

50 Ways to Reduce Stress!!!

Stress is a fact of everyday life. It is associated with happy events (weddings, promotions, vacations) as well as unhappy ones (divorces, burglaries, job layoffs). It can be triggered by trivial matters (burned toast, a missing button) as well as by major life crises (births and deaths). It also builds up gradually when you have more things to do than time in which to do them.

Too much stress leads to chronic headaches, high blood pressure, ulcers, heart disease, and other health problems. In fact, some doctors believe that 90% of all illnesses are stress related. But stress is not necessarily bad. A life without it would be stagnant and boring.

Some people encounter more stressful events than others, but the way we perceive and react to stress is often more significant than the amount we face. The accumulation of minor hassles (long lines, wrong numbers, surly salesclerks) can be just as stressful as a mugging or a serious illness.

There is no need for anyone to suffer from the kind of stress overload that result in health problems. There are many practical ways to avoid, reduce or relieve stress. Here are fifty suggestions culled from our busy staff. They won't all work for you, but all you need to find is a few new ones you haven't already thought of yourself.

AVOIDING STRESS

1. **Get up fifteen minutes earlier.** Morning mishaps are less stressful and also less likely, when you have time to spare.
2. **Prepare for morning the night before.** Set the breakfast table, get the coffee pot ready, make lunches for any who may need them. Check to see if the clothes you plan to wear need pressing or mending.
3. **Never wear ill-fitting clothes.** If shoes pinch, pantyhose sag, or waist bands bind, even a stroll to the mailbox can be stressful.
4. **Set appointments ahead of time.** If you are always waiting for others, personalize meeting times. If one of your friends is perpetually late, tell them you will meet them ten minutes earlier than you actually plan to get there.
5. **Don't rely on your memory.** Write down addresses, directions and phone numbers. Take them with you to unfamiliar places. Leave notes for yourself on the fridge, the bathroom mirror or in the car to remind you of important dates or errands.
6. **Practice preventative maintenance.** You'll have fewer breakdowns of automobiles, heaters, air conditioners, washers, and other machines you depend on if they're cleaned and serviced regularly.
7. **Make duplicate keys.** Exchange house keys with a trusted neighbor, hide your car keys in the garage, keep extra for luggage, storage closets and strong boxes in a safe and convenient place.
8. **Rearrange work hours, if possible.** A thirty minute change in a arrival or departure time can make a big difference in traffic, crowds and other stress producers.
9. **Say "no" more often.** It's amazing how much stress can be eliminated by giving up unrewarding activities, refusing inappropriate requests and turning down invitations from people you don't enjoy.
10. **Never shop for clothes with critical teenagers, skinny friends or those who look terrific in everything.** We all have imperfections. Why call attention to them?
11. **Take advantage of off-hours for banking and shopping.** Shop by mail or phone whenever possible. Why put up with the crowded stores and long lines when you don't have to?
12. **Rearrange meal times.** If it's a hassle to get dinner ready on time, then try postponing it. Your family won't starve if they eat an hour later.
13. **Feed the children separately.** It's nice to get the whole family together for meals, but *not* if you have to endure spilled milk, sibling squabbling, and cranky remarks about the food. You deserve to eat in peace.
14. **Keep an emergency supply of necessities**—soap, toilet paper, toothpaste, tampons, etc.—and dip into it only in emergencies.
15. **Walk everywhere you can.** Exercise has a soothing effect—especially when it permits you to avoid traffic jams, crowded buses and costly taxis.
16. **Make copies of all important papers and keep originals in a safe place.** Never let go of an original deed, birth certificate, will or important receipt; send copies instead. When originals are required (such as passports, securities and insurance policies) send them by registered mail.
17. **Anticipate your needs.** Make sure you have plenty of coins for toll collectors and vending machines, batteries for children's toys, pens and pencils that still write, and pantyhose without runs. Always stop for gas before you really need to top up, especially at night and on holidays.
18. **Don't put up with anything that doesn't work properly.** No one needs the aggravation of malfunctioning alarm clocks, key rings that lose keys, radios that buzz and squeak or appliances that smoke. One woman told us, "My mood improved when I treated myself to a coin purse that didn't pop open all the time!"
19. **Make advance reservations**-- At hotels, restaurants, and theatres. Re confirm time, location and other details before you go.
20. **Allow for extra time.** If it usually takes thirty minutes to get to the airport, allow an hour. It's better to arrive well ahead of schedule than to fret over every stoplight or traffic tie-up along the way.

