

7 Easy Stress Management Tips

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A new year, a new set of resolutions, right? Instead of resolving to lose weight or work out more, why not make stress management your resolution? By making the reduction of stress your priority, you may end up feeling happier and healthier overall! And believe it or not, there may actually be some helpful tips out there that you've not yet tried as researchers continue to test new theories and explore new methods of achieving equilibrium and a state of calm.

1 Talk to yourself in the 3rd person.

Yes, it may have your co-workers staring at you with worried expressions on their faces, but this technique has been found by researchers at Michigan State University to actually be helpful in lessening the impact of intense, negative emotions. So if, for example, you find yourself consumed by anger about something and your name is John, rather than ruminating about the situation, try saying something like "John feels really angry right now. Why is John angry?" Researchers noted that the psychological distance provided with this technique can help to regulate emotions to some degree.

2 "You can do it!!!"

The corny pep talks that you always see in movies actually DO work. So before your next project or presentation, try telling yourself that you will not only succeed in whatever it is that you intend to do, but that you will... (pause and cue the inspirational music) *do better than you have ever done before!* Researchers from the BBC Lab in the UK, in a massive study using over 44,000 subjects, found that while using positive imagery before an online test had positive results, nothing was quite as effective as the positive self-talk. As long as the self-talk focused upon the positive and not upon avoiding mistakes i.e. "Don't screw up!", subjects were able to improve their results overall with short motivational self-talks just before performance.

3 Feeling frantic, as if you're just "spinning your wheels"?

Most people who run around in a state of panic do so because they are only attending to the immediate crises when they should also be focusing upon bigger issues which have much better pay-offs. This is where it's crucial to do some prioritization around the issues that you have to take care of personally vs. those tasks can you delegate to others. When you look at your "to-do" list, which of those tasks will have a more gratifying pay-off in terms of your career and your goals in life? Those tasks may be longer to accomplish, but if you take time to work a little on them every day/week, that incremental progress will help you to feel like you are moving in the right direction, not just "spinning your wheels" by attending to the crisis of the hour/day.

4 Schedule buffer zones into your day.

If you're someone who is always running from meeting to meeting, late for the next one, then it's a good idea to consider the simple concept of allotting extra unscheduled time in your day in between meetings and the other obligations. This will give you some breathing room to take notes regarding the meeting you just finished and get ready for the next task or, if there is an unexpected crisis, then you'll have built in some time to handle it before your next obligation. It's helpful to give yourself some time to mentally "switch gears" as you move from project to project. You might find that the result is that you're less forgetful and less anxious about always being late.

5 Sleep enough, eat well and exercise.

These three habits are the foundation for good physical and mental health. We all know that the lack of sleep, a poor diet and no exercise will eventually lead to some unpleasant consequences when it comes to our health. And yet so many of us who complain about stress often ask questions like, "Who has the time to work out, sleep a full 7 to 9 hours, etc?" however, these stress management tips are probably the most crucial and effective tips of all. The quantity and quality of your sleep affects your energy level which affects your mood, your self-esteem and so on.

Researchers have noted that those who exercise, typically sleep better and report feeling better emotionally as well, but those who exercise regularly may be able

to keep depression at bay. One 2017 study looked at over 22,500 participants in Norway, and found that those who engaged in some deliberate form of exercise were less likely to develop depression. The interesting part was that it didn't matter what form that exercise took and that it could be as little as one hour a week! Researchers theorized that it was the social aspects of getting out and being active that made all of the difference.

Avoid turning to the high fat, high sugar, over-processed foods which can dramatically affect blood sugar levels or using caffeine, sugary snacks or chips every time you need a boost. We all deserve the occasional tasty snack treats... just not on a daily basis.

Quarterly Quote

"Do not anticipate trouble or worry about what may never happen. Keep in the sunlight."

—Benjamin Franklin

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7 Easy Stress Management Tips, Continued

6 Try filtering for more positive options.

Many of us may have a running monologue which predicts doom and gloom wherever we go, whatever we do. "Well, this is going to be a disaster!" Or, "Oh no! The boss just dropped in on the one day that you're leading the meeting! This does not look good." If you've had a lot of stress in your life, it's easy to fall into the rut of scanning for the next big bad thing heading your way.

Be careful though, that you aren't looking ONLY for the pitfalls in life. We can become so accustomed to expecting disastrous outcomes that we essentially overlook the good things in life, or the opportunities we have to change things for the better. Research suggests that more good things happen every day than

bad things! Unfortunately, we are culturally geared to focus upon the negative. Make a practice to notice the good things, like finding a great parking spot, savoring an excellent cup of coffee or greeting an old friend with a warm smile. By focusing upon the positive, we can lift our spirits. And bring awareness to that inner monologue and change the "script" running in your head to something more positive and less catastrophic

7 Go get a massage!

Massage helps in several ways. It can boost your immune system; help loosen tight muscles and prevent injury; and of course, it's a great stress-reliever. If you're not comfortable with the idea of full body massage, try just getting a chair massage which focuses upon your neck and shoulder muscles. Since this

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is where most people carry their tension, it makes sense to focus upon those areas anyway!

There will always be plenty of reasons why you don't have time to follow these self-care tips; however, with the arrival of the new year, why not try some reflection and evaluation? Take an hour...or maybe even a day two and just assess how you feel physically, mentally and emotionally. Are you feeling drained, stressed and run-down? It might be helpful to talk with someone like an EAP counselor, who is outside of your circle of family or friends, who can help you decide to shift your habits in a healthier direction.

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