Eat Your Way to Calm

Discover a Diet and Lifestyle That Combats Stress

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Introduction

Stress. It's a normal part of human life that increases and decreases depending on what's going on in our personal, professional, or academic lives at specific times. Although at some point each of us will feel stressed about something, some people are affected more by stress than others. If left unchecked, stress can sometimes turn into further problems, such as anxiety or depression. Because of this, understanding how to prevent, manage and control your stress with your diet and your lifestyle is absolutely important. Since stress can have such a huge effect on your life if left to worsen, understanding how what you put into your body can help your mental state is absolutely vital to living a life that is calm, relaxing and stress-free.

Often, when it comes to dealing with and reducing stress, we think about removing our 'stressors' from our lives. For example, if a person is increasingly feeling stressed and anxious in the workplace, they may look to change departments, companies, or even careers. Another example would be a couple who no longer get on choosing to break up or divorce to get rid of the source of their stress. However, although steering clear of situations or people who stress you out can definitely help, one of the main things which affect stress is your diet and lifestyle.

And, since it may not always be possible to remove yourself from stressful situations immediately, making the right dietary and life-style changes is important to help you deal with and manage stress by staying in control. Your diet and exercise habits don't only affect your physical health; they can have a huge impact on your mental health as well. In this book, you'll learn:

- The various foods which can improve your overall mental health and help you manage stress;
- Why exercise is absolutely vital to combating stress;
- The lifestyle habits that are stressing you out more than you may realize;
- Healthy habits to combat stress;
- Relaxation techniques for life;
- How to recognize the need for lifestyle changes, and
- Much more!

Feeling stressed out is something that we all go through at some point, but nobody particularly enjoys. Although a small amount of

stress can actually be good when it comes to motivating somebody to work hard to reach their goals – whether that be personally, professionally, or academically – having too much stress can actually have the opposite effect and can cause you to feel like you are ‘shutting down’. Common side effects of high stress levels include lack of focus, trouble concentrating, frequently forgetting things, or even feeling like your mind has gone completely blank. All of these can contribute to other things in your life going wrong, which in turn can lead to stress which is more severe or in some cases, anxiety.

Since trying to ignore your stress won’t make it go away, it’s important to know exactly what to do in order to help your stress levels remain manageable and easy to control. One of the best ways to take control of the amount of stress which you are feeling is to take control of your diet, exercise and lifestyle habits. When your diet and lifestyle are working together in your favor to combat and fight stress, you will find that you are better able to control any feelings of worry or anxiety that come up. Remember that what you put into your body isn’t just important for your physical health, but also for your mental health, too!

1. Your Stress-Busting Diet

When you're stressed out, the foods that you're turning to are most likely going to be traditional 'comfort' foods – think big meals, takeaways, fatty foods, sweet foods, and alcohol. Let's face it – we've all found some comfort in a tasty meal and a bottle of beer or glass of wine when we've been stressed out or upset about something. However, this isn't a good permanent solution. When you're turning to unhealthy foods you can feel better temporarily, but in the long run, you will feel worse. When your body isn't getting the right nutrition, you can begin to feel less energetic, more lethargic, and in some cases less able to concentrate and focus. All of this can lead to even more stress.

Foods that Fight Stress

If you've been feeling more stressed out than usual lately, it's important to know which foods are best to choose and which to avoid when it comes to combatting stress and helping you to deal with feelings of stress and anxiety. The best way to fight stress is to have a healthy, balanced diet which includes a moderate amount of each of the different food groups. Filling up on foods such as whole grains, leafy vegetables, and lean proteins as the basic staples of the diet is the best way to ensure that your body

gets the optimum amounts of nutrients to fight both physical and mental health problems. When it comes to choosing the foods to eat, some have a range of great properties which help the body to combat stress. Choosing stress-busting for foods will help to heal and calm your mind permanently, rather than providing a temporary fix. Some of the best stress-fighting foods include:

- Avocado – Avocados are a creamy and versatile fruit which can be eaten in a range of different ways whether you enjoy it raw, made into sauces, dressings and dips, or in a smoothie. These nutrient-dense fruits have the properties to stress-proof your body, thanks to their high glutathione content which specifically blocks the intestinal absorption of certain fats which cause oxidative damage. Avocados also contain higher levels of vitamin E, folate, and beta-carotene than any other fruit, which boosts their stress-busting properties. However, be careful with portion control when eating avocado, as it is high in fat.

