

The 5-Minute Guide To Managing Your Stress Levels

-SPECIAL REPORT-

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Stress Management – A Five Minute Guide

Stress is one of the biggest problems faced by modern society. According to the statistics, a great majority of us are stressed on a regular and ongoing basis. What's more, stress is leading to heart disease, to depression, to strokes and to a number of other serious health effects. Stress is as ubiquitous then as it is devastating and many of us just accept this as 'normal'.

But it's not normal and nor is it acceptable. If you're living with chronic stress then it means that your immune system is constantly compromised and you might be on track for a nervous breakdown. That's not even the point though: the point is that when you live with stress, you don't enjoy life to its fullest and you don't really *live* life. This is simply unacceptable and if you're stressed to the point where you're no longer enjoying yourself, then *something* needs to change.

And the good news is that combating stress is relatively easy. In fact it doesn't have to take all that long. Stress is a straightforward problem and the solution is straightforward too. Sometimes it just takes a simple change in your mindset and in the way you look at things...

How to Think About Stress

The first way in which you need to change your mindset is simple: you need to recognize that stress is unacceptable and you need to find ways to get rid of it.

And you should make this the *goal* of your lifestyle. If you have less stress, then you will be happier. And being happier is a noble aim.

This is where the idea of 'lifestyle design' comes in. Essentially, lifestyle design means that you are designing your career and your routine around the lifestyle you want. This is the definition of 'working to live' as opposed to living to work and it makes a huge difference.

At the same time, you should be making constant progress towards this goal of less stress. Make small changes wherever possible and improve your lifestyle in countless little ways to break down your stress piece by piece.

What is Causing Your Stress?

To combat stress you need to make it into a target and that means you need to define it. Specifically, you're going to need to know precisely what is causing you stress.

A good place to start then is with a list of all the things that are causing your stress. Write down all the things that take energy away from you on a daily basis and rate them by how culpable they each are. Don't forget to include the less obvious things that are a part of your routine and even people can go on this list.

At the same time, break down the larger items into smaller parts. So for instance, if you are having a lot of workplace stress, you should try looking at all the smaller aspects that are contributing to this. You may find that your workplace stress is caused by the commute, by your workload, by your uncomfortable chair and by your boss. Likewise, if 'housework' is one of the things you've listed then think about how that can be broken down to 'vacuuming', 'washing up' etc.

Now what you're going to do is to look at how you can address each of these items. If you have one very big item then you might find it's possible simply to cross that off the list if you decide it's worthwhile. For example, you can maybe just quit your job. If it's causing you so much stress that it would be a huge undertaking to make it less stressful any other way then just start looking elsewhere. Remember: your happiness and your health should take absolute priority here. It is *never* worth putting yourself through hell every day.

Easier is to start addressing the smaller factors that contribute to making each of your big stresses as big and stressful as they are.

So for instance, if you are very stressed by 'work' and you've identified that this in turn is due to the commute, your workload and your boss – you can fix those things by looking

into a lift share, admitting you've taken on too much and perhaps talking to a higher up manager about changing departments.

Here are a list of some common 'small stresses' and solutions to them:

- The commute – Try travelling in at a different time, or getting a bike
- A colleague – Try asking to move seats or even departments
- Money – Look at cancelling some bills that you don't absolutely need
- An uncomfortable chair – Simply buy a better one!
- An untidy house – Automate house tidying with a robotic vacuum, a washing machine and a steamer!

'Fear Setting'

Gradually as you come up with solutions for the small stressors in your life, you should find your load getting lighter and your overall mood improving.

This has removed some of the smaller and more concrete stresses in your life but it won't necessarily have dealt with the bigger and more abstract ones. Try as you might, you're not going to be able to fix date or a bad relationship overnight.

A different technique to use here then is something called 'fear setting' which was proposed originally by Tim Ferriss and which takes strong cues from cognitive behavioral therapy. The idea of fear setting is to look at the things you're afraid of and then to break them down by looking at whether those fears are really founded on anything or not.

What you will very often find is that your fears aren't as bad as you think they are and when you realize this, there's a lot less to be afraid of.

So first you should start by writing down all your current fears and stresses. Perhaps you're afraid of losing your job. Maybe you're afraid of your partner walking out on you. This is why a deadline is *really* stressful and it's why arguments cause us so much unhappiness.

