heart attack - are caused by improper nutrition.

One of the first dietitians, William Banting, wrote as long ago as the mid-19th century, "among all maladies which concern the human race, I know none nor can I imagine anything worse than obesity." According to Dutch medical specialists, people who gain a significant amount of weight after the age of 35-40, shorten their lives by approximately seven years. Also, "if a

40-year old woman smokes and is overweight, she will live, on average, 13.3 years less than a non-smoking woman of standard weight." When we speak of proper nutrition, it is imperative that we associate it with long life. Quality of life in old age is not about turning back the clock to maintain an artificial extension or replay of youth, but rather, to increase longevity and make life healthier, happier and more fulfilling within the limitations of age. It is no coincidence that the Japanese boast the best nutrition among their population, and their average lifespan is 82.5 years for women and 76.2 years for men.

Suitable combinations of carbohydrates, proteins and fat directly affect brain activity, and consequently, influence our intellectual abilities. Carbohydrates feed the brain, proteins slow down the carbohydrate absorption rate, and fat aids in the production of the hormones that make us happy and also assists in balancing the nutritive chemicals in the blood stream. In addition to the main food categories, trace amounts of specific elements and minerals can have a profound influence on health. For example, the selenium contained in dairy products alleviates stress and is a very good defense against aging.

Is it possible to become happier through proper nutrition? Most definitely the answer is "Yes!" The human brain is composed of and maintained by a certain number of building blocks, supplied through nutrition. The brain requires fat, amino acids and proteins to sustain its solid structure. When these substances are missing or insufficient, the brain loses functional efficiency, which in turn causes accelerated aging.

Do not avoid fat altogether for fear it may clog arteries. On the contrary, certain fats, such as those found in olive or sunflower oil, cod-liver oil, almonds, peanuts and walnuts are valuable and essential. It is these fats that structure the nerve cells in the brain. The limiting of fat should be closely monitored, so that it does not damage brain function.

Proteins are also of significant importance. Enzymes, which allow cells to receive messages, and some neuro-meridians, are actually proteins in different proportions composed of amino acids in the food. The conclusion is that the brain needs proteins to stimulate proper activity. Meat, eggs and dairy products supply the required animal proteins to the human body. It has been proven that a lack of Vitamin B-9 is the chief contributor to memory loss during the aging process, and that the liver supports and strengthens the memory. Vitamin B-9 is contained in whole grains, egg yolks, beans, walnuts and spinach. If we add Vitamins B-6 and B-12, contained in fish and meat, we create a healthy blend that guarantees us optimum memory strength.

The ancient Roman physician Galen recommended walnuts for stimulating brain activity. His suggestion was based on the ancient theory that body organs should be treated with foods that resemble them, and the walnut, with its convoluted surface, does indeed resemble the folds of the human brain. Although that superficial theory is obviously superceded by the biochemistry of metabolism, modern medicine confirms that walnuts stimulate intellectual ability, help prevent tumors and heart disease, and lower bad cholesterol. That's why it is important to consume no less than one ounce of walnuts per day, at least three times a week. Vitamin E, which

is just one valuable constituent of olives, walnuts as well as other foods, protects the biological membranes from aging.

Broccoli, peppers, cabbage, lemons, oranges and other products containing Vitamin C have a direct influence on the blood circulation in the brain. And in order to prevent the reduction of red blood cells, which supply oxygen to the brain, we need to include iron-rich foods in our diet. Dr. Jill Halterman's research at the University of Rochester demonstrated that students with low amounts of iron in their blood scored lower on tests. Additional research showed lower IQ scores among young, vegetarian girls, in contrast with girls of the same age who enjoyed a balanced diet.

The bread/pasta food group, particularly whole-grain and multi-grain, is perfect fuel for the brain, and the lack of rice, lentil and glucose causes hypoglycemia and dulls brain function. Carbohydrates are the best energy source for our body, since they digest slowly, are absorbed into our system in small amounts, and feed the brain longer.