- Blueberries – If you’re feeling stressed out and reaching for the snacks, swapping chocolate or chips for one of the best superfoods is a great way to help you deal with your stress levels and achieve a higher level of calm. Blueberries have some of the highest levels of antioxidants, especially anthocyanin, which means that this berry has been linked to a

wide range of health benefits including sharper cognition, better focus, and a clearer mind – all of which can help you to better deal with stress.

- Chamomile Tea – Of course, it's not all about what you're eating when it comes to managing stress, as what you're drinking can also alleviate or worsen stress. Drinking liquids which are high in sugars and caffeine, such as coffee, energy drinks or soda, can actually increase your stress levels if consumed regularly. Chamomile tea has long been used as a natural bedtime soother, and it has also been used in clinical trials, which determined that chamomile tea is effective in reducing the symptoms of generalized anxiety disorder.

- Chocolate – Although it's usually seen as an unhealthy treat, there is an undeniable link between chocolate and our mood. Studies have shown that eating chocolate can actually make you happier. However, that doesn't mean that you can start munching on chocolate bars every time your stressed out – chocolate works best as a de-stressor when eaten in moderation and as part of a healthy and balanced diet. Dark chocolate in particular is best for you, as it contains more flavonols and polyphenols, two hugely important antioxidants which can help combat stress, more than many fruit juices.

- Beef – Grass-fed beef is not only kinder to the planet and to animals, it's also good for people, too. Grass-fed beef has a huge range of antioxidants, including beta-carotene and Vitamins C and E, which can help your body to fight stress and anxiety. If you're looking for more reasons to spend a little more money on organic, grass-fed beef, it's also lower in fat than grain-fed beef whilst being higher in omega-3.

- Oatmeal – Oatmeal is great in that it can be a filling comfort food, but also has a large number of healthy property to actually make you feel better from the inside out. A complex carbohydrate, eating oatmeal causes your brain to produce higher levels of the feel-good chemical serotonin, helping you to feel calmer and less stressed. Studies have shown that kids who choose oatmeal for breakfast tend to be much sharper throughout the morning in school compared to kids who had alternative morning meals.

- Walnuts – If you're looking for a healthy snacking option which will help you to stay better in control of your stress levels, walnuts are a great choice. There is no denying the sweet, pleasant flavor of walnuts and they can be a tasty snack for in-between meals or as part of a desert. A versatile nut, walnuts are great for salads, or add them to a sweet treat such as coffee and walnut cake.

- Pistachios – another food which is great for snacking on and can also help to combat stress and anxiety in the long term is pistachios. Studies have found that simply eating two small, snack-size portions of pistachios per day lowers vascular constriction when you are stressed, putting less pressure on your heart by further dilating your arteries. Along with this, the rhythmic, repetitive act of shelling pistachios can actually be quite therapeutic!

- Green Leafy Vegetables – leafy, green vegetables should be a pivotal part of anyone's diet. Along with helping to combat stress, leafy greens are full of nutrients and antioxidants which help to fight off disease and leave your body feeling healthier and more energized. Dark leafy greens, for example spinach, are especially good for you since they are rich in folate, which helps your body to produce more mood-regulating neurotransmitters such as serotonin, which is a 'feel-good' chemical. Making leafy greens a part of your diet will help you to feel happier and less stressed out overall.

