

## Helpful Tips to Manage Stress

If you go to our website you will find lots of helpful information around tips for home, work, relaxation, sleep, etc: <http://www.warninternational.com/blog/>.

### **Breathing – (Always breathe through your nose and expand your stomach as you breath in)**

To control your fight-or-flight response, in other words when you feel yourself getting angry or afraid – take a long slow deep breath to fill your lungs, then hold your breath for at least 3 seconds, counting inside your head as you hold your breath, then slowly breathe out to reduce your heart rate, hold your breath for 3 seconds before breathing in again – do this just once or twice, too many breaths may cause you to hyperventilate.

In these busy times, we have forgotten how to breathe properly. To help reduce anxiousness there are two options;

#### 5-5-5

Sit up straight in a chair;

1. breathe in for 5 seconds to fully expand your lungs.
2. hold your breath for 5 seconds, this will start to slow your heart rate.
3. breathe out for 5 seconds which will slow your heart rate even further.
4. Hold your breath for 5 seconds before breathing in for another 5 seconds.

Count each of the 5 seconds inside your head, this will control your thoughts. Do this technique for three cycles, once each night, for 30 nights. You may have to start with 3-3-3 then progress to 4-4-4 building up to 5-5-5.

#### 6 second repeating

Sit up straight in a chair;

1. set your phone to beep at 6 second intervals.
2. at the first beep, breathe in, at the next beep breathe out, breathe in, breathe out.
3. do this exercise for 2 minutes, twice a day.

If you are having trouble getting to sleep, or you wake up in the early hours the morning, there is a 9-breath technique you can use to quickly get back to sleep. You are going to take nine deep slow breaths through both nostrils;

1. Take three long slow breaths, imagining cold air is going only through your right or left nostril. Remember you are breathing through both nostrils.
2. For the next three breaths you are imagining cold air going through the other nostril.
3. For the last three breaths, if you get that far, you are imagining cold air going through both nostrils.

### **Sleep**

Sleep is the most important thing to keep you well (sane) so here are some other things that you can do;

- When you have finished work, you need to tell your brain that. When logging off your computer at work, watch the computer logging off and imagine your brain doing the same thing. As you leave the place where you work, tell yourself inside your head, “Works over”.
- If you are a shift worker, you need to start the slow down process at work. A good way of doing this is to have a shower after work as water is not only a cleanser for your body but

also for your brain. As you wash yourself, think about the water washing the residue of work away. Plus, on the drive home you will relax as your brain starts to cool down.

- When you get home, make sure you switch your brain off completely by doing some form of practical action accompanied with a mantra to get your physiology & psychology (body & brain) working together. As you step inside your house take a deep breath, say to yourself “It’s over”, “I am home”, or “Relax”. Do this for 66 days (sorry, it takes that long to change your pattern) and you will find that just by opening the door and stepping inside that your brain will automatically switch off.
- Go for a 30-minute walk in the evening after dinner to calm your brain, settle your food, and burn off adrenaline and cortisol that has built up over the day.
- Exercise creates endorphins which helps you sleep, get some form of exercise daily during the working week but make sure that you do not exercise within 2 hours of going to bed.
- If you can, get out in the sun for at least 15 minutes each day – don’t use sunblock as you need to absorb vitamin D plus this will help build your melatonin levels which is needed at night to sleep.
- Don’t use any electronic devices (phone, i-Pad, e-reader, etc.) at least 2 hours before bed. The backlight doesn’t help as it keeps your brain running by thinking it is daytime. There is a setting that places a red ‘cover’ on your device which will stop the blue light. There is an App called Twilight that does the same thing.
- Make sure your room is dark and cool – we once lived in caves and cold places that were dark so over evolution our brain is accustomed to total blackness at night – use both blinds and curtains in your room.
- Have a hot shower 30 minutes before bedtime. As the brain cools, it sends a signal that it is night-time.
- Go to bed at the same time every night and get out of bed the same time every morning.
- Eat a small piece of protein just on bedtime to stop you waking between 3am & 4am – this can be a small handful of walnuts, a boiled egg, a couple of bits of cheese (watch out for the weird dreams) or some cooked minced chicken.
- Know that if you are someone who regularly wakes at 3 to 4 am, this is normal. It is part of the interaction between your brain and stomach as part of the natural digestive process. You aren’t worried or stressed if you find yourself thinking about a problem or issue, it is the release of cortisol as part of fight-or-flight involving the digestive system.
- When you are in bed, don’t have too many blankets. If you feel a little cold, that is good as the brain needs to be cool to go to and stay asleep. Too many blankets = too hot = brain starts operating = bad dreams.
- Your brain may be rushing as you become anxious at trying to get to sleep. If you can, try to think about nothing. To do this, look into the darkness of your closed eyes and keep looking at it intensely. Or think ‘black’ is another way of doing this. That is the best method of slowing your brain. If you can’t do that then think of something pleasant (your happy place) and stay focussed on that one thing. Another technique is to imagine a large oak tree with the leaves blowing in the wind. Look at the large trunk, the big branch, a smaller branch, working right out to a tweak, on the triggers a leaf, on the leaf is a small bike, on the bug is a black spot, when you see that black spot the wind stops and everything goes quiet. You may have to do this three times.
- Some people like to go through things that they are thankful for when they get into bed. One technique is to work through each member of your family, acknowledging what you’re grateful about in relation to each one.
- You could try playing with noise levels. I sleep with ear plugs to block out all noise and it also helps me to focus on my breathing. Some people like music therefore have their