We've all been taught since grade school that water is of extreme importance to the human body; we may be able to live without food for two to three weeks, but no more than three days without water. Indeed, water represents 70 percent of a human's body mass. Every one of us loses around half a gallon of water daily, an amount that needs to be replenished. Some of the water we receive through the food we eat, but the majority simply has to be drunk. If this does not happen, the result is dehydration and cellulite, including aging.

Our bodies need the proper nutrition and hydration in order to function at their best. When we don't follow these guidelines, the result is not only physical stress but also mental stress. There is enough stress in our lives without sabotaging ourselves by not eating properly.

Chapter 7: How Exercise Lowers Stress Levels

As we've stated throughout this book, everyone experiences stress. While we can do whatever we can to limit our stress, it is inevitable that you will still have to deal with stress.

A healthy approach to relieving stress is by practicing stress techniques that can maintain the person's state of balance and regulation in both body and mind. Exercise is a stress technique that is not only good for your physical health but also helps relieve a person's tension and frustration. Sports and other fitness routines are excellent ways to relieve tension. Many people who want to manage stress go to a boxing class, join a cycling club, or engage in other exercise activities that would allow them to release their stress.

Exercise has been shown to be a significant form of natural stress relief. Sometimes, just simply turning off the day and focusing on yourself for an hour can make all the difference in the world. Not only does exercise benefit you physically but it benefits you emotionally as well; this comes from the release of worries while you also release adrenalin and endorphins – natural hormones that reduce stress and ease the body.

When we exercise, our bodies produces chemicals called endorphins, which, scientifically speaking, are polypeptides, which are able to bind to the neuron-receptors in the brain to give relief from pain. Endorphins are not just produced from exercise; they are also triggered by deep-breathing, meditation, eating spicy food and deep laughter.

Endorphins are believed to produce four key effects on the body: they relieve pain, they reduce stress, they enhance the immune system and they postpone the aging process.

When you are stressed, it is important to get enough sleep. Exercisers actually go to sleep faster, are more refreshed and have sharper memories. Exercise increases the blood flow to the brain, bringing extra sugar and oxygen, which can help when concentrating.

Most therapist and stress management experts would agree that physical exercise is considered as the best stress reliever during this time and age. Aside from changing your focus from your problems to something productive, physical exercise will help your body function at peak efficiency.

Since physical exercise involves a lot of body movements, this will improve your cardiovascular functions and greatly strengthens your heart – this will practically free you from possible effects of stress like heart failure, stroke, high-blood pressure, and so on.

When your heart is attuned to the exercise regime, blood circulation will also improve which in turn increases oxygen throughout the body. Your cholesterol level and other harmful bio-chemicals will be reduced and will lessen the chance of your body breaking down due to the negative effect of these substances.

Physical exercise also helps you mentally aside from keeping your body in perfect shape. Indulging in various forms of physical exercise will provide an outlet to stress-related emotions such as anger, fear, frustration, depression

and irritability. Since exercise improves the circulation of chemicals to your body and brain, hormones that elevates certain responses to your body will be reduces as well - keeping you relaxed and in control.

Specific Benefits of Exercise for Stress Relief

- Exercise distracts you from the causes of stress.
- Exercise builds stamina and enhances productivity.
- Exercise relaxes the cold and tight muscles that contribute to stress.
- Exercise stimulates and tones up the nervous system.
- Exercise improves your focus and concentration.
- Exercise induces a sound sleep.
- Exercise releases beneficial hormones and chemicals like betaendorphin, which promote a feeling of wellness.
- Exercise produces a feeling of well-being and confidence.
- Exercise improves blood flow to the brain and other body systems.
- Exercise maintains a healthy body that is less prone to stress and stress-related disorders.

All these benefits of exercising and many more have a stress-relieving and/or stress-preventative effect in some way or other. Whenever you are feeling stressed or tense, exercise for a while and feel the instant relief. Moreover, if you can involve simple exercises in your daily routine, you may be able to keep stress at bay.