- Fermented foods – last but not least, eating fermented foods such as yoghurt can help to keep your gut healthy, which actually in turn will help to improve your mental health and reduce stress levels. The beneficial bacteria which are found in fermented foods such as yoghurt actually have a direct effect

on your brain chemistry and transmit positive mood and behavior regulating signals to your brain via the vagus nerve.

Putting Together Your Diet Plan

Planning your meals wisely is key to not only staying physically fit and healthy, but also to staying mentally strong and being able to best manage your levels of stress. Knowing which foods to avoid and which are the best to reach for to snack on when you're feeling worried and anxious is important to helping you get control over your emotions and fears. When you're feeling stressed, you may be tempted to reach for classic 'comfort foods' – usually foods which are laden with sugar, very starchy, or greasy. However, although these foods can make you feel momentarily better, they will actually make you feel worse in the long run. Having stress-busting snacks such as fresh berries, dark chocolate, yoghurt, walnuts or pistachios, or even a fruit smoothie with avocado and leafy greens in it can help you to feel better in both the short and long term when it comes to stress.

When it comes to combating and dealing with stress in the long run, it's important to make sure that for the most part, you are eating a diet which is healthy and balanced. In order to stay on track, it's a good idea to make a meal plan for your week and plan ahead to make sure that you have a good selection of these

stress-busting foods in your kitchen to make meals and snacks from when you're feeling like stress-eating. Making sure that the majority of your meals include foods such as lean proteins and leafy green vegetables will not only make you feel healthier overall, but can improve your mental health and stress levels, too. A good example of a healthy, stress-busting menu would be:

Breakfast: Oatmeal with berries or a fruit smoothie with avocado and berries

Mid-morning snack: Natural yoghurt with fruit or a handful of pistachio nuts

Lunch: A pasta salad filled with plenty of leafy greens

Afternoon snack: Dark chocolate

Dinner: Grass-fed beef with vegetables

Before bed: Chamomile tea

Of course, you don't need to stick to this menu – but it gives you a good idea! Remember to exercise good portion control when eating foods such as nuts, chocolate, yoghurt or avocado!

As the saying goes, you are what you eat – so make sure that first and foremost, you're filling yourself up with foods which are good for your mental health.

2. Your Active Lifestyle

When you're feeling stressed out, exercising is probably the last thing on your mind. However, having a lifestyle which is active and participating in some sort of exercise regularly can actually help you to feel calmer and less stressed. Cardiovascular exercise has been proven to have a wide range of health benefits besides weight loss and increased fitness, and has been shown in studies to actually reduce the symptoms of depression. Because of this, taking part in regular exercise should be an important part of your lifestyle when it comes to dealing with your stress.

Best Stress-Busting Exercises

If you've ever been stressed out and went outside for a while to 'walk it off', you've probably found that this approach actually works. Exercise, no matter how gentle, can often be the best thing for stress and anxiety. Walking has been proven to have a number of huge physical and mental health benefits, so if you're not used to exercising a lot or don't want to join your local gym, there's nothing to worry about as simply going for a walk could be enough to help you feel better and clear your head.

If you've had a stressful day or something is really getting to you, getting out for a walk can be the best, quick-acting antidepressant. This is especially true if it's a nice day and you're getting some sunshine as well, as Vitamin D is absolutely crucial for mental health. Simply heading for a walk up the road or setting off to your local park to wander around for a while can help to take your mind off whatever is stressing you out, allow you to clear your head and put things into perspective – all of which can help you to manage your stress and deal with your stressors in a calm, collected manner. This is because walking, which is a simple exercise that most of us can easily do, releases endorphins, which create feelings of increased happiness and euphoria. So, if you're feeling like stress is taking over, hitting the pavements for ten minutes or taking your dog for a walk can be a quick solution.

