Finding Relief from Stress

(Published in *Natural Awakenings* magazine - February, 2011)
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Stress, much like your own shadow, is always “out there” and arrives when you least expect or want it to show up. In all honesty, you truly cannot be free from stress entirely. And, a little stress can be helpful at times, motivating us to make healthy lifestyle changes, or even for protection and survival. Actually, stress can be viewed as a neutral, negative or positive.

So, what exactly is stress? Let’s break it down. Stress, a viable outside force, delivers a potent message to us, similar to a poke in the shoulder, and sits back and waits for us to react. It’s an excellent messenger and one that cannot be easily overlooked, since it really is preparing us for fight or flight. Our bodies want to take action. Stress, therefore, must be dealt with and can affect us on many levels:individually, physically, behaviorally, emotionally, and even environmentally. And, prolonged stress can lead to an array of health problems.

Common stressors can include employment (or lack of), relationships, home environments, divorce, births, death, moving/relocations, illness and too many more to mention. How we choose to respond to stress, is entirely up to us. Sitting idly and waiting for stress to pass is not very effective. Truly, to manage stress for healthy outcomes requires a new, proactive paradigm of thinking.

Top 10 Tools for Managing Stress

1. **30-Second Rule.** When stress arrives, try not to speak for at least 30 seconds. Go within and give yourself permission to assimilate what is happening and how you “choose” to respond. Perhaps the situation can be dealt with later when you are more calm or you may desire to remove yourself from the situation and come back to address it later.
2. **Get out some paper.** Draw a line down the middle of the paper and on the left side write down the worst case scenarios and on the right side of the paper write down one positive step you can do to get you on the right track in removing the stressor. Then, take action.
3. **Create a safe haven.** Everyone should have a place in their home or yard where they can relax, regroup, think, and feel safe. Make this a special place surrounding yourself with things that bring you comfort, joy, and will nurture positive thinking. Read a new book or begin to journal.
4. **Exercise is essential.** Exercise lowers the production of stress hormones and associated neurochemicals. And, it aids against depression, combats anxiety, and is helpful for better sleep. Enjoy our beautiful outdoor weather and breathe in some fresh air while walking, biking, hiking, skiing, and swimming. Enroll in a martial arts or yoga class.

5. **Meditation and deep breathing.** Just 15 to 20 minutes daily of being still, quiet and observing your breath can help control blood pressure and lower your heart rate. In our fast-paced lifestyles, few people truly take the time to be still and witness the benefits of this timeless tradition. Try a guided meditation where you create a safe place within a garden or other setting.
6. **Avoid drugs, alcohol, caffeine and nicotine.** Reaching for these items is only a temporary fix that masks the underlying problem and robs you of the clarity you require to cope with or eliminate the stress. Reach for healthier alternatives such as fresh fruits and crisp vegetables. Change your scenery and step outside for just a minute or two and the urge may pass.
7. **Don't go it alone.** Consider speaking with a trusted friend or partake in a form of individual or group therapy. Stress counseling has proven to reduce stress symptoms and improve overall health, attitude and well-being. Avoid isolation.
8. **Incorporate relaxation in your lifestyle.** Schedule some "me" time and indulge in a massage, hypnotherapy or hypnosis session, scalp massage, reflexology or other modality to give you a break from dealing with stress.
9. **Change your routine.** Consider gardening or potting some favorite flowers. Call a friend and go for a walk or hike. Being in nature is rejuvenating. Get out to a movie during the middle of the week. Gather some friends and check out a local museum, new restaurant, or cultural event. Mix things up and expand your horizons.
10. **Keep things in perspective.** All of us face challenges in our lives. Try to remain objective and take steps to take care of yourself. Find your voice. Be proactive. Remember, things just happen; they don't happen to you.

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