But now ask yourself: how likely is it *really* that you're going to be fired because you were late for one deadline? It's actually illegal to fire people without a good reason and unless you're on your 10th warning, you're probably in no position to be fired. Likewise, remind yourself that no one ever broke up over normal arguments. Would you leave *them* if your situations were reversed?

Be logical about your fears and you will find that many of your stresses start to subside.

Lifestyle Changes to Combat Stress

With many of your small stressors dealt with and those looming fears appearing all the less terrifying, life should already start to be looking a little happier and calmer.

At the same time though, you can also look at making some lifestyle changes if you really want to improve your mental health and avoid stress.

The aim here is basically to improve your energy levels and your health, such that all your normal stresses should feel that much more manageable and easy to cope with.

Sleep is a great place to start with here and as soon as you start getting better rest, stress will seem easier to manage. The problem is that stress also makes it harder to sleep, so use the following tips to improve the quality and quantity of your sleep even when you're tired:

- Open a window a jar to make your room cooler
- Have a hot bath before bed to relax your muscles
- Ensure your room is perfectly dark and quiet
- Get a comfortable bed and bed clothes
- Keep your room for sex and sleeping and make sure it's always tidy

Make these changes and you'll find it easier to sleep even despite your stress. At the same time though, don't try to *force* sleep (this only makes us more stressed!). Better yet, try and make sure you give yourself 20 minutes to unwind and relax at the end of the day before you go to sleep. During this time, stay away from computers and phones

and just read a book quietly. This will calm and relax your mind ready for sleep and it's an excellent stress busting tool.

Diet wise, ensure that you are getting plenty of vitamins and minerals. This will improve your immune system, immediately removing a lot of *physical* stress. At the same time, specific nutrients can help to boost your energy (such as the *crucial* B6) and your brain function. Others are utilized in making the 'feel good' neurotransmitters. A key example of this is tryptophan and 5-HTP, both of which are precursors for the neurotransmitter 'serotonin'.

Cut Back and Simplify

Another tip is to keep your life as simple as possible. Cut back on anything that is unnecessary and generally 'declutter'.

One way to do this is to physically declutter by removing things you don't need from your home. That means throwing out any belongings of yours that you haven't used for a while. This might seem extreme and you might be wondering how it could possibly lead to less stress. In fact though, it's an incredibly effective way to make life that much easier. When you have less stuff, you will find the home is easier to keep clean and tidy and that it looks less 'busy'. What's more, you'll be less tied down and encumbered.

So go through your things and be ruthless. Aim for simplistic minimalism and your life will suddenly get a lot easier.

At the same time, you should also look at ways you can cut back in your personal life. This might mean for example that you simply start saying 'no' a little more. Often we are exhausted and stressed all the time because we never have any time to catch up with all the things that need doing. Start saying no to invitations and requests occasionally when they're just too much and realize that your friends aren't going to give up on you all of a sudden because you missed the last few meet-ups.

In business this is also a good idea. Apply the '80/20' principle by getting rid of the 'small clients' and the 'small jobs' that you don't need. Focus on the few jobs with the

most yield and that way you will simplify while also increasing your earnings. Narrowing the focus of your business can be helpful too for the self-employed. Are you a lawyer? How about becoming a specialist in art, or in divorce? You just cut your own research in half.

Good Habits

Finally, make sure that you get into good habits when it comes to dealing with stress and working through big loads.

The first good habit is to deal with stressful jobs as soon as possible and to avoid 'open loops' at all costs. An open loop is any job that is causing you stress while it remains unresolved. So for instance, making that phone call to a difficult client.

Instead of putting it off every day though and constantly having that stress in the back of your mind, make the effort to deal with it *as soon as possible*. This way, you'll have less to think about at any given time and actually the problem will be easier to deal with.

Another tip is to make sure you maintain the separation between working time and relaxation. This is *key* because otherwise you won't be getting the recovery time that you really need.

A good example of putting this into practice is to use the 'pomodoro' technique. Here you break your available time to complete a job up into small segments – 25 minutes of being productive followed by 10 minutes of resting for example. This is an excellent way to cope with any work schedule that will prevent you from 'half working' or procrastinating.

Either work and focus on it, or stop and don't worry about it. Compartmentalizing like this and learning *not to worry* is the key to stopping stress once and for all.

TOP RECOMMENDED GUIDE:

A Simple Guide to Managing Your Stress Levels and Leading a Stress-Free Life



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