Your Regular Routine

Whilst exercise can create a great 'quick fix' for those who are feeling anxious and stressed out, sticking to a regular exercise routine can actually help to improve symptoms in the long run. Doctors recommend that people who are suffering from chronic stress, depression or anxiety to make sure that they get plenty of time in the gym. But, don't worry if you can't or don't want to join a gym or fitness center, as there are plenty of exercises which you can do from the comfort of your own home. For the best physical

and mental results, you should mix a range of cardiovascular and weight training exercises. This could include walking, jogging, cycling, or swimming, for example, along with exercises such as push-ups, squats, lunges, sit-ups, crunches, and stretches. Combining these two types of exercises will not only improve your mental health by releasing feel-good chemicals to your brain, you will also reap the benefits of a body which is stronger and healthier.

Benefits of Exercise for Mental Health

Exercising regularly has a range of benefits for your mental health. Not only does the actual act of participating in physical activity release endorphins to your brain which will make you feel happier, calmer and help you to clear your mind, it can also help in a range of other ways. Since exercising regularly can help to improve your physical appearance due to muscles which are stronger and more toned and perhaps weight loss, this can help to give your self-esteem a boost, resulting in increased levels of self-confidence which in turn can have an effect on your stress levels.

Along with that, exercise is important for keeping you in good physical health. Studies have shown that regular exercise can help to prevent against diseases such as cardiovascular disease,

stroke, and even some cancers. Since poor physical health can be one of the biggest causes of feeling stressed or at the very least contribute to increasing anxiety levels in stressful situations, exercising regularly can help to reduce stress by giving us less to be stressed about. Regular exercise can also help with issues such as muscle or joint pain, which in turn can help you to feel better, stronger and healthier overall. In turn, you'll feel more able to take on stressful situations and will be less likely to be worried about your own health or dealing with pain and discomfort.

Getting Started With Exercise

If your lifestyle has been more on the sedentary side than that of the active recently, there's nothing to worry about as gentle exercise is often enough to help improve your stress levels. If you're taking up exercising regularly for the first time or haven't done much exercise for some time, it's important to make sure that you start off slowly and gently in order to make sure that you give your body the time to get used to the increase in activity and gradually improve your strength. Jumping straight from the sofa to a strenuous exercise routine can actually do more damage than good. So, don't feel bad if you can only do a little bit of exercise at first – as you continue to practice, you will be able to increase the amount that you do.

Yoga for Stress

Yoga is one of the best exercises which you can do in order to combat feelings of stress and anxiety. Yoga is designed to not only improve fitness levels, strength and balance, but also clear the mind and help reduce stressful thoughts and feelings. Taking part in yoga not only allows you to improve your levels of fitness and strength to be healthier overall, but it can also strengthen your mind and help you to feel more at peace with yourself and everything around you. Yoga is also often associated with mindfulness meditation, which can be extremely useful for dealing with stress and anxiety. Another benefit of yoga is that it is often done socially – joining a yoga class means that not only will you be able to benefit from the physical and mental health benefits of taking part in yoga, but you will also be able to reap the social benefits of meeting new friends and getting support, something which can be incredibly useful for dealing with stress and anxiety.

3. Lifestyle Habits Which Cause Stress

Unhealthy lifestyle habits are some of the biggest stressors. You may not realize it, but some of the habits which you do on a regular basis could actually be a huge contributor to your stress levels. Do you lift a cigarette to your mouth whenever you're feeling stressed and anxious? Or, do you turn to alcohol to help you relax? Maybe you drink more cups of coffee in a day than you should, or stay up late working to find solutions to fix whatever is causing your stress? The thing is, doing any of these can usually only serve to make your stress worse.

Smoking

Stress and smoking tend to have a direct relationship with one another. For many people, having a cigarette is what they turn to when stressed as they feel that inhaling the smoke from the cigarette calms them and helps to clear their head. For smokers, being addicted to nicotine itself can actually cause stress levels to rise. When the body is deprived of nicotine, stress can be a huge symptom of cravings. Since having a cigarette quenches the nicotine cravings, the smoker begins to associate having a cigarette with feeling less stressed.

