

Stress Management

We all know what stress is, but what can we do to stop it from affecting us?

Stress is a reaction to a stimulus. It's how we react to, or respond to something, that stress is perceived. No matter what you do, or how you do it, there's a reaction. The reaction can be a good one (pleasurable), a bad one (not pleasurable) or somewhere in between. Did you ever notice how some of the people you work with seem to be very stressed out and others seem to be unaffected by the demands of their jobs? This is due to how we, as individuals, react. Our personality type is somewhat responsible, and you could use it as an excuse for how stressed out you are if you want. The alternative is to learn how to change the situation around. Instead of letting your life happen to you, you reappoint yourself as the one in control. Here are a few examples of stress:

- Getting married is the best day of your life, and probably the most stressful.
- Holidays are another big stressor.

Starting a new job can also be stressful. You want the job, but what about meeting new people and how will they judge you, unfamiliar surroundings, and the insecurities of job expectations?

- Even winning the lotto is very stressful. What will you do, will you quit your job, move, how will you change?

Change is the key to understanding stress. Change is very stressful; it represents the unknown. Many of us will do the same things over and over, like eating at the same restaurant, going to the same place for vacations. The more familiar the situation is, the less likely it is that it will cause friction, change or stress in our lives. Stress affects our mind, body, and spirit. Depending on how the stress is perceived, your body will have a reaction. Stress can obviously cause health problems. Muscle tension, headaches, ulcer, irritable bowel syndrome, and chronic fatigue are all usually related to stress. In fact, the more stress you have, the weaker your resistance will be to everyday common colds, viruses and flu's.

By learning some very basic techniques, you can reduce the amount of stress in your life. Over time, you'll be able to recognize exactly what things are stressful, and how to minimize their effects on your mind, body and spirit.

Breath

There is one thing that's always with you all the time that can help you to reduce or even stop stress from affecting your mind and body. It's your breath.

The way you breathe has a direct relationship to your nervous system, which affects your brain (mind), your body, and your spirit. The human body, as we know, is an incredible thing; we know that these different parts of us are in some way related to one another. Here's how it works.

When you get mad or angry your breath is quick and short, your body responds by tensing up, your adrenaline becomes elevated, and the fight or flight response is stimulated. On the other hand, when your breath is slow and relaxed the nervous system receives a message (perceived by the calmness and rhythm of the breath) that everything is okay, then the nervous system sends a message to the brain. The brain accepts the message that the breath is slow, and that the nervous system is experiencing the environment as unstressful. The brain then transmits a message to the body to go ahead and relax or stay relaxed, so the muscles relax, the cycle is complete and the whole body is relaxed. You can break the cycle at any point; it doesn't matter where you start, and the rest will follow. You could get a massage (body first), meditate (mind first), use medication such as drugs or alcohol (nervous system first), or say a prayer (spirit first). However, the easiest and quickest way that stress can be relieved, and that can be done anywhere at any time, is through regulating your breath.

The simplicity of it is what makes it so practical. If you just take ten long slow breaths you'll feel better physically and mentally. By just being aware of your breath, you become more comfortable with yourself and everything around you. Try it and see for yourself.

Meditation is the single most health enhancing technique known to mankind. It requires no tools or equipment, no special props, and can be done anywhere at any time. There are no adverse side effects or contraindications. One of the easiest types of meditation that's comfortably adaptive for most personalities, religious beliefs and temperament is called *The Relaxation Response*. It was introduced by Dr. Herbert Benson in 1968. Dr Benson and colleagues at the Harvard Medical School studied the physiological effects of meditation on the mind and body. Dr Benson introduced a simple mantra, the word "one" that could be used to keep the mind focused while breathing comfortably.

The technique is as follows:

Sit comfortably, close your eyes, become aware of your breathing, and mentally repeat the word "one" on each exhalation. This may at first be difficult, or seem a little strange, but within a few minutes you'll relax right into it. After all, that's what it's all about, relaxing, stress reduction and feeling good. I've found that as a beginner, seven minutes is long enough to have a significant and obvious change come over you. When you're comfortable with the technique, extend the time you stay in this meditation practice up to ten minutes, then fifteen, and work your way up to a suggested twenty minutes at a time. By practicing meditation regularly, the events of your day, whether you're on or off the job will be more manageable and you'll have less stress.

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