

The *Stress-Free* Stress Management Plan



CHECKLIST

Checklist and Guide

So, you've read the book and you're feeling pretty psyched and ready to get started?

But wait, did you pay careful attention? Do you remember all the points we covered? Before you rush ahead and potentially miss some crucial steps, let's take a look at the key points again.

Take Stress Seriously

Stress really does ruin lives. Recognize this and take it seriously; to the point even where you might start choosing your career and lifestyle *around* the aim of minimizing stress.

Many of us have become accustomed to living with stress but the first thing you must do is accept that it is possible to live free of stress and I promise you, it's a much better life!

Use a Daylight Alarm

One of the worst things for stress is your morning alarm which startles you awake. Try swapping it for a daylight lamp that will gradually get brighter in the morning!

Having a regular morning routine will do wonders for your stress levels, so make a change and then *stick to it!*

Exercise!

Want to reduce stress in the long *and* short term? Exercise! This will increase the production of feel-good endorphins which act as natural anxiolytics (stress relievers).

How much exercise can you fit into your week? Be honest with yourself. I'm sure that if you stopped watching so much TV or playing videogames then you could get to the gym.

If you really want to change then you should push yourself to make that change. Commit to a regular workout program and find the 6-8 hours each week to exercise. Doctors prescribe exercise regularly for a reason; it's extremely beneficial to our physical and mental health.

Talk to People

As they say, a problem shared is a problem halved. What's more, social time is great for more natural stress busting.

If you don't have family or friends that you can share the problem with you could look into talking to a counselor. Or you may benefit from simply communicating with others about random topics. This will allow your body to shut off from the stressors in your life.

Learn to Enjoy Your Downtime

This is one of the biggest challenges for those who have become addicted to stress. Learn to actually enjoy your time off!

Keep track of your progress. Are you still thinking about work when you should be having fun? What can you do to improve and shut off more next time?

Have 30 Minutes at the End of the Day

This will help you to decompress and to relax and will ensure you sleep better. It's recommended that you do something away from bright screens. This is because the bright light tricks your body into thinking it's still daytime and this prevents you from falling asleep.

Eat Tryptophan

Tryptophan is a chemical precursor to the feel-good hormone serotonin. It's found in foods like poultry among other things. Whilst you can supplement this, it's advised that you try to consume a more varied and healthy diet. This will help a lot with your stress levels because as the saying goes; "healthy body, healthy mind".

□ **Try the Pomodoro Technique**

Got a lot of work to do? Keep procrastinating? Set a timer for 25 minutes, work during that time, have 5 minutes off. Repeat.

□ **Outsource and Delegate**

Most of us just take on too much work. It's no wonder we're stressed! Fix this by outsourcing your work or delegating. There's no shame in it.

If you work for yourself then you may think about hiring a virtual assistant. This will mean that you have somebody to handle your time consuming but easy tasks, leaving your brain power for more complicated issues.

□ **Use Thought Challenge**

Often our fears are unwarranted. Challenge your beliefs. This is a form of CBT and the idea is to prove to yourself that your fears are irrational, hence allowing you freedom from them.

For example you might be stressed about work and find yourself regularly replying to emails late at night. Try not replying until morning for a few days. Nothing went wrong, right?

Have Contingency Plans

Think about your worst fears and come up with contingency plans for each. If you can figure out a way to overcome the worst then all of a sudden your fears aren't so scary after all!

Fears are emotionally driven. Think rationally about what would happen if your fear did become a reality. Likelihood is that you would cope and deal with the situation, becoming stronger in the process. You're stronger than you think!

Change Your Commute

Most of us who commute to and from work find that it's probably the worst part of the day. The whole principle is extremely stressful to our minds because we are designed to be wary of large groups of strangers.

If you can avoid a commute in any way then I would highly recommend it. Can you share a lift, and thus have someone to relax with on the way to work? How about working remotely from home? Is it quicker and less stressful to cycle?

Stop Drinking Coffee

Coffee is essentially stress in a cup. Try and make a conscious effort to reduce your intake and if possible completely cut it out from your diet. Do some research into healthier alternatives if you need a morning boost!

Learn Mindfulness

This is an incredibly useful technique for lowering your stress levels and is highly recommended by healthcare professionals.

Mindfulness is the idea of taking in what is currently around you, rather than dwelling on other issues. In essence, you should be in the present not stuck in the past or worrying about the future.

Don't be Persuaded

Our employers, our colleagues and our society tries to teach us that work is synonymous with being a good person. Don't buy into it.

If you have too much on then learn to say no. It's better for yourself and also your long term productivity. Don't let yourself burn out for the sake of one more small project.

Get a Massage Chair

A massage chair can deliver massages on demand and is great for stress relief!

Or Have a Hot Bath

The next best thing? A hot bath with some muscle soak thrown in for good measure.

Learn to Compartmentalize

When you're not at work, don't worry about work. If you can't fix your money now, don't think about money.

A good way to improve is every time you think about something that you shouldn't be, write it down on some scrap paper. Then you can scrunch it up and throw it in the bin. This sounds trivial but the actual motion helps you to compartmentalize and develop good habits.

Close Open Loops

If there's a small, stressful job you need to do, then get that out the way *first* to feel better. Try writing to-do lists by order of simplicity, that way you will feel more positive as you see it getting ticked off and you will have less to think about.

Breathe!

Breathing is the best short-term fix to stress. Focus on your breathing and you'll activate the parasympathetic nervous system and instantly feel calmer.