On the other hand, smoking marijuana can actually have the opposite effect. If you live in a state where marijuana is legal for either medical or recreational use, you may be able to try using cannabis to help with stress and anxiety.

Drinking Alcohol

The problem with turning to alcohol when you are stressed out is that alcohol is a depressant. Have you ever noticed that you are a happy drink when you were feeling good before you started drinking, but if you drink when you're feeling down, you only end up feeling worse? This is because alcohol tends to heighten whichever mood you were in when you were sober. If you drink alcohol when you're stressed, you could end up feeling worse. Along with that, alcohol can impair your judgement of situations, therefore getting drunk when you're stressed out could lead to some regrettable decisions. For this reason, it's vital to consume alcohol in moderation in order to help control your stress levels. For example, one glass of red wine per night can actually be good for your health, but it's important to avoid overconsuming.

Caffeine

In moderate amounts, caffeine can actually be good for us. It speeds up the metabolism and gives your body an energy boost,

which can be useful in many situations. However, relying on caffeine can actually make you feel less energized, tired, and sluggish which in turn can lead to increased levels of stress. If you rely on multiple cups of coffee throughout the day in order to feel awake or have even turned to energy drinks or caffeine tablets, this could actually be causing you to feel more stressed. When your body's relying on caffeine for energy, you will experience caffeine withdrawal symptoms when you've not had your cup of coffee, for example – which can include feeling increased levels of stress. If you're relying on caffeine for your energy, it's important to cut down gradually. Cutting out caffeine altogether could lead to mild to severe withdrawal symptoms, depending on the level of your dependence. These could include headaches, aches and pains, feeling lethargic, and stress.

Sleeping Habits

Your sleeping habits are integral to your mental health. How well you sleep at night has a direct correlation to your stress levels. If you're getting enough sleep and at the right times, you will wake up feeling more refreshed and with a clearer mind to take on the stresses of the day. But, busy life and other things can get in the way of us having a good night's sleep. In order to make sure that you are fully rested and reap as many health benefits as possible, you should be aiming to have around six hours' sleep per night.

Waking up early can also have some great health benefits, which is why you should look to sleep before midnight at the very latest.

Clearing your mind before you sleep is a vital part of making sure that you get a good night's rest. One of the biggest mistakes made by people in the modern day is to take their technology, which comprises a massive part of their lives, to bed with them. If you sit on your laptop in bed doing work or go through your appointments on your smartphone whilst you're lay in bed, your mind will start to associate getting in bed with working, rather than resting, which can affect your ability to fall into a restful sleep. Not allowing yourself time to relax and wind down when getting in bed can lead to issues such as insomnia or feeling tired and unrefreshed every morning. In order to get the best sleep every night, you should make your bedroom a tech-free zone after a certain time of the evening. Listening to soft music and using an essential oils diffuser can be great for setting the sleepy mood and allowing yourself to relax and float away into a deep and peaceful sleep each night.

Social Habits

You may not think about it, but your social habits can also contribute to your stress levels. The people who you spend time with and confide in can either be helpful or harmful when it comes to

mental health, anxiety and stressed. When you are feeling stressed out, it's important to surround yourself with people who you can trust to give you the best support. Understanding how to ask for support and who to turn to can be hugely important when dealing with increased levels of stress and anxiety.

When it comes to being stressed out, it can often feel like some people know exactly which buttons to press in order to get your stress levels rising. Understanding who is contributing to your stress is vital to taking control of the situation and working on it. Sometimes, the people who cause our stress can mean little to us – for example other parents at your child's school, friends of friends, or people who work with you on the same level. On the other hand, sometimes it's harder to get away from the people who stress us out – perhaps they're your relative, or maybe your boss. In this case, it's vital to understand how they stress you out. Sometimes, talking to somebody who is causing you to feel stressed and explaining how you feel in a calm and sensitive manner can be helpful – not only will you feel better off for it, but it can also strengthen your relationship with the other person. Of course, it's important to remember that if you are going to speak to somebody in order to tell them how they contribute to your stress, you should do it in a tactful, non-accusatory manner so as not to further damage the relationship.