favourite 'peaceful' music playing quietly in the background. White noise is another option you could try, like all things there's an App for that as well.

- Sleeping is all about patterns of routine. If you change one thing, it will disrupt your pattern. A new pillow, new sheets, daylight saving, shift work, etc., all impact on our sleep pattern and routine. Try to be as consistent as possible.
- Never, ever go to bed too early. When you do so a little voice says to you "I'm glad you've come to bed early, I have some questions for you", and your brain will start to race.
- If you can't get to sleep, stay in bed and try to relax. This contradicts what you may have read or been told but it works for a lot of people. I find if I get out of bed I wake up again and have trouble getting back to a relaxed state.
- Oftentimes, we feel that we haven't had any sleep across the night. Know that you have slept but haven't gone through the appropriate number or full REM cycles.
- If you are someone who likes to get out of bed in the night to go to the toilet or 'patrol' the house, don't turn on any lights as the light will wake your brain.
- Have a pad and pen beside your bed to write down ideas that pop into your thoughts in the early hours of the morning. If you don't write them down, you will stay awake in fear that you will forget the thought.
- Our brains work 24/7 so keep it calm by relaxing as much as you can prior to bedtime, refer below for more on this.
- If you miss out on sleep during the week, don't be afraid to sleep longer in the weekend or to have a 'power nap' in the afternoon.
- Magnesium is known to assist with getting to sleep, as is melatonin. These can be purchased over the counter.

There is a very new technique to get to sleep, you may wish to try it;

- Place the tip of your tongue against the tissue ridge right above your upper front teeth. Keep it there for the remainder of the exercise.
- Exhale completely through your mouth, making a *whoosh* sound as you do so.
- Close your mouth and inhale slowly through your nose while mentally counting to four.
- Hold your breath for a mental count of seven.
- Exhale completely through your mouth for a mental count of eight. Make the same *whoosh* sound from Step Two.
- This concludes the first cycle. Repeat the same process three more times for a total of four renditions.

In a nutshell: breathe in for four, hold for seven, and breathe out for eight. You must inhale through your nose and exhale through your mouth. The four-count inhale allows chronic under-breathers to take in more oxygen. The seven-count hold gives the oxygen more time to thoroughly permeate the bloodstream, and the eight-count exhale slows the heart rate and releases a greater amount of carbon dioxide from the lungs.

### **Relaxation Tips**

Try these different ways of relaxing in just 10 minutes;

### **Socialisation and Fun**

Cuddle with a Pet – cuddling a pet can boost self-esteem, you can also tell them your darkest secret without fear of discrimination or rejection.

Laugh a Lot - Laughing can increase blood flow and boost immunity. Keep a book of jokes handy in the desk drawer or watch a funny YouTube video.

Talk to a Friend - When something's really bothering you, it can help to share your feelings. Research tells us that talking can significantly reduce our stress levels.

Look Ahead – Start looking forward to a trip that you have coming up. If you don't have one, start planning a holiday.

### **Exercise**

Do Some Yoga - Lay on the floor and rest your legs up against a wall. Not only does it give the body a good stretch, but it helps create peace of mind.

Stretch - Standing up for a quick stretch can relieve muscle tension and help us relax during a stressful workday.

Run on the Spot - Try running in place for a few minutes to get those endorphins flowing. Even brief physical activity can help beat stress.

Take a Quick Walk Outside - When you're feeling overwhelmed or having trouble concentrating, go for a quick stroll around the block. You'll get the benefits of alone time, physical activity, and a few minutes to gather your thoughts.

### **Entertainment and Creativity**

Listen to Your Favourite Song – Listening to music can be a quick fix for a bad mood. Classical music can be especially relaxing before bedtime.

Dance - Research suggests people feel less anxious after dancing.

Complete a Puzzle - Brain games that require lots of concentration can help take our mind off whatever's worrying us.