REDUCING STRESS

21. **Be prepared to wait.** A long line at the post office or a delay at the dentist's office is almost pleasant when you have a good book with you.
22. **Never arrange a meeting place that has no telephone.** An unavoidable delay can be a nightmare when there is no way to make contact. If it's possible to meet at a place where you can receive calls, agree on the number you can both call if something goes awry.
23. **Find the humor in it.** Every disaster has something funny about it if you look for it. Seeking a taxi in the rain, for example, used to put us out of sorts. Now we remember the passerby that told us "New York taxis are water soluble", and hardly mind at all.
24. **Keep a "busy kit" handy when you travel.** Transportation snafus are easy to ignore when you have a portable tape deck, a favorite magazine or a needle-work project with you. "I learned to speak French," one mother told us, "while driving my three kids around all day."
25. **Relax your standards.** Doing everything perfectly is not only unnecessary, it's boring. Life is a lot easier if you ignore a little dirt, take more shortcuts in the kitchen and let the sheets go a few more days between laundering.
26. **Get help with the jobs that you hate.** If you find that certain chores always make you tense—such as paying the bills, defrosting the refrigerator or scrubbing the bathtubs—get someone else to do them. Beg, barter or pay for help if you have to. It's worth it.
27. **Establish a serene place of your own—even if it's just a comfortable chair in a quiet corner.** If the sound of your teenager's stereo, your husband's ballgame or the neighbor's barking dog still penetrates, wear earplugs.
28. **Change your perspective.** Instead of worrying about what will happen if...try asking yourself, "So what?" So what if your mother's birthday gift is a few days late? SO what if you actually miss your train or plane? Will it matter next week? Or next year? Even if your worst fears are realized, they often turn out not to be that bad.
29. **Count your blessings.** No disaster is so bad that it couldn't be worse. And it helps to remember that. After all, you could have burned the entire dinner instead of just the rolls. The doctor could have kept you waiting two hours instead of only twenty minutes. You might have lost a thousand dollars instead of ten.
30. **Keep time fillers by the telephone.** You won't mind being put on hold if you can spend that time reading mail or writing a letter. You will be more sympathetic to a friend who "needs to talk" if you can do your mending or file your nails while you listen.
31. **Memorize your favorite poems—and recite them to yourself whenever you're forced to stand in a crowded bus or get stuck in an elevator.**
32. **Keep a supply of individually wrapped candies or sugar free gum handy.** "Getting one out, unwrapping it and popping it into your mouth," one writer told us, "is a welcome distraction that takes some of the tension out of bad moments."
33. **Travel light.** The less you have to keep track of when you're away from home, the easier it is. If you never take more than you can comfortably carry onto an airplane, you can avoid lost luggage, long waits at baggage-claim counters and frustrating searches for porters.
34. **Be prepared for rain.** Don't try to out guess the weatherman. Stock your handbag, work place and car with rain hats, plastic rain capes, umbrellas and shoe protectors.
35. **Ask questions.** You're less likely to make mistakes or get lost if you make sure to get detailed instructions first.
36. **Take advantage of your body rhythms.** If you're at your best early in the morning, that's the time to schedule complicated tasks that require concentration. If you don't reach your peak until later in the day, start with easier things that don't require much thought. It doesn't matter when your peaks and valleys come as long as you plan accordingly.
37. **Make contingency plans.** A rained out picnic, a sold out theater or a closed restaurant is a disappointment, of course, but it won't spoil your day if you've made alternate plans "just in case."
38. **Un-clutter your life.** Get rid of clothes you never wear, objects that just collect dust, furniture you hate and activities you don't enjoy. Anything you can do to simplify your life helps reduce stress.
39. **Avoid reliance on chemical aids.** Alcohol, tranquilizers and sleeping pills may reduce stress momentarily, but regular use increases stress in the long run.

RELIEVING STRESS

40. **Get in touch.** Hold hands, stroke a pet, hug a loved one, or make love. Physical contact is a good stress reliever.
41. **Take time out.** Breathe deeply, stretch your muscles, nap, meditate or do a few tension-relieving exercises. If you can't arrange a brisk walk, try raising your shoulders in a high shrug, hold ten seconds and release and repeat.
42. **Find enjoyable ways to exercise.** Experts agree on the benefits of aerobic exercise - the kind that raises your heart rate and makes you breathe hard. If you hate to jog or jump rope, you'll create as much stress as you relieve. Try swimming, cycling, aerobic dancing, racquetball, or a few fast sets of tennis instead.
43. **Get it off your chest.** Bottling up feelings just increase stress. If you buy defective merchandise or receive bad service, write a letter of complaint. If a friend lets you down, express your disappointment. If your spouse hurts your feelings, tell them. You'll feel better afterwards.
44. **Talk to a loving friend or relative.** A sympathetic listener is always helpful. "When I have a bad day," one woman told us, "I always call my grandma. To her, I can do no wrong."
45. **Reward yourself after stressful activities.** Stop for a special lunch or snack after shopping in crowded stores. Relax with a favorite television show or book after cleaning the house.
46. **Take leisurely baths.** Showers are more efficient, but a long soak in a hot fragrant bath is more relaxing. (Unplug or turn off the phone first!)
47. **Schedule more fun.** Don't give up seeing friends and doing things you enjoy because you "have too much to do." Pleasurable activities are important.
48. **Take a break from the children.** Babysitters are not just for emergencies or special occasions. You also need time to yourself to listen to music, pursue a hobby, or have a heart-to-heart talk with a friend. If you can't afford to hire a babysitter, trade childcare time with another mother.
49. **Have a massage.** Tension just melts away under the touch of experienced fingers. Be a talented amateur - exchange techniques with a friend and practice the art of massage. Sometimes just a soft rub on the shoulders can do wonders for tightness.
50. **Unwind before bedtime.** Do some stretching exercises to get the kinks out, then read, listen to music, do needlework, or some other calming activity. It helps you sleep better - and that's a great stress reliever.