4. Lifestyle Habits Which Relieve Stress

So, smoking, drinking too much, not getting enough sleep, overdosing on caffeine and hanging around people who stress you out can all contribute to your stress levels rising through the roof. But, when you try to give up these harmful habits in order to help with your stress and anxiety, which ones are the best to replace them with? Often, replacing a habit with another habit can be a great way to help you quit the first one. For example, those who smoke may want to replace smoking cigarettes with vaping, which is less harmful but provides them with something to do instead of lighting up a cigarette. Others prefer to swap harmful habits for good habits which are drastically different – for example, someone who drinks too much alcohol may decide to start lifting weights to give them something else to do instead of having a drink.

Exercise

We've dedicated a whole chapter of this book to exercise already, but it's so important that it needed to be mentioned again. Regular exercise is one of the best lifestyle habits that you can have when it comes to improving your mental health and making sure that your stress levels are under control. Taking part in activities such as walking, running, cycling, swimming, yoga, and even weight

lifting or playing a team sport can boost physical fitness, improve strength, and increase self-esteem and confidence, all of which can help to improve stress and anxiety. Exercising itself releases feel-good chemicals in the brain, and has been clinically proven to reduce the symptoms of anxiety and depression.

Meditation

When it comes to combatting stress, meditation is a great habit to take up and integrate into your lifestyle. For centuries, meditation has been used to help people deal with their stress and anxiety levels and feel calmer within themselves. Meditation helps you to find the positive energy inside of yourself and feel more connected and at peace with yourself and the world around you. Those who meditate regularly find that stressful situations no longer overwhelm them as much; they are calmer, more relaxed, and able to take on more and more. Whether you are a spiritual person or not, there is no doubt that mindfulness meditation can help you to feel more relaxed and in control. Even the act of taking the time to sit in quiet and collect your thoughts for a while can help to reduce stress, as meditation requires you to breathe deeply, which will oxygenate your brain and give you more energy to deal with your stress. Mindfulness mediation can be done at home, or in a class. You can also use a range of essential oils or music to aid you.

Creativity

Getting creative can be one of the best ways to deal with stress. And, the best thing about using creativity to combat stress is that you don't have to be particularly artistic in order to so successfully. There have been many studies which directly relate getting creative to lower stress levels, with adult coloring books and apps for stress being a huge success. The simple act of coloring in pictures, or perhaps doing something creative such as baking, needlework or even DIY, can be very therapeutic and can distract your thoughts and focus from your stress and on to something else. So, if you're feeling stressed out, it might be time to think about taking up a new creative hobby.

Friends and Family

People who are mentally strong do not dissociate themselves from those who are closest to them. When you're feeling stressed out, it can be easy to try and hide your stress levels from your family members and close friends as naturally, you don't want them to be worried about you. However, knowing when to ask for support and having the best people around you to offer that can be very important when it comes to effectively managing stress. Building and maintaining strong relationships with your family and close friends means that you will have somebody to talk to when

the going gets tough, which can be extremely helpful for stress. Having somebody to talk to and confide in about whatever is stressing you out can help you by giving you an outsider's perspective, which can often help by putting your own thoughts into a better perspective. Along with that, having people to turn to can stop you from taking too much on yourself, giving you more time to relax and keep on top of your mental health.

5. Your Lifetime Relaxation Techniques

One of the worst things about stress is that it is not always clear how to deal with it. If you've ever been stressed about something and then began to feel even more stressed because you couldn't get in control of these anxious feelings, you will understand. However, there are a number of techniques which you can use in order to help you get control over your stress and relax more. Understanding the various techniques for relaxation, finding out which ones work best for you, and applying them to your life when necessary is important in managing your stress and anxiety and staying in control. Being able to relax and collect your thoughts is absolutely vital when it comes to finding yourself in situations which cause your stress levels to rise and make you anxious. Using good relaxation techniques can help you to gain control over your feelings and deal with them before they worsen.