What Kinds of Exercise for Stress Relief

It is not necessary that you take up any particular form of exercising for stress

control. You can do whatever you like which fits your schedule. You can select

from:

- aerobics
- Yoga
- recreational sports
- brisk walking
- jogging
- swimming
- working out in the gym
- a cycle or treadmill at your home
- any physical activity that you enjoy

However, be careful to maintain a regular exercise schedule and do not take up

any activity that could be harmful for any physical condition that you have.

It is important to consult your physician before starting your exercise regimen.

To prevent you from becoming bored as well as to help work the entire body, most people recommend that you change up your exercise routine regularly. You could do a brisk walk on Monday, switch to tennis on

Wednesday, and then take an aerobics class on Friday – or any combination you choose.

Simple Stress Relieving Exercises for Specific Areas

Stress Headache or Neck ache: When you are having a stress head- or neck ache, take a short break from your work.

1. Stand up and, if possible, walk a few steps.
2. Thereafter, take a few deep breaths and rotate your neck gently in clockwise and anticlockwise movements.
3. After that move your neck leftwards and rightwards.
4. Then you can roll your shoulders in a backward direction slowly and gradually pick up the speed to about one roll in a second.

After a few minutes of exercising your headache and/or neck ache should be gone and you will feel fresh and relaxed.

Tense Shoulders:

1. Stand up and take a few deep breaths.
2. Stretch your neck to left and right as far as you can.
3. Dip your head and gradually bring it back to normal position.
4. Straighten your arms and then take them sideways so your shoulders also move backwards.

Do these movements twenty times. After that, place your arms on the shoulders and rotate your arms in clockwise and anticlockwise directions twenty times each.

Next, lift your right shoulder and bring it down and then lift your left shoulder and bring it down. Do this ten times.

Lastly, swing your right arm in full circular movements ten times and repeat the same with your left arm.

These exercises, which take just three to four minutes, instantly relieve you from tense and painful shoulders.

Backache:

1. Stand up and breathe deeply.
2. Stretch your arms sideways and perform swinging movements to your sides with arms still in the stretched position ten times in each direction.
3. Raise your hands above your shoulders and bend down to touch your feet without buckling your knees. Do these movements ten times.
4. Then, lie down on your back and, without moving your legs, raise your torso as far you can and return to the supine position. Perform this exercise ten times.
5. Finally, lie down on your stomach and raise your torso and return to normal position ten times.

These exercises may provide instant relief from a sore back.

Tai Chi and Yoga

These Indian and Chinese methods of meditation and exercise are popular due to the health benefits experienced by those practice them. Many health buffs claim that they now enjoy a stress and anxiety-free lifestyle because of their Tai Chi and Yoga lessons.

Studies show that these kinds of exercise do have beneficial effects on the mind and body. These religious-philosophical movements gave emphasis to the state of Zen. According to Buddhism, the term "zen" refers to the attainment of a stage of "awakening." This belief was introduced in China by a Buddhist monk named Bodhidharma in A.D. 520. According to studies, people who cling to the teachings of Zen endeavor to achieve "satori" which is also called "nirvana". "Satori" in general can only be reached through a meditation called "zazen" which, in turn, leads to a state of mushin or "no mind". Mushin is the ability to see things more clearly mentally. It means that one's judgment will not be blurred with negative thoughts. Although this belief originated from the south, many Western students and practitioners of Yoga and Tai-Chi are satisfied with the health and vitality it brings.

Yoga Benefits

Practicing yoga increases flexibility because stretching exercises the different tendons, ligaments, and joints of the body. Studies also say that yoga is probably the only form of activity that massages all the internal organs and glands in the body. These may include the prostate, which according to

medical specialists hardly receives stimulation. This massage or stimulation may keep certain individuals from diseases and other forms of illness. Yoga ensures the best supply of blood to the body. This helps detoxify the body of toxins and, in the process, delays aging and renewed energy. Muscles are also toned because of repeated stimulation through yoga.