### **Food and Drink**

Sip Green Tea - Green tea is a source of L-Theanine, a chemical that helps relieve anger.

Eat Chocolate - Just a square of chocolate can calm your nerves. Dark chocolate regulates levels of the stress hormone cortisol and stabilises metabolism.

Slurp Honey - Replace stress with a spoonful of honey. Besides being a natural skin moisturiser and antibiotic, honey also provides compounds that reduce inflammation in the brain, meaning it fights depression and anxiety.

Eat a Mango – Mango's, are packed with a compound called linalool that helps lower stress levels.

Chew Gum – Chewing a stick of gum is a surprisingly quick and easy way to beat stress. Just a few minutes of chewing can actually reduce anxiety and lower cortisol levels.

Munch on a Crunchy Snack - A handful of trail mix, nuts, or a bag of celery/carrot sticks will help relieve stress.

### **Inner Peace**

Remember to Breathe - Slow, deep, quiet breaths can help lower blood pressure and heart rate.

Meditate – Evidence suggests that just two quick bouts of silent meditation per day can relieve stress and depression. Find a comfortable spot in a quiet place, concentrate on your breathing and listen to the air going in and out.

Take a Nap - There are days when all we really need is a nice, long nap. Take one if you can. If you can't, just lay down for 5 minutes on a pillow and imagine you are somewhere else.

Try Progressive Relaxation - Progressive relaxation involves tensing the muscles in one body part at a time to achieve a state of calm. Start at your feet and work up your body, squeezing each muscle group, holding it for a few seconds and releasing. The method is also a good way to help fall asleep.

Use Creative Visualisation - Small daydreams, also known as "creative visualisation," involve thinking of something that makes us feel happy. It's an instant mood boost on hectic days when we're feeling tense. (Take your mind to a happy place, where you love to be).

### **Message**

Massage Your Hand - Massages can be especially helpful for people who spend a lot of time typing on a keyboard. Hands in general can carry a lot of tension. Massage the base of the muscle under the thumb and the soft area between the thumb and index finger of the hand.

Rub Your Feet Over a Golf Ball - Rub your feet back and forth over a golf ball to relax the muscles in your foot.

Drip Cold Water on Your Wrists - There are major arteries right underneath the skin, so cooling your wrists can help calm the whole body.

### **New Environment**

Alone Time - Five minutes of alone time can help you collect your thoughts and clear your head.

Get Some Sun - If it's a sunny day, head outside to soak up the Vitamin D. Bright light can be an effective treatment for people who suffer from depression, and can even cheer up otherwise healthy folks.

Stare Out the Window - When things get busy, take a five-minute break to do nothing but stare out the window.

Get Organised - Clutter contributes to stress. Take a few minutes to reorganise your desk (or table, or wherever you are), leaving just what you need on top.

### **Smells**

Smell Some Flowers - Certain odours can change our mood.

Try Aromatherapy - Drip some lavender, tea tree, or another essential oil into your palm and inhale. The soothing scents may help send stress and anxiety packing by stimulating smell receptors in the nose that connect to the part of the brain that regulates emotions.

Sniff Citrus - The smell of citrus can help us relax by increasing levels of the stress-related hormone norepinephrine.

Smell the Coffee - The odour of coffee can help reduce stress hormone

### **Vitamins**

- Vitamin D is known to boost immune systems, fight disease, reduce anxiety and depression, and boost weight loss.
- Magnesium us this and calming nerves, assisting with sleep, helps with digestive, relieves muscle aches and spasms, and increases energy levels.

### **Socialisation**

With the advent of e-devices we have lost the art of human-to-human conversation. And, it is hurting us. Communicating face-to-face has many benefits which we miss out on when we send an electronic message. Communicating in the presence of others goes back to our early days when all we had was each other. In fact, most things in life involving our well-being go back to these times. We would meet and talk about the problems of the day, share stories about how we killed a sabretoothed tiger, how we hadn't washed for two months and it felt good, what your best friend is doing, how to keep safe when going for water, that sort of thing.

During these early communications, we were not just sharing stories, we were socialising. We were learning about life, learning about social skills, learning how to interact with others, telling others how we felt. Importantly, socialisation involved emotions. There is no emotional connection when we converse electronically. We don't learn about manners - your turn, my turn - when we use emails. We can't convey our true feelings in a text message, if we do we exaggerate it. We can't

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read body language in an instant message. We may say something hurtful on Facebook, we find it easier to say in an e-message what we wouldn't normally say in person.

In summary our brains are hardwired to communicate with other humans.

I hope that these tips are helpful, if you have any other tips that you are willing to share, please do let me know.

Kindest regards,  
Lance