Breathing Techniques

Deep breathing is one of the most commonly used techniques by people who suffer from high stress levels, or anxiety or panic attacks. When you start to feel your stress levels rising, taking a few deep breaths can be an easy way to quickly check yourself and get in control of the situation. Taking a moment to consciously

breathe in and out deeply means that you will be momentarily distracted by focusing on your breathing rather than on what is stressing you out.

Knowing which breathing techniques work for you and when to use them is important to helping to control your stress levels and make sure that anxiety and worry does not take over in stressful situations. Timed, deep breathing can make all the difference when it comes to taking control over your emotions and thoughts during stressful times. Breathing deeply in for four seconds and then exhaling slowly for four seconds, repeatedly until you begin to feel calmer, can be one of the simplest exercises to do when it comes to managing your stress. Breathing in through your nose will create a natural resistance to the breath and help you to focus on breathing and staying calm rather than on whatever is causing you to feel stressed and anxious.

Advanced Breathing Techniques

Although basic deep breathing is something that anybody can do in order to recollect themselves and regain their calm in particularly stressful situations, sometimes enhanced levels of stress call for more advanced, focused breathing techniques. These breathing techniques are used by yogis and even during meditation to help bring calm to the body and mind.

- Alternate nostril breathing: This breath is said to bring calm and balance, something which you will certainly appreciate if you are feeling particularly stressed out about a certain situation. You should make sure that you are comfortably posed before doing this breathing technique as it requires focus and stability. Known as Nadi Shodhana, you carry out this breathing technique by covering your right nostril with your thumb and inhaling deeply through your left nostril. At the point of inhalation, uncover your right nostril and cover the left, to exhale through your right nostril. This is a great breathing technique for times when you need to focus more, such as before an exam or a presentation.

- Abdominal breathing techniques: Placing one hand on your chest and the other on your belly, take a deep breath in through your nose until the diaphragm inflates with enough air to create a stretch in the lungs. Taking around six to ten of these kind of breaths for about ten minutes per day can help to reduce your heart rate and blood pressure, something which is hugely important in dealing with stress.

Conscious Relaxation

Sometimes you may think that you're relaxed – perhaps you're taking a hot bath, or lounging on the sofa at the weekend – but in

reality, there's a million thoughts running through your mind. It's possible to try and relax our bodies, but when it comes to dealing with stress, it's also important to make sure that you work to relax your mind, as well. Breathing techniques can help with conscious relaxation as carrying them out forces you to focus on your own breathing and ignore other thoughts which could be causing you to stress out or worry. Focusing on breathing and making a conscious decision to relax helps you to gather thoughts which are spiraling out of control and get a handle on your stress.

One of the best ways to consciously relax your whole body and mind is to practice progressive relaxation techniques. In order to get rid of as much tension as possible from your head right down to your toes, you should close your eyes and focus on tensing, and then relaxing, each of your muscle groups for a couple of seconds each. Start with your feet and toes, and then move upwards, through the knees, thighs, buttocks, stomach, chest, arms, hands, neck, facial muscles, and even around the eyes. Whilst doing this, it is important to maintain slow, deep breaths. At first, it may be difficult to remain focused, so breathing in through the nose, holding for a count of five, then releasing the breath slowly can help. Remember that if holding your breath ever feels uncomfortable, you should shorten the amount of time to one which you can easily deal with.

6. Recognizing Stressful Situations

A huge part of dealing with stressful situations and managing to be able to regain your state of calm when things start to go off course is recognizing what an impending stressful situation looks like. Of course, this isn't always going to be possible as some stressful situations in your life may be genuinely out of the blue, but for the most part, you will at least be able to notice when your stress levels begin to rise.