Tai Chi benefits

Medical researchers and Tai Chi practitioners claim that immediate benefits occur from day one of practice. These may include a more relaxed and clearer mind. Clinical studies in the US show that improved balance and peace of mind took place after only eight weeks of training. These benefits were immediately evident after performing very simple set of movements taken from different Tai Chi styles. Other benefits of this "soft" martial arts include improved internal organ functions, improved breathing, and better sleep. Additional reports show that people who practice Tai Chi enjoyed improved strength and reduced stress, aside from gaining the ability to better deal with anxiety attacks.

However, people with a history of heart disease, back injuries, and those who have undergone recent surgery should consult a physician before starting a Yoga or Tai Chi routine. In general, Tai Chi and Yoga are very effective routines to bring back health and a sense of peace of mind to a devoted practitioner. Done properly, these ancient arts of exercise and meditation can help provide anxiety relief and alleviate other forms of stress.

Almost any form of exercise is going to help relieve stress due to the natural chemicals released in the brain. Not only do these chemicals help instantly, the ongoing benefits of exercise are pretty obvious. When you feel healthier and better about yourself, you will naturally experience less stress and anxiety in your life.

Another side benefit of regular exercise is maintaining a healthy weight which lowers your risks of several diseases such as diabetes, high blood pressure and heart disease. Being fit and in shape is also a self-esteem booster and when we feel better about ourselves, we are better equipped to handle stressful events because we feel more confident.

Chapter 8: The Psychology of Stress

There are many mental reactions that are caused by extreme stress, anxiety and panic. They may include decreased attention, trouble concentrating, restlessness, irritability, mood swings, increased anger and frustration, acting out, and lowering of one's inhibitions.

There are those that also respond to worry and stress by simply shutting down. Their productivity becomes so low that they accomplish virtually nothing. It's as if they are using all their mental abilities to cope with the stress and there is nothing left for them to use on their other responsibilities. Rather than facing the situations giving them stress, they often seem to be in denial that they need to do anything. Or they ignore the situation completely and do nothing.

When feeling stress, anxiety and panic and all the mental problems associated with these things, it's also very easy for someone to become afraid of these reactions they have. This of course increases their tension and worry.

The mental reactions by those who are suffering from stress, worry and anxiety are nothing to be dismissed. They can be dangerous and distracting and can also be tied into physical illnesses and ailments as well.

Stress and depression are two of the things in modern life that you have to deal with at one point or another. The former is an everyday thing, one that can stem from something as difficult as social anxiety to something as

mundane as tripping over your own shoelaces. The latter, depression, is not quite as easy to develop in the clinical sense, but most people will end up experiencing a point in their lives that comes dangerously close to being depressed and this can be brought on by chronic stress. For the most part, these two problems are considered to be threats to one's physical and mental health. However, recent studies show that these two conditions also have nasty side effects on one's intelligence.

According to recent findings, it is untrue that the human brain ceases production of neurons and other critical brain cells later on in life. In fact, there are some things that imply that the brain regenerates the aforementioned cells on an as-needed basis, generating more to suit the needs of the individual. This is in direct opposition to long-held medical doctrine that human brain cells do not regenerate after a certain point and instead begin to enter a state of slow decay. However, as recent studies have shown, the more primitive areas of the brain are capable of regenerating lost cells. This has subsequent effects on a wide range of mental functions, including memory, reaction time, and comprehension. Now, what does this have to do with stress and depression, you ask?

A whole lot, apparently. The two conditions states above put the more primitive parts of the brain into "survival mode." Upon entering that state, the brain naturally attempts to minimize anything that could be seen as frivolous or unnecessary, instead focusing all energies on the basics. This not only accounts for the apparent reduction of brain activity during periods where an individual experiences the aforementioned problems, but it also starts to kill the currently existing cells. Basically, the brain cells are slowly

dying when subjected to excessive stress and depression, burning out neurons at a faster rate than normal. This would explain why some normally intelligent people seem to be mentally slower and less adept when put under emotional and psychological pressure.

Another consequence would be the fact that the two aforementioned disorders can actually prevent the brain from regenerating new cells to replace the old ones. Trophic factors, chemicals that are known to stimulate the brain, are not produced properly when a person undergoes prolonged periods of the above conditions. Studies show that trophic factors are actually the chemicals responsible for telling the brain to regenerate new cells. If the chemicals are cut off or if the flow is disrupted, it can result in a rapid decline in the human brain's ability to repair itself over time.

While these findings are still controversial and questionable, it does provide an interesting look into just how the brain works on a physical level. The long-held belief that the brain is incapable of fixing itself once a person reaches adulthood may just be put into question. These findings are still subject to further research, but there are already several avenues being opened by the concept. For example, there are studies now being conducted devoted to finding out whether or not serotonin, a chemical used to combat a variety of mental disorders, has an effect on neuron regeneration.

Chapter 9: Control Your Thoughts, Control Your Stress

As we learned in the last chapter, stress begins in the mind. How we allow ourselves to think has a huge effect on our stress levels. Those who are constantly worrying and thinking negative thoughts have higher stress levels than those people who think positively and expect good things to happen.

Contrary to the "that's just the way I am" philosophies, you do have control over your thoughts or at least, can learn to control them. If you want to stop much of the stress before it takes hold, you must learn to control your thoughts and focus them in a beneficial direction.

Many people have a negative mindset. Negative mindsets come in different forms. For some people, they are just pessimistic about everything in life. For others, they are only negative when it comes to themselves and their own abilities. Either way, when you have a negative mindset you cannot enjoy life the way you should and you may even find that it is hard to maintain personal and work relationships.

Luckily, you can overcome a negative mindset and start enjoying the life that you were meant to have. It is a matter of recognizing the harmful thought patterns, figuring out what created them and then turning them off, replacing them with healthier patterns.

Where Do Negative Thought Patterns Come From?

Often our negative thought patterns were instilled in us as children and many times this was an unconscious thing. We pick up worry over money from listening to our parents fret and fight. As time goes on, this worry about money wears a groove in our psyche and it becomes a familiar pattern. When we think about money, we automatically begin to worry and see everything that could possibly go wrong.

Don't Go There!

It's easier said than done, but don't allow yourself to get negative. As soon as you start to think negative thoughts, you need to stop them in their tracks. Unfortunately, much of our inner dialogue is subconscious so we are being negative without even knowing it. We set ourselves up for negative thinking early on in life, in many cases, so that the negative dialogue is always there. This being said, how can we not go there? You need to start with those situations in which you know you are being negative and stop the thoughts in their tracks.

Take the Power Away from the Negativity

When you hear the negative thoughts spinning around and around in your head it's time to take action. While many of our negative thoughts happen without us even knowing it, we are aware of some of these thoughts. As soon as you have a negative thought, stop the process. Take the power away from the negative thoughts and replace them with positive ones. For instance, if you are thinking "I cannot do this!" tell yourself, "I can do this if

I try." When you replace the negative thought with a positive one and you allow it to run through your head instead of the negative thought, you will feel as though a 5,000 pound weight has been lifted from your shoulders. The key is to be consistent in replacing the negative thoughts with the positive ones.

Make a Choice

Whether you realize it or not, having a negative mindset really is a choice. That is difficult for many people to hear, but it's the truth. Many people spend their whole lives feeling imprisoned by negative thoughts and their emotions. The bottom line is that you need to make a choice whether you want to be happy or whether you want to continue to be miserable. Decide right now if you want to be happy or not. If you decide that you really want to be happy, you can go forward knowing that happiness really is your goal. When you aren't truly dedicated to being happy replacing the negative mindset with a positive one will be nearly impossible.