Noticing Your Stress

When you are starting to feel stressed out, you will notice your stress levels rising. You may feel nervous, agitated, sweaty, faint, or you may start to get a headache. Understanding the physical symptoms which you experience when you are stressed is key to noticing when your stress levels are rising, recognizing stressful situations, and getting everything back under control. One of the worst mistakes that you can make is to try and ignore your stress and hope that it will go away – this will not work. In order to best manage and get control over the stressful thoughts and emotions, it's absolutely essential to accept them before attempting to deal with them. Once you have noticed a stressful thought, it is easier

to pin down the cause of your stress in your attempt to deal with it.

How to Manage Stressful Thoughts

However important the ability to notice stressful and anxious thoughts may be, it's a useless skill if you do not know how to deal with and manage these thoughts once you have dealt with them. There are a multitude of different ways in which you could deal with stressful and worrisome thoughts and feelings, and it is really down to you finding out which coping techniques and methods work well for you. Some common coping techniques include:

- Breathing techniques;
- Taking a break;
- Listening to music;
- Going outside;
- Taking a walk;
- Switching off your phone and other connected devices;

- Talking to somebody you trust, or
- Eating a healthy snack.

Of course, these are all different techniques, and whilst some may work great for others, they may not be what suits you. You may also find your own personal coping techniques which are not listed here. In the end, dealing with stressful thoughts, feelings and situations is all down to finding what works best for you and applying it when these situations arise.

Finding Your Techniques

When it comes to discovering which relaxation techniques for dealing with stress work well for you, it is absolutely vital to have patience with yourself. If you have never used any anxiety-busting or stress-busting techniques before, it can often take a while for you to discover which ones actually make a difference to you as compared to those which don't work at all. The key here is to try not to be disheartened if a certain technique doesn't work for you – it's OK, you can just try another one. You also need to be aware of the fact that relaxation and stress-busting techniques not working when you try them could make you feel even more stressed. However, once you have figured out what works well for you and know exactly when and how to use it, you will have made a huge

step in controlling your stress levels and encouraging a life which is calm and collected.

Finding Your Stressors

We all have things in our lives that stress us out more than others. Understanding what causes you to feel the most stressed out is absolutely vital to taking control of your life and your stress levels. When you're stressed about something but not quite sure why, it can make you feel even more stressed – some people end up in situations where they are stressing about their own levels of stress, further intensifying the condition. Being able to pinpoint your stressors in life not only means that it is easier for you to know what to avoid in order to keep stress at bay, but it can also help you stay in control as you will be able to better prepare ahead for most situations which include your particular stressors.

Discovering what stresses you out the most is all about being totally honest with yourself. When you are feeling particularly anxious, you should ask yourself what it is that you are worried about. Sometimes, you may find that small things which would not usually worry you are stressing you out – if this is happening, you need to understand that it is usually the result of a knock-on-effect from other stressors, perhaps over an extended period of time. It can be helpful to enlist the services of a therapist when dealing

with your stressors, especially if you suffer from a lot of stress which is related to a traumatic past experience.

Being In Control

The key to a life which is calm and has minimal stress is to be in control of it at all times. Staying in control not only means being on top of thing such as your diet, finances, and lifestyle, but also your own thought processes and energy. Staying in control of your own mind by making sure that your body and mind is getting the right nutrition, adequate exercise, and little harm from bad lifestyle habits is absolutely important when it comes to achieving a life which is calm and relatively stress-free.

Understanding how to harness your thoughts is one of the main goals of managing stress and anxiety. Rather than allowing your thoughts to run away with you, being in control – both physically and mentally – means that you can catch stressful thoughts when they first appear and use a range of techniques to deal with them efficiently.

Conclusion

Stress is a normal part of everyday life. But, what happens when your stress stops motivating you, and starts to control you? If you're feeling like your stress levels are rising just a little bit more every day, it's time to check your lifestyle and get in control. By making changes to your diet, your exercise routine, your sleep routine and your social habits, you can improve your life by making it calmer and clear of stress and anxiety.