Replace Negative People with Positive People

If you are stuck in a negative mindset, chances are you are surrounded by like minded people. The old adage that misery loves company is true, so when you are in a negative head space you are going to attract or being attracted to people who are also negative. When you surround yourself by negative people and situations you will have a much more difficult time changing your life. Do away with negative people and situations. Cut

negative people out of your life and if there are situations that contribute to your negative mindset such as relationships or working environments, work to change them or find your way out of the situation as soon as possible.

Don't Take Criticism to Heart

Many people fall into a negative mindset if they are criticized in any way. Whether you are criticized by someone you love or by a co-worker you need to work not to take it to heart. Instead, work to find the positives in what you have been told. Instead of looking at the criticism as a character assassination, look at the criticism and consider whether or not making a change will make you a better person, mate, or coworker. The bottom line is not to take criticism to heart, instead you can consider it, make changes if you deem it necessary, and then move on knowing you are better for it.

Consider Meditation

When you feel overwhelmed by negativity and a swirl of negative thoughts and emotions, you might want to consider meditation. Many people find that meditation helps them let go of those non-stop emotions that contribute to their negative emotions. There are many therapists as well as self help books and videos that will help you learn how to mediate if you are not already familiar with it.

Positive Affirmations

Many people find that positive affirmations work wonders when they are trying to improve their negative mindset. Positive affirmations are statements that help you change your perspective of the world and those around you. For instance, you can tell yourself every morning, "I am worthy of a happy, healthy, positive life." If you tell yourself this several times a day you will start to believe it. Just as you trained yourself to think the worst of yourself and the world around you, you can train yourself to see and feel the best of everything around you.

Fake it Until You Make It

If all else fails or you just want to feel better right now, you need to employ the fake it until you make it strategy. If you put a smile on your face and you force yourself to look and feel happy, you will! Many times just putting a smile on your face will help you begin to see the world in a more positive light. While you may not feel 100% positive, faking it will take you a long way. When you are faking it you will elicit positive behaviors all around you because people are drawn to you, which will only help in strengthening your positive spirit.

Making a Permanent Change

If you are struggling with a negative mindset you can overcome it. When you feel yourself beginning to come out of that dark hole you need to keep

up with the positive thoughts. If you don't force yourself to employ positive thoughts every day you may find that you slowly slip back into a negative mindset. If you continue to think positive thoughts and stay in the company of positive people, you will find that it is much easier to look at the world in a much healthier light.

It's not easy to overcome years of negative thinking but it can be done. In order for you to beat the stress in your life, you will need to take control over your mind and thoughts.

It will take practice but you will find that it becomes easier each time you work on controlling your thoughts. After a while, it becomes a habit and it is internalized within yourself. Soon, you won't have to think about it because you will be automatically thinking positive thoughts instead of the negative, stress-inducing thoughts.

Chapter 10: Learning to Let Go

By now you've learned some effective ways to address and conquer your stress. You know the importance of addressing physical stress as well as mental and emotional stress.

But when you're rushed or are just feeling a slight bit of anxiety, how can you address your stress quickly? How can you incorporate stress management techniques into your everyday life? There are some quick and easy things you can consider in this regard; let's look at some simple stress management tips in this section.

1. Breathe!

When you get stressed or anxious you may naturally start to hyperventilate. The muscles around the lungs tense up as do all the other muscles and breathing becomes shallow and raspy. You can overcome this if you give thought to your breathing and take steps to control it.

Taking slow, deep breaths will help to get the oxygen again flowing through the body and in turn other muscles may relax as well. It's not unusual for someone that is stressed and anxious to think that they're going to have a heart attack or pass out, and not being able to breathe can make this feeling worse. So if you control your breathing and take a minute to catch your breath you can relax and feel less stress.

2. Visualize something soothing and calming.

What is calming and soothing to you? Time with your kids? A hot bath? A favorite vacation spot?

Whatever it is, turn to it when you're stressed. Imagine being there with the kids or soaking in that hot tub. Try to see and experience the smells of that favorite vacation spot. Project yourself there mentally and you'll find that you're much less stressed with the circumstances at hand.

3. Argue with yourself.

Don't let those thoughts get out of control. Instead, argue with yourself and replace negative thoughts with positive, calming ones. Practice your catchphrase, such as, "I am calm. I am relaxed." Say this over and over again to yourself and don't let stressful thoughts get out of hand.

4. Massage your face.

When stressed, the facial muscles tend to tense up more than just about any other muscles in the body. So indulge in that mini massage. Rub your forehead, chin, the bridge of your nose, and everything else. Use slow but firm movements. You can also massage your hands and even your feet if possible. By working these stiff and sore muscles you'll find that your body will relax and you'll feel less mental and emotional stress.

5. Smile and tell a joke.

They say that laughter is the best medicine, and it can go a long way toward relieving stress. Laughing releases endorphins which in turn make a person feel calm and serene. You may not have much of a sense of humor which would mean creating your own jokes, but you can look up something funny on the internet, read the comics, or watch something funny on television. Think of something that gives you amusement, such as your cat or children. Whatever brings a smile to your face, use it to help alleviate stress and tension.

6. Count to ten.

While most use this method to keep them from giving in to an angry response, you can do the same when you feel stress. Stop what you're doing and thinking and concentrate on counting to ten and then back to one. Do this a few times so that the initial stress you feel has a chance to wane. Taking a moment to just focus on something else may help you to see that what you're feeling stress over is not as horrific as you first assume.

7. Get some exercise.

You don't need to drop everything you're doing and go jogging every time you feel stressed, but regular exercise will help to relieve anxiety. And when you need to consider immediate stress, think of how some quick activity can help. Get up and walk around your office or go outside for a moment. Walk down to the cafeteria even if you're not buying anything! At home, take a quick walk around the block or scrub the bathroom floor. This burst of

energy and adrenaline can go a long way toward relieving immediate tension.

8. Do something productive.

When you feel stressed, you may not feel as if you're accomplishing much. This is especially true when you feel trapped by your circumstances. So do something productive, even if it's washing dishes, cleaning out a closet, or finishing a small project that's been hanging over your head.

Accomplishing one thing can help you to feel as if you're ready to tackle something else. This can help you to feel less stress and tension and to feel in control and ready to take action.

9. Get some sleep.

A quick nap can go a long way toward helping you to feel less tension and stress. Additionally, getting enough sleep every single day can also help to alleviate anxiety. When you don't get enough sleep you're tense and anxious just as it is, and this fatigue can add to the stress you feel every day. Often it's not a matter of what time you get up in the morning as it is the time you go to bed at night. If you must watch late night television, use TiVo or tape your shows and watch them the next night, only an hour or two earlier so you can enjoy your show and get to bed at a decent hour! Finish chores around the house early so you can settle down into bed without having them hanging over your head.

10. Watch your caffeine and sugar intake.

When you feel tense and anxious, ask yourself how much caffeine and sugar you've had that day. Remember that you get caffeine from more than coffee; tea, cola, chocolate and other food and drink items are typically loaded with caffeine and sugar. Start making cuts so you won't be tense and anxious.

11. Use music.

Music can soothe and calm nerves, or make them even edgier. Think about the music you choose every day; is it loud or soft, calming or jarring? Tune out the jarring music and use something soft and soothing when you're feeling stress. You may miss your loud music at first but consider how it's not helping you when you're feeling stress. Save that for when you're in a good mood and don't need to calm your jangled nerves.

12. Say no.

If you're stressed because you have yet again taken on too much, learn to say no. use the "count to ten" method before you agree to a new project or volunteer opportunity or anything else; count to ten while you consider if you really can take something else on.

And if you have already taken on too many projects, send some back or ask for help. Get the kids involved with projects that are for their school or ask your spouse for help. Tell your boss you'll need help with a project; even

some simple tasks done by the receptionist or a clerk can go a long way toward alleviating your stress.

13. Get help.

And you don't need to wait until you're stressed and overwhelmed to get help. Do this regularly. Think of how you can get help around the house to alleviate some stress. A cleaning person even once per month to handle big chores or a neighborhood kid to cut your grass or walk your dog can free up your schedule. An older student can help your children with their homework or school projects. At work, you may need to ask for help on a regular basis as well. See if there are small projects you can give to someone else.

When you get help on a regular basis, you may see that you have less stress overall as you're not trying to juggle everything yourself.

14. Get organized.

One common culprit for being stressed and anxious is a lack of organization. When you're trying to juggle many different projects and aren't sure how you'll accomplish them or are forgetting deadlines and other requirements, you increase your stress levels.

Getting organized can be as simple as taking five minutes to review your projects and demands on your time and writing everything out in a calendar. It can also mean going through your entire home, office, job, and personal life and getting things in order. Cleaning out your home of unnecessary

items can mean a great weight off your shoulders, and cleaning unnecessary demands from your schedule can do the same.

If you're feeling overwhelmed right now, get organized. Take that time to write out deadlines and to familiarize yourself with where you are with all your projects.

15. Get physical.

Sexual activity is a great tension reliever, and so is just about any romantic activity. Take a few minutes to share a hug with your spouse or a passionate kiss. Give each other a quick massage. Being physical releases those endorphins and helps you to feel relaxed and calm.

You can also get physical, appropriately so, with your children and family or friends. When was the last time you hugged your children? Or held one on your lap as you both read a story together or watched television? A hug from a friend can also help with tension and stress. While you and your circle of family and friends may not be much for hugging, you can start a trend. Just a quick hug when you see them or when you're leaving can help everyone to feel connected and to relieve stress as well.

16. Think of others.

No matter how bad your situation, someone else has it worse. And if you're feeling stress, chances are so is your spouse, neighbor, coworker, child, parent, and best friend.

One good quick stress reliever is to do something nice for someone else. This will help you to feel better about yourself and can remind you that you're not the only one suffering. Doing good for others actually releases endorphins and increases self-confidence and self-esteem. So even if it's just a kind word or an encouraging email, or baking a batch of cookies, doing something nice for someone else can make you feel less tensed and stressed.

17. Take a mental break.

When you need to de-stress quickly, take a mental break. Do a quick crossword puzzle, read a chapter of a good book, or put together a small jigsaw puzzle. If you do something along these lines you can take your mind off the stressor and give yourself a moment to let the situation defuse. You may find that when you come back to your problem or situation, things are not as bad as you once thought they are. Your mind also gets a break from thinking about these things and you'll feel less stress overall.

18. Engage in an easy and creative hobby.

Sometimes an easy hobby can be as much of a break as one that exercises the mind! So, try something that doesn't require you to concentrate much at all but that is creative. This might mean knitting, putting together a scrapbook, carpentry, painting, and so on. If you work with your hands and aren't solving complex problems you may find that being able to shut off your mind for those few minutes is a great way to alleviate some tension.

You may also feel better if you can create something as this makes you feel good about yourself.

These tips are quick and simple but they can mean a tremendous difference when dealing with stress. If you cannot get out of your situation, remember to breathe deeply or take a quick mental break. Doing these things will mean less stress and anxiety overall.

Chapter 11: Asking for Help

Asking for help can be difficult for many people but it can be a necessary step to alleviate stress. This might mean help with the actual situation that is causing stress such as a project at work, or just help with household chores and things in general.

Keep in mind, if you're having problems asking for help, that refusing to do so can mean that things don't get done properly. If you try to care for aging parents or a disabled child by yourself, or try to handle your career and parenthood and home on your own, something may be missed. And if nothing else, you could wind up damaging your own health which means that things will not be handled at all! This may cause more stress for others as you may then be the one that needs help.

As you have read through the material in this book, you have learned what stress is, what the common causes of stress are and more importantly, how to start managing your stress. Practice the techniques and tips you've learned and you will be able to minimize stress in your life.

Less stress will enable you to live a healthier and happier life.